Whom Does God Love?
Comparing Divine Love in the Hadith and the Bible

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Abstract
The hadith control the daily lives of Muslims. For Christians seeking to engage with Muslims, understanding the hadith is indispensable. This article investigates the question “Whom does God love according to the Bible and the hadith?” Comparative studies exist for the Bible and the Qur’an, but less so for the hadith. This study scrutinizes what the Bible and hadith, respectively, mean by divine love. First, I describe divine love in the Bible and, second, in the main Sunni hadith collections. I study Allah’s love for himself, for named individuals, and requests for Allah’s love and, next, I investigate earning Allah’s love, deeds that earn Allah’s love, and Allah’s love for certain character qualities. Lastly, I examine the implications of divine love by addressing the following questions: How does the conception of divine love determine human love? What are the implications of this study for engagement with Muslims?

Keywords
God’s love, Hadith, Bible, Islam, Christianity, comparative theology

Introduction
The Qur’an holds unrivalled authority in Islam, yet it is the hadith1 that, more than anything else, controls the daily lives of Muslims. The hadith are the oral traditions depicting the example or sunnah of Muhammad and are authoritative for Muslims.2 Muhammad’s life or sunnah is the perfect

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1 For the purposes of this article, ‘hadith’ may refer to a single hadith, several hadith, or the entire hadith corpus.
2 ‘Qur’an only’ Muslims who reject the reliability and authority of the hadith and thus
example for Muslims to emulate, and Muslims are to imitate him because he embodied Allah’s will.³ Consider these words from an Islamic website:

“There has been no greater force for the unification of the Muslims than the presence of this common model for the minutest acts of daily life…. And this sameness is brought about firstly through the presence of the Holy Quran and secondly, and in a more immediate and tangible way, through the presence of the Prophet…in his community by virtue of his Sunnah and Hadeeth. Allah told us in the Holy Quran to pray, but did not explain how, were it not for the Prophetic Sunnah we would not know how to perform prayers.”⁴

The *sunnah* is embodied in the hadith, making their functional authority unparalleled. Andrew Rippin echoes this, describing the hadith as “the living Qur’an quite literally.”⁵

The hadith are necessary because of what the Qur’an omits. Consider the five pillars of Islam. The Qur’an commands prayer but does not explain how, when, what, and how frequently to pray. The Qur’an omits details about fasting: when it should begin and end, and what should be included and excluded. The Qur’an commands *zakat*, almsgiving, but provides no specific directions. Likewise, the hajj is mentioned in the Qur’an but the precise procedure is not. Muslims cannot fulfill the five pillars of Islam without the hadith. Al-Tayyib acknowledges that

in most cases the Quran tends to provide general rather than specific rules…. There therefore had to be another source to function as an explanatory, illustrative, interpretive, and exegetical complement to the

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⁵ Rippin, *Muslims*, 89.
Divine Discourse... [one that is] of equally Divine Provenance; that is what is guaranteed by the Sunnah.  

Al-Tayyib summarizes, bluntly, “the Quran needs the Sunnah,” furthermore, the “Sunnah is indeed as binding as the Quran.” He illustrates that with regard to core Islamic obligations such as prayer, almsgiving, and “many other obligations...there are certain commands and prohibitions in the Quran that can be neither understood nor acted upon in the absence of the Sunnah.”

The Qur’an itself provides legitimacy for the hadith. There are over a dozen commands to “obey Allah and his messenger” (for example, Q. 3:32,132; 4:59,69), investing Muhammad’s life with theological and practical authority. Yet the Qur’an contains almost no details about Muhammad’s life: no childhood stories, no chronology, nothing about his occupation or his many marriages, no detailed stories about his life or details about his death. Muhammad is the divinely ordained role model, and it is the hadith that provide information about his life.

The theologian and jurist al-Shaf’i (d. 820) taught that the recurring phrase “the Book and the wisdom of Allah” (Q. 2:129, 151, 231; 3:48, 79, 81, 164; 4:54, 113; 62:2) referred to the Qur’an and the hadith. Since al-Shaf’i the hadith have been widely recognized as authoritative for Muslims. Fazlur Rahman refers to the hadith as “the authoritative second source of the content of Islam besides the Qur’an.” Muslim thinker Badru Kateregga acknowledges, “As Muslims, our knowledge of Islam would be incomplete and shaky if we did not study and follow the Hadith. Similarly an outsider cannot understand Islam if he ignores the Hadith.” In order to understand

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9 Included within the hadith corpus is the sirat literature, which is the genre of hadith that narrates Muhammad’s life.
Islam one needs to understand the hadith. For Christians seeking to engage with Muslims, understanding the hadith is indispensable.\footnote{In this regard the works by Bernie Power are commendable: Engaging Islamic Traditions: Using the Hadith in Christian Ministry to Muslims (William Carey, 2016) and Challenging Islamic Traditions: Searching Questions about the Hadith from a Christian Perspective (William Carey, 2016).}

While there have been many studies on the Bible and the Qur’an, there have been few on the Bible and the hadith. One reason is obvious: for Muslims the Qur’an is God’s word and therefore it is the natural contrast to the Bible. (In practice, however, the Qur’an holds a status similar to that of Jesus as God’s eternal Word.) Further reasons include size and accessibility. The hadith exist in numerous multivolume collections and, by contrast, the Qur’an is short. Furthermore, there exist in translation many Qur’an commentaries (\textit{taf\textsuperscript{s}ir}),\footnote{Notable is the website https://www.altafsir.com/ created by the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought in Jordan. Other popular \textit{taf\textsuperscript{s}ir} freely available in translation online include by those written by Ibn Kathir, Syed Abul A’la Maududi, Sayyid Qutb, and Muhammad Husayn Tabatabai.} but hadith commentaries are not yet widely available in translation. This situation is a limiting factor in this present work, which consequently will predominantly focus on the primary source of hadith literature.

The hadith collections investigated in this study include the six canonical collections for Sunni Muslims plus other well-known collections. There are many serious questions that can be raised about the authenticity and reliability of the hadith. The Islamic tradition records that tens of thousands of hadith were fabricated, many hadith are contradictory, and the most authoritative sahih collections are very late historically (ninth century, reporting the words of Muhammad, who died in 632). While acknowledging the serious nature of these critical questions, which Muslim and non-Muslim scholars have addressed, my purpose is to study the hadith as functionally authoritative in Islam. Whether or not the hadith authentically derive from a historical Muhammad, they nevertheless continue to exercise authority for Muslims. While this study focuses on the hadith, reference will be made to Allah’s love in the Qur’an, and Islamic theologies of divine love. This is because the hadith literature belongs within the broader Islamic tradition which includes both the Qur’an as its foundational text and subsequent Islamic theological reflection.

