

FIRST-PERSON: Are God & Allah the same?

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FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--In some far-flung field around the world a Southern Baptist missionary enters a territory which has remained hostile to the Gospel for some time. Upon entering the mountainous village, he is able to speak to some of the villagers about eternal matters. They are uninhibited to speak about their faith, although reticent to accept any other opinion, and this missionary quickly gains a cursory understanding of their god. He is an all-powerful being who blesses both the just and the unjust. He reveals himself through miracles. Additionally, these villagers believe that there is no forgiveness of sin without the shedding of blood. In fact, these villagers believe that their god has a son and that this son was once dead and now has come to life! Now, can this missionary then assume that the god the villagers are describing, due to so many similar characteristics, is the same God the Scripture reveals?

If your answer is yes, you have fallen prey to a tactic the devil has used since the Fall in the Garden of Eden. The devil, the best counterfeiter in history, plays upon the attributes of God and places them upon another, even himself. Ironically, the situation above is not foreign to the Scripture, for Elijah is that missionary who found himself in a strikingly similar situation in 1 Kings 18:20-40. The Jewish people had fallen into idolatry, specifically Baal worship. Although Baal worship differed regionally, Elijah came across the form of Baal worship which believed that Baal is the son of El, the most high god. Baal was once dead, but like the fall harvest, has come back to life. Baal required a blood sacrifice for appeasement to El, albeit the sacrifice is not of Baal himself but of a first-born son of each family. Baal was all-powerful and could be seen in miracles such as raining down fire. Yet, Baal was not mistaken as Jehovah. Elijah rhetorically asks the Israelites who are worshipping a false god, "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God follow him; but if Baal, follow him" (1 Kings 18:21).

Today, similar debate has revolved around the two largest faiths in the world, Islam and Christianity, and whether the god of the Koran is the God of the Bible. Simply put, the god of Muhammad is not the Father of Jesus. The subject in its essence is not a linguistic issue, but a theological matter with eternal ramifications. To say that since Allah is Arabic for God and YHWH is Hebrew for God, Christians and Muslims worship the same God is beyond naïve -- it is blasphemous.

When Elijah challenged his fellow Jews to follow the one true God, he did so without regard to linguistics. Indeed, the etymology of Baal is derived from the root word for Lord or Master. If the matter at hand were merely about words and similar nomenclature,

Elijah's statement would make absolutely no sense. Would the Israelites not be worshipping the same god as their forefathers since they have a title similar to that of their forefathers? Would Elijah not owe an unqualified apology to the prophets of Baal for assuming their worship was a façade and their god nonexistent? How could there even be such a theological animal as a "false god" if the word "god" is used in conversation? And for those who argue linguistically, would they be comfortable praying to Baal today since it is only another word for Lord?

As someone who came out of a Sunni Muslim background, I can personally attest that I rejected God as Father (surah 5:18), Jesus Christ as the Son of God (surah 5:116; 19:88), and the very person of the Holy Spirit (surah 70:4). What part of the Triune God did I understand? I was an idolater, plain and simple, and the vacuity in my prayers only proved that point. Like the Israelites who worshipped Baal, I know too well the great pain of praying to a non-existent god. As 1 Kings 18:29 describes, "There was no voice; no one answered, no one paid attention." To argue, then, that I was worshipping the true God, just inadequately or incompletely, would have been to place false light upon my total darkness. My Muslim mind would have interpreted such folly as insisting that Muhammad did receive at least some of his revelation from the one, true God -- that in some ways he was a true prophet.

This is not an argument which denies that God is sovereign over Muhammad and all followers of Islam. But as Timothy George noted in a recent Christianity Today article, "No devout Muslim can call the God of Muhammad 'Father,' for this, to their mind, would compromise divine transcendence. But no faithful Christian can refuse to confess, with joy and confidence, 'I believe in God the Father ... Almighty!' Apart from the Incarnation and the Trinity, it is possible to know that God is, but not who God is." Even modern Muslim apologists recognize the difficulty in arguing that Christians worship the same god as Muslims. In a recent editorial in the PakTribune (Pakistan News Service), Ahmer Muzammil asserted, "I believe that whoever believes in one Allah (God) without any partners, sons, daughters or incarnations, whether they are Christians, Jews, Muslims, or whoever they might be, they all believe in the same Allah (GOD) that we do and that Jesus, Moses, Adam, Noah, and Mohammad called masses to the same GOD."

