

Jumuah

The Son of God and the Trinity: part 1

Do you have to sit in pews or chairs in a “sanctuary” for it to be “church”? Do you have to have instruments for a worship service? Do you have to sit with your husband or wife, or is it okay to sit segregated—men on one side and women on another? What about carpeting (we won’t even get into the discussion on carpet colours!)? And stages, pulpits and a cross on the back wall? Are these necessary or required for “church”? Is it “church” without them?

There’s a whole pile of cultural issues Muslims face when being presented with the Gospel by a Western style believer. These issues are not *biblical* issues; the Bible does not mandate the use of pews, instruments, seating or orders of service, etc. These are *cultural* issues.

When we remove those cultural issues workers among Muslims have found *significantly* less resistance to the Gospel. This is good news!

Yet, there are some “stumbling blocks” which cannot be removed.

Jesus is the stumbling stone that cannot be removed from the Gospel. He is the corner-stone that sets the sure foundation for faith and salvation to all who trust in Him.

You can, however, help your Muslim friend understand Jesus as Son of God and part of the Trinity—or Triune Godhead—in a culturally relevant way.

Understanding Your Muslim Friend

In the view of many Muslims, to say “Son of God” means to believe that God physically begot a child as we humans do. This would be blasphemy. God is so great that, if He wants to create anything, He has no need to come down to human level and take a wife. He simply says “Be,” and it is. Many Muslims know and recite Surah 112 of the Qur’an:

Say: He is Allah, the One! Allah, the eternally Besought of all! He begetteth not nor was begotten. And there is none comparable unto Him.

Muslims feel deeply about this. Even if you explain that “Son of God” (referring to Jesus) has nothing to do with physical begetting, many still suspect that somehow this title is dishonoring to God. Some modern Muslims, nevertheless, do accept that Jesus could be called “Son of God” in a spiritual sense. But they say that any righteous person can be called “son of God.” Jesus is only one among God’s righteous people.

If you tell Muslims that “Jesus is God,” they will inevitably misunderstand you. (Do we understand it ourselves?) They may ask, “Do you mean that when Jesus was born, God was born; that when Jesus was [as you say] dead for three days, God was dead? Then, please, who was looking after the world while God was dead?”



There are many “tripping hazards” or stumbling stones we can remove when sharing the Gospel. These are the cultural forms and styles we use to express our faith in God through Jesus Christ. We need to remove these as they are not necessary for salvation and cause misunderstanding for people of other cultural backgrounds. Jesus, however, as Son of God and Saviour, cannot be removed since He is the Stumbling Stone. But you can help your Muslim friend come to understand in a cultural way natural to him/her, helping them come to faith in Jesus.

These are fair questions and hard to answer. Hard, but not impossible.

When Muslims criticize the doctrine of the Trinity, they usually have the idea that it means three gods, of whom Allah (God) is only one; or that it means dividing God into three parts.

They surely disbelieve who say: Lo! Allah is the third of three... (Surah 5:73).

And when Allah saith: a Jesus, son of Mary! Didst thou say unto mankind: Take me and my mother for two gods beside Allah? (Surah 5:116).

Today's Conclusion:

Next week we'll start looking at the Steps for Christian Witness discussion points on this topic. We'll start sharing some examples from daily life to help our Muslim friends understand Jesus as Son of God and the concept of the Trinity. Even as we do so, keeping the following two things in mind will help *you* as you do so:

First, we do very much need to reaffirm our belief in the Oneness of God while not denying the Trinity. We DO believe in only one God. We can confidently stand with our Muslim friends in that. The difference is they believe in absolute singularity of God, whereas we believe in the plural oneness and unity of the Godhead. More about that as we progress through all this.

Second, there's no doubt Jesus is the stumbling stone for Muslims. But think about stumbling stones with me for a moment. If we are looking at where we're going and stepping, we can avoid tripping on them. In this sense, they're more like speed bumps—those big humps in the pavement that are there to slow drivers down. Jesus makes us all slow down and look specifically at Him. Why? Because He *is* different from all else.

We *can* help our Muslim friends appreciate His differences... if we, too, slow down and prayerfully walk through these critically important discussions with them!

References: Taken and adapted from "Christian Witness Among Muslims" by Voice of the Martyrs, © 1994, pp. 77-78.

