

## Christ the Victor

---

Roy Oksnevad

### Introduction

Three great monotheistic religions exist in the world today: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. All three speak against idolatry, affirming that God is One while calling people to a higher moral standard. All three teach that people should be submitted to God and follow his word.

In recent years, Westerners have been meeting Muslims up close as they have been emigrating en masse to the West. As Christians in the West seek to share Christ with Muslims, they are confronted with a religious belief they have not encountered before. Can the Christian message be shared without causing so much misunderstanding? Is there something the Western Church is failing to understand as it tries to share with its new Muslim neighbors? If Christians will take into consideration fundamental differences as they present the gospel, they will be more effective in sharing the Christian message with new Muslim neighbors and friends.

### Conflict

For the Christian, the heart of the gospel is to share the wonderful message of Christ's gift of salvation through his birth, death, and resurrection. The first conflict arises over the nature of Jesus. All too often, while attempting to share the reason for Christ's birth, Christians present the theological concept of the Incarnation (God becoming a human being). This raises the "hacksles" of the average Muslim, who proclaims God's Oneness in every prayer five times a day. The hallmark of Islam is the Oneness of God. Though Christianity also



teaches that God is One, Islam is particularly sensitive to what they consider a Christian heresy, the Trinity. Muslims are unwilling to accept the Christian affirmation that God is One and are told that Christians believe in three gods.

The conflict continues over the nature of Jesus because Muslims see Jesus as a great miracle-working prophet, not the second person of the Trinity. Muslims are taught that the role of the prophet is to call people to repentance and that some prophets were given God's word for a specific people and time. They are taught that Jesus was given the Gospel for the Christians, but He is not the Savior of the world. They are told that Muhammad is the last and greatest prophet so Jesus cannot have a position greater than Muhammad.

Another major area of conflict concerns Islam's understanding of justice. When Christians share that Christ died to save us from our sins, the Muslim calls this reasoning unjust, for everyone must die for his or her own sins; there can be no substitute. Muslims have a clearly defined understanding of God's justice, which does not accept substitution in a sacrificial system, particularly the Christian definition of atoning sacrifice.

As Christians share the gospel, they should keep in mind that when they impose the biblical understanding on these subjects, the Muslim will be offended. It is not unreasonable for Muslims to refuse to try to understand the Christian position, considering the things they have been taught. Any attempt by the Christian to use the Scriptures to redefine the Muslim's understanding of the person of Christ and his work gets a standard response, basically stating that the Scriptures as recorded in the Bible are corrupt. The last revelation as found in the Qur'an is the latest word on the subject and is not corrupt.

### Purpose

Rather than unending dialogue over such issues as those mentioned above, I have gone back to the gospels and church history to discover ways the early church presented the message of Christ's work on the cross. It is my intent that the liberating message of Christ's work on the cross be proclaimed without continual rejections and assumptions by Muslims.

### Various Approaches

Various approaches have been used to reach Muslims. First, there is the apologetic approach. Here the Christian attempts to an-

swer each objection with a truthful and reasonable answer found either from Scripture or from historical evidence. For this approach to be effective, the person needs to be knowledgeable about Christian doctrine and apologetics (answers to objections) as well as Islamic sources and arguments. Authors N. Geisler and A. Saleeb have written an excellent book entitled, *Answering Islam: The Crescent in the Light of the Cross* (1993).

The second approach is called the Bridge. In this approach, the person tries to find some aspect in the other's religion from which they can build a bridge to a similar concept in their own religious perspective and give it meaning. An example would be using the Muslims' annually celebrated feast of *al-Adha* (at which a sheep or ram is sacrificed) and trying to use it to explain Jesus as the sacrificial lamb.

In the third approach the basic assumption is that God's Word is truth and all we need to do is share the Word. It is understood that the Holy Spirit will take the words of Scripture and the word of witness and convict the person of sin, righteousness, and judgment.

Another approach takes into consideration some of the cultural ways of passing on information. Story telling is one such vehicle. Some have retold the parables with the perspective of introducing one aspect of the Kingdom of God to the listener as Christ did, in a culturally relevant manner. Martin Goldsmith, in his book *Islam and Christian Witness* (1983), gives excellent examples of this cultural method.

Yet another approach uses common evangelistic tools with modifications for the Muslim audience. Campus Crusade for Christ, Lebanon, has done this with their time-tested tool, *The Four Spiritual Laws*. They changed the order of the points and added a defense for the Scriptures to address the common objection Muslims have about the corruption of the Bible.

