

Bible Studies based on the book "Facing the Muslim Challenge" by John Gilchrist. Compiled/Edited by N.T. Jabbour

THE DEITY OF JESUS CHRIST

The Muslims perspective.

The Qur'an is quite emphatic in denying that Jesus is the Son of God. He was only a prophet just like all the other prophets who went before Him. This is so because of the following:

1. The Qur'an, when dealing with the Trinity, talks of three: God, Jesus and Mary, and this is a blasphemy. Surah 6:101, 72:3.
2. Ascribing partners to God is unthinkable and is compromising His Being and Glory. Surah 10:68 "They say God has taken a son. Glory to Him! He is Self-Sufficient! All that is in the heavens and the earth is His! You have no justification for this. How can you say of Allah what you do not know?"
3. According to the Qur'an, scribing partners to God is the only unforgivable sin. Surah 4:48 "Truly God will forgive any association with Him but will forgive anything else to whomever he pleases. For whoever associates (shirk) with God verily commits a great sin".
4. In Surah 19:35 The Qur'an does not teach that it is absolutely impossible for God to have a Son, but that it is not befitting for Him to do so. The issue is what glorifies Him.
5. Although the Qur'an teaches that God has neither sons nor daughters (Surah 6:100), some Muslims admit that Jesus called himself son of God but they understand it to be in a metaphorical sense. They say that Jesus could be called son of God in the sense in which all righteous human beings can be called the children of God, but not in a literal or unique sense. Muslims base this idea on verses from the Bible such as: Jn 10:34-36 " Jesus answered them 'Is it not written in your law. I said, you are gods'? If he called them gods to whom the word of God came, do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent in to the world'. You are blaspheming because I said 'I am the son of God'". Muslims also quote Ps 82:6 where all believers are also called "sons of the Most High". Solomon according to 1Chronicles 17:13 is called a son of God. " I will be His Father, and he will be my son". Adam is also a son of God according to Luke 3:38.

6. Muslims wonder how can Jesus be the Son of God if He spoke of the Father as being greater than He was in power, authority and knowledge. If He was divine, they think, how come he was not equally omnipotent and omniscient?
 7. Abraham is a major and a unique figure in the Qur'an. According to the Qur'an Abraham believed in God and believed that He is One before the existence of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Muslims perceive Abraham as the first "Muslim" and they believe that Islam is an attempt to go back to the "source of the river", the pure faith of Abraham, before the existence of the "tributaries", namely Judaism and Christianity.
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1. Just as fathers and sons on earth are both human and have the same essential being, so in heaven the Father and the Son are both divine. The Son took human form at a certain point in history and became the God/Man Jesus Christ. So the Father did not beget a son. The Son existed from eternity. How do you see this truth in the following verses?

Jn 1:1-3 "In the beginning was the Word (The Son), and the Word was with God (The Father), and the Word (The Son) was God. He was with God (The Father) in the beginning. Through Him all things were made, without Him nothing was made that has been made".

2. Fathers on earth have authority over their sons although both fathers and sons are of the same nature. Sons are expected to submit to their fathers. The same with Jesus who although He was of the very nature and essence like God the Father, He submitted to Him as a Son and Servant. The Son could do nothing of his own accord but only what He saw His Father doing. Yet the intimacy that the Father had with His Son was unique and very intimate. How would you describe to a Muslim this relationship between the Father and the Son?

Jn 5:19 "I tell you the truth, the Son can not do anything by Himself, He can do only what he sees His Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does."

Jn 5:20-23 " For the Father loves the Son and shows Him all He does... For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom He is pleased to give it. Moreover the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as

they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent Him”.

3. Jesus alone is the Son of God in an eternal and absolute sense and He taught clearly about that. When He was brought before the Jewish Sanhedrin the night of His arrest, the high priest Caiaphas emphatically asked Him “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?” Jesus replied “I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven” Mk 14:61-62. The answer that Christ gave demanded from the high priest a response, either kneeling before Him and begging Him for forgiveness, or declaring Him a blasphemer. The high priest tore his robe and charged Him with blasphemy. His question to Jesus was not, “Are you one of the children of God?” The high priest and all those that were there knew what was the issue; did Jesus claim to be the Eternal Son of God? What do you think of the following statements that Jesus made, or the Father made about Jesus?

Mt 11:27 “No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him”.

Jn 5:22 “The Son should be honored like the Father is honored”.

Mt 3:17 and 17:5 God the Father declared from heaven about Jesus: “This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased”.

4. In the parable of the Tenants of the Vineyard Mt 21:33-43, Mt 12:1-12, Lk 20:9-18, Jesus points out clearly that He is not like the other prophets but that He is the Son of God in a unique way. According to the parable the owner of the vineyard sent a number of servants to collect his fruit. But the tenants stoned one and killed another. When he sent some more they beat one stoned another and killed the rest. Look at the climax of the parable and think of the following questions:

Mk 12:6-8 “He had still **one** other, a beloved **son**; finally he sent him to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son’. But those tenants said to one another ‘this is the heir, come let us kill him and the inheritance will be ours’. And they took him and killed him, and cast him out of the vineyard”.

a) Is it obvious in this parable that Jesus was speaking about himself as the son?

- b) Are there other passages that you can think of as cross references to the main idea in the parable? Example Acts 7:52 Peter said in his sermon "Which of the prophets did you fathers not persecute?"

5. One of the reasons Muslims find it hard to believe that Jesus was the Son of God was because He was not omniscient not knowing all things. Mt 24:36 Jesus said "But of that day and hour, no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only". Do you see a scale in this passage? Where did Jesus place Himself on this scale? Is it possible for the Father, the eternal source of all things to whom both the Son and the Holy Spirit are subject, to decree the final Day without disclosing the exact time to anyone else?

