

## Abstract

This project came from research conducted for my senior honors thesis and focuses on essential differences between Yahweh and Allah. After careful study, it was determined that, while many differences could be discussed, two essential differences were beliefs about the Trinity and Christology. For these reasons, Christians and Muslims do not worship the same God. While the two religions may have agreement on minor issues, it can be argued that essential differences bring them into inherent conflict, and the differences cannot be harmonized. For the Christian, God is triune, but Islam is a strictly unitarian faith. This difference directly affects how each religion views the God it worships. The doctrine of the Trinity directly impacts other aspects of God's nature, including His love and His self-sufficiency. The Islamic rejection of the Trinity and its belief in a unitarian deity also have direct implications for how Allah is able to love and relate to his creation. Also essential is that the Trinity allows for the deity of Christ, while the Muslim denial of it makes it impossible for them to believe in Christ as divine. Christ's divinity and His work in salvation is the second essential issue. Christ being fully divine as well as being fully human is essential to His salvific work, meaning that the Muslim denial of this aspect is, in fact, denial of the means by which God provided for salvation. This conflict of belief systems cannot be reconciled. For these reasons, the two descriptions of deity provided by each religion are irreconcilable with one another. What one affirms the other denies; what one considers essential is, for the other, blasphemy. Religions are defined by their doctrines pertaining to their deity. For this reason, what a person believes on this issue is foundational to their faith. A proper understanding of the religious teachings of both religions is important so that open and honest dialogue may be pursued in a respectful manner. It is important so that Christians can share the Gospel with their Muslim neighbors.

## Research Questions and Introduction

**Research Questions:** (1) How can it be argued that Christians and Muslims do not worship the same God? (2) Why is it important that Christians and Muslims do not worship the same God?

It is important for Christians to have a proper understanding of the religious beliefs of Islam, and as Islam grows and Christian interaction with Muslims increases, this understanding becomes more important. In particular, it is important for Christians to have an understanding of those areas where the two religions disagree. The doctrines specific to God are the most important to this discussion. What a person believes about God affects the entirety of their religious beliefs and practice. Their beliefs about God will also affect the way they reach out to people of other faiths, if they attempt to do so at all. Based on research and the teachings of the two respective religions, it will be argued that the two religions do not worship the same deity but, in fact, put forth two conflicting concepts of deity. The argument will be made by discussing two fundamental areas of disagreement between the descriptions given of Yahweh and Allah by their respective religions. These areas are disagreements on the Trinity and the person and ministry of Christ. While there are other areas of disagreement between the two religions, it can be argued that they relate back to the issues of the Trinity and Christology. It is the areas of Trinity and Christology that provide the foundation for the claim that Christians and Muslims do not worship the same God. The same God could not conflict in areas essential to His nature and, it can be assumed, would not give conflicting revelation in these areas.

Finally, this debate matters because Christians should seek to have honest dialogue with Muslims, and they should want to have intellectual integrity while engaging with Muslims. Most importantly, this debate has soteriological implications. Christians should recognize that this argument has practical ramifications for those on both sides because it directly relates to the object of faith and worship for both religions.

## Methods

The research was conducted by a careful study of various literature materials. Primary sources included translations of the Qur'an and the Bible. Early Christian creeds were also given careful study. Secondary sources included books written by a variety of Christian apologists including Nabeel Qureshi, Josh McDowell, Andy Bannister, William Lane Craig and Norman Geisler. An important book used, which took the opposing side of the argument being presented, was *Allah* by Yale theologian, Miroslav Volf. Also used was his debate with Nabeel Qureshi on the same subject. Research was also based on audio recordings including, but not limited to, debates and lectures on the subject by experts on this specific topic of theology and apologetics in general. Online audio recordings by experts on this subject are prevalent because this area of study is seeing a renewed interest.

### Important Christological Passages

**John 1: 1-5, 10-14, 16-18 NIV**  
**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.** He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it... The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth... Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. **No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.**

**Philippians 2: 6-11 NIV**  
**Who, being in very nature God,** did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, **that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.**

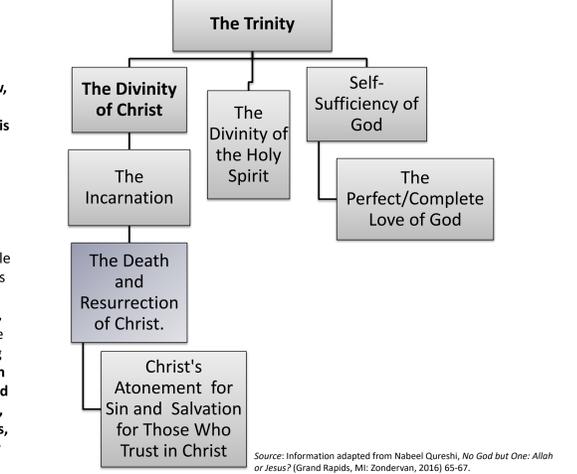
**Colossians 1: 15-20, NIV**  
**The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.** For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; **all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.** And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, **so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.**