The latter part of the quote, attributing Islamic devotion to Old Testament prophets, is key to understanding why the Koran states, "We believe in the revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you; Our God and your God is one; and it is to Him we bow (in Islam)" (surah 29:46). Muslims do not believe the God of the Old Testament, especially as seen in the Major and Minor Prophets, is their god since the Old Testament is a corrupted collection (surah 3:78) which fails to clarify that Abraham, Moses, and the other prophets were actually Muslims. Islam, in denying the revelation, denies the Revelator.

The Koran further substantiates the claim that Christians do not worship the same god as

Muslims. Surah 5:72 denounces partnering "other gods with Allah," and warns those who do so, "Allah will forbid him the Garden, and the Fire will be his abode." Surah 112:3, perhaps the central passage in the entire discussion, explicitly divorces Allah from the Christian God, explaining, "He begets not, nor is He begotten; and there is none like unto Him." Ultimately, Allah "forgives not (the sin of) joining other gods with Him" (4:116).

It is clear, then, that according to Islam Peter committed this heinous sin when he publicly proclaimed, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). The church itself is built upon this confession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, indeed, in the very character of Jesus Christ as the Son of God. To remove Him from the Godhead would be the death knell of the church, the end of Christianity. "There is no other foundation that anyone can lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:11). Rejecting each person of the Trinity, the God of the Old Testament and New Testament is replaced by a figment of Muhammad's imagination, a god that beyond the somewhat similar characteristics of monotheism and transcendence resembles only remotely the God of the Scriptures.

It behooves us as Southern Baptists to stand unwaveringly against the ecumenists and syncretists who try to convince us that Muslims and Christians worship the same god. When Baptist scholars like Charles Kimball state, "The name for God in Islam, in Arabic, is Allah. This is not another god. This is the God. It's the same God that Jews and Christians are talking about," Southern Baptists must ardently stand against such theological heresy. For the sake of ensuring that the Gospel is preached faithfully and biblically, it is imperative that Southern Baptist leadership stand united on this crucial and non-negotiable issue. While Kimball and other prominent Baptists are creating confusion with a corrupt notion of the One True God, SBC leaders should draw a line of separation from them by boldly affirming that He is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and rejecting the grave theological error that others are promoting.

Since an assent of the god of Islam is ultimately a rejection of the Triune God, any such person who holds to such aberrant views should have the integrity to resign from any position of leadership held within the Southern Baptist Convention. To equate the god of Islam with the God of the Bible is to reject the God described in the Baptist Faith and Message, the doctrinal statement which Southern Baptists have accepted for more than eight decades as a confessional statement ensuring theological accountability in our convention.

Evidence strongly suggests that the vast majority of Southern Baptists uphold the distinction between the god of Islam and the God of the Scripture. In a recent survey, it was stated that 79 percent of evangelicals do not believe Muslims and Christians worship the same god. If that is the case within evangelicalism, it is certain that the percentage of Southern Baptists, more conservative than evangelicals at large, reject this belief in even greater numbers.

Let's reassure Southern Baptists that what they believe is not in vain, that without Christ, religions and their gods are false. Our voices must be heard on the issue or else our zeal for the lost will diminish and the clarity of the Gospel will be muddled. I pray our response to the situation will be vastly different from that of the Israelites who, when confronted with this issue, "answered [Elijah] not a word" (1 Kings 18:21b). This hour must be one of courage and not cowardice, for if the doctrine of God is compromised, other crucial doctrines will soon fall to the ecumenists as well. Truth is immortal.

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