A method I have found helpful is "Christ the Victor." This approach looks at the Islamic worldview, which sees the universe inhabited by a myriad of spiritual beings, some good and some evil; the whole concept of Satan, jinn, and angels is used to determine key issues to address. The concept of using Christ the Victor speaks to the Near Eastern worldview of the great battle of Satan against mankind.

This came together when I was in Belgium and shared it with an Algerian in a coffee bar. At the end, he said, "This is the first time I have heard the Gospel," although others had witnessed to him before. And he accepted Christ.



### Biblical Foundations for Presenting Christ to Muslims

I try to follow two themes in presenting Christ to Muslims. Both themes are found in Johannine literature and were themes of the gospel in the early church Fathers. First is the theme of life, and secondly, Christ the Victor.

#### Life

In Revelation 20:12-15 entrance into heaven is based upon whether an individual's name is found in the Lamb's book of life. In Gen. 2:9 there was the tree of life, and in Revelation 22:2 there is the tree of life. In John 10:10 Jesus says, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (NIV). I John 5:12 states, "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life."

This theme of life is found in the early church Father, Irenaeus.

... For what purpose did Christ come down from heaven?

Answer: "That He might destroy sin, overcome death, and give life to man." By the side of this pregnant saying we will set another, chosen from among many similar passages, which develops the dramatic idea in fuller detail: "Man had been created by God that he might have life. If now, having lost life, and having been harmed by the serpent, he were not to return to life, but were to be wholly abandoned to death, then God would have been defeated, and the malice of the serpent would have overcome God's will... through the Second Man He [God] bound the strong one, and spoiled his goods, and annihilated death, bringing life to man who had become subject to death" (Aulen 1937, 35).

#### Christ the Victor

The second theme is Christ the Victor. The Bible is pregnant with the theme of a cosmic battle fought for God's creation. It tells us that a foundational reason Christ came was "to destroy the works of the devil" (I John 3:8) and to "destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil" (Heb. 2:14). Satan had to be defeated. For a fuller development of this concept, Gustaf Aulen's book *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement* (1937) is an excellent resource.

In the first of these passages Irenaeus speaks of sin and death as the enemies of mankind; in the second there emerges by the side of or behind death the figure of the devil... The work of Christ is first and foremost a victory over the powers

which hold mankind in bondage: sin, death, and the devil... the victory of Christ creates a new situation, bringing their rule to an end, and setting men free from their domination (Aulen 1937, 35).

The strength of the Christus Victor approach is that it doesn't assume the deity of Christ to understand the purpose of Christ. It doesn't require Muslims to understand a new judicial system that requires substitution. Christ the Victor stresses the sovereignty of God and the victorious aspect of God (familiar Islamic concepts), and broadens the scope of Christ's work to include the devil and death, as well as sin. It is not my intent to change the gospel or to unduly criticize other attempts in presenting the gospel, but rather to give another tool and perspective to be considered when introducing Muslim friends to Christ.

#### A Critique of Popular Western Premises

In viewing the popular evangelistic material presently being passed around in Christian circles, much of it seems to begin with a Western orientation or worldview. These methods then seek to find symbols or cultural events in the Islamic world that might explain Western theology. However, these presentations are used in a way foreign to Muslim thinking.

Islamic symbols and cultural events are often reinterpreted to reflect Western priorities and theological points of view over against Islamic priorities and theological sensitivities. For example, should the presenter use the "Id Al-Adha" bridge approach, Islam rejects outright substitutional sacrifice. The explanation given by Muslims of this festival and story is generosity, not substitution. On a theoretical basis, it seems that we make certain theological assumptions (it is obvious that God provided an acceptable sacrifice) and needlessly spend much of our time trying to convince the audience to accept these assumptions.

We should remember that the aim of the Qur'an is man and his behavior, not God. Islamic teaching centers on 1) everything except God is contingent upon God, 2) that God is the all-merciful God, and 3) a proper relationship between God and man is a relationship of the served and the servant. Trying to convince Muslims of certain Christian theological priorities may be a needless hindrance in presenting Christ.



### Where to Start

Common ground is an important place to begin. When Christians begin with God as they share Christ with Muslims, they immediately enter into the Islamic theological worldview where Muslims have clear definitions of God. Christians may have to shift common ground away from a theological starting point, toward how human beings experience life.

I would suggest that instead of starting the gospel presentation from God's perspective, we use instead the perspective of how man experiences life on earth. All too often Christians end up arguing about the God perspective in their presentations and rarely get on with the message of God's salvation found in Christ. Basing a gospel presentation on how God enters into daily life to help face life's challenges, to live life to its full, and to have a living hope avoids speaking about philosophy, ideology, or religion. The way all people face life and the quality of their life may be the best common ground.

