

Class Objective: To refine our faith and understanding by dismantling misconceptions regarding God, the Bible and the Christian life.

Notes

VI. Twelve misconceptions considered in light of biblical truth

C. Jews, Christians and Muslims worship the same God.

1. In a 2007 interview, then-President George W. Bush said this: "I believe in an almighty God, and I believe that all the world, whether they be Muslim, Christian, or any other religion, prays to the same God. That's what I believe."
2. On December 10, 2015, Larycia Hawkins, a faculty member at Wheaton College, wrote a Facebook post saying, "I stand in religious solidarity with Muslims because they, like me, a Christian, are people of the book. And as Pope Francis stated last week, we worship the same God. ... As part of my Advent Worship, I will wear the hijab to work at Wheaton College."
3. "Philosophers break down 'sameness' into two parts: reference and sense. Reference indicates the object we are pointing to and sense is the content or meaning that we assign to the object." *Wittmer*
 - a) Two different sources may assign a different sense (or meaning) to the same object (or reference). Though the same term or word might be used for the reference (in this case, God) the meaning attached to it can be very different.
4. Jews and Christians
 - a) The comparison being made here is between evangelical Christian belief (there are a wide range of beliefs within Christendom including Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodox and many protestant groups) and orthodox Judaism (there are diverse beliefs among four branches of Judaism including, Orthodox, Reform, Conservative and Reconstructionist).
 - b) **Common beliefs** between these two include that there is one creator-God who is infinite, omnipotent, omniscient and has revealed himself in the Old Testament Scriptures.
 - c) **Divergent beliefs** are most pronounced with regard to the nature of God and the identity, nature and work of Jesus.
 - (1) Contrary to foundational Christian doctrine, Judaism **denies**:
 - (a) The New Testament as inspired, authoritative scripture
 - (b) The triune nature of God as Father, Son and Spirit
 - (c) The deity of Jesus as God's Son
 - (d) The redemptive power of Jesus' death
 - (e) The controlling hermeneutic of the Old Testament: The identity of Jesus as the promised messiah
 - (i) ⁴⁴Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that **everything written about**

me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms **must be fulfilled.**" ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶ and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, ⁴⁷ and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. Luke 24:44-47

(ii) ⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, ⁹ if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, ¹⁰ let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. ¹¹ This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. ¹² And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." Acts 4:10-12

(iii) As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, ⁵ you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ For it stands in Scripture:

"Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone,
a cornerstone chosen and precious,
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."

⁷ So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe,

"The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone,"

⁸ and

"A stone of stumbling,
and a rock of offense."

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

1 Peter 2:4-8

(iv) ²⁶ "Brothers, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to us has been sent the message of this salvation. . . . ³² And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, ³³ this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm,

"You are my Son,
today I have begotten you.'

³⁴ And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he has spoken in this way,

“I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.’
Therefore he says also in another psalm,

“You will not let your Holy One see corruption.’

Acts 13:26, 32-35

A Brief Excursus on Comparative Religion

Starting on the wrong foot.

Part of the problem inherent in last week’s discussion was our starting point.

Culturally relevant but . . .

We began by questioning the statement, “Jews, Christians and Muslims worship the same God.” We chose this assertion because of its frequent occurrence in our culture and because it often implies that since “we all worship the same God,” our religious distinctions are not of great importance.

For purposes of comparison, doctrinal affirmations and or denials by religious organizations matter.

However, even though it has cultural relevance, it is framed in a way that is unhelpful because it refers to the adherents of these religious traditions rather than the formal statements of belief articulated by those traditions or organizations. This proves problematic because the actual internal content of any person’s understanding of God cannot be humanly determined. Only God knows an individual’s heart and mind in relationship to Him. Thus, the only way for us to practically address this question is to compare the affirmations and or denials of the given religious group with Christian doctrinal statements.

What Judaism affirms and denies.

“Scattered throughout the Talmud [Jewish rabbinical interpretation of Torah], the founding document of rabbinic Judaism in late antiquity, can be found quite a few references to Jesus — and they’re not flattering. In this lucid, richly detailed, and accessible book, Peter Schäfer examines how the rabbis of the Talmud read, understood, and used the New Testament Jesus narrative to assert, ultimately, Judaism’s superiority over Christianity.

