

WEEK 2 OF 6

Tawhid vs. Trinity

Two Views of God's Oneness

Christianity & Islam • September 20, 2026

Holy Trinity Presbyterian Church • Tampa, Florida

Review & Introduction

Week 1 Recap

- Muhammad: born ~570 AD, first revelation ~610 AD, Hijra 622 AD
- The Qur'an: 114 surahs, ~6,236 ayat, organized by length not chronology
- Meccan vs. Medinan surahs; abrogation (nasikh) as an interpretive key
- Key concepts: fitra, mithaq, the Five Pillars, the Shahada

Today's Focus

The doctrine of God—"theology proper"—is the deepest divide between Islam and Christianity.

Today we ask: What does Islam mean by the oneness of God (tawhid)? And how does that compare to the biblical Trinity?

"The single most important question any religion must answer: What is God like?"

Defining Tawhid

“Lā ilāha illāllāh, Muḥammadun rasūlullāh”

“There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah.” — The Shahada

Rubūbiyyah

Lordship / Sovereignty

Allah alone is Creator, Sustainer, and Sovereign over all creation. No creature shares in these functions.

Ulūhiyyah

Divinity / Worship

All worship (ibadah) belongs exclusively to Allah. Directing worship toward any other being is the sin of shirk.

Asmā' wal-Sifāt

Names & Attributes

Allah possesses the 99 beautiful names (al-Asma' al-Husna). His attributes are affirmed without likening Him to creatures (tanzih).

Key Qur'an Texts on Tawhid

Surah 112:1–4 (Al-Ikhlās)

“Say: He is Allah, the One. Allah, the Eternal Refuge. He neither begets nor is born, nor is there any equivalent to Him.”

Al-Ikhlās (“Sincerity”) — the Surah of Pure Monotheism. Recitation equals one-third of the Qur'an in merit. The phrase *lā yalid wa lā yūlad* directly targets Christian claims about the Son.

Surah 5:73

“They surely lie against Allah who say, ‘Allah is the third of three:’ There is no god except one Allah.”

The charge of *kufr* (unbelief/disbelief) for Trinitarian belief. Again uses the concept of a numerical division of the divine.

Surah 4:171

“Do not say ‘Three’ — desist, it is better for you. Allah is but One God. Exalted is He above having a son.”

Direct prohibition of the Trinity. Uses the term *walad* (physical offspring) rather than *ibn* (son in relational/positional sense).

Surah 19:35

“It is not appropriate for Allah to take a son. Exalted is He! When He decrees an affair, He only says to it, ‘Be,’ and it is.”

The comparison between God's creative word (*kun*—“Be!”) and having a son. The implication: a son implies divine vulnerability or limitation.

Shirk: Islam's Unforgivable Sin

"Indeed, Allah does not forgive association with Him, but He forgives what is less than that for whom He wills."

— Surah 4:48

Shirk (شِرْك) — from the root sh-r-k, "to share / to associate" — is the act of assigning partners or associates to Allah.

Major Shirk (al-Shirk al-Akbar)

- Worshiping any being other than Allah
- Attributing divine qualities to a creature
- Affirming a Trinity of persons in God
- Results in permanent exclusion from paradise (per Surah 4:48)

Minor Shirk (al-Shirk al-Asghar)

- Performing acts of worship to be seen by others (riya')
- Swearing by anything other than Allah
- Excessive attachment to worldly things
- Does not nullify Islam but diminishes piety

The Qur'an's Critique of the Trinity

Does the Qur'an understand the doctrine it critiques?

White's Key Argument

“Does the Qur’an’s author show knowledge of the Trinity to where the criticisms offered are accurate and compelling?” — James R. White, p. 75

“And when Allah will say [on the Day of Judgment], “O Jesus, Son of Mary, did you say to the people, Take me and my mother as deities besides Allah?” He will say, “Exalted are You! It was not for me to say that to which I have no right.”” — Surah 5:116

What the Qur’an Critiques

Father • Mary • Jesus

The Qur’an presents the Christian Trinity as: Allah (the Father), Mary, and Jesus — a triad of two humans elevated to divinity alongside God.

What Christians Actually Believe

Father • Son • Holy Spirit

One divine Being, three co-eternal Persons — none of them human, none elevated to divinity from below. Mary is not a member of the Trinity.

The Biblical Trinity

“In the unity of the Godhead there be three Persons of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost.”

— Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter II.3

One ousia (essence) • Three hypostaseis (persons)

Matthew 28:19

Baptize in the name [singular] of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — three Persons, one name.

John 1:1

“The Word was with God (pros ton Theon) and the Word was God (Theos).” Distinction and identity simultaneously.

John 10:30

“I and the Father are one.” Hen (neuter) — one thing; not heis (one person). Unity of essence, not person.

2 Corinthians 13:14

The grace of Christ, the love of God, the fellowship of the Spirit — Trinitarian benediction in apostolic practice.

Being vs. Person

“What is God?”

BEING (ousia)

One divine essence — infinitely perfect, self-existent, eternal. Christianity affirms ONE divine being, the same in all three Persons.

“Who is God?”

PERSON (hypostasis)

Three distinct centers of consciousness, will, and relation — Father, Son, Holy Spirit — each fully possessing the one divine nature.

The Qur’ān conflates being and person: it treats "three Persons" as equivalent to "three beings" or "three gods." This is the fundamental category error that invalidates its critique of Trinitarian Christianity.

Perichoresis (περιχώρησις): mutual indwelling of the three Persons — each fully in the others, no separation, no hierarchy of essence.

Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381 AD): the Spirit is "Lord and life-giver, who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified."

The Relational God

“Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.” — 1 John 4:8

If God is a solitary person...

- Before creation, Allah had nothing to love.
- ‘God is love’ becomes contingent on the existence of creatures.
- Love is not intrinsic to the divine nature but an attribute that activates only with a created object.
- Creation becomes necessary for God to be fully himself—a profound limitation on divine aseity.

If God is triune...

- The Father has eternally loved the Son (John 17:24).
- Love is eternal, intrinsic, and not dependent on creation.
- The Spirit eternally proceeds as the bond of love between Father and Son (Augustine, de Trinitate).
- Creation flows from the overflow of eternal Trinitarian love, not from divine necessity.

Discussion Questions

1.

How would you respond to a Muslim who says, “You worship three gods—that is shirk”?

2.

Surah 5:116 presents the Trinity as Father—Mary—Jesus. What does this reveal about the Qur’an’s knowledge of Christian doctrine?

3.

“God is love” (1 John 4:8). Why does this verse argue for the Trinity rather than a monadist view of God?

4.

Al-Ikhlās (Surah 112) says Allah “neither begets nor is born.” Does this accurately address the Christian doctrine of eternal generation?

5.

How can we respond to the charge of shirk with charity—acknowledging its sincerity—while also showing it is misdirected and biblically incorrect?

NEXT WEEK

Week 3: Jesus in the Qur'an vs. Jesus in the Bible

Sunday, September 20, 2026

Reading Assignment

James R. White • “What Every Christian Needs to Know About the Qur'an” — Chapter 5

- 'Isā ibn Maryam — Jesus son of Mary in the Qur'an: prophet, Messiah, Word from God, Spirit from God
- What the Qur'an denies about Jesus: his deity, his sonship, his crucifixion
- The titles the Qur'an gives Jesus vs. what it gives Muhammad — what do they imply?
- The biblical Logos: John 1:1–18, Colossians 1:15–20, Hebrews 1:1–4