It is hoped that this study will contribute toward filling a gap in the literature. I also hope it will yield greater mutual understanding between the adherents of the world’s two largest faiths. Furthermore, a person’s belief about the nature and object of God’s love has enormous ethical implications. Given that divine love has different meanings in the Bible and hadith, as I will argue, the potentially divergent ethical implications will be provisionally explored. Finally, I hope this study will be useful for Christian engagement with Muslims. Since Christians seek to communicate God’s love for Muslims, it is expedient that they know how this is likely to be understood and misunderstood. To anticipate the results of this study, divine love in the hadith (and Qur’an) has a distinctly different meaning from that of the Bible. Knowing the difference is essential for Christians to engage with faithfulness, sensitivity, and wisdom. For example, to the extent that Muslims are shaped by the hadithic meaning of divine love, the claim that God loves sinners is likely to be perceived as careless, not commendable. Such love is not to be desired but disparaged as injudicious and irresponsible.

15 See Brown, Hadith, chapters 2–3, 9–10.
WHOM DOES GOD LOVE ACCORDING TO THE BIBLE?

Systematic Theology

The question of whom God loves according to the Bible must first be answered by identifying the subject of this loving, God. According to the Bible, “God is love” (1 Jn 4:8, 16). In the Bible, explicitly in the New Testament, God reveals himself as three Persons: Father, Son, and Spirit. According to the Bible, “God is love” (1 Jn 4:8, 16). In the Bible, explicitly in the New Testament, God reveals himself as three Persons: Father, Son, and Spirit.16 Robert Jenson, explaining God’s identity, says, “Father, Son, and Spirit are persons whose communal life is God.” There is a communality to God’s inner life that was first perceived by the Nicene theologians who championed the word homoousion, which indicates that Jesus shares the same being with the Father.18 God is therefore understood to be inherently relational: the eternal love relationship of Father, Son, and Spirit. Describing what “God is love” means, Lesslie Newbigin explains:

Within the eternal being of God love is a never-ceasing self-emptying and out-pouring, forever met by the same out-poured love, the love of the Father and the Son in the unity of the Spirit. Eternal life is no motionless serenity, but love meeting love, the rapture of love forever poured out and forever received.19

It must further be stated that God’s existing and God’s loving cannot be separated. Barth helpfully states: “The statements ‘God is’ and ‘God loves’ are synonymous.”20 Since God is love in himself, everything God does flows out of and expresses who God is. John Stott explains that “the words God is

20 Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, ed. and trans. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance, IV / 2 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1957–75), 755.
love mean not that loving is ‘only one of God’s many activities’ (Alexander) but rather that ‘all His activity is loving activity’ and that, therefore, ‘if He judges, He judges in love’ (Dodd).”

All of God’s actions, from creation to reconciliation to consummation, are expressions of his love, and all are directed toward the whole world. Whom does God love? As Creator of all, God, therefore, loves all.

**Biblical Theology**

Turning from systematic to biblical theology, in the Old Testament the pinnacle of divine self-revelation in the Mosaic covenant is God’s proclamation of the divine name: “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin” (Ex 34:6-7). This confessional statement, repeated in various forms throughout the Old Testament, “constitutes a kind of ‘canon’ of the kind of God Israel’s God is.”

In the old covenant as in the new, God’s loving actions outwardly express God’s inner being. Fretheim observes that the canon’s emphasis is on “the unconditionality of the divine love to Israel.”

Perhaps the most extreme Old Testament portrayal of divine love is in the book of Hosea. There, God instructs the prophet Hosea to marry a prostitute who repeatedly betrays him. This portrays hesed, God’s “tenacious fidelity in a relationship and readiness and resolve to continue to be loyal to those to whom one is bound.” God’s hesed is often paired with God’s abounding faithfulness (‘emeth) that perseveres. That is what God’s love means.

God’s love, like Hosea’s love, causes suffering. Fretheim explains, “God is revealed as one who, from creation on, is open to and affected by the world. The sinful response of humankind has indeed touched God.”

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suffers because he chooses to bear human sin at cost to himself even to the point of humiliation. Hofmann and Ghazi stress how Allah’s love is unlike human love, due to Allah’s transcendence. Nasr notes this motif of divine suffering is absent from Islam. Moltmann’s reflections on this subject are insightful.

A God who cannot suffer is poorer than any human being. For a God who is incapable of suffering is a being who cannot be involved. Suffering and injustice do not affect him. And because he is so completely insensitive, he cannot be affected or shaken by anything. He cannot weep, for he has no tears. But the one who cannot suffer cannot love either. So he is also a loveless being.

In Jesus we see the culmination and fulfillment of God’s covenantal love toward Israel and Israel’s response of covenant faithfulness toward God. God’s love and suffering culminate in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus declares that love is the distinguishing mark by which his followers will be recognized (Jn 13:34-35). This teaching comes after an enacted parable of the cross at the start of John 13, in which Jesus removed his outer clothing and washed his disciples’ feet. Several facets of God’s love are revealed in this incident. First, Jesus commenced the foot-washing as an expression of God’s being. “Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God” (Jn 13:3). Jesus’s “sharing in the divine essence is what leads him to wash their feet,” such that “God’s glory is revealed in Jesus in this sign. This is what God himself is like—he washes feet, even the feet of the one

26 Fretheim, The Suffering, 148.
27 Hofmann, Differences, pages unnumbered; H.R.H. Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad Ghazi, Love in the Holy Qur’an (Chicago: Kazi, 2010), 11–12.
28 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2002), 141. Responding to philosophical objections against divine suffering, Fiddes says that since “God chooses to be humble and even to suffer with his creation, it is not for us to pay God metaphysical compliments by protesting that the divine being will not allow it.” Paul S. Fiddes, Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2000), 13.
who will betray him!”

Second, God’s love serves, even to the point of humiliation. In removing his outer garments Jesus dressed like a slave, but not even Jewish slaves could be required to do this. Jesus came to serve (Mt 20:28), as exemplified in washing his disciples’ feet and pointing to the humiliation of the cross. Jesus’s humiliation, in this foot-washing and in “his sacrificial death, is a mark of his divinity and glory, not of his inferiority.”

Third, God loves the undeserving. Perhaps the disciples could have been expected to wash Jesus’s feet, but certainly not the reverse. Further, Jesus intentionally washed Judas’s feet, knowing he would betray him (Jn 13:10-11, 18-30). This facet of divine love is prominent in Jesus’s parable of the Lost Son (Lk 15:11-32). Fourth, God’s love is not ethereal but is tangibly expressed, again prefiguring the cross. Fifth, Jesus’s washing his disciples’ feet reveals the Father’s love for them, a love that is meant to be imitated and embodied. Jesus explains, “Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you” (Jn 13:14-15). The foot-washing is a pattern of life for followers of Jesus. Jesus reveals that divine love is for friends and enemies alike, implying that that divine love is for all.

Conclusion

The biblical revelation of divine love reaches its zenith in the crucifixion. Romans 5:8 says, “God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” The sacrificial action of the Father’s giving of the Son is out of love (agape) for an undeserving world (Jn 3:16). God desires all to be saved (1 Tm 2:4). According to the Bible, God’s love is an expression of God’s being. God’s love is universal, covenantal, unconditional, relational, persevering, serves at cost to self, is given to

33 Unless otherwise stated, all biblical quotations are from the New International Version. See also 1 John 3:16.
the undeserving such as the disciples, Hosea’s wife, and even Judas, and is expressed in tangible action.

