

**Q&A with Nabeel Qureshi, Author of
No God But One—Allah or Jesus?
*A Former Muslim Investigates the Evidence for Islam & Christianity***

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Q: Why did you write *No God But One—Allah or Jesus?*

A: Every year, millions are faced with this dilemma: to follow Islam or Christianity, to worship Allah or Jesus. Unless the seeker lives in a nominal or secular environment, the stakes are high: It can cost a seeker his or her family, friends, job, and potentially his or her life. For such seekers, it's not simply a matter of believing whatever seems right. They need to be sure, and they need to be sure it's worth the sacrifice.

For me, it's been a decade since I made the decision to leave Islam, and the fallout of my decision haunts me every day. I knew it would, well before I ever converted, but I also knew that I was sure. I was sure that Islam and Christianity are not just two paths that lead to the same God, but two very different paths that lead very different ways. I was sure that I had excellent historical reason to believe the gospel. I was sure that, though I loved Islam, I couldn't ignore the problems that plagued its foundations.

But most of all, I was sure that following the one true God would be worth all trials and all suffering. I had to follow the evidence and the truth, no matter the cost.

I left my religion of twenty-two years and became a follower of Jesus in 2005. In 2009, after graduating from medical school, I decided to leave medicine in order to share what I had learned about the gospel, the message of Christianity. I sincerely believe that this message has the power to transform hearts and change the world. The God it proclaims is unlike any other, and it is an unfathomable honor that we get to be a part of His story and introduce people to Him.

As I speak around the world, I often come across two kinds of people: Christians who enjoy criticizing Islam, and Muslims who want to argue but do not want to learn. I am not writing this book for either of them. I am writing for people who—like I did—need the answers to three main questions: 1) what are the differences between Islam and Christianity? 2) Can we be confident that Christianity or Islam is true? 3) Is it worth sacrificing everything for the truth? It took me four years to answer these questions, and they remain so important to me that I've studied them for another decade beyond.

Q: Are Christianity and Islam basically the same religion?

A: When I hear people say that Islam and Christianity are basically the same, I have to try to restrain my incredulous response. Are Islam and Christianity the same? My parents certainly don't think so, nor do any of the dozens of friends I lost when I renounced Islam and became a Christian. This cliché is a slap in the face to the hundreds of thousands of converts who have left Islam for Christianity and vice versa.

Not only are these religions different, but the differences have far greater ramifications than I realized when I converted. I knew that the historical doctrines of the two religions were different, but doctrines do not exist in a vacuum. They work together to impact the way we see the world, which in turn changes who we are.

Q: How do the differences between Allah and Jesus color one's world view?

A: Both Muslims and Christians believe that there is no God but one, but is He Allah or is He Jesus? I can tell you from personal experience and in all sincerity: How we answer this question has the power to change who we are.

What we think God is like has a tremendous impact on how we see the world He created. Why did God create humans: to share intimacy with them or to test them? What does He think about people: are they His servants or His children? How does He want us to live: focusing on love or focusing on law? What does He tell us about the afterlife: to anxiously anticipate unknown judgment or to have joyful faith in His grace? The Islamic view of God and the Christian view lend themselves to different answers, and how we answer these questions changes how we see ourselves, other people, and the world around us.

Q: Are there some similarities between Islam and Christianity?

A: There's really no question that Islam and Christianity are close to one another on the broader religious spectrum. They are both monotheistic, the largest two faith communities in the world, and they share many similarities. Each teaches the doctrine of an eternal, all-powerful, all-knowing God who is sovereign over the universe. It is God who created mankind out of one man and one woman, yet mankind turns away from Him. Each teaches that one day there will be a resurrection and final judgment. Before then, it is of paramount importance for us to seek God and follow Him.

But the similarities between Islam and Christianity run even deeper, beyond the trappings of monotheism: Both lay claim to Abrahamic lineage; both teach that God has sent messengers, human and angelic, to steer people back to Him; both teach that God has inspired divine scriptures to guide man; both teach that Satan is a deceiver that misleads the unwary; and both teach that believers ought to sacrificially care for each other and proclaim the truth to nonbelievers.

Perhaps the most surprising shared feature is reverence for Jesus. Both Islam and Christianity teach that Jesus was born of a virgin, and that He was the most miraculous man who ever lived. Both the Bible and the Quran teach that Jesus cleansed lepers, healed the blind, and even raised the dead. Indeed, both books teach that Jesus is the Messiah, and Muslims await His return, as do Christians.

