

What Does Islam Teach about Salvation?—Part 2

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(continued from last month)

C. The concept of a loving God is foreign to the Muslim mind.

As we have indicated, the God of Islam, Allah, is not a God of love. In Islam, Allah's "love" is not based on unconditional commitment and self-sacrifice, as is biblical love (John 3:16; 1 Corinthians 13:1-13). Rather, what passes for love is based on conditional performance and arbitrary decree. In Islamic theology, much as in Buddhist philosophy, the concept of love is primarily that of "mercy." It is far more impersonal than personal.

Dr. J. Christy Wilson observes that the concept of God's love is foreign to the Muslim because of the extreme emphasis placed upon Allah's sovereign power and utter transcendence:

It should be said, however that most Muslims will misunderstand and question the statement of the New Testament that "God is love." His power and sovereign transcendence over all creation are so emphasized in Islam that to call Him a God of love or to address Him as "Father" would be far from Muslim thought. ¹⁶

John Elder, cited above, comments, "In addition to the idea that God does not need men and therefore cannot love, the Muslim commonly cites two main problems in believing that God is love: the existence of sin and pain, and man's insignificance in the vastness of the universe." ¹⁷

But again, the Bible teaches the Islamic view of God is wrong when it declares that "God is love" (1 John 4:16).

D. Muslim salvation is fatalistic.

We have discussed the fact that the Muslim concept of forgiveness is conditioned upon good works. On the one hand, we find in the Koran the "promise" of heaven for those who do good. But on the other hand, the promise is conditional: One must possess the true religion of Islam, obey its precepts, and also find favor with Allah. But at this point Islam becomes fatalistic.

The largest indeterminacy in the Muslim concept of salvation is Allah's predestination. The Koran teaches, "All things have we created after a fixed decree...." ¹⁸ Further "God leads astray whomsoever He will; and He guides whomsoever He will...." ¹⁹ Abdiyah Akbar Abdul-Haqq observes:

There are several [Muslim] traditions also about the predestination of all things, including all good and bad actions and guided and misguided people.... Even if a person desires to choose God's guidance, he cannot do so without the prior choice of God in favor of his free choice. This is sheer determinism. ²⁰

Dr. Wilson comments; "The fifth article of [Muslim] faith is predestination... the fact that everything that happens, either good or bad, is foreordained by the unchangeable decrees of Allah. It will be seen at once that this makes Allah the author of evil, a doctrine that most

Muslim theologians hold.”²¹

At first glance there does appear to be one way a Muslim can guarantee his salvation. This is found in connection with the Muslim concept of *jihad* or holy war. Achieving security of salvation requires death in battle: “If you are slain or die in God’s way... it is unto God you shall be mustered....”²²

Consider the following statement endorsing *jihad* (It could apply to the killing of Christian missionaries attempting to convert Muslims to faith in Christ.):

What, do you desire to guide him whom God has led astray? Whom God leads astray, thou wilt not find for him a way [of salvation]. They wish that you should disbelieve as they disbelieve, and then you would be equal; therefore take not to yourselves friends of them, until they emigrate in the way of God; then, if they turn their backs, take them, and slay them wherever you find them; take not to yourselves any one of them as a friend or helper.²³

When you meet the unbelievers in the battlefields strike off their heads and, when you have laid them low, bind your captives firmly.... Thus shall you do.... As for those who are slain in the cause of Allah... he will admit them to the Paradise he has made known to them.²⁴

Finally, the Koran teaches:

Allah has given those that fight with their goods and their persons a higher rank than those who stay at home.... The unbelievers are your sworn enemies.... Seek out your enemies relentlessly.... You shall not plead for traitors.... Allah does not love the treacherous or the sinful.²⁵

In the above material, it first seems that the Muslim is promised heaven for death in battle. But we discover that even this security of salvation is conditioned on something else—in this case, bravery:

O believers, when you encounter the unbelievers marching to battle, turn not your backs to them. Whoso turns his back that day to them, unless withdrawing to fight again or removing to join another host, he is laden with the burden of God’s anger, and his refuge is Gehenna—an evil homecoming!²⁶

So even in the “guarantee” of heaven through death in a holy war, the Muslim promise of salvation appears to remain conditional. And no one can deny that millions of Muslims, trusting in Islam to save them and take them to heaven, have instead been sent to their deaths. Lamentably, they have been sent to eternity without Christ.

E. Do Christians have salvation according to Islam?

Some have claimed that Christians can remain Christians and still inherit salvation, according to Islam. They also claim that the God of Islam and the God of the Bible are the same God. But to the contrary, the Koran teaches that only if Christians convert to the Muslim faith and remain good Muslims will they have the opportunity for salvation. Because Christians reject the Koran, they are classified as “unbelievers” and their destiny is therefore eternal hell. For example:

God guides not the people of the unbelievers.... They are unbelievers who say,

“God is the Messiah, Mary’s Son.”... The Messiah [Jesus] said, “Children of Israel, serve God, [Allah] my Lord and your Lord. Verily, whoso associates with God anything [*shirk*], God shall prohibit him entrance to Paradise, and his refuge shall be the Fire; and wrong doers shall have no helpers.” They are unbelievers who say, “God is the Third of Three.” No god is there but One God. If they refrain not from what they say, there shall afflict those of them that disbelieve a painful chastisement....²⁷

In the above citation, we see that 1) Christians who believe that Jesus is the divine Messiah are classified as unbelievers; 2) those who believe in the trinity (that “God is the Third of Three”) are unbelievers, and 3) Christians who believe that Christ is God (those who “associate” God with Jesus) will be consigned to hell. Therefore if Christians do not repent of their evils they are subject to the strictest judgment:

Kill those who join other gods with God wherever ye shall find them; and seize them, besiege them, and lay wait for them with every kind of ambush: but if they shall convert, and observe prayer, and pay the obligatory alms, then let them go their way, for God is Gracious, Merciful.²⁸

If Christians do not repent, not only may they be killed in this life, but they will go to hell in the next life:

Do they not know that whosoever opposes God [Allah] and His Messenger [Muhammad]—for him awaits the fire of Gehenna, therein to dwell forever?²⁹

Verily, God will not forgive the union of other gods with Himself!... And He who uniteth gods with God hath devised a great wickedness... the flame of Hell is their sufficing *punishment!* Those who disbelieve our signs we will in the end cast into the fire: so oft as their skins shall be well burnt, we will change them for fresh skins, that they may taste the torment.³⁰

Notes:

16. J. Christy Wilson, *Introducing Islam*, (New York: Friendship Press, 1965, rev.), p. 20.
17. John Elder, *The Biblical Approach to the Muslim* (Fort Washington, PA: Worldwide Evangelization Crusade, 1978), p. 59.
18. J. M. Rodwell, *The Koran*, (New York: Dutton, Everyman’s Library, 1977), p. 78.
19. A. J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted* (New York: MacMillan, 1976), p. 174.
20. Abdiyah Akabar Abdul-Haqq, *Sharing Your Faith with a Muslim* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1978), p. 159.
21. Wilson, *Introducing*, p. 24.
22. Arberry, *Interpreted*, p. 93; cf. p. 98.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 113.
24. N. J. Dawood, trans., *Koran*, pp. 212-22.
25. *Ibid.*, pp. 367-68.
26. Arberry, *Interpreted*, pp. 198-99.
27. *Ibid.*, pp. 139-40
28. Rodwell, *Koran*, p. 471.
29. Arberry, *Interpreted*, p. 214.
30. Rodwell, *Koran*, p. 417.