### Fellowship with God

*Christian starting point.* Most gospel presentations begin with the theological assumption that an intimate relationship exists between God and man. However, this relationship was broken when man disobeyed God by eating of the fruit in the Garden of Eden. Both God and man are trying to reestablish or restore this relationship. Man has been unable to do so, yet God promised to do so and has done so through Christ.

*Islamic perspective.* Fellowship with God is not possible. To bring God down to an interactive level with mankind is considered disrespectful. God is to remain distant and unapproachable. God does not need man nor is He like man. Therefore, a relationship is not expected, sought, or taught. (An exception to this is popular Sufi Islam. In Sufism, God is presented as being close and an intimate relationship with him is sought.)

*Alternative starting point.* Since so many of the assumed Biblical perspectives have another meaning in Islam, I think it best to start with the creation story in Genesis, not with fellowship between God and man. Since Islam so strongly guards its understanding of Allah or God, this issue can be sidestepped until another time.

I begin with God as the creator of mankind (accepted in Islamic teaching). Mankind was created 100 percent good—full and com-

plete. God makes everything perfect and human beings are the crowning work of God's creation. Muslims will not disagree with this description. It is better to avoid using the phrase "created in God's image" for fear of needlessly entering into defending what "image" means and does not mean. (Muslims who love to debate might take this opening to argue that God is wholly other, and mankind is not the image of Allah, for God has no form.) In beginning with a positive image of man, we avoid the Islamic argument that they have a better image of man, which does not include a sin nature.

### The Fall

*Christian perspective.* Following the theme of fellowship with God in Western presentations, Christians often proceed to a discussion of the breaking of this fellowship with God, called the Fall. They may state that now man is separated from God. God is presented as seeking to re-establish this intimate fellowship with man through the promise of a Messiah Jesus. Christ is presented as the bridge between God and man so again God and man can have fellowship.

*Islamic perspective.* Muslims believe that Adam's sin did not affect all mankind. Adam asked for forgiveness and Allah, who is forgiving and merciful, forgave Adam's sin. Each person is born sinless. From a Muslim perspective, man's duty is to reverence, honor, obey, and respect God. Any familiarity between God and man is disrespectful.

*Alternative view.* How then should we present the Fall? Both Islam and Christianity have a concept of temptation and a Fall where mankind is no longer in paradise but sent to earth (or the Christian version where mankind was banished from the garden). Rather than pushing Christian theology on the significance of the Fall, we can explain that since the time of Adam, the human race has suffered from the effects of sin. Murder, rebellion, wars, lying, cheating, covering, misplaced sexual desires, abuse of power, greed—the list goes on and on of the unworthy deeds mankind commits, no matter the religion, race, or nation. This is neither the will nor desire of God for mankind.

By presenting the fact that persons are unable to achieve balance by themselves, the biblical concept of original sin is introduced. When the various remedies for sin are presented, such as knowledge, discipline, religion, or law, it becomes clear that none of these has the power to produce balance or control the evil in human lives.



## The Concept of Sin

*Christian assumptions.* Within the Christian understanding of mankind, after the Fall all human beings are born into sin. Man after the Fall is not born neutral, but born powerless to do good. Thus the Christian usually seeks to convince non-Christians that they are sinners—born in original sin. Christians quote Romans 3:10–23, which declares there is no one righteous who seeks God, or does good. Therefore, mankind is in need of a Savior to forgive sins.

*Islamic perspective.* Islam usually presents mankind as essentially good, although the teaching is not always clear and at times, mankind may be bent toward corruption. According to Islam, the problem of sin is basically ignorance of God's law (shari'a) and the Qur'an. It is taught that what people become is due to a collection of influences; heredity, environment, destiny, and jinn. Added to this is an understanding that God is merciful and forgiving. Allah will overlook sin if persons truly repent and do some good to counterbalance the bad. Sin is relegated to a weakness of mankind. There is no need for atonement. The Qur'anic teaching on forgiveness can be found in Surah 3:18:

Say: "If ye do love Allah, Follow me: Allah will love you and forgive you your sins: For Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful..."

*Caution.* For the Christian, sin separates mankind from God. All were born sinners and therefore separated from God. The Christian view of sin seems rather unpalatable to the post-modern person as well as to Muslims. Muslims could easily pride themselves that their understanding of mankind is positive and filled with hope in comparison with the Christian understanding of human nature.

