

WEEK 6 OF 6

Is the Qur'an Perfect?

Textual Criticism and Faithful Witness

Christianity & Islam • October 18, 2026

Holy Trinity Presbyterian Church • Tampa, Florida

Review and Introduction

Week 1

Foundations

Muhammad, the Qur'an, and why this matters for Christians today.

Week 2

Tawhid vs. Trinity

Two monotheisms, two irreconcilable understandings of God's oneness.

Week 3

Jesus in the Qur'an

Isa as prophet vs. the biblical Christ as eternal Son of God.

Week 4

Cross and Salvation

The Qur'an's denial of the crucifixion and two irreconcilable gospels.

Week 5

Scripture Wars

Tahrif, manuscript evidence, and claims about Muhammad in the Bible.

Week 6 — TODAY

Is the Qur'an Perfect?

Textual criticism + faithful witness to our Muslim neighbors.

Qur'anic Parallels and Sources

White, Ch. 10 — The Qur'an draws on material from non-biblical sources that predate it by centuries.

Infancy Gospel of Thomas — Surah 3:49

Qur'an: Jesus says: "I will create for you from clay [the form] of a bird, then I breathe into it and it becomes a bird by permission of Allah."

Parallel: Inf. Thomas 2:1-5 (c. 2nd century): The boy Jesus makes twelve sparrows from clay on the Sabbath and claps to make them fly away.

Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5 / Genesis Rabbah 38 — Surah 5:32 & 21:51-67

Qur'an: Surah 5:32 parallels Sanhedrin 4:5 on the sanctity of one life. Surah 21 has Abraham smashing his father's idols — a story absent from the biblical text.

Parallel: Genesis Rabbah 38:13 (Talmudic midrash): Abraham smashes his father Terah's idol shop, then blames the largest idol. Not in the Hebrew Bible.

Syriac Alexander Legend — Surah 18:83-98

Qur'an: Dhul-Qarnayn ("the Two-Horned One") travels to where the sun sets, builds a wall of iron and brass against Gog and Magog.

Parallel: The Syriac Alexander Legend (c. 629-630 AD, just before Islam): Alexander is a Christian king who builds a gate against Gog and Magog. The parallels are extensive and specific.

The Uthmānic Revision

White, Ch. 11 — After Muhammad's death, the Qur'an existed in multiple competing manuscript traditions. What happened next?

Historical Record

- 632 AD:** Muhammad dies. The Qur'an has not yet been compiled into a single volume. Companions memorize portions; written on palm leaves, bones, and fragments.
- 633 AD:** Caliph Abu Bakr orders Zayd ibn Thabit to compile a written Qur'an. Many "reciters" (huffaz) had already died in battle.
- ~650 AD:** Caliph Uthman ibn Affan orders a standardized text. Zayd ibn Thabit chairs a committee. One official codex produced.
- 650 AD:** Uthman orders ALL variant codices burned — including those of respected companions Ibn Mas'ud and Ubayy ibn Ka'b, who had their own complete versions.

What This Means

The evidence was destroyed.

We cannot compare the Uthmanic text with Ibn Mas'ud's or Ubayy's versions. The variants were burned. This is acknowledged in Sahih Bukhari (Vol. 6, Book 61, Hadith 510).

Ibn Mas'ud refused.

Abdullah ibn Mas'ud, one of Muhammad's closest companions and a leading Qur'an authority, refused to surrender his codex. He believed his version was superior to Uthman's.

Contrast with the NT.

No single authority ever controlled and burned competing NT manuscripts. Our manuscript abundance is the very thing that allows textual criticism — and demonstrates reliability.

Textual Variants in the Qur'an

The claim: the Qur'an has been preserved perfectly, letter-for-letter, since the time of Muhammad. The evidence complicates this claim.

The Sana'a Manuscripts

In 1972, workers restoring the Great Mosque of Sana'a, Yemen discovered a cache of ancient Qur'anic manuscripts hidden in the roof space. Among them was a palimpsest — a parchment that had been washed and reused — whose lower (earlier) text differed from the standard Uthmanic Qur'an in spelling conventions, word order, and even content. Carbon-dated to the first Islamic century. German scholar Gerd R. Puin studied these manuscripts and reported significant variations. Access to the manuscripts has been restricted by Yemeni authorities.