Jumuah

The Son of God and the Trinity: part 2

Last week we looked again at the cornerstone issue of Jesus as the Son of God. It's an issue that is a stumbling stone, or—from another point of view—a speed bump on the road to understanding. Our Muslim friends definitely stumble on this one. When they hear us use the term "Son of God," they hear something entirely different from what we think. What's happening in their head? They're having a crisis, that's what. It is the height of human blasphemy to say that Allah (God) had physical relations with a woman in order to conceive a son and then to make that son into a god with Himself!

Of course, if we believed that, we'd be blaspheming, too. Gladly we do not.

Instead we must work to undo 1,400+ years of misunderstanding. Our Muslim friends are taught quite wrongly what we believe. They don't actually know what we believe. Will you tell them?

Here's how to navigate this speed-bump on the route to their understanding the Biblical Jesus.

Steps for Christian Witness

First, set your Muslim friend's mind at rest. "Trinity" = "Tri-unity." Christians believe in one God, in God's unity. We are opposed, as much as our Muslim friends are, to the idea of three gods, or to the idea of God's having a physical son. Then take good-humored examples from everyday life, using these to introduce what the Bible means by "Son of God."

- Give illustrations to show that, when in everyday speech people say "son of something," they often mean it "spiritually" (as a parable or metaphor) and do not mean physical son-ship. Give examples, such as son of the road, sons of thunder, sons of light. Present these in a humorous way, *not argumentatively*. Emphasize that we speak of Son of God only in a spiritual sense.
- Give illustrations from everyday life and from the Bible to show the relationship of son to father (apart from the physical relationship, which is excluded). Find proverbs, stories, and experiences to help make the conversation interesting. Lead to one or more of these points:
 - The son is the picture of his father. When we know the son, we know what the father is like (Heb. 1:3; John 14:9).
 - The son has the closest knowledge of his father and obeys his father (Matt. 11:27; John 8:28,29).
 - The son is the highest representative of his father. He can stand in the father's place and receive the honor due to his father (Mark 12:1-9).



Check out the size of that speed bump! I'm not sure even an 4x4 could traverse it without bottoming out. This is a great example of how BIG the issues of Jesus as "Son of God" and the "Trinity" are to our Muslim friends. You'll have to navigate these speed bumps with great care. It can be done and you can do it!

- Show how God told Jesus at His baptism that He was the Son of God (Mark 1:11); it does not mean "physically begotten." Jesus' prayers show how He trusted in God as Father. When Peter recognized Jesus as "Son of God," Jesus congratulated him and said that God Himself had revealed this to Peter (Matthew 16:16,17).

Many Muslims will be partly satisfied by these explanations. Still, because of their tradition, they do not find it easy to give the title "Son of God" to Jesus. You need not argue about it. If your friend finds it easier to think of Jesus as the Word of God or Messiah, be content for him to do so for the present. Trust God to make things clearer in time.

Today's Conclusion:

The discussion of Jesus as "Son of God" is naturally tied to the concept of the "Trinity" or "Tri-unity" of God. And this is another huge stumbling stone for our Muslim friends. We will have to exercise much patience in talking through these speed-bumps. And they are indeed speed-bumps, because you cannot race over them quickly without severe damage to the vehicle and the passengers!

Next week we'll take a look at the discussion points for understanding the Trinity.

Are you willing to go for a long slow drive with your Muslim friends down the road of the Son and the Trinity? I hope so. As you do, remember this: You'd better have your car's fuel tank topped up before you depart! And you'll likely have to stop for more gas along the way.

What is the "fuel" for this long discussion?

You know it already: Prayer ☺. Do continue to pray for yourselves as you prepare for one of the *best* long drives in your life, for the Holy Spirit's work in your Muslim friend's heart, and for our work with Muslims. We value your prayer support so much. You are friends who help keep our tank full for our work here "in the field!"

References: Taken and adapted from "Christian Witness Among Muslims" by Voice of the Martyrs, © 1994, pp. 78-80.

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The Son of God and the Trinity: part 3

Sharing these Biblical truths with our Muslim friends will challenge the “status quo” or conventional way they have been taught and think. Yet, the Gospel *must* challenge the status quo of all our lives in order for it to be effective.

As you consider the article below I think you’ll also find the story in the sidebar enlightening and encouraging. Don’t be afraid to speak the truth *in love!*

Discussions with a Muslim on the Trinity

Show that Christians are firmly committed to the belief in one God and that nothing is to be worshipped besides Him (Mark 12:29; Exodus 20:2,3).