The Talmudic stories make fun of Jesus’ birth from a virgin, fervently contest his claim to be the Messiah and Son of God, and maintain that he was rightfully executed as a blasphemer and idolater. They subvert the Christian idea of Jesus’ resurrection and insist he got the punishment he deserved in hell — and that a similar fate awaits his followers.” *Synopsis of Jesus in the Talmud* by Peter Schäfer in Princeton University Press

What Jesus said about such denial:

³⁷ I know that you are offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you. ³⁸ I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father.”³⁹ They answered him, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus said to them, “If you were Abraham’s children, you would be doing the works Abraham did, ⁴⁰ but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. ⁴¹ You are doing the works your father did.” They said to him, “We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father—even God.” ⁴² Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came

not of my own accord, but he sent me. ⁴³ Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. ⁴⁴ You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.
John 8:39-44

What John, the Apostle, said about this kind of denial:

²² Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. ²³ No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also.
1 John 2:22, 23

^{4:1} Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. ² By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³ and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. . . . ¹⁵ Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.
1 John 4:1-3, 15

For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist. 2 John 1:7

(e) To **deny** the revelation of God's nature and plan culminating in the person and ministry of Jesus in favor of a selective part of that revelation is to give allegiance to an unbiblical version of God.

(i) In answer to the question, "Who is God?" Judaism describes a god who is **not** triune, **not** the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, **not** the God who sent Jesus as the promised and prophesied Messiah for the salvation of mankind and **not** the God who will judge the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

4. Muslims and Christians

a) **Common beliefs** held by Islam and Christianity include that there is one God who is creator, ruler and judge, that Jesus was (at least) a miraculous prophet and that God inspired holy books.

(1) While the Quran has many allusions to biblical stories and characters (the two most frequently named figures are Moses, 136 times and Abraham, 69 times, and Jesus is named six times as frequently as Mohammed), it both misconstrues the historic occurrence of these people and events and "repurposes them to serve a radically different theological agenda." *Mark Durie*

b) **Divergent beliefs** in Islam accept the authority of the Koran as God's revelation to Mohammed but believe the Bible is not reliable because its text has been corrupted. Islam **denies** the Trinity, the deity of Christ, the doctrine of the incarnation, the death of Jesus on the cross (and thus its redemptive power) and the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

(1) “The differences between Christianity and Islam are wide and deep. We disagree about the Bible, the Koran, the place of Mohammed, the person and work of Jesus Christ, what happened on the cross, what happens when you die, and how you get to heaven, to name only a few major differences. Christians worship a Triune God, one God in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19-20). In the Christian understanding, God is only truly known and truly worshiped when he is known and worshiped as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (John 1:18; 14:6-7; 9-11). The Christian God is the invisible God we behold as visible in the face of Christ (2 Cor. 4:4-6; Col. 1:15). On this side of the incarnation, all other conceptions of God are not merely incomplete, but idolatrous (John 8:39-59).” *Kevin DeYoung*

(2) “Muslims believe that ‘God is one.’ Allah has no partners and assigning partners to him is **shirk**, the highest blasphemy. Christians believe ‘God is one in three persons.’ Each person in the Trinity is fully and eternally God. Yet there is one God. Our Muslim neighbors believe Christians are guilty of the greatest sin—making partners with God.” *Thabiti Anyabwile*

c) The glory of the nature of God is seen in Christ alone.

(1) ⁵ For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. 2 Corinthians 4:5, 6

d) God receives only worship that comes through the mediation of Jesus Christ.

(1) ²³ But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth. ²⁵ The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things.” ²⁶ Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am he.” John 4:23-26

(2) Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” John 14:6

e) Old Testament Jewish history begins with Abraham about 2000 B.C. Christianity dates from Jesus’ birth at 6-4 B.C. and Islam begins about 600 A.D. Regardless of this historic progression and the close relationship between Jewish and Christian history, it cannot be said that Islam evolved from either Old Testament Jewish roots or Christianity.

f) “Islam’s relationship to Christianity is not like that of a church which has been transformed into a mosque, like the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul. Rather it is more like a church has been demolished, and its materials have been repurposed for the construction of a mosque.” *Mark Durie*

- g) What does this mean for our relationship with followers of Islam? (K. DeYoung)
- (1) Muslims are made in the image of God and deserve to be treated with fairness, dignity, and respect.
 - (a) “We can assure them that we do not hold them responsible for the radical Muslims who terrorize the world.” *Irwin Lutzer*
 - (b) This does not mean that Muslims are our brothers and sisters.
 - (2) Christians should look for opportunities to show love and compassion to our Muslim neighbors.
 - (a) Studies in the 21st century suggest that, in terms of percentage and worldwide spread, Islam is the fastest-growing major religion in the world. There are presently more than 2 billion Muslims in the world.
 - (b) “We can be good and helpful neighbors without sacrificing the very truths that bring sinners into the presence of God. Jesus affirmed “Love your neighbor,” but He did not say that we had to agree with them doctrinally in order to do so.” *Irwin Lutzer*
 - (c) This does not mean the church has the responsibility to provide for all Muslims everywhere.
 - (d) Christians should do good to all people as they have opportunity, especially to the household of faith (Gal. 6:10). The church’s priority is the church, and the mission of the church is to make disciples and plant healthy churches (Acts 14:21-23; Rom. 15:19).