

*Disciple of Christ Study: Lesson 9*  
*Addendum A. Tips for Sharing the Gospel with Muslims*  
*By Pastor Thabiti Anyabwile*

**#1. Know the Gospel**

Surely this is obvious, but it bears stating. I've been surprised at the number of times Christian friends have found themselves in discussion with Muslims and left the exchange realizing how shallow their understanding of the gospel is. And I've been surprised at how many times I've left conversations with Muslims scratching my head about this or that Christian belief I was unable to communicate well.

So, the first order of business is to drink deeply from gospel waters. The thimble-sized sips that are reflected in so many evangelical "presentations" of the gospel actually leave you thirsty when you're sitting across the table from someone who not only doesn't believe the gospel but actually believes you're going to hell for believing it. In those encounters we need to do more than whet our whistles with the good news. We need to be bathed in the Good News!

We need to be soaked with an understanding that far surpasses the "four spiritual laws." We need rock-ribbed, Trinitarian, virgin birth, hypostatic union, definite atonement Theology. Prepare for your discussions by reading good literature. The concepts that are taken for granted in a nominal Christian culture are challenged at most every point when witnessing to Muslims. So, there is a necessary apologetic task that is best met by understanding Gospel truth in a more profound way than is taught in most evangelical circles.

**#2. Renounce Fear**

There are four fears that most Christians tend to experience when it comes to sharing the Gospel with Muslims.

A. Fear of Terrorists

Let's face it; a great number of us think "terrorist" or "potential terrorist" when we see an Arab, in general, and an Arab Muslim in particular. The images that inform this fear are plentiful: images of 9/11, of bearded men with head scarves, of angry Arabs protesting cartoons, of masked militia wielding automatic weapons and rocket launchers, of young Arab boys throwing Molotov cocktails and rocks at tanks, of dreaded suicide bombers maiming and killing bystanders and civilians.

The almost daily deluge of these images fills us with suspicion and fear and causes us to hesitate in sharing, lest we talk with an actual terrorist and somehow end up on their "hit list." This fear blinds us to the person's great need of a Savior by focusing us on ourselves, our vain lust for security and safety. So, what if the person is a terrorist? Aren't we better off rejoicing at the prospect of speaking with a terrorist and by God's omnipotent aid actually seeing them converted

from such hate-filled darkness to the joy and love-filled light of Christ? The Christian's "war against terror" is the warfare we wage to spread the gospel to all—including folks we fear might be terrorists.

#### B. Fear of Muslim's Knowledge

We often carry in our minds the idea that Muslims are thorough in their knowledge of the Qur'an and its teaching. We fear that our discussion will turn into an embarrassing display of their superior knowledge and our weak understanding of the Bible.

The truth is that most Muslims are rather ignorant of the Qur'an's teachings, depending heavily on the interpretations of clerics and tradition, and even more ignorant of the Bible. We need not fear what turns out to be another stereotype. We will more often meet Muslims who claim in sweeping terms, "The Qur'an<sup>1</sup> teaches..." or "There is a Hadith<sup>2</sup> somewhere that teaches...". Rarely will we meet men and women who have any specific reference or developed theology in mind.

So, our task is to hear and heed the call of scripture to "study to show ourselves approved" (as the KJV renders it), to be "a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). As we do so, any fear of what a Muslim knows will be replaced with confidence in the word of God which does not return void but accomplishes its purposes.

#### C. Fear Muslims Don't Convert

A third stereotype or misconception is that Muslims do not convert from Islam to Christianity. That's hogwash! And moreover, when we buy into that fear or misconception, we actually deny that the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to all who believe, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile (Rom. 1:16), and yes, the Muslim too! I am exhibit A (my testimony), and there is an innumerable host of others. Spend some time reading and listening to their testimonies and know that the Lord's arm is not shortened that He cannot save!

#### D. Fear of Offending

And then there is the fear of offending our Muslim friends and neighbors. We worry way too much about this one. When listening to a conversation I was having with a Muslim man, my wife pointed out to me that he had no qualms about telling me how blasphemously wrong he thought I was and how he felt no hesitation at proclaiming his own point of view (theological, political, cultural, etc.). She was correct, and that has almost always been my experience in discussing religious matters with Muslims—they aren't shy at telling you what they think is right or wrong.