The Bible shows this one God revealing Himself in three ways: as Father, as Son, and as Spirit. Or, if your Muslim friend is finding it hard to listen to the titles "Father" and "Son," you may say that God reveals Himself as Creator, Word, and Spirit. Also, mention that this does not mean God changed Himself from one thing to another. He always exists as these three.

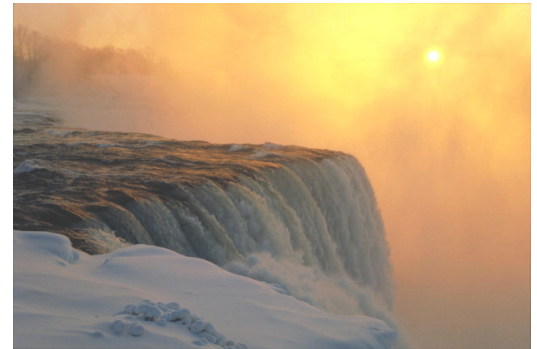
Of course, God is a mystery, far above our thought. No Christian can explain exactly how God exists in three ways. Neither will a Muslim claim to explain fully the nature of God. But simple examples can help us to think about it.

For example, Mr. So-and-So is a mechanic, a husband, and a church member; you may meet him at work, at home, or in church; all the time he is these three things, yet he is only one man. Similar examples are man, who mysteriously exists as body, mind, and soul; and the sun, which we see as a globe in the sky, as rays in the air, and which we feel as warmth on the body.

Emphasize that your examples are imperfect. Examples do not prove the Trinity; they just help people to think about its meaning.

The doctrine of the Trinity is simply the way Christians try to summarize what the Bible teaches about God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. Rightly understood, this doctrine exists to defend the unity of God and to guard against the false idea that Jesus is a god besides God.

For example, the Bible says that Jesus does things that no created being could do: He forgives us our sins, He holds all authority in heaven and earth, and He will be the judge on the Last Day. Someone reading this might mistakenly think that Jesus is another god besides God. The doctrine of the Trinity warns us against any such misunderstanding. It is the one God who reveals Himself through His Word; this Word lived as a man among humanity, Jesus the Messiah. So what Jesus does is not something apart from God; the acts of Jesus are acts of God Himself. Likewise,



At Niagara Falls, during winter, you can see all three forms of water: Vapor, liquid and solid/ice. All are water, all are of one substance, but all are in different forms. This is a limited example of the Triune God: Father, Son and Spirit—all are one substance, God, but all are not the same.

the one God reveals Himself to us as Holy Spirit. God works in us and among us through the Holy Spirit. The acts of the Spirit are acts of God Himself.

We must acknowledge that mere talking cannot convince anyone about the Trinity and Son of God. God wants people to trust in Him through Jesus Christ. When we trust in Christ, little by little we grow to understand the doctrines.

There are, of course, a number of practical hints that will help with today's material. We'll get into those points in next Friday's issue.

Today's conclusion: Bold as Lions, Peaceful as Lambs

Have we in the West become so so-called "politically correct" that we are afraid to cause offense? If so, then we will never share the Gospel, for it is in itself offensive to peoples of all cultures.

We must be as bold as Jesus in proclaiming that the Kingdom of God has come near. Being bold does not mean being offensive; being bold means not being afraid to proclaim the truth in love. Proclaiming the truth in love, with wisdom and humility by the Spirit of God is what set Jesus apart. People listened not just because his words were different. People listened because he was different.

Are you willing to be different? Our human nature—which also comes under the scrutiny and scalpel of the Gospel—wants to fit in. If we fit in, we'll not be catalysts for change around us.

As you pray this week, pray not only for us as we boldly share the Good News here, but pray also for yourself to be as bold as a lion and peaceful as the Lamb!

References: Taken and adapted from "Christian Witness Among Muslims" by Voice of the Martyrs, © 1994, pp. 80-82.

Jumuah

The Son of God and the Trinity: part 4

Sharing with your Muslim friends about Jesus and the Trinity are probably some of the most challenging topics to be discussed. They will inevitably raise many good questions—questions which make you and I examine our own faith! And when we do examine our faith and research how to answer our friends, we come to a stronger place of understanding, faith and witness.