**Whom Does Allah Love according to the Hadith?**

Introducing the Hadith

A hadith saying is comprised of a *matn*, the content of the hadith, and an *isnad*, a chain of transmitters connecting the *matn* with Muhammad or one of his companions or successors.

**Table 1: Example of a hadith**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Isnad</th>
<th>Matn</th>
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| 'Abdullah bin al-Zubair bin 'Isa  → Sufyan bin 'Uyaynah  → al-Zuhri → Abu Salama bin 'Abdur Rahman → Sulayman ibn Yasar → Abu Hurairah (a companion of Muhammad) | Narrated Abu Huraira: The Prophet said, “Jews and Christians do not dye their hair so you should do the opposite of what they do.”  

The authority of a hadith depends upon the strength of its *isnad*. While Muslims use different classifications, it is customary to categorize *isnads* as either *da’if* (weak or sick), *hasan* (good), or *sahih* (sound, authentic); see Table 2, below. The authority of *sahih* hadiths is rarely questioned, and while *da’if* hadiths were generally deemed unreliable, that did not prevent them from being used for legal rulings. The hadith collections by Bukhari and Muslim contain only *sahih* hadith and are, in that order, the most authoritative.

**Table 2: Classifications of Hadith Authority**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Da’if</th>
<th>Hasan</th>
<th>Sahih</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Authentic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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A second classification system contrasts āḥād reports that were transmitted by few chains of transmission, yielding only probable knowledge, with hadith that are mutawātīr, meaning massively transmitted. The latter are “reported by such a vast number of people in so many different places” that forgery is deemed impossible.\(^{36}\) In between, scholars, including Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), developed a third category, which varied in name—mashhūr (well known), mustafīd (widespread), or mutawātīr bi’l-ma’nā (massively transmitted in meaning).\(^{37}\) In this study, while hadith are sometimes described as da’if, hasan, or sahih, my purpose is to establish a high-level overview of the subject and not evaluate individual isnads. The latter would be beneficial but beyond the present scope.

Allah’s Love in the Hadith

Allah’s Self-Acknowledgement

Muhammad declares, “None loves one’s own praise more than Allah, the Exalted and Glorious, does. It is because of this that He has praised Himself.”\(^{38}\) This is Allah’s favorite activity\(^{39}\) because he is the most self-respecting and he forbids shameful sins.\(^{40}\) Common to both Islam and Christianity is God’s unique praiseworthiness. This cannot escape sounding slightly narcissistic, even though such a criticism is anthropomorphic and consequently inapplicable to God. Christian faith articulates a comparable divine self-love, but in a distinctively trinitarian fashion.

According to the Bible, “God is love [\textit{agape}’]” (1 Jn 4:8, 16). This applies, first, within God’s triune self: Father, Son, and Spirit give themselves to one another and make room for one another. As Creator of all God loves all; that love can be understood as self-giving. Divine self-giving is an intra-trinitarian reality that is opened up toward all humanity in the persons

\(^{36}\) Brown, \textit{Hadith}, 191.


\(^{38}\) Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj al-Naysaburi (d. 875) trans. Abdul Hamid Siddiqui, Sahih Muslim 2760d.

\(^{39}\) Sahih Muslim 2760c. Also, Allah loves his own deeds, both praising himself, and also Allah loves to see the results of his favors. Abu ‘Isa Muhammad at-Tirmidhi (d. 892) trans. Abu Khaliyl, Jami’ at-Tirmidhi 2819.

\(^{40}\) Sahih Muslim 2760a; 2760b; Sahih Bukhari 4637.
of the Son and Spirit. This biblical theme of divine self-giving makes the biblical account of God’s loving less susceptible to charges of narcissism.41

No equivalent statement to “God is love” exists in the hadith. In Akhtar’s view, “Muslims are not enticed to claim that ‘Allah is Love’” because only adjectival descriptions of Allah’s revealed will are permissible; the divine essence itself “remains mysterious.”42 Elsewhere he reiterates, “A comment such as ‘God is Love’ is, according to Muslims, ultra vires: it goes beyond the sanction of revelation.”43 Nevertheless, some Islamic theologians do make a comparable claim. Nasr declares, “Islam states that God is Love, since this is one of His Divine Names.”44 However, Nasr references a hadith qudsi45 that most scholars deem inauthentic.46 Based on this same controversial hadith, Ghazi argues that “Divine Love…is of the Divine Essence Itself.”47 He also connects Allah’s love to his mercy,48 and Allah’s mercy is of the divine essence.49 While an indirect Islamic argument can be made that love is of Allah’s essence, based on Allah’s mercy, the hadith do not make this argument. Even if the hadith made this argument, it is clear that in Islam, unlike God’s love according to the New Testament, “Allah’s mercy is not for everyone.”50

41 See Barth, Church Dogmatics II/1, 279.
42 Shabbir Akhtar, A Faith for All Seasons (Chicago: Ian R. Dee Publisher, 1990), 181.
45 “I was a hidden treasure; I loved (ahbabtu) to be known; therefore, I created creation so that I would be known.” A hadith qudsi contains Allah’s words expressed in Muhammad’s words. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “Foreword,” in H.R.H. Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad Ghazi, Love in the Holy Qur’an (Chicago: Kazi, 2010), xxiii.
46 It contains no isnad (chain of transmitters) either strong or weak. Ghazi, Love, 422.
47 Ghazi, Love, 17.
48 Nasr also makes a similar argument. Nasr, “Foreword,” xxiii–xxiv
50 Gabriel Said Reynolds, Allah: God in the Qur’an (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2020), 64. Similarly, Marshall explains that Allah’s mercy is conditioned by the demands of justice: “the underlying logic is that God is merciful to those to whom his justice permits him to be merciful, and by definition the unbeliever is excluded from this category.” David Marshall, God, Muhammad, and the Unbelievers: A Qur’anic Study (London & New York: Routledge, 2014), 82.
Allah Loves Named Individuals

The only individual whom Allah is frequently said to love by name is Ali ibn Abi Talib, Muhammad’s cousin and son-in-law and the fourth caliph. A repeated hadith affirms that Allah and Muhammad love Ali.\footnote{Sahih Bukhari 2975. See also Sahih Bukhari 3702; Sahih Muslim 2404d; Jami’ at-Tirmidhi 3724. Allah’s love for Ali is reiterated, with slight variation, in Jami’ at-Tirmidhi 3725; Muhammad bin Yazid Ibn Majah al-Qazvini (d. 887) trans. Nasiruddin al-Khattab, Sunan Ibn Majah Hadith 117.} Two other hadiths, both \textit{da’if}, name four individuals that Allah loves: Ali, Abu Dharr, Al-Miqdad, and Salman.\footnote{Jami’ at-Tirmidhi 3718 and Sunan ibn Majah 149. These hadiths may suggest Shia political influence. Brown, \textit{Hadith}, 317.} Why these four and only these four? And if these two hadith are unreliable, why does Allah love only Ali? No specific reason is offered. At a minimum, Power concludes that according to the hadith, “Divine love for everyone is not assumed.”\footnote{Power, \textit{Challenging}, 123.} Furthermore, in the hadith Allah’s love for named individuals is exceedingly rare. This scarcity is implied in another hadith:

