

Study Guide for “Lesson on Salvation in Christianity and Islam”

To be used along with the video of the same name on www.ChristianfromMuslim.com

Summary and Notes:



Quick Summary: Today’s lesson is on salvation in Christianity and Islam. If salvation to eternal life is a gift, do good deeds mean anything? Muslims rely on their good deeds for salvation. We discuss faith and works in the setting of Christmas, when God gave us the greatest gift of all – Jesus Christ and salvation through him. Guest Rev. Bob Siegel discusses the gift of salvation, and how it leads to obedience to God.

Reality: Giving Gifts at Christmas

Huda has only been a Christian for three months. This is her first Christmas. In the video lesson’s opening segment, we see Huda and Dr. Cynthia exchanging Christmas gifts – real ones in real time.

Is there a reason that we give gifts at Christmas? Huda asks. Yes. We do it for fun. It is a happy time! But more importantly, we give gifts because at Christmas God came to earth as Jesus to give us the gift of eternal life. Because of our sin, we face eternal death.

The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life, in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 6:23

For by grace you are saved, through faith. Ephesians 2:8

This reality scene is another **example of how we can use the activities of everyday life** to share the truth of the Bible. We close the scene by drawing attention to God’s gift:

Thanks be unto God for his indescribable gift! II Corinthians 9:14

(Note: Because she is teaching Huda, Dr. C uses the Arabic word *Injeel* for the New Testament.)

Salvation in Christianity: a Ticket to Heaven

Heaven, our hope in the Christian faith, is a wonderful place. It is described as having gardens and lovely places to dwell, jewels and streets of gold; but its **primary blessings are spiritual**.

In heaven we will meet Jesus face to face, God will live among us, there will be beautiful fellowship with believers, we will not be married, and we will understand many things which are now puzzling. In sum, heaven is a beautiful place filled with love and understanding. (Revelation chapters 21 & 22)

➤ **Getting to heaven**

EVERY religion in the world, except Christianity presents a way of salvation, or gaining favor with the gods, through a system of works.

ONLY in Christianity does God reach down to human beings to save us!

Recognizing this, we can get into salvation conversations with people of any religion. Simply ask, “What is the main difference between..... and Christianity?” Let them answer, then share this truth.

➤ **The Foundational Truth of Christianity**

God saves us through FAITH in him. This is the truth upon which our faith is based. It was true in both the Old Testament, even during the time of the Law of Moses, as well as after Jesus came in the New Testament. Before Moses,

Abram believed the Lord, and it was credited to him as righteousness. Genesis 15:6

***For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son,
that whoever believes in him, will not perish, but have everlasting life.*** John 3:16

(Note: In sharing the gospel with Muslims, many of us recommend using “*The Path of the Prophets Gospel Method*.” It is directed toward their understanding of the Old Testament, and through that explains that Jesus was the prophesied final sacrifice for sin. It overcomes many of the obstacles to the gospel which are built into the Qur’an and as a result Islam. To learn more about it, see the lesson, study guide, and video tract of this name.)

➤ **Does God only love us if we are worthy?**

No! God loved us, even though we are unworthy. This is a difference from Islam.

***God demonstrates his own love for us in this:
While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*** Romans 5:8.

Salvation in Islam: a Ticket to Paradise

We do not discuss salvation in Islam in the video lesson, because the Muslims it was originally broadcast for already knew about it. We present it here however, so that all of you will understand what Islam teaches about salvation, works, and the afterlife.



Paradise is the goal of Muslims in the afterlife, rather than heaven. In contrast to the spiritual emphasis of heaven, paradise is **a place of sensual delight**. It is described in detail in the Qur’an in surahs 52 & 55. It contains “blessings of your Lord,” which include:

gardens, branches, flowing springs, fruits, thrones in ranks, couches with silk brocade, green cushions and rich, beautiful mattresses, beautiful and devoted virgins for each man, boy servants, meat, wine, fruits, date palms and pomegranates, and curiously enough, they will have “white faces,” in contrast to the “black faces” of those in hell.

It is very sobering to meditate on this and fully comprehend that,

to Muslims, the greatest possible state of human existence is

enjoying sex and alcohol in a garden.