Christians need more mettle. We need to "man up" and share the Gospel Truth about Jesus without fear of man, without fear of offending, and with the passion and certitude that recognizes that their and our eternal destinies are at stake when it comes to believing the truth about Jesus

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<sup>1</sup> The Qur'an is the holy book of Islam and was compiled in the seventh century.

<sup>2</sup> The Hadith records the sayings and deeds of Muhammad, who is regarded as a prophet by Muslims.

(John 17:3, 7-8). We need a holy recklessness that throws our overly cautious and fear-laden civility to the wind to declare, proclaim, defend, announce, herald, assert, affirm, state, show, persuade, argue the fact that a holy, sin-hating, sin-judging God is opposed to men who love darkness rather than the light, whose deeds are evil and therefore worthy of eternal condemnation, that this same God sent His Son, born of a virgin, perfect in obedience, to die a criminal's death in our stead, and raised Him from the grave conquering our sin and death and now calls all men everywhere to repent and believe in Jesus!

Let it rip with the kind of love that risks social awkwardness in favor of eternal fellowship with God the Father and the Risen Lamb! When witnessing to Muslims... renounce all fear in the name of Jesus!

But remember to show respect and love for them as someone made in God's image: 1 Peter 3:15; Colossians 3:12, 4:6; 1 Corinthians 4:20-21.

### **#3. Defend the Bible.**

The assertion is ubiquitous. "The Bible is corrupted; it's been changed by Jews and Christians." That's what Muslims claim. And from that claim they move on to assert that the Qur'an is perfect and pure. Whenever a Christian is given the God-sent opportunity to proclaim the gospel to a Muslim, they will have to effectively defend the Bible against such notions.

To do so, it's helpful to keep a couple things in mind. First, remember that the typical Muslim is what we might call a "folk Muslim" or "cultural Muslim." That is, she or he is not likely to be a scholar of either the Qur'an or the Bible. Their views are shaped greatly by the teachings of an Imam or cleric and tradition. So, don't be afraid of hearing this charge. Second, a few key passages from the Qur'an can be used to suspend belief in Muslim claims about a corrupted Bible. The Qur'an everywhere affirms that the Law of Moses (Torah), the Psalms of David, and the Gospels were "revelations" from God. For example:

"No just estimate of Allah do they make when they say: "Nothing doth Allah send down to man (by way of revelation)" Say: "*Who then sent down **the Book which Moses brought?**- a light and guidance to man...*" (Surah 6:91).<sup>3</sup>

"And it is your Lord that knoweth best all beings that are in the heavens and on earth: We did bestow on some prophets more (and other) gifts than on others: *and We gave to David (the gift of) the **Psalms***" (Surah 17:55).<sup>4</sup>

"The Great Terror will bring them no grief: but the angels will meet them (with mutual greetings): 'This is your Day,- (the Day) that ye were promised.' The Day that We roll up the heavens like a scroll rolled up for books (completed),- even as We produced the first creation, so shall We produce a new one: a promise We have undertaken: truly shall We fulfill it. *Before this*

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<sup>3</sup> The "book which Moses brought" is likely a reference to the Torah, the first five books of the Bible. Muslims believe that Moses was a prophet of God.

<sup>4</sup> The "Psalms" may refer to the Book of Psalms in the Bible, which is a collection of prayers and praise songs written mostly by David.

*We wrote in the **Psalms**, after **the Message (given to Moses)**: My servants the righteous, shall inherit the earth” (Surah 21:103-105).*

*“And in their footsteps We sent Jesus the son of Mary, confirming the Law that had come before him: We sent him the **Gospel**: therein was guidance and light, and confirmation of the Law that had come before him: a guidance and an admonition to those who fear Allah. Let the people of the Gospel judge by what Allah hath revealed therein...” (Surah 5:46-47).<sup>5</sup>*

Notice in the last quote (Surah 5:47) that “the people of the Gospel” are told to judge all things by what is put in the Gospels. As Christians, we should seize that as an open opportunity to move directly to Jesus. Moreover, we should expose our Muslim friends to this “revelation” in the Qur’an, where even in the time of Muhammad the Gospels were still seen as reliable enough to arrive at the truth. Surah 10:94 reads: “If thou wert in doubt as to what We have revealed unto thee, then *ask those who have been reading the Book from before thee: the Truth hath indeed come to thee from thy Lord: so be in no wise of those in doubt* (see also 16:43; 21:7). Even the writers of the Qur’an admit in places that the Bible is sufficient for matters of faith and conduct.

