

Only a Trinitarian God can be a God of love



Big picture: A God who is indivisibly one and self-sufficient is alone by definition, and cannot be a God of love as to love requires relationship.

1. Christians and Muslims both believe in the oneness and independence or self-sufficiency of God

One of the most important statements in the New Testament that show us what God is like is [1 John 4:8](#), which states that “God is love”. The fact that God is love shows us that this is foundational to his character, and raises an important question when it comes to the Quran’s understanding of God.

Both Christians and Muslims believe in the oneness of God and it is hard to underestimate the importance of this doctrine in Islam. The idea is found throughout the Quran, in the “Shahada” (the Islamic creed which one recites to become a Muslim) and in the call to prayer. [Quran 112.1](#) starts with this idea, “He is Allah—One (and Indivisible)”¹.



Alongside the oneness of God, the “independence of God” is also a foundational doctrine. God’s independence means that, “God does not need us or the rest of creation for anything”² but also that for God to be God he must not depend on anything for him to be who he is. A New Testament verse that shows us this is [Acts 17:24-25](#) which states, “The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything”. His name as given to Moses in [Exodus 3:14](#) is “I am who I am” (which could also be translated as “I will be who I will be”).

2. Quran 112:1-4 are key verses for Muslim understanding of Allah’s oneness and independence

In the Quran, Allah is also declared to be “independent”, or as [Quran 112.2](#) puts it, “Self-Sufficient” (this verse is the background verse to one of the 99 names of Allah with the same name). The following verses of the chapter build on this idea: “He begets not, nor was he begotten and there is none co-equal or comparable to Him” ([Quran 112.3-4](#)).

While there seems to be overlap with what we believe as Christians, that God is one, the [Quran 112.1](#) is problematic as it also says that God is “indivisible”³. The footnote in the “Saheeh International” translation of [Quran 112.1](#) helps us understand why this Islamic “oneness” creates a problem for God to be a God of love: Allah is “alone, without another, indivisible with absolute and permanent unity and distinct from all else. The one and only true deity, unique in His essence, attributes and deeds.”

3. The oneness of Allah means that he is “indivisible” and therefore in eternity past was “alone”

Allah in his eternal nature is essentially “alone”. If, however, we understand “love” as being the act of giving of oneself, “in order to bring about blessings or good for others”⁴ we must recognise that for God to “be love” or be loving, he must be in relationship; someone or something other than himself must exist in order for him to be able to give to them or love them, as love requires both a subject (a lover) and an object (the loved). This leaves the Allah of Islam unable to love without an act of creation if we are to insist that he to be declared to be “self-sufficient”. A God who is in essence “alone” cannot be in essence “love”.

4. To love is to give of oneself for the good of another, and therefore only those in relationship can love

The oneness of God in Christian understanding however is very different. God in his essence is a unity of three persons who are each fully God; three individual persons in relationship with each other. This is why the Trinity is completely consistent with God being a God of love. The Bible teaches that God has always existed as one God, yet also as three persons in perfect relationship with each other. The Father for eternity has loved the Son, the Son the Spirit, and so on. This means that God has always been “love” from all eternity, without the need to create someone to love, in perfect unity, in perfect relationship, and in perfect love.

5. Therefore, an eternal God who is “alone” cannot essentially be “love” while remaining “self-sufficient”

It may be argued, how then God can punish sin as a “God of wrath”, if “from all eternity” there is no one to punish without either mankind or angels being created? The answer to this is that punishment for sin is really just an expression of the justice of God. Without the presence of sin, God’s justice is expressed in the loving care of those who are objects of his love. This justice has always existed in the Godhead from all eternity, as the Father, Son and Spirit have always been in perfect loving relationship with each other.

It is amazing seeing how the theme of love works itself out in the Gospel. Not only do we see God as loving, delighting in his “beloved Son”, but also loving towards those who do not deserve it. Romans 5:8, Ephesians 5:2 and 1 John 4:10 are good verses to show your Muslim friends. The cross is the ultimate expression of God’s love for us. It is also worth asking your Muslim friend whether they know if God loves them and, if so, how they know that God loves them. Many Muslims will claim they cannot be sure of God’s love, and it is worth being ready to share your testimony of how you have personal experience of God’s love in the Gospel.

References

1. 1 Khattab translation
2. 2 <https://www.monergism.com/independence-god>
3. 3 “one/indivisible” is also one the of 99 names of Allah
4. 4 Grudem