> When Allah loves a servant, He calls Gabriel and says: Verily, I love so and so; you should also love him, and then Gabriel begins to love him. Then he makes an announcement in the heaven saying: Allah loves so and so and you also love him, and then the inhabitants of the Heaven (the Angels) also begin to love him and then there is conferred honour upon him in the earth.\footnote{Sahih Muslim 2637a. See also Sahih Bukhari 3209, 6040, 7485; Jami’ at-Tirmidhi 3161; Malik ibn Anas (d. 795) trans. Aisha Abdurrahman Bewley, Malik’s Muwatta Book 51 Hadith 15.} \footnote{Power, \textit{Challenging}, 123.}

Power observes, “It appears that this love is a rare enough event to warrant a heavenly proclamation.”\footnote{Jami’ at-Tirmidhi 3775.}

Requests for Allah’s Love

Muhammad declares that “Allah loves whoever loves Husain.”\footnote{Jami’ at-Tirmidhi 3718 and Sunan ibn Majah 149. These hadiths may suggest Shia political influence. Brown, \textit{Hadith}, 317.} This is likely part of a motif that expresses Muhammad’s love for his grandsons
Hasan and Husain. Numerous hadith record Muhammad requesting that Allah love Hasan and Husain, that people love them also, and that Allah love those who love them.\footnote{57} This could appear to be a grandfather doting on his grandsons and expressing his desire for their flourishing.\footnote{58} Muhammad’s repeated prayer for Allah to love them reveals that Allah’s love for people is not assured.

In one \textit{da’if} hadith Muhammad prays for himself, “\textit{O Allah grant me Your love and the love of those whose love will benefit me with You.”}\footnote{59} Although the \textit{isnad} is weak, its \textit{matn} (content of the hadith) accords with other hadiths. One unidentified man prayed, similarly, that Allah would love Muhammad,\footnote{60} and another prayed that Allah would love a friend.\footnote{61} Muhammad prayed, “I ask You for Your love, the love of whomever You love, and the love of the deeds that bring one nearer to Your love.”\footnote{62} Muhammad does not have assurance of Allah’s love since he prays for it. If Islam’s prophet does not know that Allah loves him, what are the implications for everybody else? Furthermore, Muhammad’s prayer indicates that good deeds can draw a person closer to Allah. We will discuss this shortly.

Muhammad’s prayer is similar to that of David (Dawud). He used to pray, “O Allah, indeed, I ask You for Your love and the love of those who love You, and for the action that will cause me to attain Your love, O Allah, make Your love more beloved to me than myself, my family and cold water.”\footnote{63} Like Muhammad, David did not know that Allah loved him, hence his prayer for Allah’s love. In no unambiguous case, save Ali, is Allah’s love for a person assured.

Comparing this hadithic prayer of David with the Davidic Psalms is instructive. For example, Psalm 63 shares a similar theme of thirsting after God. David begins, “You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I
thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water.”  

Here the comparisons end and the contrast begins, for David continues to say that he has met with God (Ps 63:2). Experientially, David remembers being overcome by God’s power and glory, for he “has seen God’s glory in the holy place.”  

This contrasts with the hadith that suggest that no one can see Allah in this life. Based on personal experience, David knows that God’s “love is better than life” (Ps 63:3). Tremper Longman explains that for David, God’s love or hesed “is the most important thing to him; it is better than life. He would rather die than live without God’s love.”  

David does not pray for God’s love; he rejoices that he has experienced God’s love, and that God will again satisfy him with his love, like being “satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you.” (Ps 63:5) According to the Bible, David knew, experienced, and rejoiced in God’s love, all because he had met with God. By contrast, according to the hadith David asked for Allah’s love, as did Muhammad, perhaps because he did not know that Allah loved him. Both Davids recognize divine love, to use the later language of Jesus, as the pearl of great price (cf. Mt 13:45-46). For the David of the hadith, divine love appears to be unknown, unexperienced, and a hoped-for future reality. For the biblical David divine love has been joyously experienced and cherished. Both are hungry for divine love. David of the hadith is hungry for divine love potentially because he has not experienced it, whereas the biblical David is hungry for divine love because he has experienced it and longs to again. Thus, at least vis-à-vis divine love, the David of the hadith has the same name as the biblical David but this shared name masks theological divergence. Indeed, in the Qur’an many biblical figures, such as those that appear in the punishment narratives, are “merely repeated examples of an eternal truth.”  

There is a historical ‘flattening’ whereby each biblical

64 Compare also this theme in Psalm 42:1-2.
66 Sahih Bukhari 7380; 4855; Jami’at-Tirmidhi 3068. However, the Hadith are inconsistent on this; see Jami’at-Tirmidhi 3235; 3279—both are grade Hasan.
figure is recast to be a type of Muhammad. Mark Durie calls this messenger uniformitarianism. It appears that here in the hadith, the resemblance of David’s prayer to Muhammad’s prayer fits this pattern of Islamicizing of biblical material.

Earning Allah’s Love

The hadith teach that a person can earn Allah’s love. Like Muhammad, David prayed “O Allah, indeed I ask You… for the action that will cause me to attain Your love.” This is similar to the Qur’an, which Ghazi understands as teaching that good deeds can cause a person to attain Allah’s love. Muhammad records Allah as saying:

My slave keeps on coming closer to Me through performing Nawafil (praying or doing extra deeds besides what is obligatory) till I love him.

Allah’s love can be attained through a person performing supererogatory deeds, such as, for example, praying the witr prayers at night. Once Allah loves a person in response to this, Allah promises to answer his prayers and not disappoint him.

What Deeds Earn Allah’s Love?

An unnamed man who used to recite Surah Al-Ikhlas (Qur’an Surah 112) earned Allah’s love. In a similar hadith about a man (possibly the same man) who said he loved this surah, Muhammad says, “Your love for it will admit you to Jannah [Paradise].” Why is this surah singled out? Said to be

71 Jami` at-Tirmidhi 3235.
72 Jami` at-Tirmidhi 3490.
74 Sahih Bukhari 6502, emphasis added.
75 Sunan an-Nasa`i 993. See also Sahih Bukhari 7375; Sahih Muslim 813; Yahya ibn Sharaf an-Nawawi, ed. (d. 1277), trans. Ismail Abdus-Salaam, *Riyad as-Salihin* 388.
76 Jami` at-Tirmidhi, recorded in *Riyad as-Salihin* 1013.
equal to one third of the Qur’an, it concerns the oneness of God, *tawhid*, that is central to Islam.

A man said to Muhammad, “show me a deed which, if I do it, Allah will love me”, to which Muhammad replied, “Be indifferent towards this world, and Allah will love you.” Like reciting Surah 112, this hadith also reveals a God-centered life and resembles the biblical injunctions “Do not love the world or anything in the world” (1 Jn 2:15) and “Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things” (Col 3:2). There is some common ground here. However, in the biblical schema this instruction is in response to God’s love; in the hadith it will earn Allah’s love. One well-attested hadith states Allah loves those who love to meet him and hates those who hate to meet him. Allah only loves those who first love him.

