

Q&A

with Sam Solomon



Author Sam Solomon talks about his new book ‘Not the Same God: Is the Qur’anic Allah the LORD God of the Bible?’

Q: Sam, why did you decide to write this particular book at this particular time?

A: You have posed the most important question right at the start. It is a topic that has been bubbling below surface for a few decades, but only came into the public square in a most dramatic way the very week that we sent the U.S. edition to the publisher in December of 2015. We were stunned when the Wheaton controversy surfaced at that time, as our book had been brewing in one form or another for four or five years within the framework of an in-depth theological treatment about the driver of the entire Islamic narrative—the doctrine of the Tawheed—before we were motivated to simplify and put the focus on a more popular treatment. We made that decision to simplify in response to an expressed need within the Church in the Fall of 2014 to combat rising concerns about major theologians who were (and are) advocating common ground between Islam and Christianity to the point the Allah of the Qur'an is seen to be the same referent as the LORD God of the Bible—notwithstanding all of the obvious differences. The idea was that these differences were simply innocent “misunderstandings”, rather than an intentional attempt to circumvent, and contravene the incarnational nature of the Triune God as being a corrupt attempt at idolatry by making Christ a “partner”. This was the line in the sand that we saw, this far and no further. The thinking of these theologians and in particular, Professor Miroslav Volf in his book, “Allah: A Christian Response,” is that although there are differences, there is ‘sufficient similarity’ to consider Allah to be the same referent as the LORD God.

Q: Doesn’t the Qur’an teach the same basic values as the Bible? Jesus taught that the most important commands are to love God and to love our neighbour (Matthew 22:36-40).

A: Since Allah is non-relational and unknowable, love of



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Allah is reduced to obedience of his commands and obedience of Muhammad. This is not the same as the relational love for and by God found in the Bible. There is no command in the Qur'an for Muslims to love their non-Muslim neighbours. In fact, the attitude to non-Muslims in the Qur'an is one of enmity (Surah 8:39; 9:29; 58:22). Thus we do not find common ground between Islam and Christianity in either love of God or love of neighbour. However, the cornerstone of Volf's ‘sufficient similarities’ contention is based on just that—that ‘the love of God and love of neighbour’ appear in both the Bible and in an unsubstantiated Hadith.

Q: So, please explain to us, exactly what is wrong with Miroslav Volf’s ‘sufficient similarity’ criteria for determining sameness?

A: Well you don't use ‘sufficient similarity’ to assess counterfeit banknotes! All it takes is one difference and the banknote is counterfeit. Differences are the determiners, not the similarities. Instead, Volf openly advocates emphasising the similarities between Allah and the LORD God while minimising the impact of the major differences—guided by the admitted desire to establish an atmosphere of ‘harmony’ between Christianity and Islam. Actually, I would like to ask Volf what would constitute ‘sufficient difference’?

Q: However, the Qur'an asserts that Allah is the same as the LORD God of the Bible (Surah 29:46). How do you reconcile that?

A: That is a key question. It cannot! The title of our book attests to the refusal of this assertion. In reality, although Surah 29:46 asserts this ‘sameness’, the Qur'an in many verses asserts that the Christian belief is false, a blasphemy. Even considering the issue superficially it doesn't add up, for example: the LORD God of the Judeo Christian scriptures is a covenant making, covenant keeping and covenant sustaining God, and to cut covenants He reveals Himself – to redeem mankind He became incarnate, that He is One in three persons and that He indwells those that receive Jesus as Saviour who knew no sin, in Him was no sin, and He who committed no sin became sin for us that we may be declared to be the righteousness of God in and through Christ Jesus. The Qur'an refutes all the foregoing yet it claims that sameness, so it is the Qur'an that needs to reconcile itself.

Q: Many people have heard that the Qur'an contains many of the 'same' stories as the Bible, stories about Noah, Moses, and Abraham for example. This has led some people to conclude that this is the proof that Muslims and Christians worship the same God. What's wrong with that argument?

A: That's an assumption, and a big assumption, whereas, even a very cursory comparison would demonstrate conclusively that they are far from being the same stories. Furthermore, we need to understand not only the narratives are fully different, but in the Bible these narratives and their characters are Christ pointers. The Qur'an, by recasting and transforming these characters to have been all 'Muslims' goes on to make the audacious claim that these characters in reality were pointing to Muhammad instead of Christ.

Q: In the book you discuss the fundamental unknowability of Allah. Can you explain that?

A: The unknowability of Allah is central to the Islamic doctrine of Allah. The Qur'an states that "there is nothing like Him (i.e. Allah)" (Surah 42:11). This is taken to mean that Allah has no 'likeness', 'image', 'partner', or any form of direct revelation. The Qur'an also says "that it is not fitting for a man that Allah should speak to him except by inspiration or from behind a veil..." (Surah 42:51). Knowability requires direct revelation hence no direct revelation and no knowability.

Q: You've talked about these differences between Allah and the LORD God without even mentioning the Trinity yet. Is the Trinity not important to your argument?

A: On the contrary, the Christian doctrine of God finds its fullest expression in the doctrine of the Trinity. The Qur'anic understanding of the doctrine of Allah and its claims of the 'sameness' of Allah and the LORD God is so far-fetched that it requires an appropriate response. Failing to comprehend the complexity of the differences or the contrasts, would lead to confusion. As such it was necessary to deal with the foundational aspects of these differences, i.e. creation, revelation, messengers and their messages, the prophets and their messages, sin and its remedy, etc. Naturally, understanding the foregoing would leave no reader in doubt.

Q: I thought that the Qur'an encourages Muslims to read the Bible and therefore sees the Biblical God as the same as Allah?

A: Actually the Qur'an holds Jews and Christians responsible for the alleged corruption of the Bible. When the Qur'an refers to the Biblical scriptures, it means the alleged 'original' scriptures with all the alleged prophecies of Muhammad.

The Qur'an does not therefore testify to the validity of the Bible as we know it. It asserts that the Bible is corrupt, unreliable and untrustworthy.

Q: What do you say to people who accuse you of being divisive and intolerant in emphasising the differences between Christianity and Islam?

A: For any true understanding between faiths to take place we need to start from a place of agreeing where we are different. We need to recognise our differences in order to be able to discuss them properly. True tolerance will not try to paper over our differences and pretend they are not there. People need to understand that Allah is very different from the LORD God of the Bible.

Q: And finally, what do you expect to achieve in writing this book?

A: My book makes it very clear—based on the primary sources—that Christians and Muslims do not worship the same God. I hope that this will help Christians, Muslims, and others to understand the differences between the two religions. The next step would be to determine which view of God is correct. Here I am writing as a Christian so in exposing the differences I am also showing the ways in which Islam distorts and rejects the God of the Bible. The true God is relational, loving, and self-sacrificing. This God is not Allah □



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