

How Can Man Be Saved with Praying, Fasting and Giving?

By Abu Atallah

Dear Friend:

You have asked a great question: How can man be saved with praying, fasting, and giving? This is really an important question. How much prayers and giving do you need in a lifetime to pay for all the sins you have committed? In the Day of Judgment are we sure that we have done enough good works to enter heaven? Theoretically, do you think that we can tell God, "I have done all the good works that you have asked me to do, therefore I should go to heaven"?

I have many Muslim friends—none of them have been able to make the above statement. Even the prophet of Islam alluded to this fact. In Sahih Bukhari 8.537: "Allah will say (to Adam), 'Bring out the people of the fire.' Adam will say, 'Which (how many) are the people of fire?' Allah will say, 'Out of every 1000 (take out) 999.'" Another Hadith says "99 out of 100." Even in the Qura'n it says, "If God were to punish men for their wrongdoing, he would not leave a single creature on earth (16:61/64). So as you see, my friend, we are not far from each other on this point.

Martin Luther, the founder of the Protestant church, struggled with the same issue. He said, "The more good works I do, the more guilty I feel." He tried to do all the good works he could do, but realized it was never enough.

Are you sure that you will go to heaven? Are you sure that you have done enough good work that, if the end of time comes now, you will be ready? It is a scary thought to all of us.

Let me share a story with you. A young man lived his life according to his own desires and sinned against God and against others. He enjoyed all the sinful pleasures of life. After a while his life lost its meaning and he had to pay for living the sinful life. He was tired of this life. Even physically he was paying the consequences of what he had done.

He had a good friend who lived a good life away from sin. So he decided to visit him. When he met his friend he was very tired as well as disenchanted with life. He explained to his friend that life had failed him. He was feeling disappointment and sinfulness. He was afraid of what the future might bring. All of this caused him pain and many sleepless nights.

So he asked his friend, "You are a good man, you stayed away from sinning. What good deeds can I do to pay for the entire blunder that I have committed in my life? How much do I have to give to God to ask pardon for my sins?" He wanted to relieve his conscience; he wanted to purchase peace for his heart and mind.

His friend offered him a glass of cold water to quench his thirst. But before he gave him the drink, he used his ink pen and squirted some ink in the water.

The young man stood up in anger and said, "I will not drink from this cup. Why did you do that? Do you want to poison and kill me? I thought you were my friend. I came to you for an advice."

His friend answered, "No, I did not want to kill you, but I wanted to answer your question about if good deeds would buy salvation with God. You have refused to drink this drink because I put very little ink in it. But meanwhile you ask God, the Holy one (Al Qudoos), to

accept your sinful life and evil deeds and thoughts, which you poisoned your life with.”

So he understood what his friend meant. He repented with humility and asked God, who is able to forgive all his sins, to clean his heart. There was nothing he could do to pay for his salvation.

The Bible affirms this fact:

“What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. As it is written: ‘There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.’ ‘Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit.’ ‘The poison of vipers is on their lips.’ ‘Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.’ ‘Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know.’ ‘There is no fear of God before their eyes.’ ‘For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.’” (Romans 3:9-12, 23)

You see, salvation is a free gift from God. All the good works in the world are not enough to earn salvation for us. In the Bible it says: “For the wages of sin is death, but the [free] gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 6:23) It also says: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9)

What should we do? Absolutely nothing. Just accept the gift, and say “thank you.” I will tell you more next time.