Are Muslims ashamed of this version of eternity? No! They say Christians are missing out on these sensual delights. They use it to recruit, especially men, into Islam.

How does a Muslim seek to attain paradise? Many or most Muslims believe that if you say the *shahada*, the statement of faith or creed, and mean it in your heart, you will eventually get to paradise.

The shahada is:

There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is his messenger.
La ilaha illa Allah wa-Muhammad rasul Allah.

But if your sins are many and not overbalanced by your good deeds, you will need to spend time in hell to suffer for them. In this way, hell for Muslims can be temporary (something like the purgatory of the Catholic Church). But the suffering is severe and the length of time disproportionate to the misdeed (like a single hair astray of the hijab). So Muslims sincerely do fear and want to avoid hell.

In contrast to Christianity, Allah does not love human beings until they show themselves worthy.

If you love Allah then follow me. Allah will love you and forgive your faults, and Allah is forgiving, merciful. Say: Obey Allah and the Apostle; but if they turn back, then surely Allah does not love the unbelievers. Qur'an 3:31,32

Perhaps someone could say that this means that Allah does not like it when people choose not to follow his way. The Bible does tell us that God does not like the way of the unrighteous. But **nowhere in the Qur'an do we see the kind of intentional reaching down** to save those who are still living in sin.

In Islam it is, "Obey Allah and he will love you."

Basically, in Islam at the Day of Judgement, a person's good and bad deeds will be weighed. If the good deeds are higher, they have a good chance of being admitted to paradise.

But those who believe and do righteous good deeds, and believe in that which is sent down to Muhammad – for it is the truth from their Lord – he will expiate from them their sins, and will make good their state...O you who believe! If you help Allah, he will help you, and make your foothold firm. Qur'an 47:2,7

How it Works:

*And we have created man, and we know what his own self whispers to him. And we are near to him than his jugular vein. The **two receivers** receive, one sitting on the right and one on the left. Not a word does he utter but there is a watcher by him ready.*

Qur'an 50:16-18

The "two receivers" are **two angels designated to record deeds**, one for good and one for bad deeds. On the Day of Judgement:

*That Day it will declare its information because your Lord will inspire it. That Day mankind will proceed in scattered groups that they may be **shown their deeds**. So whosoever does good equal to the weight of an atom shall see it. And whosoever does evil equal to the weight of an atom shall see it.* Qur'an 99:4-8

Is there assurance of salvation in Islam?

No! Even Mohammed said,

*I am not a new thing among the messengers, nor do I know what will be done with me or you.
I only follow that which is revealed to me, and I am but a plain warner.*

Qur'an 46:9

In our work with Muslims we have often heard, “**No one goes to paradise apart from the Mercy of Allah.**” This statement has surprised Christians with its similarity to the God of the Bible. But the basis of the mercy is different.

The mercy claim reflects Mohammed’s words in the Qur’anic verse above, and in hadiths from the authentic collections of Sahih al Bukhari and Sahih Muslim. For example,

A'isha, the wife of Allah's Apostle reported that Allah's Messenger used to say:
Observe moderation and if you fail to observe it perfectly, try to do as much as you can do and be happy for none would be able to get into Paradise because of his deeds alone. They said: Allah's Messenger, not even you? Thereupon he said: Not even I, but that Allah wraps me in His Mercy.
Sahih Muslim

So, even if you have an abundance of good deeds, Allah may decide against you. Or, if Allah takes a fancy to you, he might let you into paradise with few good deeds. Although Islam talks much of the mercy of Allah, you might consider that **Allah’s mercy is a “wild card,”** something that is not consistent. Even the greatest Muslim did not know if in the end Allah’s mercy would save him.

Example of a Muslim explanation for Mohammed’s insecurity:

When presented with Mohammed’s insecurity of his final fate, Muslims have told Dr. C, “Of course Mohammed will be in paradise. He was just being humble.”

This “humility” comes from a salvation based on human effort. Mohammed, they let us know, was reluctant to brag about the weight of his good deeds.