Q: How do Islam and Christianity deal with the problem of brokenness in the world?

A: Islam diagnoses the world with ignorance and offers the remedy of *Sharia*, a law to follow. Christianity diagnoses the world with brokenness and offers the remedy of the *gospel*, a relationship with God that leads to heart transformation.

What is it that truly ails mankind, and is there a cure?

From my perspective, the gospel resonates with reality: People are broken in their hearts and souls, and no matter how educated or self-reflective we become, it does not appear that following rules will be enough to address the problem. The problem lies deeper than what we do; it is embedded in who we are. Having spent some time working with the dejected and downtrodden, such as those whose lives have been ravaged by various addictions, I do not think ignorance is their problem. It is brokenness. Having seen families be torn apart by abuse or anger, the answer does not appear to lie in knowledge or following rules, but in transformed hearts.

This leads me to a second observation: Mankind seems incapable of saving itself. In our natural selves, we perpetuate cycles of destruction. Our hearts are broken, so we break other hearts. We were abused, so we abuse in return. Our families were fractured, so we leave fractured families in our wake. When loved ones are killed, we kill in revenge. This is the way of humanity, and we need an otherworldly solution—something radical to break these cycles. We need God to save us.

Q: Do Christians and Muslims worship the same God?

A: Christians worship Yahweh, the Trinity, whereas Muslims worship Allah, a monad. This is not an incidental difference; Islam makes every effort to condemn the Trinity as blasphemy (4.171). The Quran rejects the relational aspects of God, saying that He is not a father (5.18) and He is not a son (112.3). It establishes its own doctrine of God, *Tawhid*, in diametric opposition to the Trinity, and that doctrine becomes the central doctrine of Islamic theology.

Most people who say Christians and Muslims worship the same God are aware of this difference, but they treat it as relatively inconsequential. This is not a trivial difference, though; it has major implications. *Since mankind is made in the image of the Triune God, love is woven into our very nature.* The Trinity gives us the most consistent, most powerful basis for being self-sacrificial and altruistic.

This is an important point to unpack. Of course, many people are very altruistic, regardless of their worldviews. A person does not need to believe in God to genuinely care for others, as secular humanists demonstrate. There are even people who don't believe in any kind of morality yet still desire to care for people. Ultimately, though, such ungrounded altruism is a sentiment, something a person just wants to do. Unless one believes in a transcendent basis for altruism, one's desire to care for people is unanchored and ephemeral, little more than a whim. According to this amoral worldview, nothing behooves a person to be kind. Even though someone might wish to be altruistic, in the next moment it would be entirely consistent with their worldview if they chose to be selfish.

The question of whether Muslims and Christians worship the same God is complex, and there is much more that could be said. Ultimately, when we understand the Trinity, we realize that the doctrine is not just a theological curiosity. It has far-reaching implications for how we ought to live and how we see the world, and it makes the Christian God categorically different from the Muslim God. It is what makes God relational, what makes His love eternal. It is how God can be in us, through the Holy Spirit, while being over us, as the Father, and suffering for us, in the Son.

And it is the Son that most distinguishes the Christian God from the Muslim God. We need to learn about Him not only in light of the Trinity but also in light of His life on earth.

Q: As you have studied Islam and Christianity, how has objectivity affected your research?

A: I want to share something that took me years to really grasp: It is virtually impossible to study these matters objectively. Not only do we all have a vested interest in defending the faiths we and our social circles have believed for years, but our beliefs also color the way we receive information. The same data will be interpreted differently by people from disparate worldviews. When we investigate Islam and Christianity as devout believers in one or the other faith, our Christian or Muslim presuppositions affect the way we interpret the evidence, and we often see what we want to see.

When I started investigating the data, I came to the table with the presupposition that Islam was true, and I interpreted the data accordingly. No matter what facts provided, I either made them fit my Islamic paradigm or I found some way to dismiss them. It is not difficult to defend what you already believe, and anyone who sets their mind to it will be able to do so, whether Muslim or Christian.

What is difficult is pursuing the truth about your faith and assessing it honestly. This feat requires one to be introspective and self-critical at frequent intervals. Although we can never completely overcome our biases, the most important step we can take is to pursue fair-mindedness with intentionality. While considering the data, we need to repeatedly ask ourselves the question: "Would an objective observer find the arguments compelling?"

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