

Christianity vs Islam: Two Faiths, One God? – Lesson 7

Do Christians believe in three gods?

If you're a Muslim, you may think Christians believe in three gods. That idea is as blasphemous to Christians as to you.

There is one God!

Christians believe in one God. In the Holy Bible, God commands, "You shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3).

When asked for the greatest command, Jesus responded, ". . . The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" (Mark 12:29-30).

The one God exists as three Persons.

The Bible teaches that God is one in essence, three in Person: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:16-17; 28:19). Each is fully God. God is not three gods but three in one. Although we cannot completely grasp the tri-unity of God, we must trust His revelation is true.

Is Jesus God's Son?

The same Jesus who affirmed God's oneness also said, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). Jesus' perfect life, miracles, death, and resurrection proved He was God's Son in the flesh. We cannot both praise Jesus' teaching and refute His deity because He claimed to be from and of God (John 1:1-2; 5:18-24). Jesus is either God's Son or a blasphemer.

The religious leaders of Jesus' time refused to believe He was the Son of God and so desired to kill Him for blasphemy. ". . . Again the high priest asked him, 'Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?' And Jesus said, 'I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.' And the high priest tore his garments and said, 'What further witnesses do we need? You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?' And they all condemned him as deserving death" (Mark 14:61-64).

What is your decision?

Your beliefs cannot change the truth. Is Jesus the Son of God? If not, He deserved death for blasphemy, and His bones would be resting in a tomb. But the resurrection proved Jesus divine.

Being God's Son, why did Jesus die? Death is the punishment for sinners (Romans 6:23). Jesus kept every commandment—even the greatest command to love God.

Have you? Unlike Jesus, not one of us loves God supremely. Even breaking a small command (such as lying, hating, or coveting) disqualifies us from heaven: "For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10). We deserve death—eternal separation from God in hell.

But take heart. The Lord Jesus took the punishment for sin when He died on the cross. "[God] made [Jesus] who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). After dying on the cross, Jesus rose from the dead, showing God's approval of His sacrifice for sin.

The living Lord Jesus can pay for your sin, providing the way to paradise. When Jesus was promising to prepare a place in heaven for His followers, one asked Him for the way to heaven. "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me'" (John 14:6).

You cannot come to the Father on your own because you are a sinner, unable to fix yourself. Trust in Jesus as your Savior from the penalty and power of sin. Turn from your sin and your own way to follow Jesus as the Lord of your life. He is the way, truth, and life!

Should Christians attend weddings of those in other faiths?

This can be a difficult issue. Believers want to show friendship, but we're wary of seeming to condone the unbiblical aspects of a wedding ceremony in another religion.

As a starting point in any decision-making process, we should pray for wisdom (James 1:5). What does God say about whether or not you should attend the ceremony?

In general, though, if a believer is invited to a marriage ceremony, he or she should feel free to attend. God instituted marriage, and, whether the couple is Christian, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, atheist, or some other religion, marriage is honorable in God's eyes (Hebrews 13:4). As long as the marriage is between a man and a woman, it is as God intended. Attending the ceremony is a matter of supporting the bride and/or groom; it's not necessarily a stamp of approval on another faith.

In some cultures, elements of paganism are part of the wedding ceremony. A traditional Bengali wedding, for example, includes prayers and offerings made to an idol. If attending a wedding requires a believer himself to perform a pagan ritual, then he should honor God rather than man (Acts 5:29). In most cases, however, a Christian can simply attend and not be involved in the sacrifices to false gods. There is also the possibility that others will interpret a Christian's presence there as giving "approval" to what is taking place. Again, this is a situation that demands prayer and godly discernment.

Jesus' prayer in John 17:15-18 contains a principle that may help: "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world." Christians are *in* the world, sent by Jesus Himself, but we are not *of* the world. We are an infusion of light in a dark place (Matthew 5:16). The goal is not to separate totally from the people and events of a culture, but to be preserved from evil.

