

16 July 2015

ICNEF
2333 St Johns Bluff Road S
Jacksonville, FL 32246

To the Board of Directors and members of the Islamic Center of Northeast Florida:

The following is my plea for you to address your belief in Jesus Christ. This letter will be posted online at GodsBreath.Net. I write to you because of your association with the Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA) and a response to the promotion of Islam on billboards in Jacksonville. I certainly hope that you receive this letter with the kindness and love that I intend. Furthermore, my family has experienced the kindness and respect of local Muslims for which I am very thankful. I look forward to your reply.

My writing to you is to encourage discussion concerning the detrimental differences between the Gospel's perception of Jesus and the Qur'an's depiction of Jesus. My appeal to you is that you reconsider God's moral perfection, the apparent crucifixion of Jesus, and the resurrection.

I write recognizing our commonality in the belief of one God. He is the omniscient and omnipotent Creator of the universe. Because the Creator is forgiving and merciful, consider His moral perfection. If Allah is the perfect and Almighty Creator, then His morality is perfect. Do you believe that God is all-loving? Does Allah love non-Muslims? Must people earn Allah's love? Is Allah's love like a father who loves his children because they are his or only when they obey him? Does Allah love humanity only when they obey Him?

My concern is that Allah does not appear to love sinners according to the Qur'an. From Abdullah Yusuf Ali's translation, the Qur'an instructs, "Fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you, but do not transgress limits; for Allah loveth not transgressors" (2.190). The text affirms, "As to those who believe and work righteousness, Allah will pay them (in full) their reward; but Allah loveth not those who do wrong" (3.57). I find such statements throughout the Qur'an without a note of love for sinners (3.31b-33; 4.36; 5.87; 6.141).

However, Jesus instructed his followers to love their enemies. Jesus's Gospel is far different from the Qur'an. Jesus proclaimed, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven" (Matt 5:43-45a ESV). Furthermore, an apostle of Christ wrote, "but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8). Jesus's apostle John wrote, "Anyone

who does not love does not know God, because God is love” (1 John 4:8). Therefore, my plea is for all Muslims to read the words of Jesus Christ.

According to the Qur’an, Allah’s love is no greater than the love of unbelievers who love one another and not their enemies. There does not appear to exist a love-hate relationship. God and Jesus’s love excel that of Islam’s Allah. If God is morally perfect, then His love must exceed the world’s love so that God’s love is impartial and unconditional. Jesus proclaimed, “For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt 5:46–48).

If Allah is the perfect Creator, then His morality must exist in perfect love. However, the Qur’an presents that God does not love those whom the Bible says God loves. The Qur’an does not present Allah as morally perfect in love. Therefore, will you submit to a morally imperfect God? Please, read the words of Jesus Christ, because Jesus taught, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away” (Mark 13:31; cf. 8:38).

I am glad that Muslims share belief in the virgin birth of Jesus Christ (Surah 3.45–47). However, I am heartbroken to know that the believers of Islam reject the historical facts of Jesus’s death upon the cross, and thus reject the resurrection of Christ. Why would Allah start the Christian faith by making Jesus appear as crucified when he was not? The Qur’an asserts, “they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them, and those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no (certain) knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety they killed him not:” (4.156–158). However, critical scholars of Christianity recognize that Jesus’s disciples were not “full of doubts,” but they sincerely witnessed that Jesus died, witnessed His burial, and experienced appearances from the resurrected Christ.

Critical scholarship accepts that Jesus lived and died by crucifixion. Islamic scholars rely upon such critical scholarship who presume that today’s Bible is not a product of God. However, historical critical scholarship accepts these facts of Christ’s Gospel that: (1) Jesus died by crucifixion, (2) his body was buried in Joseph of Arimathea’s tomb, (3) women found Jesus’s tomb empty, (4) his disciples experienced appearances of Jesus raised from the dead, and (5) the church started and grew upon the teaching of these witnesses and previous prophecies (Sanders, E.P. *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*. 2000. P. 705–7). Historical scholarship dates the teachings of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus within five years of Jesus’s apparent crucifixion (1 Corinthians 15:1–11). They also recognize that soldiers guarded Jesus’s tomb that was found empty (Matthew 28:11–15; Mark 15:42–16:8). The Qur’an denies what critical scholarship recognizes as historical facts.

Centuries before Christ was born, the Book of Isaiah records that God's faultless servant will be cut off from the land of the living, his grave will be with the wicked and a rich man, and God will prolong his days (Isa 53:8-10). Jesus predicted, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise" (Mark 9:31). Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection is His Gospel. Christ proclaimed, "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again" (John 10:17).

Jesus's apostle Peter declared, "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Isaiah's Scriptures predict that a child will be born who is "Mighty God," and God and His Spirit will send the Redeemer who is God (Isa 9:6-7; 48:12-17). However, the Qur'an asserts, "In blasphemy indeed are those that say that Allah is Christ the son of Mary" (5.17a). The Qur'an also curses Christians for believing that Christ is the Son of God (9.30). Jesus professed, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

I welcome your response to address the concerns of God's love and Jesus's Gospel. You may contact me via GodsBreath.Net.

Lastly, Jesus proclaimed, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it" (Mark 8:34-35). Believers in Christ are saved when they are raised with Christ from death in their sins (Rom 6:1-6; Eph 2:1-10; Col 2:12-13; 1 Pet 1:3; 3:21).

With love from Christ for my neighbors,

Scott Shifferd, minister, church of Christ - Jacksonville, FL