

ALLAH VS. YAHWEH/ TAWHID VS. TRINITY

Part 1: THINKING ABOUT GOD'S NATURE

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1. INTRODUCTION

Talking about God with Muslims can be confusing, because on the one hand, in so many ways we can seem to be talking about the same being, yet on the other, when we think we are heading to some point of mutual understanding different assumptions as to God's character, nature and actions toward mankind can intrude and derail the discussion. Why is this so? It is because of how the Qur'an teaches about the supreme being. First of all,

-The Qur'an presents its God, Allah, as being the same God as that worshipped by the Jews and Christians (Surah 29:46, "Our God and your God is one.").

But, after asserting this complete agreement the Qur'an goes on to contradict this understanding:

-The Qur'an presents Christians as believing in the same God but also asserts that there are differences in our beliefs, with the explanation that Christians have gone astray. (Surah 4:48-50; 5:77; 9:31)

Putting the polemical assertion that Christians have gone astray in their beliefs to one side for a moment, are the views of God in the Bible and the Qur'an compatible? The Qur'an is clearly asserting that Christians worship more than one God, that they have added Jesus as a God beside the one god against the clear teaching of their scripture. Do the books present the same kind of being? How do they actually compare?

This lecture will help you understand precisely how they compare, and help you understand how to construct an effective response to Muslim polemics against the Bible's view of God.

2. GENERAL SIMILARITIES

2.1 Seven Areas of general similarity

Colin Chapman in his book, *Cross & Crescent*,¹ cites seven areas of general similarity that exist between the Bible's and the Qur'an's views of God. They are:

1. God creates
2. God is one
3. God rules
4. God reveals
5. God loves
6. God judges
7. God forgives

¹ Chapman, Colin, *Cross & Crescent*, Leicester, UK: InterVarsity Press, 1995. 218.

2.2 Muslims will say: “We believe basically the same thing!”

With these in mind, Muslims will often say, “We believe basically the same thing!” There is a lot of similarity if one is contrasting Christianity and Islam to Hinduism or Buddhism, but-

2.3 Agreement **That** God does these, but not **How** He does them.

Chapman goes on to show that while Christians and Muslims agree **that** God is or does these things, they disagree about **how** He does them or **how** He exists as one. The table below will demonstrate this.

	Islam’s Allah		Christianity’s Yahweh	
	How	What	How	What
1 God creates	His word	everything	His Word and Spirit	everything
2 God is one	numerically	what He is not	organically	Spiritual essence
3 God rules	despotically	everything	cooperatively	everything
4 God reveals	through nature, prophets	His will only	through nature, prophets, Incarnation	Himself and His will
5 God loves	bestowing favor	those who love Him	bestowing favor, self-sacrifice	everyone
6 God judges	capriciously	everyone	perfect justice	everyone
7 God forgives	capriciously	only ones he chooses to forgive	through Christ’s atoning sacrifice	Those who will believe in Christ

What these things bring out is that underlying the general similarities are very **real differences** of nature and character.

3. INCONSISTENCIES IN ALLAH’S CHARACTER

3.1 The Just vs. The Deceiver

Also, there are problems with how the character of Allah in that it can be changeable and inconsistent. For example, Islam presents Allah as being the author of both good and evil. His actions are not consistent with a set standard of righteousness. One of his names is El-Muthill, The One who leads astray. Surah 4:88, “The Women,” says, “Seek ye to guide whom Allah hath sent astray? He whom Allah sendeth astray, for him thou canst find no road.” Yet Islam also teaches that Allah is just and fair. One of his names is El ‘Adl, The Just (S. 16:90). He is also called, El-Hakim, The Judge. Surah 95:8, “The Fig,” says, “Is not Allah the wisest of all judges?” Surah 7:85 (or 87), “The Heights,” “He is the best of all who deal judgement.” There are also major problems with Allah’s mercy and love in that they are exercised in an arbitrary

and capricious manner. Allah's justice and mercy are both submitted to his sovereignty so that he is not accountable for his decisions or actions. He doesn't have to be fair, yet Muslims call him just.

One of Allah's 99 names is 'The Holy' (al-Quddūs, S. 59:23). Zwemer notes that the Qur'an's conception, however, is different from the Biblical one, in that the aspect of moral purity or perfection is missing.² Rather it is merely transcendence. At most, the concept of being ceremonially clean is attached to it, but no concept of inward moral purity.³ Moral purity and complete separation from sin is a missing concept from the Qur'an.⁴

'We might sum up by saying in the words of Tor Andrae, "No one can call Allah to account for His actions. Another peculiar aspect of the irrational nature of the Divine Will is that Allah often makes offensive or misleading statements in order to prove men or even to stir up unbelievers to contradict the revealed word (Suras lxxiv. 30; xvii. 42)." (Tor Andrae: *Muhammad*, 91) Islam thus never escapes from an exaggeration of the power of God which leads it to a conception of arbitrary will.'⁵

3.2 Power over Love

In Islam, the overwhelming emphasis is on the power and sovereignty of God. There is an absence of that gracious attitude shown through out the Bible where God delights in revealing His loving-kindness, His covenant-keeping love. 1 John 12:29 tells us God is righteous. 1 John 4:8 tells us God is love. With the God of the Bible these two attributes are exercised fully in balance. With Islam the Sovereignty of God is over all other attributes. This can be seen in that Love is not one of the 7 'Eternal Attributes' of God,⁶ which are living, knowing, powerful, willing, hearing, seeing, and speaking.⁷ Of the attributes that are action-oriented, powerful and speaking are the two key ones. Also, The Loving (al-Wudūd, can be translated 'The Affectionate') is only one of the 99 Names of Allah, and the emphasis of the others is clearly on Allah's power and majesty.⁸ Al-Wudūd only occurs twice in the Qur'an,⁹ and in both instances it is tied to the name 'The Merciful' in a context that Allah is loving toward those who repent. The biblical concept of a God who loves even those who do not love Him is missing. Anderson, noting other uses of the word love toward Allah said:¹⁰

² Zwemer, Samuel M., *The Moslem Doctrine of God*, New York: American Tract Society, 1905. 58.

³ Zwemer, *Doctrine*, 59-60. Zwemer comments he could not find one verse in the Qur'an that spoke to the need for inward purity in man or God.

⁴ Zwemer, *Doctrine*, 60.

⁵ Sweetman, J. Windrow, *Islam and Christian Theology*, London: Lutterworth Press, 1945-1967. Part 1, 2:180.

⁶ Anderson, Norman, *Islam in the Modern World*, Leicester, England: Apollos, 1990. 60-61.

⁷ Sweetman, *Islam*, Part 2, 2:29, note 1.

⁸ Sweetman, *Islam*, Part 1, 1:215-216.

⁹ S. 11:90; 85:14.

¹⁰ Anderson, *Islam*, 61, citing 2:195, 222; 3:76; 5: 46; 19:96.

These verses...affirm the love of God only for those who in some measure deserve it, and there are far more which assert that God does not love those who do not.

With Allah, this is further seen in that power and Sovereignty are his chief attributes and he is in no way limited or bound by absolute moral standards or by covenant agreements with his creatures. To be so bound is seen to compromise his absolute sovereignty. His essential nature is unknowable and Allah does not reveal himself. If you read the Qur'an you will notice quickly that power to overwhelm, destroy, terrify, and condemn to hell is the main emphasis of his character that is conveyed. His love extends only to those that love him and he hates those who hate him or reject him or his prophets.

Next, Andy Bannister will take a closer look at the philosophical heart of the issue, comparing the Trinitarian nature of the God of the Bible with the Monistic nature of the god of the Qur'an.