

World Religions

Better understanding our neighbors and their beliefs

Week Four: Contemporary Islam – A Christian Perspective Matthew 5:43-48

Series overview: As we get to know our neighbors, many of us are met with a rich collection of people from cultures worldwide. With so many religions and backgrounds represented in our community, you may find yourself wondering more about the people who surround you. What do they believe? How do I relate to people coming from experiences far different from mine? And most of all, how do I interact with my neighbors in a way that shows love and respect?

This week's message: Islam maintains that each person will answer to God for what they do. The religion revolves around obedience – obedience to Allah, the prophet Muhammad, and those in authority. However, there is a struggle for interpretation regarding who those in authority are.

- Sunni Muslims: believe the leaders of the community were responsible to pick Muhammad's successor; believe Muslim scholars came up with the correct interpretation of Islam by the 9th century; comprises 90% of Muslims
- Shi'ite Muslims: believe Muhammad's cousin, Ali, was his rightful successor; believe the *caliph*, or ruling successor of Muhammad, receives insight to interpret the Qur'an and the Hadith

There is confusion both within and outside the Muslim world regarding religious interpretation as well as the goal of Islam. The goal of Islam is *jihad* – both an internal and external struggle. The internal being a struggle within yourself to make peace with Allah by submitting. The external being the struggle to advance the *ummah*, or the community of peace that holds individuals accountable for remaining in Allah's will. The goal is to extend the invitation to other nations to submit to Allah, but since Islam and political systems are so closely tied, it has become coercive in certain areas.

As Christians, we should respond by rejecting religious pluralism that kills dialogue. Not talking about these things creates a greater sense of distrust and more conflict within society. Instead, show hospitality to your Muslim neighbors, engage with them to learn their beliefs, and support religious freedom for more than just Christians. Lastly, we should pray for Muslims.

Small Group Discussion:

➤ Connect

- List what springs to mind when you hear the word “jihad.” Where do you think these word pictures come from?

➤ Grow

- Do you think there is an internal *jihad* within Christianity as well? If so, describe it. (Romans 7:14-25)
- Read John 8:1-11. Compare and contrast Islam and Christianity as it relates to breaking moral law. Consider the role of *ummah*/community and God’s response to disobedience.
- We draw a lot of conclusions from observing Muslim nations under strict Sharia law. How do you think the United States is perceived by other nations when we call it a “Christian nation”? Consider personal decisions, how our politicians operate, our government’s choices, how our culture is represented in Hollywood
- Pastor Tim Hawks shared a story about a recent suicide bomber who turned herself in after recognizing relatives among potential victims. She was torn between her family allegiance and what she believed was obedience to Allah. Have you ever experienced a similar tension in your life between obedience to God and something you love? Describe the tension and the outcome. What does Luke 14:25-27 mean?
- As Christians, we should respond to contemporary Islam by rejecting religious pluralism, supporting religious freedom for all, showing hospitality, and praying for Muslims. Which of these responses is hardest for you to accept or live out, and why?

➤ Reach

- One City. How will you show hospitality to your Muslim (or non-believing) neighbor this week?
- One Nation. Pray for our country – that Christians will pray for, love, and learn about the Muslims living in our communities; that non-Muslims will choose to ignore the sensationalized media that inspires fear
- One World. Regardless of how each group member feels about the refugee crisis, participate as a small group in HCBC’s 24 Hour Prayer and Fasting for the Refugee Crisis on Tuesday, February 16. Have each small group member commit to praying for an hour for Muslims around the world seeking hope to encounter Christ. www.hcbc.com/prayer

Prayer Focus

Pray Psalm 139:23-24 over yourself and your small group. Confess any fear, anxiety, doubt, hate, or apathy regarding your attitude toward Muslims. Ask God to give you His heart for people.

Scripture Memory

“But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...”

Matthew 5:44