

# Does Islam Teach Salvation by Works?

by Matt Slick

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*The sermon explores the contrast between Islamic salvation, which relies on works, and Christian salvation, which is based solely on grace through faith in Christ.*

**Scripture:** Jeremiah 17:9, John 6:47, Romans 4:3, Romans 5:1, 1 Corinthians 15:1, Galatians 2:21, Ephesians 2:8, 1 Peter 2:24

**Topics:** "Salvation By Faith", "Christian Apologetics"

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## Description

Matt Slick discusses the contrasting views of salvation between Christianity and Islam, emphasizing that Christianity teaches salvation by grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ, while Islam combines Allah's grace with the works of the believer for forgiveness and entry into Paradise. Slick points out the uncertainty and lack of assurance in Islam regarding salvation, as it depends on the balance of good and bad deeds on Judgment Day, contrasting with the assurance of salvation in Christianity through faith in Christ's finished work on the cross.

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## Transcript

Generally speaking, there are only two methods of salvation in all the religions of the world: grace and works. Christianity is a religion of salvation by grace alone: "For by grace through faith you have been saved, not of works..." (Eph. 2:8-9). All other systems rely totally or in part on the works of the believer to merit salvation. Mormons, for example, say that you are saved by grace through faith after all you can do. In Roman Catholicism, God's grace is infused into a believer that enables him to do good works by which he is judged for salvation. In Islam, forgiveness is based on a combination of Allah's grace and the Muslim's works. On the Day of Judgment, if a Muslim's good works outweigh his bad ones, and if Allah so wills it, he may be forgiven of all his sins and then enter into Paradise. Therefore, Islam is a religion of salvation by works because it combines man's works with Allah's grace. Consider the following verses from the Qur'an. (All quotes from the Qur'an are from The Holy Qur'an, Mushaf Al-Madinah An-Nabawiyah, Revised and Edited by THE PRESIDENCY OF ISLAMIC RESEARCH, IFTA, Call and Guidance, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Fahd Complex, for the Printing of the Holy Qur-an.)

"To those who believe and do deeds of righteousness hath Allah promised forgiveness and a great reward," (Surah 5:9).

"And He answers those who believe and do good deeds, and gives them more out of His grace; and (as for) the unbelievers, they shall have a severe punishment," (42:26, online, trans. by M.H. Shakir).

"O you who believe! If you are careful of (your duty to) Allah, He will grant you a distinction and do away with your evils and forgive you; and Allah is the Lord of mighty grace," (8:29, online, trans. by M.H. Shakir).

Of course, the Muslims will tell us the Qur'an teaches that Allah is gracious to them and that they do not earn their forgiveness. I acknowledge this. The Qur'an says, ". . . Allah is the Lord of grace unbounded," (8:29), and also, ". . . But Allah will choose for his special mercy whom he will - for Allah is lord of grace abounding," (2:105). But, as you can see from the quotes 1, 2, and 3 above, Allah's forgiveness is tied to the Muslim's works. Therefore, I ask the question, how is it really grace if it is by also by works? Isn't grace the unmerited favor from God? It would seem the Islamic system of salvation is more a reward than grace.

For further confirmation that Allah's grace is dependent upon the deeds of faithful Muslims, here are more quotes from the Qur'an:

"O you who believe! be careful of (your duty to) Allah and speak the right word, He will put your deeds into a right state for you, and forgive you your faults; and whoever obeys Allah and His Apostle, he indeed achieves a mighty success," (33:70-71, online, trans. by M.H. Shakir).

". . . But if ye obey Allah and his messenger, he will not belittle aught of your deeds: for Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful," (49:14).

"If you obey GOD and His messenger, He will not put any of your works to waste. GOD is Forgiver, Most Merciful," (49:14).

Notice how the Qur'an teaches forgiveness based upon Allah's grace and man's works. Can any Muslim be assured of his salvation before his God? No.1 Numerous Muslims have told me that they do not know if they will make it to heaven because they do not know if their good deeds outweigh their bad ones. Unlike Christianity where we have assurance of salvation (John 6:47; 1 John 5:13), there is no assurance in Islam because it rests in part on the obedience and good works of Muslims. Unlike Christianity where salvation is an unearned, free gift from God (Rom. 4:3; Eph. 2:8-9), the Muslim can at best only hope he has performed enough good works to outweigh his bad ones and that Allah so wills to forgive him.

