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## *Do Muslims and Christians Worship the Same God?*

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**A**cross the Western world our major towns and cities are now incredibly diverse, with myriad religions and beliefs jostling together. Where I grew up in London, one could choose from every religion imaginable: Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Judaism, Islam, Christianity. Given that maze of religious diversity, no wonder some people have tried to navigate it by assuming that all religions are *essentially* the same; just different paths to the top of the spiritual mountain.

This is especially true when it comes to Islam and Christianity, religions that are often lumped together (along with Judaism) under the term *Abrahamic faiths*. But is it *true* that Muslims and Christians worship the same God? This is a trickier question than it appears, because it's actually two questions combined.

First, does the Qur'an describe the same God as the Bible? And second, are some Muslims seeking after the same God as Christians worship? I would suggest that there are three major attributes of God that, while absent from the Qur'an, saturate the whole Bible: namely that God is relational, knowable, and loving.

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### **God in the Bible and the Qur'an**

That God is relational is the thrust of the whole biblical story, from the very first pages where God walks in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve, to the very last pages where we are promised that, in the age to come, God will dwell with us once again. Time and time again God shows up in person: speaking with Moses face to face (Exodus 33:11), leading His people through the wilderness, throughout the Old Testament, and ultimately stepping into history in the person of Jesus in the New Testament. The Bible also uses highly relational language to describe God: words such as Father, husband, and friend. For the Qur'an, however, things are quite different. First, the Qur'an keeps Allah (the name of God in Islam) very much at a distance. So while the Qur'an retells the story of the Garden of Eden and talks about heaven, in each case Allah is absent: neither walking with Adam and Eve nor dwelling with his people in Paradise. The Qur'an also stridently denies the incarnation of Jesus (see, e.g., Q. 112:3). So Allah is absent from the *beginning* of history, absent from the *end* of history, and *absent* from the middle of history.

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It's similar with our second theme: that God can be known. The Bible stresses this repeatedly, teaching that God reveals not only His commands, but also His character. Think of Moses at the Burning Bush, where God reveals His own personal name, Yahweh (Exodus 6:2–3). Or recall when Jesus turns to His disciples and says, “Anyone who has seen me, has seen the Father” (John 14:9). The incredible claim at the heart of the Bible’s story is that God is both Lord and King but also One who can be known personally. The idea that God can be known personally is fully absent in the Qur’an. In Islam, one can know Allah’s *commands*, but one cannot know Allah *himself*; he is too lofty, transcendent, and removed. Indeed, in Muslim theology, not even Muhammad encountered God. Instead, Islam teaches that the Qur’an was revealed to Muhammad indirectly through an angel. In *Christian Mission and Islamic Da’wah*, Muslim scholar Isma’il al Faruqi distinguishes Islam from Christianity by noting that “Allah does not reveal Himself to anyone in any way. Allah reveals only his will.”

What of our third characteristic, love? The Bible is clear that God doesn’t simply *act* lovingly; He *is* love (1 John 4:16). Because God is Father, Son, and Spirit, then at the heart of God lies a loving relationship. Even before God made *anything*, He was still a God of love. Conversely, the Qur’an does not ever teach that Allah is love. Indeed, of the mere 42 times that the Qur’an mentions Allah and love, the majority (55%) of these are *negative* instances—the Qur’an stating whom Allah doesn’t love. (See Q. 2:190, 205, 276; 3:32, 57, 140; 4:36, 107, 148; 5:64, 87; 6:141; 7:31, 55; 8:58; 16:23; 22:38; 28:76–77; 30:45; 31:18; 42:40; 57:23.) The rest (45%) are *conditional* instances of the reader being told the kind of things (piety, fighting in Jihad, etc.) that, if done and if you are fortunate, might attract God’s love. (See Q. 2:195, 222 [twice]; 3:31, 76, 134, 146, 148, 159; 5:13, 42, 54, 93; 9:4, 7, 108; 49:9; 60:8; 61:4.) As Pakistani scholar Daud Rahbar summarizes in his book *God of Justice: A Study in the Ethical Doctrine of the Qur’an*: “There is not a single verse in the Qur’an that speaks of God’s unconditional love for mankind . . . [Its verses] do not say that God loves all men.”

### Muslims and Jesus

The differences are profound and in so short a space we have only scratched the surface. But we’ve seen enough, I hope, to show that the Qur’an has a thoroughly different view of God. (For a more detailed exploration, check out my 2021 book *Do Muslims and Christians Worship the Same God?*) But what of individual Muslims: are some, despite the Qur’an, seeking the God of the Bible? I think so.

Over the years, I’ve had many conversations with Muslims who have said things like “I believe in a God of love!” And when they say this, I like to gently reply: “Well done! But, with respect, you’ve described to me the God of the Bible, not the God of the Qur’an.” Like the Athenians who had no idea who their “Unknown God” was until Paul told them (Acts 17:23), so many Muslims are earnestly seeking a God who is relational, a God who can be known, a God who is love. Let’s gently, winsomely, and persuasively tell them about the God who has revealed that He is all of those things, most wonderfully in Jesus. (For a beautiful story of one such Muslim, see Nabeel Qureshi, *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus: A Devout Muslim Encounters Christianity*.)