### Vital Christian Doctrines vs Vital Islamic Doctrines

	Christianity	Islam
<b>Trinity vs Tawhid</b>	Christians believe in the Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity is the belief that God is one being and three persons within His being: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.	Muslims believe that Allah is unitarian in nature. There is no room for a triune god within Islamic understanding. To assert that there are multiple persons within Allah is to commit the unpardonable sin of <i>Shirk</i> .
<b>Jesus</b>	Jesus is the Son of God. He is coequal member of the Godhead. He became incarnate. He was born of a Virgin, Mary. He became fully human while retaining His full divinity. He never sinned. He performed miracles. He is the Messiah promised to the Jews. His first and second comings were prophesied in the Old and New Testaments. He died on a Cross and was Resurrected on the third day.	Jesus is not the Son of God. He was only human. He was a prophet. He was born of a Virgin, Mary. He never sinned. He performed Miracles. He has the title of Messiah. He was not crucified.

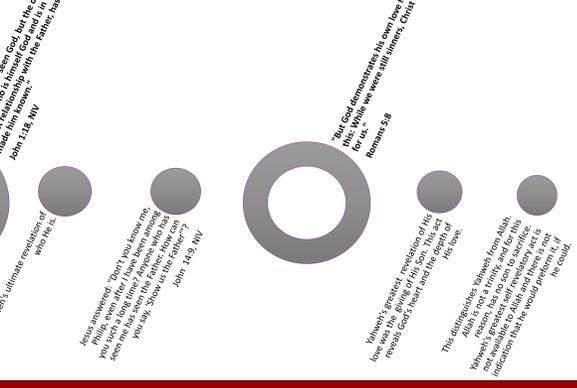
Source: Information adapted from Josh, McDowell and Don Douglas Stewart, *Handbook of Today's Religions*. San Bernardino, Calif: Here's Life Publishers, 1983. 393-395. Shabir Ally and Nabeel Qureshi, "What is God Really Like: Tawhid or Trinity?" (Video Debate, Ravi Zacharias International Ministries) Posted April 8, 2015. Accessed July 10, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FWpqaqz7Kk>

### Important Doctrines Affected by the Trinity and Christ's Divinity



Source: Information adapted from Nabeel Qureshi, *No God but One: Allah or Jesus?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016) 65-67.

### Yahweh's Method of Self Revelation



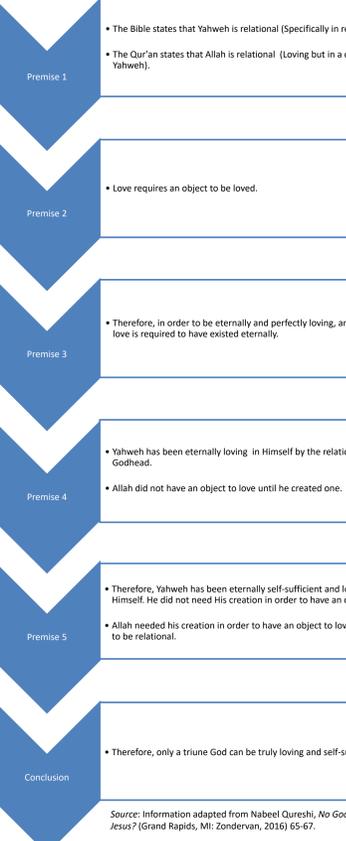
Source: Data adapted from Nabeel Qureshi, *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus: A Devout Muslim Encounters Christianity*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016. 21-26.

### Important Qur'anic Passages

**Qur'an 112, M.A.S. Abdel Haleem**  
 He is God the One, God the eternal. **He begot no one nor was He begotten. No one is comparable to Him.**

**Qur'an 9:30-31, M.A.S. Abdel Haleem**  
 The Jews said, 'Ezra is the son of God,' and the Christians said, 'The Messiah is the son of God': they said this with their own mouths, repeating what earlier disbelievers had said. May God thwart them! How far astray they have been led! They take their rabbis and their monks as lords beside God, as well as Christ, the son of Mary. **But they were commanded to serve only one God: there is no god but Him; He is far above whatever they set up as His partners!**

### Nabeel Qureshi's Trinitarian Argument



Source: Information adapted from Nabeel Qureshi, *No God but One: Allah or Jesus?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016) 65-67.