The friendships we make with those of another religion may plant seeds that someone else may water, and God may later bring the fruit (1 Corinthians 3:6). To be asked to take part in a wedding is an honor and a privilege. We should use everything that comes our way to bring glory to the Lord.

What is Ramadan?

Ramadan is a holy month in the religion of Islam and is marked by a time of required fasting. Observance of Ramadan is one of the Five Pillars of Islam. By fasting during this month, Muslims believe they earn spiritual rewards and draw closer to Allah.

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, which is lunar based. Based on the region, either astronomical calculations or moon sightings mark the beginning of this month of fasting, which ends at the next new moon. Ramadan officially commences when a Muslim imam announces it. During the month of Ramadan, Muslims seek the mercy and attention of Allah by fasting from dawn to sunset. Muslims abstain from food, drink, smoking, and sex during the daylight hours. It is said that good works done during the month of Ramadan will result in a multiplication of the normal reward for the same works performed in other months. For this reason, generosity and charity increase during Ramadan. Muslims are also encouraged to read the entire Qur'an during Ramadan and to recite special prayers. Ramadan ends

with the feast of Eid al-Fitr / the Festival of Breaking the Fast.

The word *Ramadan* comes from the Arabic word *ramida*, which means “intense, scorching heat or dryness.” It is believed among adherents of Islam that Ramadan burns away a person’s sins with good deeds. Muslims seek to suppress everything sinful in themselves, putting away all vices and bad behavior and desires, to show their dedication to Allah and their hope that he will be merciful to them. The word *Islam* means “submission,” and the posture of obedience and self-denial taken during the month of Ramadan is the ultimate act of a Muslim’s submission to Allah.

Fasting is also found in the Bible. For a Christian, fasting is usually accompanied by prayer and is a way to express deep distress and dire need. However, there is a big difference between a Christian fast and the Islamic fast of Ramadan. For one thing, the New Testament never commands a fast (even in the Old Testament, the Jews were only commanded to fast one day a year, on the Day of Atonement). Christian fasts are voluntary, not obligatory.

Also, Christians do not believe that fasting will atone for or burn away sins. Self-denial has long been associated with Christianity (see Mark 8:34), but what the Bible says about self-denial is quite different from the Muslim understanding of it. In Islam, self-denial is a way to persuade Allah to “repay” the worshiper. For a Christian, self-denial is a natural occurrence due to a change of heart and a desire to follow Jesus (Romans 6:17–18).

The idea that a god will be appeased by works of charity, generosity, or the suppression of natural desires is almost universal in world religions. In fact, the only religion that does not believe in appeasing the gods with good deeds is Christianity. The Bible teaches that a Christian’s faith will result in good works animated by God’s Spirit (James 2:26; Galatians 5:16–18). Faith itself is a gift (Ephesians 2:8–9), and, even when Christians falter and sin, we do not have any fear that God’s love will be revoked (Romans 8:1,38). Muslims have no such assurance and must continually seek Allah’s approval by performing good works and fasting during the month of Ramadan. To fail to fast during Ramadan is to face the wrath of Allah.

Do the Qur’an and Muhammad affirm or reject the Bible?

The Qur’an praises the Bible as God’s preserved truth.

As a Muslim, what is your guide? If hadiths or imams differ with the Qur’an, which would you believe? Most likely, the Qur’an is your ultimate authority. Does the Qur’an

give you permission to learn from the Bible?

- “Lo! We did reveal the Torah, wherein is guidance and a light” (Surah 5:44a; 2:87).
- “And We caused Jesus, son of Mary, to follow in their footsteps, confirming that which was (revealed) before him in the Torah, and We bestowed on him the Gospel wherein is guidance and a light, confirming that which was (revealed) before it in the Torah - a guidance and an admonition unto those who ward off (evil)” (Surah 5:46).
- “It is He Who sent down to thee (step by step), in truth, the Book, confirming what went before it; and He sent down the Law (of Moses) and the Gospel (of Jesus) before this, as a guide to mankind, and He sent down the criterion (of judgment between right and wrong)” (Surah 3:3).
- “If thou wert in doubt as to what We have revealed unto thee, then ask those who have been reading the Book from before thee: the Truth hath indeed come to thee from thy Lord: so be in no wise of those in doubt. And be not thou of those who deny the revelations of Allah, for then wert thou of the losers” (Surah 10:94-95; 16:43).