6. Another area of difficulty for the Muslims to accept the deity of Christ has to do with His power. Is He omnipotent and all-powerful? After all, they think, He said in Jn 5:19,30 "The Son can do nothing of his own accord but only what he sees the Father doing... I can do nothing on my own authority". We need to look at the context of these passages. Jesus was not dealing with an explanation of His relationship to the Father nor was he denying His own deity. Look at the context in Jn 5:19-30 and see how Jesus is not denying His own deity. On the contrary what do we see?

7. Another verse that makes Muslims wonder about His greatness is a statement that Jesus made in Jn 14:28 "If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I go to the Father, for the Father is greater than I". From this verse they conclude that Jesus admitted and acknowledged God's superiority over men including Himself.

The questions that we need to ask ourselves are the following: Did Jesus put Himself on a human scale when He measured Himself against the Father, or did He measure Himself on a divine scale, relating Himself alone to the Father? Is it possible for Jesus to have had limitations and still be the Son of God?

8. John Gilchrist said, "Jesus is the 'Son of God', a title which immediately implies a limitation upon Him. The heart of what the Bible teaches about Jesus is this, namely that while the eternal Son is a divine personality in a Triune Being, He nevertheless is subject to the Father's authority and so, when on earth, could easily assume in human form a servant-master relationship. Son-to-Father simply

became expressed as Man-to-God. In this unique person, men can come to know God face-to-face for he who has seen the Son has seen the Father also (Jn 14:9). Yet likewise we see in Jesus a man like ourselves, able to assume our position and eventually bring us to eternal glory as the sons and daughters of God just as He is by nature the eternal Son of God". How well did Gilchrist succeed in describing how God in Christ is reconciling the world to Himself? How can you communicate this same truth in your own words and perhaps with the use of some illustrations?

9. According to the Qur'an, Jesus was a unique person being born of a virgin, etc.. but the Qur'an is not clear enough about His sinlessness. In Surah 19:19 the messenger to Mary told her about himself and Jesus "I am only your Lord's messenger to bestow a clean-living boy on you". Another translation says: "I am only a messenger of your Lord announcing the gift of a holy son". The word in modern Arabic (Zakiyan) means intelligent. But the root of the word has to do with innocence. The word in Arabic (Tazakka) means declared not guilty or declared innocent.

Sahih Al-Bukhari, one of the most reliable authors of Hadith or Tradition, quotes Muhammad: "No child is born but that, Satan touches it when it is born whereupon it starts crying loudly because of being touched by Satan, except Mary and her son".(Vol 6, p 54).

Paul says in 2Cor 5:21 "For our sake He made Him to be sin **who knew no sin**, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God". What is the importance of clarifying to the Muslim that Jesus was sinless?

10. According to Hebrews 4:15 Jesus was tempted in every respect like us, yet without sin. How can that be and what is there in it for us? How would you explain this paradox to a Muslim. (A paradox is not a contradiction, but it is a seeming contradiction).

11. Muslims try hard to prove that Muhammad was sinless but the Qur'an does not teach that. In fact Surah 47:19 says that Muhammad committed sin ".. and beg forgiveness for your offense". The Arabic word used is (thanb) which means sin, yet the translators try to water the word down by using words such as offense. Surah 17:19-93 Muhammad is being told by God to say "Am I anything but a human messenger?" In contrast to Muhammad we see John who lived with Jesus for years

saying about Him: "You know that He appeared to take away sins, and in Him there is no sin". 1Jn 3:5.

Since Mary had a unique conception without intercourse with a man (both the Bible and Qur'an teach that), could this be an argument used to prove the sinlessness of Christ? What are the strengths and weaknesses of this argument?

12. Christ spoke of many leading patriarchs and prophets before Him and confirmed that they foresaw His coming and knew that He would be greater than them.

When Jesus was debating with the Jewish leaders and Pharisees they bragged about the fact that they descended from Abraham (Jn 8:33,39). When Jesus stated that if anyone kept His word he would never see death they responded: "Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you claim to be?" (We need to remember that Abraham was a major figure for both Jews and Muslims). Jesus response to their question was. "Your father Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day, he saw it and was glad.. Turly, truly I say to you, before Abraham was, I am". (Jn 8:56-58). What did Jesus mean when He said, "Before Abraham was, I am." Mt 22:32?

13. Abraham was the Patriarch of the Jews in Judah, while Jacob was the Patriarch of the Samaritans and his well in Samaria was his legacy. When Jesus offered the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:14) living water she asked Him. "Are you greater than our father Jacob who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, and his sons, and his cattle?" How did Jesus show her His superiority over the Patriarch of the Samaritans, Jacob?

14. Jesus called God His own Father and that annoyed the Jews because they thought that Jesus made Himself equal with God (Jn 5:18). They had set their hope on Moses the great lawgiver and they knew that God and Moses spoke with one another, but who is this Jesus (Jn 9:29)? From Jn 5:46-47 how did Jesus show them that He is superior to Moses?

15. Jesus challenged the Jews to identify the coming Messiah, whose son will He be? They said that He will be the son of David. How did Jesus show the Jews that he was superior to David as well (Mt 22:34-35 and Rev 22:16)?

16. God's divine character was not blurred while Jesus walked among men. On the contrary the fullness of God's love, kindness, grace and forgiveness were only finally revealed when His Son Jesus laid down His life so that we might be forgiven and live for ever. What does it take for a Muslim to realize and grasp the truth in the following passage and have an encounter with Christ (Mt 16:13-17)? What is our responsibility in this communication process and what is God's responsibility?