Unusual to a Christian readership is Allah’s love for sneezing and his dislike for yawning, those who praise Allah after a person sneezes, and those who clean themselves properly after going to the bathroom. This reflects Islam’s concern for ritual physical purification and washing that does not have a Christian counterpart.

Multiple hadith recount that there are three types of people that Allah loves: those who give in secret to a stranger, those who pray at night even when exhausted, and those who are resolute in battle and pursue the fleeing enemy until they are victorious or are killed. Allah also loves the rich who do not show off, and poor Muslims with many children who refuse to

78 Sunan ibn Majah 4102.
79 Sahih Bukhari 6508. See also Sahih Muslim 2683a, 2684c; Jami` at-Tirmidhi 1066, 2309; Sunan an-Nasa’i 1835, 1836, 1837.
80 Sahih Bukhari 6226; Jami` at-Tirmidhi 2746, 2747; Muhammad Al-Bukhari (d. 870), trans. Abu Naasir Ibrahim Abdur-Rauf et al., *Al-Adab Al-Mufrad* 919, 928. See also Sahih Bukhari 6223; Sunan Abu Dawud 5028; Riyad as-Salihin 878.
81 Sunan an-Nasa`i 931.
82 Jami` at-Tirmidhi 3100; Sunan Ibn Majah 357. See also Sunan an-Nasa`i 407.
83 Sunan an-Nasa`i 2570; 1615; Jami` at-Tirmidhi 2568.
beg. 85 Allah loves those whose righteousness and piety are hidden 86 and who exercise tolerance and generosity in selling, buying, and repaying. 87 Allah loves those who love the Ansar, 88 the Medinan population who helped Muhammad and the Muslims when they emigrated from Mecca. Additionally, loving the Ansar is “the sign of faith.” 89 Furthermore, Allah loves those who love their brother for Allah’s sake rather than because of anticipated gain. 90 In sum, there are various moral virtues and ethical behaviors that earn Allah’s love. When asked the three things Allah loves most Muhammad replied, in order, to offer prayers, to be dutiful and kind to one’s parents, and “to participate in Jihad for Allah’s Cause.” 91 On other occasions Muhammad identified participating in jihad as the best deed, 92 the second best deed, 93 or the third best deed. 94 To the extent that jihad means warfare, 95 Allah’s love for people carrying out jihad suggests, by implication, that legitimate

85 Sunan Ibn Majah 4121.
86 Sunan Ibn Majah 3989.
87 Jami’ at-Tirmidhi 1319; Muwatta Malik Book 31 Hadith 101.
88 Sahih Bukhari 3783.
89 Sahih Muslim 74b.
90 Sahih Muslim 2567a; Al-Adab Al-Mufrad 350. Power argues persuasively that this brotherly love refers to fellow Muslims, in Challenging Islamic Traditions, 124–125.
91 Sahih Bukhari 5970. See also Sahih Bukhari 527, 2782, 5970, 7534; Sunan an-Nasa’i 3129; Riyadh as-Salihin 312, 1286; Sunan Abu Dawud 2614.
92 Sahih Bukhari 2785; Jami’ at-Tirmidhi 1650; Sunan an-Nasa’i 2624, 3128; Riyadh as-Salihin 1285, 1287. Accordingly, the martyr will experience incredible honor in the Hereafter (Jami’ at-Tirmidhi 1661) and go to the highest level of Paradise (Sahih Bukhari 2790, 3982, 6550; Riyadh as-Salihin 1319).
93 Sahih Bukhari 26, 1519.
94 Riyadh as-Salihin 1286.
targets of jihad are people Allah does not love. Furthermore, what does Allah’s love for jihad reveal about Allah?

Corresponding to the deeds that Allah loves, there are some deeds that Allah does not love, including “those who are coarse and foulmouthed,” the one who is loud and “shouts in the markets.” Allah does not love people who lie on their stomachs, presumably meaning those who are lazy.

In sum, there are many deeds that contribute toward earning Allah’s love: praying, washing, generosity in giving and business dealings, modesty, brotherly love, reciting Surah 112, and not loving the world. Allah also loves those who perform bodily purification and those who wage jihad. All these good deeds help a person earn Allah’s love. A frequently repeated hadith teaches that “any good deed which you will for Allah’s sake, will upgrade and elevate you.” Most loved by Allah are Muslims doing their religious duty and supererogatory deeds; they continue to do these deeds “until I [Allah] love him.”

The human ability to earn Allah’s love raises questions. When does a person become confident that s/he has earned the reward of Allah’s love? Is such assurance possible? If so, once attained, can Allah’s love then be lost through omitting good deeds or committing evil deeds? Aside from Ali, Allah’s love is presented as a future possibility and never as a present reality or assured confidence. This teaching from the hadith resonates with what is found in the Qur’an.

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96 Discussing who are and who are not the legitimate targets of jihad is beyond the scope of this study.

97 Al-Adab Al-Mufrad 487; 755.

98 Al-Adab Al-Mufrad 310.

99 Jami’ at-Tirmidhi 2768.

100 In addition there are many deeds that Allah hates. See Sahih Bukhari 2408, 1477, 7292. Furthermore, there are numerous other deeds that Allah does not love, although the word “love” is omitted. Such actions include withholding aid, not honoring a pledge of allegiance because of selfish gain, making a false oath (see Sahih Bukhari 2672), and “The one who lets his garment hang beneath his ankles” (Sunan an-Nasa’i 2563).

101 Sahih Bukhari 4409. See also Sahih Bukhari 477, 647, 1295, 3936, 6373, 6733.

102 Yahya ibn Sharaf an-Nawawi, ed. (d. 1277), trans. Ezzeddin Ibrahim and Denys Johnson-Davies, Hadith an-Nawawi 38.

Allah Loves Certain Qualities

Related to human deeds is human character, and Allah loves certain qualities in people. Allah loves forbearance, deliberateness, insight, tolerance, and clemency.\(^{104}\) Allah loves people who are God-conscious, content, and modest.\(^{105}\) Allah loves people being kind, lenient, and gentle; however, Muhammad said this while being cursed by some Jews and returning the curse in kind.\(^{106}\) This stands in marked contrast to the New Testament: “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse” (Rom 12:14; cf. Mt 5:44). Hofmann notes the contrast between Christianity and Islam on this point, stating that “the concept of loving one’s enemy is nowhere to be found in Islamic doctrine.”\(^{107}\)

One hadith records, “Allah loves beauty.”\(^{108}\) Despite the context referencing external beauty, Ghazi argues that Allah’s love for beauty is primarily internal beauty, or “beauty of soul.”\(^{109}\) Ghazi relates Allah’s love of beauty to different human qualities identified in the Qur’an in those people whom Allah loves: the pure, the God-fearing, the just, the patient, and the virtuous.\(^{110}\) The hadith, as we have seen, expand on this list of beautiful qualities that Allah loves. This is likely the meaning behind why Allah loves certain names. “The names which Allah Almighty loves most are ‘Abdullah and ‘Abdu’r-Rahman.”\(^{111}\) They represent beautiful qualities: serving Allah (Abdullah) and serving the Most Gracious (‘Abdur-Rahman).

