

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

THE TRINITY AND THE NATURE OF GOD

The Muslims' perspective.

Belief in the Trinity strikes at the very heart of God's absolute oneness. Attributing partners to God is "shirk", the greatest sin and the only sin that cannot be forgiven.

"Truly God will not forgive any associating with him but will forgive anything else to whomever he pleases. For whoever associates "shirk" with God verily commits a great sin". Surah 4:48.

For God to "beget" a son is the ultimate expression of unbelief and blasphemy.

"Say. He is God, the One, God the Eternal One. He does not beget, nor is he begotten, and like unto him there is not one."
Surah 112:1-4

This Surah is memorized by every Muslim and is considered as one of the most important Surahs in the Qur'an. When Muslims think of the Trinity they see it as the weakest doctrine in Christianity. How can three persons exist in one God? When Christ died, did God die? Why is it that the Bible does not have the formula of the Trinity that the Christians believe?

Muslims furthermore think that their doctrine of God is very easy to understand, while the Christian doctrine of the Trinity defies reason.

What does the Bible say about the **Triune God, the Father, The Son and The Holy Spirit?**

1. God is not only the **sovereign ruler of the universe**. He is also a **relational God**. What do the following verses tell us about that truth?

Mt 18:11 "My Father."

Lk 12:32 "Your Father."

Jn 14:12 "The Father."

Jn 11:41 "Father."

Are there other texts in the Scriptures that present God as the "Father"?

2. The second person in the Triune God became the man Jesus Christ, and He spoke of Himself as the Son of the Father. What do the following verses tell us about the **absolute and exclusive relationship** that Christ has with God?

Mt 11:27 "No one knows the Son but the Father, and not one knows the Father but the Son".

Jn 4:23 "Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him".

Jn 16:28 "He came from the Father into the world".

Jn 1:1 Christ is the great Word of the Father who was in the beginning, was with God and is God.

Mt 4:17 and Mt 17:5 Christ was called by God "my beloved Son".

Do you know of other texts in the Scripture that speak about the absolute and exclusive relationship of Christ with the Father?

3. The Holy Spirit enjoys an **obvious intimate relationship with both the Father and the Son at their divine level**. What do the following verses tell us about the Holy Spirit and His relationship with the other two Persons in the Triune God?

Jn 15:26 "When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me".

Jn 14:26 " But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you".

4. Names in the Bible are very significant. Moses was called "Mosheh" which meant that he was drawn out of the water. Simon was given the name Peter to signify his new nature. Jesus in Mt 28:19 used the name of the Triune God in the singular rather than the plural when he commanded his disciples: "... baptize them in the **name** of the Father, Son and Holy spirit". Why didn't He say "baptize them in the **names** of the Father, Son and the Holy Sprit"? Is Christ saying that there is a **common divine nature or one essence** of the Father, Son and the Holy Sprit? If so do you see this truth inherent in the teaching of the Bible?

5. Paul concludes the second letter to the church at Corinth with a **common divine benediction or a blessing**. "May the Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." 2Cor 13:14. Do you think that Paul had any doubts regarding the essence of God being a Triune God? Why yes? Why no?

6. In Ephesians 2:18 Paul speaks of a **common divine accessibility** both Jews and Gentiles to the Triune God. "For through Him (the Son) we both (Jews and Gentiles) have access to the Father by one Spirit". Muslims believe that the Church in the church Counsels invented the doctrine of the Trinity. What do you think were Paul's convictions regarding the Triune God?

7. The Old Testament generally spoke of God as **Yahweh, the Lord God of Israel**. When Jesus came to the world **He opened up the revelation of God as the Triune being**. As He was in the world He spoke about God that He is the Father, and spoke about Himself as His Son and He spoke about the coming of the Holy Spirit. All three persons, He taught, were of common nature, essence and purpose with absolute unity between them. Why do you think the references to Yahweh in the New Testament disappeared?

8. Muslims assume that if the concept of God is more easily understood it becomes therefore more acceptable and more reasonable. In reality the **doctrine of the Trinity is not contrary to reason, it is above the realm of finite human reason**. The issue here is that of faith and Muslims recognize the importance of faith. For instance they do not understand how the dead can be raised back to life on the day

of judgment, but they believe it. What other major issues Muslims accept by faith?

9. The New Testament is far more concerned about our relationship with God than our understanding of His nature. What we know about Him is not as important as knowing Him as well as our pursuit of holiness, forgiveness of our sins, and assurance of eternal life. God wants to be loved and obeyed, not studied or analyzed. Christianity makes no attempt to present a **comprehensible God** but a **knowable God**. What does knowing God mean? How does God reveal Himself and makes Himself knowable to us in these and other passages?

Jn 1:14, "The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us".

Col 1:15 "Christ is the visible image of the invisible God".

Col 2:9 "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form".