The Qira'at — Official Variant Readings

Islam officially recognizes seven (some schools, ten) valid "readings" (qira'at) of the Qur'an, each associated with a different classical recitation tradition. These are not merely pronunciation differences — some involve different base texts without vowel markings that result in different meanings. The Hafs and Warsh readings, the two most widely used today, differ in hundreds of places. These variants are taught in Islamic seminaries as equally valid.

Manuscript Corrections — Small & Brubaker

Scholar Keith Small (Textual Criticism and the Qur'an Manuscripts, 2011) and Dan Brubaker (Corrections in Early Quran Manuscripts, 2019) have documented physical corrections — erasures, overwriting, and additions — in early Qur'anic manuscripts. Brubaker catalogued over 100 corrections in manuscripts spanning the first three Islamic centuries. These physical corrections demonstrate that early copyists were revising the text, not simply copying a fixed, perfect original.

Faithful Witness

Turning knowledge into compassionate, truthful engagement with Muslim neighbors and friends.

How to Engage Muslim Friends

"But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect." — 1 Peter 3:15

1 Build Genuine Relationships

Muslims deeply value hospitality (diyafa). Share meals. Learn their family's story. Ask about their home country and faith. Don't lead with arguments — lead with friendship. The relationship is the context in which truth can be heard.

2 Ask Questions and Explain, Don't Lecture

Ask questions. "What does the Qur'an say about...?" "How do you understand this passage?" Let them explain their faith, then explain yours. Questions, especially those based on Van Til's apologetic method, communicate respect and create genuine dialogue. Questions also often do the apologetic work more effectively than statements.

3 Winning Arguments ≠ Winning People

You can win every doctrinal debate and still push someone further from Christ. Our goal is not debate trophies — it is faithful witness.

4 Rely on the Holy Spirit

"I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth." (1 Cor 3:6-7)
Conversion is the Lord's work, not ours. Pray for your Muslim neighbor or co-worker by name. The Spirit's work in their heart is more powerful than any argument you could make. Trust our Triune God to work.

Six-Week Course Summary

The cumulative argument of this series — six weeks of biblical inquiry into the similarities and differences between Christianity and Islam.

Week 1 Foundations

The Qur'an's literary structure, historical origins in 7th-century Arabia, and the biography of Muhammad are essential context for evaluating its claims.

Week 2 Tawhid vs. Trinity

Islam's Tawhid and Christianity's Trinity both insist on one God, but mean fundamentally different things — and the Qur'an appears to misunderstand the Trinity it critiques.

Week 3 Jesus in the Qur'an

The Qur'an's Isa is a prophet given higher titles than Muhammad; the Bible's Jesus is the eternal Son of God, crucified, risen, and reigning.

Week 4 The Cross and Salvation

Surah 4:157's denial of the crucifixion stands against the unanimous witness of all ancient sources, and Islam's scale-of-deeds soteriology offers no assurance.

Week 5 Scripture Wars

The charge of tahrif (Bible corruption) is refuted by the Qur'an's own affirmation of prior scriptures and the overwhelming manuscript evidence for biblical reliability.

Week 6 Is the Qur'an Perfect?

The Uthmanic revision, the qira'at, and the Sana'a manuscripts challenge the claim of perfect Qur'anic preservation — and we respond with grace, not just arguments.

Discussion Questions

Final session discussion — take 20 minutes to discuss these questions in pairs or as a group.

1 How has your understanding of Islam changed over these six weeks?

What surprised you most? Was there a topic or argument that challenged your prior assumptions?

2 What is the one thing you most want to remember from this series?

If you could only take one insight into a conversation with a Muslim friend, what would it be?

3 How will you apply what you've learned in your relationships with Muslim neighbors and colleagues?

Think of a specific person. What is one concrete step you could take this week toward genuine friendship?

4 If a Muslim friend asked you: "Why do you believe Jesus is God?" — what would you say?

Practice answering this now. Keep it to 2-3 minutes. Be biblical, be humble, and be personal.

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.”

Deuteronomy 6:4

Recommended Reading

- **James White —**
What Every Christian Needs to Know About the Qur’an (2013)
- **Nabeel Qureshi —**
No God but One: Allah or Jesus? (2016)
- **Nabeel Qureshi —**
Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus (2014)
- **Louis Berkhof**
Systematic Theology, Part I, Chap. I (the Doctrine of God)
- **Westminster Confession of Faith —**
Chapter II — Of God and the Holy Trinity