Another requirement for forgiveness for the Muslim is sincerity when repenting of sins.

"O ye who believe! Turn unto Allah in sincere repentance! It may be that your Lord will remit from you your evil deeds and bring you into Gardens underneath which rivers flow, on the day when Allah will not abase the Prophet and those who believe with him. Their light will run before them and on their right hands; they will say: Our Lord! Perfect our light for us, and forgive us! Lo! Thou art Able to do all things," (66:8-9).

"God accepts the repentance of those who have sinned in ignorance and who realizing the ugliness of their deed swiftly turn toward Him in repentance," (3:16).

I am not saying that we should not be sincere when repenting of our sins. But, the problem with sincerity is that it can easily become a form of pride. After all, if a person says he is truly sincere enough to be forgiven of his sins, then isn't he appealing to something within himself, a finite sinner, as part of the basis of receiving forgiveness from a holy and infinite God? Is that not presumptive and prideful to do? Furthermore, the issue of sincerity is a subjective thing. How do you know you are being sincere enough?

Is it because the Muslims simply believes he is? It seems to me that at best, the Muslim can only hope he is sincere enough. But how can he really know for sure? Instead, the Bible says that the heart is desperately wicked and deceitful and cannot be trusted (Jer. 17:9).

In Christianity, we appeal to the work of Christ on the cross (1 Pet. 2:24) completely and totally and in nothing in ourselves as a basis for forgiveness, because no good thing dwells within us (Rom. 7:18); that is, apart from Christ. We sincerely believe in Christ, but we never claim that forgiveness is in any way merited or gained because of our sincerity or our works. Rather, our forgiveness is based on faith and trust in God in what He has done for us in Christ. Salvation in Christianity is God-centered. In Islam, forgiveness of sins is man-centered in that it is dependent upon man's sincerity and man's works in combination with Allah's forgiveness.

Both Christianity and Islam teach that we must have faith in God. But in Christianity, this faith in God is enough to save us (Rom. 5:1; Eph. 2:8-9). In Islam, faith in God is not enough. In Islam, the Muslim's works will be weighed on the Day of Judgment and it will then be decided who is saved and who is not -- based upon whether the person was a Muslim, whether or not they were sincere in repentance, and whether or not they performed enough good works to out weigh the bad ones.

Please consider the following verses from the Qur'an about how a Muslim's deeds are weighed in the balance on Judgment Day to see if he might be saved or not.

"Then those whose balance (of good deeds) is heavy, they will be successful. But those whose balance is light, will be those who have lost their souls; in hell will they abide," (23:102-103).

"And We set a just balance for the Day of Resurrection so that no soul is wronged in aught. Though it be of the weight of a grain of mustard seed, We bring it. And We suffice for reckoners," (21:47).

"They are those who deny the Signs of their Lord and the fact of their having to meet Him (in the Hereafter): vain will be their works, nor shall We, on the Day of Judgment, give them any weight," (online Qur'an, 18:105).

Is the Islamic system of salvation really enough to save Muslims? They will say that it is. But, as a Christian, I cannot see how anyone in Islam can have security and honest expectation of obtaining Paradise. How can anyone who must be completely sincere in repentance and be required to perform more good works than bad, ever hope to make it to heaven?

The problem with being saved by God's grace and human works is that human works are never sufficient to please God. God is infinite and holy. How can we finite sinners ever hope to please God by our deeds?

Muslims need the gospel

Instead of relying in any way on our own works, the gospel of Jesus teaches us we do not have to do that. The gospel of Jesus is that He died for our sins and rose again from the dead (1 Cor. 15:1-4). He fulfilled all the Law so we don't have to (Rom. 8:3-4). He took our place and received the punishment due our sins (2 Cor. 5:21). Because we are sinners and because we cannot please an infinitely Holy God on our own, because we can never fulfill the Law of God perfectly, and because God's eyes are too pure to look upon evil (Hab. 1:13), salvation must be by total grace (Eph. 2:8). Salvation must be the work of God, not of man (Gal. 2:21).

1 John 5:13 says, "These things were written so you may know you have eternal life..." Can the Muslim say he knows he has eternal life? He cannot. I know I do as a Christian precisely because it is not of my works. So, why would a Muslim want me to give up my assurance and free gift of salvation found in Jesus for the Islamic system of works that, at best, only provides the possibility of salvation if I have been sincere enough and if I have done enough good works?

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