Further, this key principle runs throughout the Qur’an: “*There is nothing that can altar the words of God*” (6:34; 10:64; 18:27). According to the Qur’an, Allah promises to watch over the revelation and guard it from corruption (15:9). These sentiments find their expression in the Bible first. “Your word, O Lord, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens” (Ps. 119:89; 1 Pet. 1:24-25). And Jesus taught “It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the Law” (Luke 16:17) and “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away” (Matt. 24:35).

Let us be quick to ask our Muslim friends:

- If the Bible had been corrupted would the “perfect” Qur’an have confirmed it?
- If even the Qur’an teaches that the Torah, Psalms of David, and Gospels are words from God, and both the Bible and the Qur’an teach that God protects His word and that His word will not be corrupted, then shouldn’t we assume that the Bible is reliable and true?

Another question for those who insist the Bible is corrupted:

What does it say about your view of Allah/God, then, if his word is corrupted by men? Either you must conclude that Allah is not omnipotent being unable to guard his word from mere men, or that he is not a god of truth because he willingly allows men to corrupt his revelation.

At this point, you’re praying that the Holy Spirit of God makes your friend honest and willing to suspend his disbelief in the Bible in order to hear a clear presentation of who Jesus is from the Law, the writings, and the Gospel. May the Lord give us much fruit from our labors!

#### **#4. Get Personal.**

Most Muslims will be eager to agree that God is holy and just, that he will punish the wicked. What most Muslims fail to realize is that in their sins they are the wicked. Most Muslims have a

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<sup>5</sup> The first four books of the Bible’s New Testament are referred to as the Gospels. They record the words and miracles of Jesus Christ. The word “gospel” means “good news.”

shallow view of sin, thinking of sin as “mistakes” or “faults” of some generic sense that may be dealt with simply by “repenting” and asking for forgiveness. They fail to understand the gravity of sin, their own personal sin by failing to recognize that sin is a rebellious, frontal assault against the holy God of the universe who will bring all men to account. They fail to realize that even the smallest sins alienate men from God and that approaching Him is not as simple as saying “I’m sorry” and calling for a mulligan (a second chance). Atonement must be made. True repentance, the kind that turns from sin and toward God through faith in Jesus Christ, is absolutely essential. And it is only on that basis alone that forgiveness is possible.

In our witnessing to Muslims we must cut to the chase. We must make it personal. We must insist upon the heinous seriousness of sin and the clear and present danger they are facing.

Having established the reliability of the Bible, press these revelations into the conversation. Take your Muslim friend to the Ten Commandments (Deut. 5) and to Jesus’ exposition of the commandments (for example, Matt. 5:21-22, 27-28, 38-48) and press them to examine their own lives in light of God’s perfect holiness.

*Nothing is gained from endless debates about politics.* It only engenders strife. And nothing is gained by abstract discussions of religion, a sort of interpersonal interfaith discussion between friends. Work, depending on the aid of God’s Holy Spirit, to expose their hearts before God. Knowing the severity of God, let us persuade all our Muslim friends to face the mirror of their own sins and see themselves the way God sees them: made in His image but like us scarred and ruined by their sin.

#### **#5. Get to Jesus.**

*“Jesus is a respected prophet of Allah. He was born to the virgin Mary and he did miracles, including speaking while an infant, raising the dead, and healing people. He will return in judgment.”*

Any Muslim you meet is likely to affirm these statements. These are the teachings of the Qur’an. But, these statements are likely to be quickly followed up with urgent qualifications.

