

## *Islam and the Deity of Christ*

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In the long ago, Pharaoh asked, “Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice?” (Exodus 5:2). At a much later time, when Jesus arrived in the district of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” (Matthew 16:13). Satan is relentless in his efforts to steal the truth out of the hearts of humanity regarding the true identity of Christ. Although the common opinion remains that Christ was a great one, multitudes have been deceived into denying that Christ is indeed the Greatest One who clothed Himself with human flesh that He might save His people from their sins. Jesus made the question of His identity personal when He asked His disciples, “But who do you say that I am?” (Matthew 16:15). Though many may argue that the answer makes little difference, they are certainly in error; for Jesus exclaimed, “Unless you believe that I am He, you shall die in your sins” (John 8:24; see margin definition for “I am”). It unequivocally does make a difference what a man believes about Christ, for everything of spiritual consequence depends upon who the Lord is.

The first decade of the twenty-first century spawned events that elevated the religion of Islam into a topic of daily conversation in the world media. The growing interest in Islam in America means the church in this country must understand the differences of the core beliefs, not only to protect the hearts of our children, but that the church may learn to reach Muslim hearts with the simplicity of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Regarding the nature of Christ, Islam and Christianity stand firmly opposed to one another. The vast difference appears from the Qur'an, wherein is stated, “Christ the son of Mary was no more than a messenger” (5:75). The Qur'an further states, “In blasphemy are those that say that Allah [God] is Christ the son of Mary” (5:17; see also 5:72). Hammudah Abdalati argued, “Jesus never claimed to be a god or the Son of God” (1975, p. 158); he contended that Christ was not unlike any other great prophet sent as a spokesman for God, e.g., Abraham or Moses. The Islamic views of Christ are not unique, but represent the primary departure from the truth concerning the true nature of Jesus Christ.

Today, self-styled Jehovah's Witnesses accuse Christians of claiming about Jesus what He never claimed for Himself, i.e., deity. However, the Jews who conversed with Jesus positively understood His claims, hence: "For this cause therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God" (John 5:18). On a later occasion, they intended to stone Him, saying, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God" (John 10:33). While on trial, the high priest implored, "'Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?' And Jesus said, 'I Am'...And tearing his clothes, the high priest said, 'What further need do we have of witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy'" (Mark 14:61-64). Jesus was condemned for blasphemy because the Jews did not believe His claim to deity.

The Bible is replete with evidence demonstrating the nature of Christ as God, and the glory of our salvation is unabashedly connected to His dual nature as both the Son of God and the Son of Man. The prophet Micah foretold the human nature of Christ in declaring His birth in the town of Bethlehem, but revealed His divine nature by insisting that "His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity" (Micah 5:2). Isaiah declared that "the virgin" would conceive and bear a son, and His name would be designated as "Immanuel," which actually signifies "God is with us" (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23). Isaiah also announced the birth of the child whose name would be called "Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (9:6). The humanity of Christ is indicated by the terms *child* and *son*, and His deity is declared forthright by His unmistakable name, "Mighty God."

Jesus stood forth as God in man, revealing and explaining the invisible God of Heaven (John 1:1; 1:18). Even though He declared in His confrontation with the devil that only God is to be worshipped (Matthew 4:10), Jesus was openly worshipped no less than ten times while on earth, and not once did He decline such worship (Matthew 2:11; 8:2; 9:18, etc.). Far from being a peripheral issue, the deity of Christ is an essential belief of Christianity. To strengthen the church and reach out to Muslims, we must be able to impress upon all men the dual nature of the Savior, carefully exhibiting the same humility as Christ, "who, existing [present tense participle,TW] in the form of God" (Philippians 2:6; ASV), condescended to become man, that through death, He might save us from our sins. May every man in this life bow before Christ, confessing like Thomas, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28). Amen.

References:

Abdalati, Hammudah (1975), *Islam in Focus*  
(Indianapolis, IN: American Trust Publications)