The Muslim is taught that Allah will judge good and bad deeds. Inherent in their concept of sin is found the motivation to strive for a holy life. According to their logic, if all the person's sins are forgiven, past, present, and future, then the motivation for striving to live a good life is removed. By saying that Christ forgives sin, we do not want to leave the impression that we have removed motivation for holy living, or that Christians can do any sort of vice or sin with no consequences from God.

*Alternative.* Most Muslims speak of themselves as not being good Muslims. All human beings, if they are honest, will share how they struggle with sin. Getting people to acknowledge that sin reigns uncontrollably in them is the first step in understanding Jesus' death. Regardless of one's theological or philosophical understanding of

this phenomenon, it is an undisputed fact that human beings are sinners.

Christianity recognizes that human nature has a bent toward sin, such as greed and selfishness. Generally speaking it takes effort and concentration to achieve a good deed. At the same time, no one has to make very much effort in order to act selfishly—hurting someone, avoiding responsibility, or even doing something evil. Man disobeyed God and something foreign (bad or evil) entered into mankind. But this bad is not God's plan for mankind. At the same time, the good that might be in humans becomes latent or dead. Some examples are:

- 1) Relationship with spouse: We understand how we are to act around our spouses, to love them and to do good to them. Yet the good we try to do often comes out wrong, or we just fail to do the good we know we should do.
- 2) Parent/child relationships: The same goes for parent/child relationships. It seems that effort must be applied to doing good, to being sensitive and understanding, or the bad side just comes out naturally.
- 3) Children: Parents know we do not need to teach children to be bad. They act badly, get into trouble, and turn mean so easily. In contrast, we must regularly correct them and teach them to do good. Even then, the good sometimes seems forced.

## Doctrine of the Atonement

*Christian assumption.* Western Christians assume that Christ's work on the cross can best be explained in the concept of the atonement. This perspective has been popular since the time of the great theologian Anselm in the eleventh century AD. There is ample biblical support for the substitutionary atonement throughout the Old Testament, as shown in the sacrificial system. Many Western Christians are taught that a person cannot come to faith in Christ without first understanding the atonement, explained as the penal substitutionary atonement.

*Islamic perspective.* The words "substitutionary atonement" put most Muslims on guard. They are quick to quote, "No one can die in the place of another." They are taught that one of the lies of the Christians is what they say Jesus came to do—die on the cross for our sins. Consider what is repeated in the prayers of Muslims five times daily. Throughout their daily prayer the uniqueness of God is espoused and the slave/master relationship is affirmed. Muslims cast themselves upon the mercy of God and his guidance. No concept of substitution is mentioned.



*Caution.* The doctrine of the atonement evokes several concepts for the Muslim that the Christian must unravel. First is the concept of justice. Muslims view the atonement as not fitting into their understanding of Allah's justice. In Islam, each person must die for his or her own sins. Second, sacrifice in Islamic tradition and teaching, particularly as understood by the average Muslim that Westerners meet, has only the significance of generosity and duty.

To legitimize the concept of substitution, Christians may use the annual feast of *al-Adha* and try to create a redemptive analogy of Christ. For Muslims worldwide the festival is a generous time of year. Part of the meat from the killing of the lamb is distributed among the poor and needy for food, and the remainder is used to feed the household and is shared with relatives and friends. The more informed Muslims are instructed that the word "sacrifice" used in this context does not have the usual meaning of atonement for sin or an attempt to appease an angry deity. It signifies the remembrance of the willingness of Abraham to sacrifice his own desires and attachments in submission to God.

*Alternative.* To avoid the misconceptions found in the Islamic worldview of the atonement, we should ask ourselves whether it is possible to explain the essence of Christianity, which is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, without looking at it from the substitutionary sacrifice point of view. It is true that any person coming to Christ will at some point need to come to understand the cross of Christ from this perspective. Yet, again I ask, at the initial stage of explaining the gospel, is this the time to introduce this concept? Gregory Boyd in his book, *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (1997, 240), states

The New Testament speaks about the significance of the cross in a variety of ways: it was an atoning sacrifice for our sin (Heb. 10:10-14); it satisfied God's justice (Rom. 3:25); it provided an example for believers (Phil. 2:5-11; 1 Pet. 2:21); and it conquered Satan (John 12:31; Col. 2:14-15; 1 John 3:8)...

Since at least the time of Anselm in the eleventh century AD and especially since the Reformation in the sixteenth century, the tendency of the Western church has been to focus almost all its attention on...the atonement, usually to the neglect of the cosmic dimension that is central to the New Testament.

