

What's the difference?

Last week was the six month anniversary of the September 11 tragedy, which, when I heard, surprised me. It doesn't seem like it's been that long, yet at the same time, it was a good reminder of why we are at war and of the other measures that have been implemented since. One of the changes I've noticed is an increased interest in religion, be it Christian or otherwise, and a curiosity about the Muslim faith. I'm personally not qualified to explain the beliefs of Islam, but I *can* share the basic beliefs of Christianity, and this can help us recognize other teachings and examine them.

You see, Christianity is a unique religion in the history of the world. Sure, other religions have flood stories, resurrection stories, and even "Last Supper" stories, but what makes Christianity unique is our teaching on salvation. In the entire history of the world, *every* religion has taught that, in order to be saved (however you define your goal, be it heaven or even fondly remembered, the ultimate hope of those who don't believe in an afterlife), you must do *something*. Works. Whether it be "live a pretty good life" or "follow this strict code of standards," *all* religions in *all* cultures in *all* times have taught salvation by some kind of human works. The Bible makes it very clear, however, that this is not the way to be saved. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast." (Ephesians 2:8,9, NIV) "Grace" means "*undeserved* love," and if we deserved God's love, it wouldn't be grace. "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8, NIV) And there is *no* sin that is so great or so small that the blood of the Son of God cannot pay for it.

So if you're curious about the teachings of other churches and religions, whether Christian, Muslim, or someone knocking on your door, always look for the cross, where *all* of our sins were paid for, because it is on the cross that you will find God.

Rev. Dale Critchley
St. Paul's Lutheran Church
Delaware, IA