*“But, he is not the son of God. Allah has no sons and no partners. There is but one God. And, he did not die on the cross, that is not a worthy death for a messenger of Allah. He was only made to look like he died on the cross. The followers of Jesus make a blasphemous mistake in making him an equal with Allah.”*

Now there is the rub! It’s amazing how two groups could have so much in common and yet be miles apart in their meanings. But that is precisely the case with any discussion between Muslims and Christians. How is one to cross this chasm (divide), to speak into the dark cavernous void that separates the two positions? What is the Christian responsibility when we come to this impasse?

Well, neither our message or our method is to change. We proclaim (method) the truth about the One who is the way, the truth and the life (message). But where does one start? I’ve found it helpful to start with as clear a statement of the consequences or risks associated with how we answer this question. That is... whether we spend eternity in heaven or in an agonizing hell

facing God's wrath depends on who we say Jesus is. It's helpful to make it clear that this is no matter for light, impersonal speculation or intellectual sparring. This is a matter of eternal life and death. This is the ultimate question, "Who do you say that I am?"

Second, it's useful if you can start with the common ground that is afforded. The Qur'an, while not a revelation from God, is not completely without truth in some matters. And where Jesus is concerned, there are at least a few things to start with, things that most Muslims don't connect into a coherent whole when it comes to a doctrine of Jesus.

- *Jesus was virgin born.* That's obviously taught in the prophets (Isaiah, for example) and the gospels. But it's also taught clearly in the Qur'an (Surah 3:45-48, 19:20ff). But the fact of His virgin birth isn't the issue, the reason for and meaning of His virgin birth is.
- *Jesus was faultless.* In Surah Maryam we read, "He said: I am only a messenger of thy Lord that I may bestow on thee a faultless son." The promise or sign given is not just a sinless, which would be miraculous enough, but for a perfectly *faultless* son. <sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The Qur'an consists of 114 chapters. Each chapter (or "surah") has a title derived from a word or idea expressed in the text of the chapter or from the first letters or words of the chapter. The following list contains the title of each chapter in the order that they appear in the Qur'an: *Al-Fatihah* (The Opening), *Al-Baqarah* (The Cow), *Al-Imran* (The Family of Amran), *An-Nisa'* (The Women)...continued on next page