From the perspective of the New Testament...the significance of Christ's death and resurrection is rooted in something more fundamental and broad that God was aiming at:

to defeat once and for all his cosmic archenemy, Satan, along with the other evil powers under his dominion.

Presenting Christ as victor over Satan is a way to open doors without getting the usual Islamic objections. Christ the Victor is a powerful concept not foreign to the Muslim's worldview. Our goal from this angle is to present Jesus as the One who is more powerful than evil. [John 3:8 is our reference point.]

He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work (NIV).

Presenting the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus as a purposeful act designed to overcome evil takes away the shame so often associated with this fact in Jesus' life. His death and resurrection becomes linked to a celestial battle to overcome evil.

Jesus made it clear that no one would take his life from him. His purpose was to die and rise again. Thus the words of Jesus spoken in John 10:17-18:

The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father (NIV).

*Illustration.* There was once a man who boasted that he was stronger than the prison and all the prison guards. Hearing of these boasts, the prison guards went to capture the man. But the man disappeared. Was he stronger than the prison guards or not? (Some at this point may say "yes" or "we can't tell." In Muslim belief, of course, when enemies came to capture Jesus and crucify him, God beamed him up to heaven).

A second man boasted that he was stronger than the prison and the prison guards. When the guards came for him, he came out and met them. They captured him, beat him severely, bound him and then took him past all the prison cells to the farthest dungeon and locked him in, leaving guards at the door. The superintendent of the prison then sat in his office with his buddies laughing at the man. But they did not laugh long. Soon they heard sounds from within the prison. The man had torn off his chains, pushed open the door, thrown the guards aside, and then proceeded to open all the doors of the cells one by one, calling, "Anyone who wants to leave this prison, follow me!"



Some of the prisoners were afraid. If they joined this man now and he was recaptured, they along with him would suffer even worse torture than before. But others said, "Look, they've already done to him the worst they can do and he has shown himself stronger. I'm following him out!" Those who followed him closely followed all the way out, finding as they did so that he shared with them his power to open cell doors and defeat the guards on the way. Eventually they followed him all the way to his kingdom of righteousness.

## Love

*Christian assumption.* Christians see God's love for mankind as the hallmark of the Christian message. John 3:16 becomes a key verse. The Apostle John is considered by theologians to be the Apostle of Love. This is borne out by the fact that the word love in its various forms is used 117 times in the Johannine writings.

*Islamic perspective:* What is important for one person or culture may not necessarily be important in another culture. For Muslims, God's superiority, sovereignty, and authority over mankind and man's necessity of submission to the will of God are their hallmarks.

*Caution.* While love may not be as clear in Islam as it is in the New Testament, nevertheless it is found in the Qur'an. (See Surah 2:195; 2:222; 3:3 1; 3:76; 3:132-135; 3:146; 3:159; 5:13; 5:42; 5:54; 9:4; 9:108; 1:90; 49:9; 60:8; 61:4; 85:14). Granted, Allah's love is usually conditional, based upon obedience. So some may argue that Islamic society suffers from a lack of understanding of biblical love.

However, if intimate, accessible, open relationships are not expected in marriage or family relations, but other aspects equally as noble such as respect, submission, and honor are sought after, then why would Muslims respond to the Western definition of love? It is possible that the loving God of the Western Christian may not have the appeal often thought.

## Presenting Christ: An Alternative Approach

Muslims will respond positively to love genuinely expressed. And Christians are to love people into the Kingdom of God. However, the Muslim is taught that Allah is the master, and mankind is his slave. In such a relationship, love would be considered out of place. The master is not on the same level with the slave. So God is not on the same plane with mankind.

*Alternative.* I believe the hidden spiritual world, the Muslim's relationship to this unseen world, and issues of destiny are greater

felt needs for Muslims than love. Though Western Christians downplay the unseen world, many Muslims are greatly interested. When Christ is presented as victorious over the unseen world of jinn and demons, a Muslim audience may be more eager to listen. The Bible has much to say about the unseen world if Western Christians will only look.

## Changing the Moral Behavior and Living for God

*Christian perspective.* The Christian holds that it is impossible for the unregenerate man to live for God outside a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Therefore, to become a Christian the unregenerate person must accept Jesus into his or her life. The person will then be born again and will have eternal life.

*Islamic perspective.* Muslims hold that the reason why people are not Muslims is that they are ignorant of Allah's law. When persons hear and understand Islam, they will recognize that this is what they really are. They will submit to Allah and say the Shahadah (the Islamic Creed). Saying the Shahadah three times in the presence of a Muslim makes you a Muslim.