As a note, let me say I don't usually like lists of "don'ts." I like "do's" much better! But there are times for "don't do this or this," and this is one of those times.

Practical Hints for Discussions on the Trinity

Do not be annoyed with the Muslim for raising these questions and for not being easily satisfied. They are fair questions.

Do not refuse to answer by saying, "It is just a mystery." Truly, God is a mystery; nevertheless, He has given us many things in the Bible that people can and should understand. Be prepared to show texts of the Bible (especially from the Gospel accounts) that reveal Jesus as the Son of God. But do not stop there; go on to explain the meaning. Do not start a doctrinal debate in which you try to defeat one another. Do not argue. Listen, explain, pray, and leave the conclusion with God.

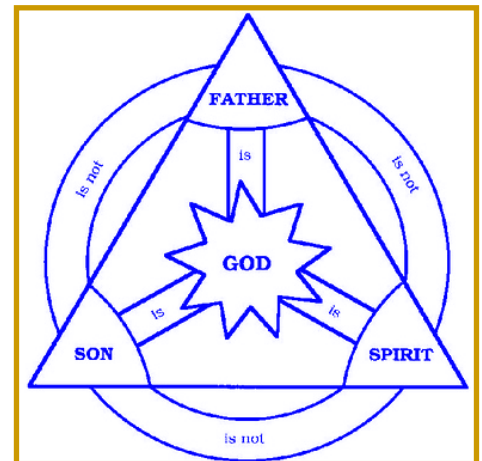
Try to keep to one subject at a time. Do not mix up Jesus as God, Jesus as Son of God, and Christians as sons of God.

If a Muslim points out that other people besides Jesus are called "sons of God," welcome the point. The Israelites as a whole (Hosea 11:1) and Christians, "adopted" through God's mercy (Galatians 4:4-7), are called "sons of God." This means that they are called to know and to obey God and to be His representatives in the world (as discussed earlier in the chapter). But they do this imperfectly; Jesus Christ alone is perfect in His Sonship.

Do you believe that Jesus is God? If a Muslim asks this, it is probably best to reply that Jesus is the eternal Word of God who came into the world and died as a human being. You may answer also in the words of Colossians 1:19,20; 2:9.

Or you could say, "Jesus is God showing Himself to us in this world, communicating as a human being with us as human beings in ways human beings communicate."

The Christian belief that Jesus is God showing Himself to mankind (the incarnation) may be difficult for Muslims to grasp and may even create misunderstandings for them. It does not mean that God lost control of the universe for three days! It does not deny that Jesus lived a real human life, though some Christians may carelessly give that



The concept of the Trinity or Triune godhead is a complex one that even Christians struggle with. Can we blame Muslims then for struggling with it? We need to answer questions with patience and in an informed manner. This may require you to do homework! You will be blessed as you do so.

impression. If you say that Jesus is truly God, you should say also that He is truly man. After all, if God's uncreated Word (uncreated like God Himself) can become a created book (the Qur'an) in this world, cannot God's uncreated Word become a created human being (Jesus), if God wills?

Some Christians speak much about Jesus— "Jesus saves," "Come to Jesus," etc. – and very little about God. This gives Muslims the impression that we are making Jesus a second god or a substitute for God. Bible texts emphasize that God sent Jesus and acted in Him (John 17:3; Romans 3:25; 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:19) and that the work of Jesus is entirely to the glory of God (John 12:27,28; Philippians 2:11; 1 Corinthians 15:28). Study these texts. Practice speaking with emphasis on what God did in Christ and on faith in God through Christ.

Today's conclusion:

I was surprised today to see a very well dressed Western man in his 50's stop in front of a Buddhist monk dressed the typical saffron coloured robe, take out his wallet, give the monk some money, bow on his knees on the public sidewalk with head bowed and hands together in supplication while the monk prayed a prayer of blessing over him.

The public display of religious devotion is everywhere ... outside most of the West. It is unusual in Western countries to see people act out their devotion in the public eye. Here (and in other regions) it is everywhere and no one bats an eye at it.

Muslims live out their faith in the public eye, too. And they need to both see and hear us live and talk about ours, too. Will you? It may be a new step of faith, but you will be blessed as you do... and your Muslim friend will, too.

God bless you as you pray AND let your light shine before all people!

References: Taken and adapted from "Christian Witness Among Muslims" by Voice of the Martyrs, © 1994, pp. 83-84.