Muhammad frequently says Allah loves a quality because he possesses that quality. “Allah is Gentle and loves gentleness in all things.”\(^{112}\) "Allah

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104 Jamiʿ at-Tirmidhi 2011; Sahih Muslim 18a; Al-Adab Al-Mufrad 584; Riyad as-Salihin 632, 633.
105 Sahih Muslim 2965; Riyad as-Salihin Book 1 Hadith 597.
106 Sahih Bukhari 6024, 6256; Jamiʿ at-Tirmidhi 2701. This appears to be in tension with Aisha’s description of Muhammad, who “would not return an evil with an evil, but rather he was pardoning and forgiving.” Jamiʿ at-Tirmidhi 2016.
107 Hofmann, "Differences."
109 Ghazi, Love, 12.
110 Ghazi, Love, 41–43.
111 Al-Adab Al-Mufrad 814; Jamiʿ at-Tirmidhi 2833, 2834.
112 Sunan Ibn Majah 3689, 3688.
Dodds: Whom Does God Love? Comparing Divine Love

is kind and He loves kindness.”113 “Allah is compassionate and loves compassion.”114 “Allah is Graceful and He loves Grace.”115 Allah is pardoning and loves to pardon;116 and Allah is most forgiving and loves forgiveness.117 For Ghazi, “God loves the universe and humanity for the beauty He placed in them, and thus God loves His own beauty in the universe. This means that He loves the universe ultimately for His own sake.”118 Ghazi connects these qualities with Allah’s Names, “such as the Gentle, the Kind, the Friend, the Forgiver, the Forbearing, and so on.”119 In summary, Muhammad says ‘Allah is Tayyib (good) and he loves Tayyib (what is good), and He is Nazif (clean) and He loves cleanliness, He is Karim (kind) and He loves kindness, He is Jawad (generous) and He loves generosity.”120 Allah loves seeing aspects of his nature reflected in people; Christian theology call this God’s communicable attributes.

Biblically, the parallels are readily apparent. God loves justice, mercy, and generosity and hates evil, idolatry, and oppression. However, in the Bible God primarily loves people, not deeds or character qualities, though the two are related. Additionally, unlike Allah’s lack of love for transgressors and prodigals, the Bible could not be more different. According to the parable of the prodigal Son (Lk 15:11-32), the Father demonstrates that “God loves not only those who love him.”121 Divine love in the hadith is a reward to the deserving; in the Bible it is a gift to the undeserving.

113 Sahih Muslim 2593.
114 Al-Adab Al-Mufrad 466.
115 Sahih Muslim 91a.
116 Jami` at-Tirmidhi 3513.
117 Riyad as-Salihin 1195; Sunan Ibn Majah 3850.
118 Ghazi, Love, 35.
119 Ghazi, Love, 15.
120 Jami` at-Tirmidhi 2799; Sunan Ibn Majah 357.
121 Chapman, Cross and Crescent, 367.
What Does Allah’s Love Mean?

Allah’s love is contrasted with his dislike, hatred, and anger. Similarly, in the Qur’an those Allah ‘does not love’ stands for “disapproving, condemning, criticizing, rejecting.” But what does Allah’s love mean?

Allah gives wealth to those he loves and does not love. By contrast, Allah “only gives faith to those He loves.” “When Allah loves a people He tests them. Whoever accepts that wins His pleasure.” Muhammad tells those who love to recite Surah 112 that Allah loves them and will admit them to Paradise. In Sahih Bukhari 6502 Allah’s love results in incredible closeness to Allah and seemingly guaranteed answers to prayer. Thus Allah’s love for a person indicates his positive disposition toward them and results in spiritual blessing in this life and the next.

The meaning of Allah’s love in the hadith concurs with that of Allah’s love in the Qur’an. According to Hofmann, Allah’s love conveys no emotional content and means that “Allah ‘approves,’ ‘is content with’ or ‘views positively’ those who act as described.” Similarly, in his tafsir, al-Zamakhshari wrote, “The love of Allah for his servants means that he is pleased with them and commends their performance.” In the Qur’an and hadith Allah’s love is focused on good deeds and human qualities. The Study Quran says, “the word love (hubb) is used in the Quran to describe what God loves or does not love in human beings.” Prima facie, the description of Allah’s love in the hadith and the Qur’an is consistent. Rahbar concluded

122 Sahih Bukhari 6226.
123 Sahih Bukhari 3783, 6508; Sunan Abu Dawud 2659; Sunan Ibn Majah 1996; Sunan an-Nasa’i 1615, 2558, 2570; Jami’ at-Tirmidhi 2568.
124 Muwatta Malik Book 51 Hadith 15.
125 Hofmann, “Differences.”
126 Al-Adab Al-Mufrad Book 14 Hadith 275.
127 Sunan ibn Majah 4031.
128 Riyad as-Salihin 1013. See also Sahih Muslim 488.
129 Hofmann, “Differences.”
that the Qur’anic references to Allah as wadud (the loving; Q. 11:91-92; 85:12-14) do not mean that Allah loves all. Rather, “The epithet ‘the loving’ is very probably a term of reference signifying God’s love for the virtuous believers.”\(^{132}\)

**Conclusion**

**Divine Love in the Bible and Hadith and Its Implications for Christianity and Islam**

Allah’s love in the hadith is portrayed as conditional. This is consistent with Rahbar’s interpretation of the Qur’an as portraying conditional divine love for some human beings who do good.\(^{133}\) Da’if hadith excepted, Allah does not name a single person that he loves, save Ali. Prominent Qur’anic figures, including Abraham, Moses, and Muhammad, are not exceptions to this general rule. Allah’s love can be earned through doing good deeds, chiefly religious and supererogatory deeds, and through cultivating virtuous character. Allah’s love in the hadith is not portrayed as something people are confident they have received, but rather something to be worked for. It is the hoped-for reward at the finish line rather than the starting gun and ambient atmosphere in the race of life. In the hadith divine love is a reward for the worthy; in the Bible it is a gift for the unworthy. Nickel observes that in the Qur’an “there is no general affirmation that Allah loves humanity.”\(^{134}\) Rather, commenting on Qur’an 3:31-32, Nasr says, “God does not love anyone who does not love His Blessed Prophet.”\(^{135}\) Similarly, the hadith do not teach that Allah loves all people. In the hadith (and Qur’an), Allah’s love means he approves of or views positively, and Allah only approves of certain kinds of deeds and character qualities. This is quite different from divine love as described in the Bible.

Nickel explains the biblical depiction of divine love: “God does not love people because they are loveable. He loves people because of the special quality of his love. His love is not based on the condition of the

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\(^{132}\) Rahbar, *God*, 175.

\(^{133}\) Rahbar, *God*, 172.

\(^{134}\) Nickel, “The Language,” 12.