Allah requires five things of Muslims, called the pillars of Islam. They are the Shahadah (Islamic Creed), the Salat (prayer five times a day), the Saum (fasting during the month of Ramadan), the Zakat (alms giving), and the Hajj (a pilgrimage to Mecca once in a lifetime). Many Muslims will admit that they are not "good" Muslims and fall short of living a truly submitted life. Yet, Muslims contend that Islam is a superior religion since it encompasses every aspect of life. It influences government, education, media, religion, and private life. Islam controls and forbids vices originating in the West such as pornography, alcohol, and the low moral standards propagated through the media. Muslims are proud of their religion and speak openly about Allah and the great heritage they have.

*Alternative.* Seeking to get Muslims to accept Jesus as the way to live for God can often be misunderstood as Christians seeking to make Muslims simply change their religion. To avoid a battle of one religion against another, we might instead deal with the arguments some Muslims use to show Islam's rightness.

Four reasons are generally given for achieving a life pleasing to God. The four are knowledge, discipline, religion, and law. To promote understanding I use the various arguments I have heard from Muslims and ask questions. A key question is: How can one revive the inner good? What can the person do to gain control of the bad?



People may suggest various ways to accomplish this:

- 1) Knowledge—If we instruct people more, their behavior will change accordingly. But are the most knowledgeable people in the world the best people? Can knowledge by itself give life to the good in us?
- 2) Discipline—If we are more disciplined in our lives, concerning our thoughts, habits, exercise, etc., then our lives will improve and we will do more good. But are the most disciplined people in the world the best people? Can discipline by itself give life to the good in us?
- 3) Religion—If we go to church, mosque, temple, or adopt a new religious perspective, then we will become better. Are the most religious people in the world the best people? Does religion by itself always bring alive the good in us?

4) Law—If we have legislation to regulate our moral behavior, then we will be better citizens. There are two types of law, civil law and moral law. But are societies with the most law necessarily the best places to live? Too much civil law may cause society to result in martial law or military lockdown, which is oppressive. With too much rigid moral law, society can end up with a totalitarian/dictatorial form in which sometimes thought becomes a crime. Can law by itself give life to the good in us? Is not law's purpose rather to contain the bad?

*Points to stress.* If a seeker wants to get off on a side issue, the person should be challenged throughout with the fact that *the good in us must be revived (reborn)* before we can truly live. When the various remedies for sin are presented, such as knowledge, discipline, religion, or law, it becomes clear that none of these has the power to produce balance or to control the evil in human lives. However, the Christian is promised the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit to become alive to good, although final perfection does not happen until the resurrection from the dead.

### The Nature of Good and Evil

In many world religions, as well as the popular New Age movement, the world is explained dualistically, meaning that this world is involved in a cosmic conflict between good and evil. Neither side is more powerful. The challenge of life according to this worldview is to identify both evil and evil influences and rid oneself of these negative forces. Harmony is sought through neutralizing negative forces and achieving balance between body, mind, and spirit.

*Christian perspective.* In the Christian worldview, there is also an element of good versus evil and the achieving of balance. The major difference is the recognition that we as human beings are incapable of achieving balance or of ever combating evil victoriously solely by ourselves. It is God himself who takes on this battle for us through Christ.

*Islamic perspective.* Islam sometimes allows for man being a blend of good and evil, ignorance and knowledge, power and impotence. Sufi Muslims have held the view that Satan is really "in" man, or is identical with the negative self of man. But Islam mostly teaches that the basic nature of man is good. It is important to get as much good (*baraka*) as possible into life. Every good deed is multiplied tenfold while an evil deed is counted as one evil deed.

He that doeth good shall have ten times as much to his credit: he that doeth evil shall only be recompensed according to his evil... (Surah 6:160).

*Caution.* Islam teaches that this life is a test to see what we will do. When confronted with the temptation of evil the Muslim is to choose good. All too often the Christian will deny that good works has anything to do with knowing God. Ephesians 2:8-9 are often quoted to prove that we are not saved by works, but by grace through faith.

However, deeds are important in Christianity. They are in fact the fruit of a holy life. According to Matthew 25 what we have done to the least of the brothers we have done for Christ. Since the Islamic worldview does not have a concept of a savior, the system of accumulating good deeds becomes important. We will need to start with this worldview and help the Muslim understand that God is calling us to the purpose for which He made us, which is good works. However, our good works fall short of God's perfect standard.

