

SURAH 3 (AL-IMRAN)

FAITH: Islam | TEXT: The Holy Qur'an | VOLUME: The Meaning of the Holy Quran | AUTHOR: Rashad Khalifa (Translator)

OVERVIEW

Surah 3, titled 'The Family of Imran,' serves as a comprehensive theological polemic and a pastoral address to the early Muslim community. The text establishes the Quran as the final confirmation of the Torah and Gospel, superseding them. A significant portion is dedicated to Christology, explicitly deconstructing Christian claims of Jesus's divinity by framing him as a created being—similar to Adam—and a messenger who preached strict monotheism. The text asserts that 'Submission' (Islam) is the only religion acceptable to God. Historically, the Surah addresses the aftermath of the Battle of Uhud, explaining the Muslims' defeat not as a failure of God's promise, but as a result of the community's disobedience and desire for worldly spoils. It emphasizes that salvation is contingent upon faith supported by 'striving' (Jihad), steadfastness, and obedience to God and His messenger. The text imposes a binary worldview: those who submit are promised Gardens, while those who reject the specific revelations of the Quran are promised severe retribution.

KEY FIGURES

GOD (Allah), Jesus (Isa), Mary (Maryam), Zachariah, John (Yahya), Abraham, The Wife of Imran, Muhammad (The Messenger)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. STRICT MONOTHEISM (TAWHID)

Assertion: There is absolutely no god but God; He has no partners, sons, or equals.

"GOD: there is no god except He; the Living, the Eternal. [003:002]"

Evangelical Comparison: The text presents a unitarian view of God that explicitly excludes the Trinitarian understanding of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. While Evangelicals affirm one God in three persons, this text defines monotheism as a singular, indivisible essence. It specifically targets the Christian understanding of Jesus, stripping him of divine nature to protect the doctrine of God's oneness. This creates a fundamental incompatibility with the Evangelical doctrine of Theology Proper.

2. CREATED NATURE OF JESUS

Assertion: Jesus was created from dust like Adam; he is a messenger, not God.

"The example of Jesus, as far as GOD is concerned, is the same as that of Adam; He created him from dust, then said to him, 'Be,' and he was. [003:059]"

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelical Christianity holds that Jesus is the uncreated, eternal Son of God (John 1:1). This text asserts that Jesus is a created being, brought into existence by a command ('Be'), identical in nature to Adam. This doctrine is designed to refute the Incarnation, reducing Jesus to the status of a prophet and removing his capacity to offer an infinite atonement.

3. SALVATION BY SUBMISSION AND STRIVING

Assertion: Salvation is attained through belief combined with obedience, striving, and martyrdom.

"Do you expect to enter Paradise without GOD distinguishing those among you who strive, and without distinguishing those who are steadfast? [003:142]"

Evangelical Comparison: While Evangelicalism teaches justification by faith alone apart from works (Ephesians 2:8-9), this text presents a synergistic soteriology. Entrance into Paradise is not guaranteed by faith alone but requires God to 'distinguish' those who strive (jihad) and remain steadfast. Salvation is a reward for the 'workers' (3:136) rather than a gift of grace received by faith.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The gap is unbridgeable regarding the person of Jesus and the method of salvation. The text explicitly demotes Jesus to a creature (3:59) and denies the Trinity (3:18). Furthermore, it establishes a soteriology based on human merit ('recompense for what they earned' - 3:25) and divine selection based on testing, whereas Evangelicalism posits salvation as a free gift of grace through faith in the finished work of Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9). The text views the Christian Gospel not as the solution to sin, but as a deviation from true monotheism.

Shared Values:

Monotheism (existence of one Creator); Moral living (charity, honesty, chastity); Belief in Prophets (Abraham, Moses, Jesus); Belief in Judgment Day, Heaven, and Hell; Rejection of idolatry

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Theology Proper (Trinity) – Explicit denial of the Trinity; assertion of Unitarian Monotheism.
2. [Critical] Christology (Deity of Christ) – Jesus is defined as a created human being (like Adam), denying his divinity.
3. [Critical] Sola Fide (Faith Alone) – Salvation is contingent on works, striving, and obedience, not faith alone.

Semantic Warnings:

"Messiah"

In Text: A title for Jesus, a messenger and prophet, but created and human.

Evangelical: The Anointed One, God Incarnate, King of Kings, Savior of the World.