*Al-Ma'idah* (The Food), *Al-An'am* (The Cattle), *Al-A'raf* (The Elevated Places), *Al-Anfal* (Voluntary Gifts), *Al-Bara'at / At-Taubah* (The Immunity), *Yunus* (Jonah), *Hud* (Hud), *Yusuf* (Joseph), *Ar-Ra'd* (The Thunder), *Ibrahim* (Abraham), *Al-Hijr* (The Rock), *An-Nahl* (The Bee), *Bani Isra'il* (The Israelites), *Al-Kahf* (The Cave), *Maryam* (Mary), *Ta Ha* (Ta Ha), *Al-Anbiya'* (The Prophets), *Al-Hajj* (The Pilgrimage), *Al-Mu'minun* (The Believers), *An-Nur* (The Light), *Al-Furqan* (The Discrimination), *Ash-Shu'ara'* (The Poets), *An-Naml* (The Naml), *Al-Qasas* (The Narrative), *Al-Ankabut* (The Spider), *Ar-Rum* (The Romans), *Luqman* (Luqman), *As-Sajdah* (The Adoration), *Al-Ahzab* (The Allies), *Al-Saba'* (The Saba'), *Al-Fatir* (The Originator), *Ya Sin* (Ya Sin), *As-Saffat* (Those Ranging in Ranks), *Sad* (Sad), *Az-Zumar* (The Companies), *Al-Mu'min* (The Believer), *Ha Mim* (Ha Mim), *Ash-Shura* (Counsel), *Az-Zukhruf* (Gold), *Ad-Dukhan* (The Drought), *Al-Jathiyah* (The Kneeling), *Al-Ahqaf* (The Sandhills), *Muhammad* (Muhammad), *Al-Fath* (The Victory), *Al-Hujurat* (The Apartments), *Qaf* (Qaf), *Ad-Dhariyat* (The Scatterers), *At-Tur* (The Mountain), *An-Najm* (The Star), *Al-Qamar* (The Moon), *Ar-Rahman* (The Beneficent), *Al-Waqi'ah* (The Event), *Al-Hadid* (Iron), *Al-Mujadilah* (The Pleading Woman), *Al-Hashr* (The Banishment), *Al-Mumtahanah* (The Woman who is Examined), *As-Saff* (The Ranks), *Al-Jumu'ah* (The Congregation), *Al-Munafiqun* (The Hypocrites), *At-Taghabun* (The Manifestation of Losses), *At-Talaq* (Divorce), *At-Tahrim* (The Prohibition), *Al-Mulk* (The Kingdom), *Al-Qalam* (The Pen), *Al-Haqqah* (The Sure Truth), *Al-Ma'arij* (The Ways of Ascent), *Nuh* (Noah), *Al-Jinn* (The Jinn), *Al-Muzzammil* (The One Covering Himself), *Al-Muddaththir* (The One Wrapping Himself Up), *Al-Qiyamah* (The Resurrection), *Al-Insan* (The Man), *Al-Mursalat* (Those Sent Forth), *An-Naba'* (The Announcement), *An-Nazi'at* (Those Who Yearn), *'Abasa* (He Frowned), *At-Takwir* (The Folding Up), *Al-Infitar* (The Cleaving), *At-Tatfif* (Default in Duty), *Al-Inshiqaq* (The Bursting Asunder), *Al-Buruj* (The Stars), *At-Tariq* (The Comer by Night), *Al-A'la* (The Most High), *Al-Ghashiyah* (The Overwhelming Event), *Al-Fajr* (The Daybreak), *Al-Balad* (The City), *Ash-Shams* (The Sun), *Al-Lail* (The Night), *Ad-Duha* (The Brightness of the Day), *Al-Inshirah* (The Expansion), *At-Tin* (The Fig), *Al-'Alaq* (The Clot), *Al-Qadr* (The Majesty), *Al-Bayyinah* (The Clear Evidence), *Al-Zilzal* (The Shaking), *Al-'Adiyat* (The Assaulters), *Al-Qari'ah* (The Calamity), *At-Takathur* (The Abundance of Wealth), *Al-'Asr* (The Time), *Al-Humazah* (The Slanderer), *Al-Fil* (The Elephant), *Al-Quraish* (The Quraish), *Al-Ma'un* (Acts of Kindness), *Al-Kauthar* (The Abundance of Good), *Al-Kafirun* (The Disbelievers), *An-Nasr* (The Help), *Al-Lahab* (The Flame), *Al-Ikhlās* (The Unity), *Al-Falaq* (The Dawn), *An-Nas* (The Men)

- *Jesus was “strengthened with the Holy Spirit”* (Sur. 2:87). In Surah 2:253 we read: “Those messengers We endowed with gifts, some above others: To one of them Allah spoke; others He raised to degrees (of honour); *to Jesus the son of Mary We gave clear (Signs), and strengthened him with the holy spirit.*” Many will argue that this reference to the “holy spirit” is a reference to Gabriel the angel. But if so, the Qur’an suffers from a classic contradiction for in several places the angels and the Spirit are mentioned as different beings. “*The angels and the spirit ascend unto him in a Day the measure whereof is (as) fifty thousand years*” (Surah 70:4). “The Day that *the Spirit and the angels* will stand forth in ranks, none shall speak except any who is permitted by (Allah) Most Gracious, and He will say what is right” (Surah 78:38; see also 97:1-5). Clearly, the Spirit is *not* an angel and is responsible for strengthening Jesus during His earthly ministry.

So, the Qur’an supports the view that Jesus was virgin born, sinless, and aided by the Holy Spirit. The questions are: What relationship does each of these teachings have to the other? And, why are these things so? These three teachings about Jesus are crucial for both the Christian and the Muslim. Moreover, they are interdependent teachings. One does not hold up without the other. This is something frequently overlooked by my Muslim friends.

So, let’s start with the teaching that Jesus is faultless. Clearly to live a faultless human life is impossible for an ordinary man. The Hadith goes so far as to say that Satan touches in the womb every human except Jesus. That’s loosely analagous to the Christian doctrine of original sin. But Jesus’ birth is different. He is born supernaturally of a virgin. And not only is His birth different, so too is his life. He is able to live a faultless life because He is aided by the Spirit of God.