If you are a Muslim, you have no excuse not to read the Bible. The Qur’an commends it.

What is *al-Qadr* in Islam?

The Islamic term *al-Qadr* is most often associated with *Laylat al-Qadr*, believed to be the evening Muhammad first received a revelation from Allah. Alternatively, the terms *qadr* and *qadar* refer to the Islamic version of predestination.

Laylat al-Qadr: Night of the Decree

According to Islamic belief, Muhammad began to receive the words of the Qur’an sometime in the last ten days of the month of Ramadan in AD 610. Muslims believe the recording of the Qur’an came through revelations brought from Allah by the angel Jibril (Gabriel). Within the Islamic community, there is no explicitly agreed-upon date for this event. The first revelations marked the beginning of a 23-year period of recitation by Muhammad, inspiring Muslims to set aside as holy the month of Ramadan.

The evening Allah sent the first decree to Muhammad is called *Laylat al-Qadr*, meaning “Night of Power” or “Night of the Decree.” The Qur’an’s 97th chapter is given the title *al-Qadr* in reference to this content and the use of the phrase in the chapter’s first verse.

Islamic tradition teaches that prayers are especially potent on *Laylat al-Qadr*. Since it is the “Night of the Decree,” it is believed this is when Allah issues orders for all of creation for the following year. These commands are carried by angels throughout the world. According to the Qur’an, *Laylat al-Qadr* is “better than a thousand months”; that is, acts of worship done on *Laylat al-Qadr* are rewarded as much as 1,000 times more than the same acts done on other dates.

Islamic Predestination

The same root word found in references to *Laylat al-Qadr* forms the Islamic term for their version of predestination: *qadar*. As is the case in Christianity, Muslim views on predestination cover a spectrum from hard determinism to open theism. To the confusion of non-Arabic speakers, Muslims may differentiate between *qadr*, specifically meaning what Allah has willed via his power, and *qadar* in the more general sense of human destiny.

In principle, most sects of Islam view *qadr/qadar*/predestination as simple foreknowledge: Allah knows all that will occur, without interfering with free will. In practice, however, Islamic theology heavily implies that Allah used something akin to double predestination. Also, in practice, Muslims lean toward a belief that the broad strokes of a person’s life are purposefully arranged by the deliberate decisions of Allah.

What is the Shahada in Islam?

Shahada is Arabic for “testimony” or “witness.” The Shahada is the first pillar of Islam and is the Islamic creed:

“There is no god but Allah, and Mohammad is the messenger [or prophet] of Allah.”

Transliterated from the Arabic, the Shahada looks like this: *La ilaha illa Allah wa-Muhammad rasul Allah*.

The Shahada is a declaration that all Muslims must make, and anyone who cannot make this declaration cannot be considered a true Muslim. This confession uttered before two Muslim witnesses is all that is required to become a Muslim. The Shahada is repeated at each of the five daily prayer times that Islam requires.

The first part of the Shahada confession affirms that Allah is one—thus, polytheism and the Christian doctrine of the Trinity are denied.

The second part of the confession affirms that the primary communication from Allah

to mankind is through Mohammad—thus, Jesus and the Bible are relegated to a lower status.

In Shia Islamic practice, the Shahada has a third phrase: “Ali is the *wali* of Allah.” *Wali* literally could be translated “guardian” or “protector” but is commonly used to refer to a Muslim saint or “friend of Allah.” Shia Muslims consider Ali (son-in-law of Mohammad) as the legitimate successor to Mohammad—a point that Sunni Muslims reject.

The Shahada is normally found on flags of Muslim countries as well as on the flags of the Taliban, ISIS, and Hamas.