Globethics Repository

Why did God Choose Father-son Familial Language for the Biblical text?

This page was generated automatically upon download from the Globethics Repository. More information on Globethics see https://www.globethics.net. Data and content policy of Globethics Repository see https://repository.globethics.net/pages/policy.

Item Type	Article
Authors	Hausfeld, Mark A.
Publisher	Asia Pacific Theological Seminary
Rights	With permission of the license/copyright holder
Download date	2026-07-15 02:03:45
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/236562

[*AJPS* 15:2 (2012), pp. 245-248]

WHY DID GOD CHOOSE FATHER-SON FAMILIAL LANGUAGE FOR THE BIBLICAL TEXT?

Editorial

Dr. Mark A. Hausfeld
International Director
Global Initiative: Reaching Muslim Peoples/AGWM USA

The hottest issue among ministry to Muslims that is weaving its way through academic arenas; the committee rooms of mission agencies; in conversations between global missionaries and among leaders of respective national churches is the use or non-use of familial language in Bible translations for Islamic people groups. Here is the essence of the challenge.

Certain para-church Bible translation agencies have been either translating or acting as consultants to Bible translations that remove the use of the words "Father" and "Son" Bible translations for certain Muslim people groups. Why? The rational that I have personally heard in face to face meetings with one major Bible translation agency is so that the Muslim reading the text of the Bible will not misunderstand and/or be offended by the familial terms "Father" and "Son" as found in the original languages of the Bible. Here in lies the major difficulty this trajectory of translation practice creates. Why did God choose familial language for the Biblical text? Before I finally address that question let's first reflect on other considerations and problems that changing familial language in the Bible causes. As this is an editorial, I will not go into great detail. However I will address presuppositions that ready the reader for the scholarly articles that lie ahead to be read and reflected upon in this journal.

Let's first consider the life setting in which the Church began in first century Israel/Palestine.

The religious fervor was at an apex of proselyte activity. Jesus said, *"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites!*

You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are" (Matthew 23:15). Interestingly, Jesus used familial language to refer to the position of the convert of the teachers of the Law the Pharisees. The Jewish diaspora not only pushed and pulled Jews throughout the Roman Empire and beyond, it was also a time of conversion of non-Jewish peoples among whom they lived.

The use of familial language as Jesus refers to himself and the "Father" was extremely volatile in that context. Yet in such a setting, at the epicenter of Judaism… Jerusalem. Jesus intentionally uses familial language of himself and the Father. This familial language is abundantly clear when Jesus stood before the high priest. What language was the word used that put Jesus on the cross? Christ was asked point blank by the *"council of the Elders…both the chief priests and the teachers of the Law"* the question: *"They all asked, "Are you then the Son of God?" He replied, "You are right in saying I am* (Luke 22:70)." Their reaction: *"Then they said, "Why do we need any more testimony? We have heard it from his own lips* (Luke 22:71)."

Jesus used familial language in the midst of people who found it at the height of offence and even blasphemy. He had to do so.

In this same historical context the Roman occupational government would have found Jesus claim as the "Son of God" to be anti-Caesar (see Matthew 27:11-24). Remember Caesar Augustus was not only King/Caesar, but also god. There was no room Jesus as the Son of God. The Roman law of *Pontifex Maximus* assured this fact. Jesus affirmed his person and position in the text as he did because he had to.

From the brief words above it is simple to ascertain the religious, cultural, social and political climate was anti familial language. However this is the very language God choose despite it being offensive and misunderstood…because he needed to do so. Now let's consider nearly six centuries forward in Arabia and the supposed recited revelation Mohammed received from the angel Gabriel. In the counterfeit revelation of the *Qur'an* do we understand why today's Muslims anywhere on the earth find familial language offensive. The *Qur'an* reads:

Those who say: 'The Lord of Mercy has begotten a son,' preach a monstrous falsehood, at which the very heavens might crack, the earth break asunder, and the mountains crumble to dust. That they should ascribe a son to the Merciful, when it does not become the Lord of Mercy to beget one (Sura 19:88)!

There are numerous texts in the *Qur'an* that support this belief. So the Muslim finds such familial language offensive. So did the religious and political authorities of Jesus time and place. If this is the case in first century in Jerusalem, the seventh century in Mecca why should it not be so today? The Muslim expects to find offensive familial language in the Bible. After all the *Qur'an* says that Jews and Christians corrupted God's earlier revelations in the Torah, Psalms and Gospel:

There is among them a section who distort the Book with their tongues: (As they read) you would think it is a part of the Book, but it is no part of the Book; and they say, "That is from Allah," but it is not from Allah (Sura 3:78).

They change words from their context and forget a part of that whereof they were admonished (5:13).

Chapter five in the *Qur'an* clearly claims that earlier revelations of God were distorted by Jews and Christians. The religion of Islam teaches God's inspired texts through Moses (the Torah), David (Psalms) and Jesus (the Gospel) have been changed by Jews and Christians through time. Therefore, if Bible translators removed familial language from the Biblical text and replaced familial words with substitute words that are less offensive to the Muslim reader the translator then has participated in the criticism that the Qur'an states Jews and Christians did in changing the words of God's revelation! The result is that what the Qur'an accuses Jews and Christians of doing is actually done.

There is another caveat in this mistaken effort in that it involves misrepresentation. I do believe the sisters and brothers doing non-familial Bible translation are well meaning. They desire to see Muslims embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ. However the language God has chosen to communicate to humankind is God's prime salvific love language to humankind is familial language. Take a look at the Gospel and Epistles of John. If the familial love language of these books is removed the inspired theological implications of God's relationship to the world is gutted. The apostolic missionary going to an unreached Muslim people group that has a non-familial language translation of the Bible is left in a challenging place to communicate the familial intimacy God has chosen to communicate His relationship to humankind.

The Muslim needs to know the one God as God the Father and God the Son. To use any other linguistic identifiers is incomplete in

comprehension and thus relationship. As humans we can only grasp meaning and feeling values in finite human terms and experience. How does the omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent God relate his love, grace, sacrifice and mercy in greater terms that humans can understand than found in a healthy family? What greater intimacy can be identified among any people, culture and languages of the world than deep, meaningful familial relationships? Therefore God had to use familial language to communicate the intimacy He expresses towards people. Such language is the pinnacle of what God can use to divinely accommodate Himself to human beings. There is nothing else and that's why God chose Father-Son familial language for the biblical text.