*Alternative.* Using the Islamic worldview that the purpose of life is accumulating more good deeds, we might agree with them that if God has created people only as a test to see what they will do, it seems logical that we would be judged according to our deeds on earth. But God has created us with a purpose. We were created before the foundation of this world for good works (Eph. 2:10).

To illustrate the point I look for a glass or use the cup of tea from which I am drinking. The glass was once filled to the top with God's purpose for us—the good works He created us to do. There are three ways we take away from the glass. First, when we do a bad work we remove liquid. Secondly, when we miss an opportunity to do a good work, we take out a measure. Thirdly, for a good work that is not



wholly good, or perhaps self-serving (I am kind to my spouse because I want to ask for something later), we take some of the liquid out. God intended us to be wholly good.

What happens when we surprise ourselves and do a really good deed with no ulterior motive behind it? When we do good, the best good possible, we take nothing out of the glass because then we are simply doing what God has purposed for us to be and do from the beginning.

How can we add to the glass and fill it up again? It is impossible to add liquid to the glass by doing good works, for this is our purpose. All we can do is draw from the glass and end up short of the mark God has set for us.

*Points to stress.* We have a struggle with evil in our lives. The good is there but we are powerless to live it out. We try many things to revive the good in us. Yet we fail to live the good life. I am not saying that a person is incapable of doing any good act. We can do good acts, but the good acts are often forced or artificial. And the good we do can come out wrong or be misinterpreted.

### The Centrality of Power

*Christian perspective.* The teaching of power is shunned in Christianity. The meek, not the strong, inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5). Jesus taught that whoever would be the greatest in the Kingdom of God must be a slave of all (Mark 10:42-45). The humility of Jesus in giving up the right of equality with God and being humble even to death is praised in Phil. 2.

\* *Islamic perspective.* In the Muslim understanding, God is on the side of those who win. This is illustrated in the rise of Muhammad to power as the priest-king in Saudi Arabia. The quick expansion of the Islamic kingdom during the time of the four Rightly Guided Caliphs and afterward until 732 AD seems further proof for the rightness of Islam. The superiority of Islamic culture in its glory years while the Western world slipped into darkness shows again the greatness of Islam. As the significance of the Islamic Empire waned and Egypt was invaded by Napoleon in 1798, the Islamic world went through much soul searching. Nasr (1994) explains:

From the Islamic point of view, the success that the Muslims had had in the world during their history had been a sign and consequence of both the truth of Islam and their firm allegiance to that truth, for as Allah asserts in the Qur'an, "If Allah helps you, none can overcome you" (3:160).

\* The theme of victory or power permeates Islamic teaching. Among Muslims the cross is perceived as a sign of weakness, and it is shameful for any prophet of God to suffer defeat. God would not allow his prophets to suffer humiliation. It may help to point out that the Qur'an recognizes that the prophets were mistreated and sometimes even killed (Surah 3:183-184). It should not come as a surprise to the Muslim that infidels will seek to destroy a prophet who exposes the people's sins.

*Alternative:* The gospel should be presented in such a fashion that the Muslim understands that we are honoring Jesus by presenting Christ the Victor over Iblis (the devil) or al-Shaytan (Satan), the jinn (evil spirits), and death (the last enemy). This celestial battle between God and Satan is a major theme in the Scriptures. From the promise of God to crush the head of Satan in Genesis 3:14-15 until the de-thronement and casting of Satan into the lake of burning sulfur in Revelation 20: 7-10, the Scriptures are pregnant with the spiritual battle. The death, burial, and resurrection of Christ are trumpeted as victory over sin and death. I Corinthians 15:54ff says, "... Death has been swallowed up in victory... But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Since power is such a central theme in Islam, in the beginning we can focus on Jesus as conqueror of Satan and evil. Jesus was with his disciples three years before they came to the realization that He was the Son of God. The disciples made this proclamation only after they saw Jesus' power to forgive sins, his power over nature, and power to heal people.

After Muslims have come to understand Jesus as Conqueror over Satan, they will be more open to understanding Jesus as Son of God. However, I sometimes challenge Muslims with this question, "Can a prophet take on Satan and beat him? If not, then who is Jesus Christ?" This question prompts the Muslim to think about who Jesus really is, and leaves the discussion open for the next meeting.

### The Christian Life

#### Three Necessary Elements

A confusing concept for Muslims is what the Christian life is all about. They may think Christians are presenting a perfect life through Christ. At that point I introduce three elements needed to live the Christian life: the Bible, the Holy Spirit, and the Church.