\(^{135}\) Nasr, “Foreword,” xxiii.
receiver. His love flows from the nature of his deity.”136 Biblically, love describes God’s inner being, something some Muslim scholars deem not possible. For example, Akhtar states “Theology, as the study of God’s nature as opposed to his will, is anathema.”137 God’s love in the Bible is not selective or particular but universal, specifically including transgressors and sinners.138 Akhtar critiques this biblical portrayal of divine love “as false and mawkish love, as irresponsible and vague.”139 The incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection demonstrate, against Akhtar’s polemic, that God’s love is not vague. The accusation of irresponsibility stands only if love meant approval and if sin remained unaddressed. Biblically, neither are true, for God clearly and consistently loves his enemies while still condemning their sinful behavior. Additionally, the cross stands for both divine love and, simultaneously, God’s unambiguous judgement, rejection, and condemnation of evil. According to the logic of the New Testament, by means of the Holy Spirit a person in Christ is born anew, with the sin nature being decisively judged, found guilty, and killed. Therefore, a Christian cannot “go on sinning so that grace may increase” (Rom 6:1). The apostle Paul reminds Christians that they have “died to sin,” and those who have been “baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death” (Rom 6:1-3). The Holy Spirit further empowers the Christian to live according to God’s will (Phil 2:13). Even an uncharitable reading of the New Testament could not read divine love as an endorsement of sinful behavior. Finally, God’s love is relational, unconditional, persevering, and its costliness is expressed in sacrificial action. Such love is not sentimental but deeply engaged, resolute, and determined: the Good Shepherd pursuing the lost sheep, the Son of God going to the far country. Therefore, the meaning of God’s love differs vastly between the Bible – reflecting the One who loves, and the hadith—approving those who are loved.

Divine love for humankind is a major biblical theme. In the hadith divine love for people is depicted as a possibility and rarely as an actuality.

138 Power, Challenging, 123.
Allah’s love is something to strive toward in the hope, but not confidence, of attaining. Some Muslim scholars are reticent to speak of divine love at all. Hofmann says, “it is safer and more accurate not to speak of ‘love’ when addressing His clemency, compassion, benevolence, goodness, or mercy.” Hofmann would rather avoid the word “love” altogether. Christian scholars A. S. Tritton and D. Gril comment that divine love is an undeveloped theme in Islamic orthodoxy. Akhtar acknowledges that “[j]oy and love are not prominent in the Quran.” The strongest argument for the central importance of Allah’s love is Ghazi’s book *Love in the Holy Qur’an*, which is a thematic *tafsir*. However, the endorsements by senior Islamic scholars are revealing. They say this study “has perhaps never been done before,” is “something which no one has ever done before,” it “is an unprecedented work” and is extremely rare, “a unique work, original,” “innovative,” “it tackles philosophical Qur’anic subjects which have not been covered before…. It enters unexplored territory in Islamic philosophy,” presents “a topic which

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146 Sheikh Prof. Dr. Muhammad Sa’id Ramadan al-Buti, Dean of the College of Shariah, Damascus University. Ghazi, *Love*, xi.
147 H.E. Prof. Dr. ‘Abd al-Salam Abbadi, Secretary General of the International Academy of Islamic Jurisprudence. Ghazi, *Love*, xiii.
150 H.E. Prof. Dr. Kamel ‘Ajlouni, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, Jordan University. Ghazi, *Love*, xv.
has not been given adequate attention in previous literature.” In the Islamic theological tradition divine love has not been a central concern, as evidenced by the first comprehensive study of divine love in the Qur’an only having been published in 2010. Contrasting with the importance of agape for Christians, Akhtar states, “For Muslims, divine love is not high on the list [of significance].” Literature on divine love specifically in the hadith is difficult to find. By contrast, Schaefer says, “The theme of the entire Bible is the self-revelation of the God of love.” This need not result in a value judgment but simply reflects a contrast between the Bible and the hadith.

Islamic reticence concerning speaking about Allah’s love directly relates to emphasizing its difference from human love. Speaking from a Christian perspective, G. K. Chesterton says, “It is the nature of love to bind itself....” True for divine and human love alike, the Bible portrays both as akin to marital love and parental love. In God’s self-giving he freely binds himself to his creation, especially to human beings. God’s hesed and ‘emeth, combined with human sinfulness, cause God to suffer. To some extent, the Bible depicts God as being bound by his inner character: “if we are faithless, he [God] remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself” (2 Tm 2:13). It is precisely this sense of being bound, and potentially suffering, that Islamic theologians want to preclude as incompatible with Allah’s transcendence. Durie suggests, “The idea of Allah deliberately comparing himself to the husband of a prostitute, as a way of describing how great his love is, would be unthinkable in Islam.” If Chesterton is right that love consists of unwavering commitment, then divine love in the hadith falls short of

151 Prof. Dr. Ingrid Mattson, Director, Macdonald Center for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations, Hartford Seminary. Ghazi, Love, xv.
152 Ghazi’s Love was published in 2010.
156 Hosea; Ephesians 5:21-32; Revelation 19:6-9.
158 Mark Durie, Revelation? Do We Worship the Same God? (Upper Mt. Gravatt, Brisbane: City Harvest International, 2010), 124.
this meaning. However, that is to judge the hadith by biblical theology. Divine love in the hadith is coherent and consistent within an Islamic theological framework and conveys the meaning of approval and reward. Both the Bible and the hadith speak of divine love, but what is meant is vastly different, and therefore, a straightforward comparison between the two is misleading. Such is the importance of studying the hadith for Christian engagement with Muslims, and for Muslims to understand that Christian theology is plotted on a different axis.

God’s love in Christianity\textsuperscript{159} and Allah’s love in Islam\textsuperscript{160} can be resisted. However, the hadith depict that Allah responds to this resistance by withdrawing his love. Muhammad said, “Whoever loves to meet Allah, Allah (too) loves to meet him and whoever hates to meet Allah, Allah (too) hates to meet him.”\textsuperscript{161} Allah does not love those who hate him because he does not approve of this human defiance. Allah’s love does not persevere through rejection and thus is conditional. Akhtar explains that Allah’s love is “the deserved love of a wise and just king towards his loyal subjects on condition that they must behave in a certain way.”\textsuperscript{162} The Bible says, “God’s response to our resistance is to endure it. He hopes to win us through our perception of his grief.”\textsuperscript{163} God’s coming near to humanity in the incarnation is met by human rejection. God does not reject humanity for this rejection, but, rather, through it God reveals his nature.\textsuperscript{164} God painfully endures our rejection, thus showing that human resistance will not stop God, for “His love cannot be turned away. Even when people killed the one who bore the love of God, God raised him from the dead to confront us


\textsuperscript{160} Ghazi, Love, 30, 409.

\textsuperscript{161} Sahih Bukhari 6507. See also Sahih Muslim 2683a, 2684c; Jami’ at-Tirmidhi 1066, 2309; Sunan an-Nasa’i 1835, 1836, 1837.

\textsuperscript{162} Akhtar, The New Testament, 199, emphasis added.

\textsuperscript{163} Diogenes Allen, Love (Princeton, NJ: Cowley, 1987), 133.

According to the Bible God’s love sacrificially bears human rejection, suffers, and perseveres.