10. The Old Testament declares: "The Lord is God in heaven above and on earth beneath. There is no other God" Deut 4:39. The New Testament likewise states: "The Lord our God is one Lord" Mk 12:29 and that "God is one" Rom 3:30, Gal 3:20. The fact that **God is one** needs to be emphasized to Muslims. **What the Bible teaches is a Tri-Unity and not Tritheism.**

Consider the following references and see how God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are of the **same essence and nature**.

James 1:17 "Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change".

Jn 8:12 "I am the light of the world. He who follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life".

Heb 13:8 Christ, like the Father, will not change.

2 Cor 4:6 Through the Holy Spirit God shines into our hearts to give "light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ".

Jn 14:6 "I am the truth".

Jn 15:26 The Holy Spirit is called the "Spirit of truth".

Jn 16:27 The love of the Father.

Rom 5:8 The love of the Father was revealed as He sent His Son to redeem us.

1 Jn 4:10 God's love has been "poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.

The Father is the source of life.

Jn 11:25, 15:6 The Son called Himself "the Life".

Acts 13:5 The Son is called the Author of Life.

Rom 8:11 Through the Holy Spirit the Father will give life to our immortal bodies.

As you look at **these themes: light, truth, love and life**, do you see three independent persons or a tri-unity and an essential oneness? What does that tell you about God? **Do you think that rational illustrations are adequate?**

What is wrong with the following illustrations? The sun is three but one, a planet, its heat and the light that it produces. The egg with its three parts. A man could be a father, a husband and a son at the same time, yet he is one person?

Muslim scholars like Abu Isa Al-Warraaq and Al-Kindi refuted such arguments centuries ago.

11. Is there a similarity between The Triune God of the New Testament and **the triad of gods** that the ancient Egyptian believed in namely Osiris (father) , Isis (mother), and Horus (son)? This pagan worship in ancient Egypt, is it closer to our understanding of the Triune God or to what Muslims assume that we believe about the Trinity?

12. The way the Gospels and Paul and the rest of the New Testament talked about God was in terms of how He relates to the believers. The aim was to call for a response of faith from the heart and to strengthen it. God does not want to be **defined, analyzed or conceptualized** as much as He wants to be **believed, obeyed, trusted and known**. In Islam man can not be anything more than "abd" a servant of God Surah 19:93. Even Jesus was no more than a servant of God Surah 19:30. Muslims believe that God has 99 most beautiful names or attributes (Surah 59:22-24), yet the attribute of being The Father is missing.

Since Jesus revealed to us that God is the Father and that He adopted us into His family then **God the Father is for us**. We are no longer servants and slaves but His children.

What are the similarities and the differences between a child and a servant?

1Jn 3:1 "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God".

Lk 12:32 "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom".

13. An interesting question to discuss with Muslims is to ask them about the greatest evidence of God's love to them. Abraham's supreme test of his love to God was shown in his willingness to sacrifice his son. Another interesting question is this: Whose love is greater, Abraham's love for God or God's love for us?

1 Jn 4:10 "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the expiation of our sins".

Jn 15:15 "I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you".

God the Father is for us and **Jesus the Son is with us.**

14. The Holy Spirit is not a mere force of divine power, He is the very Spirit of God and, when He indwells anyone, in a unique way God Himself actually lives in that person. **The Holy Spirit is God in us.**

Gal 4:4-6 The Holy Spirit helps us to call God, "Aba, Father".

Rom 8:15-16 "The spirit Himself bearing witness with our spirits that we are children of God".

Rom 5:5 Hope does not disappoint us because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy spirit which has been given to us.

How do you see in these verses and in other texts in the New Testament that the Holy Spirit as God in us?

15. The Triune personality of **God was only finally revealed** when Jesus Christ came to earth and spoke freely of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. How can we communicate with the Muslims about the threefold revelation of God's love for us - a revelation that stops at nothing less than perfection itself? **How can we make the Trinity a strength, rather than something to be shy about, in our witness?** How can we communicate that it is only in the Triune God that such love could ever be, or has ever been, shown in all its fullness?

16. There are three main texts in the Qur'an that emphatically reject a "Trinity" **made up of Jesus, Mary and God.** Surah 4:171, Surah 5:73 and Surah 5:116. These passages speak clearly about the contrast between Three Vs. One without any awareness of the threefold unity of God. What the Qur'an presents is a Triad similar to ancient religions. It is easy to imagine how Muslims assumed that the

Trinity includes Mary especially in light of the veneration through the centuries that lifted her up almost to the level of God. All three texts date to the last period in the life of Muhammad and it seems he was not exposed to Christians that could present to him a true understanding of the Triune God.

If you were a contemporary of Muhammad and you had the opportunity to explain to him the glorious Triune God, how would you have communicated these truths to him and what Biblical texts would you have relied on?