The world in which we live is not neutral. It pressures people to compromise. For example, at work perhaps coworkers do not want



anyone to tell the boss that they are cheating on their time, taking little things home for their personal use, or lying on a report. They may want us to remain silent. And when we are tired or lose our focus, we sometimes surrender to the bad.

We also have an enemy who is like a roaring lion seeking for someone to devour. This enemy is Satan. His desire is to entangle us in his web of deception, anger, or bitterness. Satan's grip is so strong that once we are entangled in his deception, deliverance is only possible from someone more powerful than he.

However, God has not left us to fend for ourselves. Not only does God revive the good in us through Jesus, but He has also more than adequately provided for us to live this new life continually.

*The Bible:* The Bible is the Christian's guideline for living. Scripture not only contains God's law, which is the believer's delight and desire to follow, but also God's perspective on life and this world. The Bible is the Word of God and with it one is able to understand the will of God. Jesus used the Bible to combat Satan, and believers can do the same.

*The Holy Spirit:* The Holy Spirit is God's Spirit living in all those who have received new life. The Spirit informs the person who is alive in Christ as to what thoughts and actions are contrary to God's way. When the person who is alive in Christ listens to the inner voice of the Holy Spirit, he or she will be guided in making right decisions and following the will of God.

*The Church:* The church is the community of God's people. This community of believers serves several purposes. The church models the new life in Christ. The church gives examples of people who follow the Holy Spirit, even in situations where there might be a high price to pay for obedience. The church provides encouragement and direction to live the new life as Christians struggle through life's perilous path.

If any of these three ingredients are missing in the new life in Christ, the person will be overcome by the power of the bad. It will be almost impossible to resist for neither we nor this world are neutral, and the enemy seeks to destroy us.

### Calling for Commitment

*Christian perspective:* When Christians ask seekers to accept Christ, they are asking them to accept the gift of God who brings eternal life.

*Islamic perspective:* I have found that many Muslims misunderstand this part and think we are asking them to merely change

religions and become a Christian, which is a negative concept. They may lose sight of who Christ is and view a call for commitment as simply changing religions. Muslims will think of the day of judgment and its consequences if they become Christians. Paradise is reserved for the true Muslims. Hell is for the *ka'fir* (unbelievers).

*Implications:* I believe it is helpful in the decision process to address the issue of judgment head on. In so doing we help the person keep focused on the real issues of life and who can give life. It is too easy to shift the focus on to the emotional issues of not changing religion for fear of the judgment of Allah.

*Alternate:* At this point, seekers can be asked if they want their inner good to be reborn. The key is what Jesus has done. Jesus allowed the power of evil to destroy Him completely through death and then overcame that power by coming to life again. Now He wants to give this new life to everyone who asks. John 1: 12, 13 states: "Yet to all who received him...he gave the right to become children of God" (NIV). The seeker needs to keep focused on the issue, not of changing religions, but rather of receiving life.

*Judgment Day:* When the judgment day comes, God will not look at the good deeds that we have done. Rather He will judge us as to whether we have new life and are alive to good inwardly. If the person is alive to good, then the person will go to heaven. If the person does not have this new life, it is too late to infuse life after death. Hell is the place for those who have not received life.

However, if the person has new life, then he or she will go to heaven. Heaven is not a reward for doing good works, but is reserved as a reward for those who are alive to good. In heaven, God promises to remove the bad in us and restore us to purity again as He originally created us. Though we do not know exactly what heaven will be like, we know that the bad in us will be removed and we will be fully what we were created to be.

### Conclusion

The Western world is changing greatly as the vast transmigration of peoples takes place in the twenty-first century. For the Christian, the task of communicating the gospel mostly with neighbors of similar background and belief system is quickly changing. The great challenge to the Western Church is to find ways to understand different belief systems, not just the religious beliefs but also the worldview behind those beliefs. As Christians go back to the Bible and prayerfully think through their presuppositions with new cultural eyes,



they can find ways to share the wonderful message of Christ's salvation in a culturally relevant manner.

Christianity is about bringing new life, which people are unable to do for themselves. The purpose is to present this life clearly to all and call them into this new life in Jesus. Some will respond. Others will continue reflecting on the issue. When that happens, the Holy Spirit will work in the person's understanding. Some will not want this new life, for their life has been built around another set of standards. To accept Jesus and this new life would be too costly. For them we can pray that God will give them a vision of true life in Jesus.

My prayer for the Christian Church is taken from some paraphrased words of the Apostle Paul; Pray that whenever we open our mouths, words may be given us so that we will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel. Pray that we may declare it fearlessly, as we should (Eph. 6:19–20).

### Section 3



## *Models of Outreach to Muslims*