Example: *In 3:45, Jesus is called Messiah, but 3:59 clarifies he is created dust like Adam.*

"Word of God"

In Text: A created command ('Be') from God, or a specific message.

Evangelical: The eternal second person of the Trinity (John 1:1, 1:14).

Example: *3:45 calls Jesus 'a Word from Him,' but context denies his pre-existence as God.*

"Gospel (Injeel)"

In Text: A specific book sent down to Jesus, similar to the Torah.

Evangelical: The 'Good News' of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection; also the four canonical books.

Example: *3:3 says God 'sent down... the Gospel,' implying it is a lost text, not the New Testament witness.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Avoidance of Hellfire and entrance into Gardens (Paradise) with pure spouses.

How Attained: By believing, submitting (Islam), striving (Jihad), giving charity, and obeying the Messenger.

Basis of Assurance: There is no absolute assurance; it depends on God's will and the believer's steadfastness under testing (3:142).

Comparison to Sola Fide: Explicitly rejects Sola Fide. 3:136 calls Paradise a 'reward for the workers.' Romans 4:4-5 states that to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation, contrasting sharply with this text.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Obey GOD and the messenger (3:32)
2. Observe Hajj (Pilgrimage) if afforded (3:97)
3. Give to charity (3:92)
4. Do not take usury (interest) (3:130)
5. Invite to good and forbid evil (3:104)
6. Do not befriend outsiders/disbelievers (3:118)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Strive/Fight in the cause of God (implied by 3:142, 3:157)
2. Reject the divinity of Jesus (implied by 3:59, 3:64)
3. Accept the Quran as the final authority over Torah and Gospel

Ritual Requirements:

1. Prostrate and bow down (Prayer) (3:43)
2. Meditate at dawn (3:17)
3. Pilgrimage to the shrine in Becca (Mecca) (3:96-97)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In Surah 3:45, Jesus is called a 'Word from God.' What does it mean for a person to be God's Word?
2. Surah 3:142 mentions that God tests you to see if you will strive. How can you be certain you have strived enough to enter Paradise?
3. The text says in 3:55 that God would 'terminate' Jesus' life and raise him. Why is Jesus the only prophet raised to God in this way?
4. Surah 3:3 says the Quran confirms the Torah and Gospel. If the Gospel says Jesus is the Son of God, how do you reconcile that?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Word (Kalimah) – Jesus is the Logos (Word) who was with God and was God (John 1:1). He is God's self-expression. [John 1:1, John 1:14]
2. The need for a Mediator/Purifier – Humanity needs purification we cannot achieve ourselves. Jesus provides the ultimate purification through His blood. [Hebrews 1:3, 1 John 1:7]
3. The desire for Assurance – True peace and assurance are only found in the finished work of Christ, not in our own striving. [Romans 5:1, Philippians 4:7]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance Anxiety / Works-Righteousness [Severe] – The believer is under constant pressure to 'strive,' 'fight,' and 'obey' to prove their faith. Salvation is a 'reward' for work (3:136), creating a perpetual anxiety about whether one has done enough to be 'distinguished' by God (3:142).
2. Intellectual Dissonance [Moderate] – The text claims to confirm the Gospel (3:3) while contradicting its core message (Jesus' divinity). The adherent must suppress the historical reality of the Christian message to accept the Quranic reinterpretation.
3. Fear of Failure/Retribution [Severe] – The text repeatedly warns of 'painful retribution' and 'humiliation' for those who turn back or fail the test (3:106, 3:177). God is described as a 'strict' avenger (3:4).

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Revelation (The Quran) interpreted through 'intelligence' and 'signs' in creation.

Verification Method: Observing signs in nature (3:190) and the historical consequences of disbelief (3:137).

Evangelical Contrast: Evangelicalism relies on the illuminated reading of the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16). This text demands acceptance of a post-biblical revelation and claims that true 'intelligence' leads to Islam, dismissing Christian theology as a lack of understanding (3:65).

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: Original text: 7th Century AD. Translation: 1978.

Authorship: Attributed to God via Muhammad; Translation by Rashad Khalifa.

Textual Issues: Khalifa's translation is idiosyncratic (e.g., translating 'mutawaffeeka' in 3:55 as 'terminating your life' rather than 'taking you up,' which differs from mainstream Islamic interpretation that denies Jesus

died).