## Conclusion

While some scholars debate whether Islam denies the true doctrine of the Trinity, it is clear from the Qur'an that Muslims cannot hold to any form of deity other than a unitarian god. To do so is to commit the blasphemy known a *Shirk*, which is a violation of their doctrine of *Tawhid*. The Qur'an directly denies the divinity of Christ. (fig. 3) As a result, the Qur'an denies the doctrine of the Trinity both explicitly and implicitly. This is important because the Trinity, for Christians, is essential to the nature a Yahweh. (fig. 4) It allows for the Divinity of Christ and the Holy Spirit. It also supports Yahweh's ability to be eternally and perfectly loving and self-sufficient. (fig. 5). Nabeel Qureshi argues that the Christian acceptance of the doctrine of the Trinity allows for Yahweh to possess the aforementioned attributes, but the Islamic denial of the Trinity makes Allah dependent on his creation in order to have an object to love. As a result, the Islamic denial and Christian affirmation of the Trinity dramatically affects the nature of the deity in whom they believe in an irreconcilable way. The second important difference is the Christian belief in the divinity of Christ as well as His death and resurrection as an atonement for sin. (fig. 2) As previously stated, the Islamic denial of this doctrine is an implicit denial of the Trinity. Another issue is that, for Christians, the Divinity of Christ, as well as His Incarnation, death, and Resurrection, holds soteriological significance. These Christian beliefs are affirmed in the earliest Christian creeds and were seen as essential by early Christians. The Bible also holds to these beliefs as essential. (fig. 1). The Qur'an, however, rejects them. (fig. 3) For Christians, Christ is the ultimate revelation of God, and God's ultimate revelation of His love was sending his son to die for sin. Allah does not reveal himself in this way. He does not have a son, and there is no indication in the Qur'an that he would draw near to his creation in this way. For Christians, God's love is essential to who He is and is revealed through Christ and His work. (fig.6) Either Christ is God or He is not, and either He died for sins or He did not, but both beliefs cannot be held to as true. For this reason, both religions cannot be describing Christ correctly, and they must be describing different deities. This debate is important so that Christians can engage in honest dialogue with Muslims as well as maintain intellectual integrity. Most importantly, Christians believe that this debate has soteriological importance, and as a result, it affects how the Gospel is shared with Muslims.

## Future Work

1. Develop a better understanding of the historical development of Islamic doctrine and how early interactions with Christians may have influenced this.
2. Develop a more comprehensive understanding of how Christians in the past have responded to this discussion and how their arguments can be extrapolated for the Church today.
3. Develop a more comprehensive argument detailing all points of doctrines on which Christianity and Islam conflict.
4. Use the information to develop ways that Christians can more effectively reach out to Muslims with the Gospel.

## References

Ally, Shabir, Nabeel Qureshi, "What is God Really Like: Tawhid or Trinity?" (Video Debate, Ravi Zacharias International Ministries) Posted April 8, 2015. Accessed July 10, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FWpqaqz7Kk>

Bannister, Andy. "Do Christians and Muslims Worship the Same God." C.S. Lewis Institute on YouTube. Last modified October 12, 2016. Accessed January 3, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=35w9LV0k-ik&t=2298s>

Craig, William Lane, Kevin Harris. "Do Christians and Muslims Worship the Same God." Reasonable Faith.Org. Last Modified February 7, 2016. Accessed July 20, 2016. <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/do-christians-and-muslims-worship-the-same-god>

Geisler, L Norman, Abdul Saleeb. *Answering Islam: The Crescent in Light of the Cross*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2002. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002.

McDowell, Josh, and Don Douglas Stewart. *Handbook of Today's Religions*. San Bernardino, Calif: Here's Life Publishers, 1983.

Qureshi, Nabeel. *No God but One: Allah or Jesus?* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016.

Qureshi, Nabeel. *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus: A Devout Muslim Encounters Christianity*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016.

Volf, Miroslav. *Allah: A Christian Response*. Harper Collins Publishers, New York, NY, 2011.

Volf, Miroslav, Nabeel Qureshi. "Do Christians and Muslims Worship the Same God?" (Video Debate, Seeking Truth with Julie Roys) Posted January 22, 2016. Accessed July 20, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KJ9k20vrvVY>

Walvoord, John F., *Jesus Christ Our Lord*. The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, Chicago IL, 1969.

White, James R. *What Every Christian Needs to Know About the Qur'an*. Bethany House Publishing Group, Minneapolis, MN, 2013