Ethical Implications: Divine Love and Human Love

In the Bible God’s love for sinners causes a corresponding Christian love for their neighbors and enemies. Christians are to participate in, embody, and reflect God’s love for all. Jesus summarizes the Old Testament into two great commandments, love of God and love of neighbor (Mt 22:37-40). Jesus’s parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37) makes it clear that neighbors exclude no one, “every person is a neighbour.” Jesus’s teaching in Matthew 5:44 makes explicit that Christians are to love even their enemies (Mt 5:45-48) because of their worth as persons. Plummer explains, “To return evil for good is devilish; to return good for good is human; to return good for evil is divine.” Christians as God’s children are to take after their Father’s character and thus are to “have the same perfect love as your Father does.”

Anders Nygren observes, “God’s love for sinners and Christian love for enemies are correlatives.” For Christians, love is to be their distinguishing mark; action not permeated by love is worthless (1 Cor 13:1-3), and love is the greatest and most durable aspect of creation (1 Cor 13:13) because “it reflects God’s character.”

In Islam Allah’s love for people also causes a corresponding human response. Since Allah’s love is directed toward people with virtuous

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165 Allen, Love, 133.
167 Alfred Plummer, quoted in Grant R. Osborne, Matthew (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 213.
168 Osborne, Matthew, 214.
170 Gordon D. Fee, The First Epistle to the Corinthians (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans: 1987), 643.
171 Hofmann says, “Islam teaches that the love of God must translate into compassion for man.” “Differences.” Similarly, Ghazi, in Love, teaches, negatively, “since God does not say that He hates the disbelievers, Muslims may not say so either” (77) And positively, since “God enjoins mercy and empathy upon all human beings to all human beings” (154), “Thus mercy and empathy should be shown to all people—every single human being—whether they be believers or not..., even disbelievers” (155).
character who do good deeds, logically Muslims are to love good deeds, those who do them, and people with virtuous character. What about other people? The hadith teach a clear causal relation between Allah’s love, anger, or hate and corresponding human love, anger, or hate. The aforementioned hadith in which Allah tells Gabriel to love someone spells this out.\footnote{172} Allah’s love for a person causes that person to be loved in heaven and honoured on earth. However, Allah’s anger toward a person will cause human beings to feel wrath toward that person. This causal connection is seen in another \textit{sahih} narration. Muhammad said, “If anyone loves for Allah’s sake, hates for Allah’s sake, gives for Allah’s sake and withholds for Allah’s sake, he will have perfect faith.”\footnote{173}

Salafism,\footnote{174} a theologically very conservative interpretation of Islam, interprets this through the doctrine of \textit{al-wala wal-barā} (loyalty and disavowal).\footnote{175} Al-Qahtani argues that Muslims should love what Allah loves and hate what he hates: “whoever loves Allah as he should must also bear hatred for His enemies.”\footnote{176} Al-Qahtani’s interpretation is not typically accepted outside of Salafism, and most Muslims are not Salafis.\footnote{177} However, the hadith do teach that Allah’s love and hate cause a corresponding human

\footnotesize{\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{172} Sahih Muslim 2637a.
\item \footnote{173} Sunan Abu Dawud 4681. See also Sahih Bukhari 16, 21, 6941; Jami’ at-Tirmidhi 2521, 2624; Sunan an-Nasa’i 4987, 4989. Sunan Abu Dawud 4599.
\item \footnote{174} According to Salafism, the most genuine and true Islam is found in the lives of the early generations of Muslims, the Salaf, who lived in closest proximity to Muhammad. Modern Salafi Muslims seek to imitate these Salafis instead of following Islam according to later historical and legal developments.
\item \footnote{175} In Islamic history \textit{al-wala wal-barā} was championed by the Khajirite sect, which is considered deviant. Ibn Taymiyyah revived the concept hundreds of years later, though he did not actually use the term. Mohamed Bin Ali, \textit{The Islamic Doctrine of Al-Wala’ wal Bara’ (Loyalty and Disavowal) in Modern Salafism}, unpublished PhD Thesis (Exeter University, 2012), 69, \url{https://ore.exeter.ac.uk/repository/bitstream/handle/10871/9181/AliM.pdf} (May 19, 2020).
\item \footnote{176} Muhammad Saeed Al-Qahtani, \textit{Al-Wala’ Wa’l-Bara’ According to the ‘Aqeedah of the Salaf, Part 3} (London: Al-Firdous, 1999), 7.
\item \footnote{177} Bin Ali, \textit{The Islamic}, 233.
\end{itemize}}
love and hate. That would be problematic\textsuperscript{178} if it is believed that Allah hates people.\textsuperscript{179}

Whom does God love according to the Bible and the hadith? Answering the question reveals, indicatively, something about the nature of the deity to which these authoritative sources bear witness. This study has shown that divine love in the Bible and hadith are related not exclusively but primarily by their difference: in their meaning, locus, and scope. These differences lead to ethical imperatives since human action imitates divine action. Both the theological and ethical consequences of answering this question are significant.

\textbf{Limitations}

There are several limitations to this study. First, it is limited to the major Sunni hadith collections; further study of the major Shia hadith collections on this topic would be instructive. Second, commentaries on the hadith were not studied since they have not yet been translated into English. Third, the hadiths referenced were not exhaustively classified according to the reliability of their isnad. This is worthwhile but was not the present focus. The object of this study was to investigate and interpret divine love in the hadith and compare and contrast this with divine love in the Bible. The strength of this approach is providing a high-level overview of the subject matter. It should be noted that the conclusions of this study are not based on hadiths that are outliers. Rather, the messaging on divine love across the major hadith collections is consistent. However, the precise authority that this study carries will depend both on the reader’s positionality and and,


\textsuperscript{179} Ghazi (Love, 12) and Nasr (“Foreword,” xxiii–xxiv) both claim that Allah loves every human being, although they both specify exceptions to this. Nonetheless, both maintain that Allah does not hate anyone. In contrast, former Grand Mufti of Egypt Sheikh Hasanayn Muhammad Makhluf believed Allah hates evildoers and disbelievers. Ghazi, Love, 427–429.
potentially, establishing whether the hadith that have been examined are āhād, mutawātir, or mutawātir bi’l-ma’nā.

Implications for Engagement with Muslims

The challenge of cross-cultural gospel communication while avoiding syncretism and irrelevance is perennial. That God loves sinners, interpreted through the filter of the hadith, is irrelevant. Rather than the gospel being conveyed, God will be perceived as, to use Akhtar’s word, “mawkish.” However, gospel communication should not so strive for understanding that it is domesticated within an existing non-Christian belief system. As Walls states, “for that society never existed, in East or West, ancient time or modern, which could absorb the word of Christ painlessly into its system.”¹⁸⁰ For engaging with Muslims in all continents, as with all people, patience is required. Christians seeking to convey divine love for and to Muslims must do so with wisdom and care, being alert to the ever-present danger of misunderstanding, while implicitly or explicitly questioning the Islamic framework through which divine love is (mis)understood.

Whom does God love according to the Bible and hadith? This study has shown that, unlike the hadith, the Bible tells of a God who demonstrated his love for sinners at great cost. This divine love reflects not the goodness of the loved but the greatness of the One who loves because God is love.

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