Now the Muslim has two problems here. He must explain how Jesus can be born of a virgin and not have God as His Father. Christians do not mean that God has sex with a woman, as many Muslims mistakenly think. But we do understand from Jesus’ own teaching in the Gospels that God the Father is His Father. Moreover, a Muslim must explain more carefully who the Holy Spirit of God is. We’ve seen that He can not be an angel. And if He is the Spirit *of God*, a Muslim must explain how He cannot *be* God, of God’s essence. What emerges, even from the pages of the Qur’an, though everywhere the Qur’an explicitly denies it, is a Trinitarian view of God! God the Father commanded the birth of a sinless Son who is aided by His omnipotent Spirit.

Why is all of this necessary? Why must Jesus be sinless, aided by the Spirit, and virgin born? For the answer to that, we must turn our Muslim friends back to the Gospels, the revelation that the Qur’an teaches was given to Jesus and that the Qur’an teaches Muhammad affirmed.

In the Gospel, we observe these wonderfully profound truths: Matthew 1:21, John 3:16, Mark 10:45, Matthew 14:33, Matthew 16:16-17, Luke 19:10, Luke 22:70, Luke 24:7.

Jesus, the perfect Son of God, came to die for sinful men. He gave His life as a ransom for our own. He died the death that we deserved to satisfy the holy wrath of God on behalf of those who repent of their sins and turn toward God through faith in Jesus the Messiah. He is the virgin born, sinless, crucified and resurrected Son of God who provides the only way of salvation and escape from the wrath to come.

When witnessing to Muslims, be bold, know the gospel, defend the scripture, confront them with their own sins and penalty of sin, and then bring them to Jesus!

Nearly every Muslim I've had the privilege of sharing the gospel with denies that Jesus was crucified. Often, the denial is accompanied with the explanation that such a death is not worthy of one of Allah's messengers/prophets. And from time to time, some will claim that it wasn't actually Jesus that died but someone (perhaps Judas) that was made to look like Jesus at the crucifixion. And still others, like Muslim apologist Ahmed Deedat, maintain that Jesus was put on the cross but did not actually die on the cross but came down and continued to live. The traditional Islamic understanding is that Jesus was "raised up" to Allah and will return at the judgment to condemn those who taught false things about him and worshipped him.

In four passages from the Qur'an, it's possible to affirm a number of things.

1. Jesus himself said he would die ("my day of death" in 19:33).
2. Jesus affirms that his death would be "blessed," so in whatever way he died we cannot conclude that it was "unworthy" of God's prophets. Note that in 19:15 the same blessing is pronounced on John the baptist who was beheaded, and yet his death is blessed.
3. The Qur'an itself teaches that Jesus actually died, not just that he was "raised up." Sura 5:117 uses the euphemism "You took me to yourself" and Sura 3:55 distinguishes between death and being raised up — "I am causing you to die" and "I will exalt you to Myself." Any theory of Jesus' death can not confuse these two things.
4. The Qur'an flatly contradicts itself. Jesus plainly claims that he would die. And in Sura 3 Allah says he is "causing Jesus to die." But in the next chapter says "they killed him not, nor did they crucify him" and "they did not kill him... God raised him to himself."
5. Not only does the Qur'an contradict itself on this point, it also contradicts all the revelations before it that it claims to affirm! From Genesis 3:15 to the Messianic Psalms to all four Gospel narratives which give a disproportionate amount of space to the crucifixion events, all of biblical revelation points to the historical fact and necessity of Jesus' death on the cross.

When witnessing to Muslims, hold before them the certainty of Jesus' death on the cross. The Qur'an contradicts itself, but the biblical witness (which the Qur'an affirms!) gives sure evidence that the Son of God was crucified and raised again!

Let's ask our Muslim friends which position a reasonable man would take given the evidence:

Would a reasonable man take the eyewitness testimony of people who knew Jesus and stood by the cross... or the contradictory claims of writers 600 years after the event?

The eyewitness testimony: Gospel of Luke 23:44-49. And again: Gospel of John 19:16-18, 25, 30, and 35.<sup>7</sup>

Rev 12/9/2015

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<sup>7</sup> The author has approved Christian Library International's use of this material.