What role does humility plays if salvation is based on God/Allah? Christians have no need of false humility. We don’t need to say, “I’m not sure if I’m good enough to get into heaven,” or “I don’t know if God is merciful enough to save me.”

By way of contrast, we know that **God Jehovah’s mercy is reliable.** Our salvation is based neither on either our goodness nor the whim of God. It is based on the sincerity and honesty of God’s character, and his word. As it says in the book of Hebrews in the New Testament,

It is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.

Hebrews 6:18-19

According to Islam can non-Muslims be Saved?

Strictly speaking, according to the Qur’an in Surah 4:48, if you believe in Jesus as your Savior, you cannot be forgiven. As mentioned elsewhere, Dr. C attended an Islamic seminar in which they said if you die with a cross on you have NO CHANCE of forgiveness and paradise, for you have committed the unforgiveable sin.

However, in general practice you will likely find that the average Muslim is not so strict in this interpretation. They will talk about good deeds and Allah's mercy. They might feel that Muslims have a much better chance at mercy; but except for very strict ones Muslims will not likely tell you to your face that you are going to hell unless you offend them.

Sunnis respect good deeds. They have told us that they admire how our people live and serve God.

Shiites have told us, "On the Day of Judgement Mohammed will take his people to paradise with him, Ali and Hussein the Shiites, and Jesus the Christians."

Old Testament and Islamic Righteousness: Similarities and Differences

Those of you familiar with the Bible might notice similarities between the Muslim and Old Testament views of righteousness, and the way faith was viewed and practiced before Jesus. These similarities are used to support the Muslim claim that they are simply returning to the eternal faith that God revealed to all of his prophets, and which has never changed. But there are also important differences.

SIMILARITIES Between Islam and the Old Testament:

- Similarities exist between **what was considered righteous** in the Old Testament and what Islam says. For example,
 - *Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God.* Genesis 6:9
 - *Job. This man was blameless and upright. He feared God and shunned evil.*
Job 1:1
 - *Mankind, he has told you what is good and what it is the Lord requires of you: to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.* Micah 6:8
- Similarities also exist in the **importance of religious law in daily life**: like the Law of Moses, Mohammed also brought a complicated law which covered every aspect of life.

DIFFERENCES Between Islam and the Old Testament:

- **The BASIS** upon which forgiveness of sins is given.
 - In Islam it is because, as is announced in the opening of nearly every surah (chapter or book) of the Qur'an, Allah is *merciful and compassionate*.
 - In the Bible, God is merciful and compassionate too. BUT he is also **just**. He cannot simply forgive and forget. That is **why blood sacrifice is required**. For the Bible characters before Jesus animal sacrifices were made to show the serious nature of sin, and to foreshadow the final sacrifice of God himself through Jesus.
- **Faith in their specific PROPHET is required in Islam**. The statement of faith and descriptive verses of what is required for Islamic paradise include the name of the Prophet Mohammed.

- Simply **believing in Allah is not enough**. You must ALSO believe in Allah's Prophet Mohammed and follow Mohammed's teachings.
- **None of the prophets of the Old Testament made such a claim**. Adding the prophet's name as an essential component of faith and salvation is way out of keeping with the Old Testament and its emphasis on total devotion to ONE God.
 - This can be used as a challenge to the Muslim claim that they are simply following in the steps of all the prior prophets of God. Their creed proves that they are not.
- It is more in keeping with "**cults**" which elevate respect for the leader the level of God and/or his holy books.
- Note: The important exception in the Bible is Jesus Christ.

*Jesus answered, I am the way, the truth, and the life.
No one comes to the father except through me. John 14:6*

But Jesus was **God in the flesh**, not merely a prophet, so he could claim this.

- **Extent of LOVE and compassion**. In the Old Testament, although God speaks against and hates the way of the wicked (Psalm 1), he loves everyone and everything. We say that he, "hates the sin, but loves the sinner."

The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all that he has made. Psalm 145:9

- **PROPHECY**. The Old Testament prophecies prepared the people for acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah, final sacrifice, and Savior.
 - Over time, these predictions became clearer and clearer.
 - This idea of progressive revelation, meaning that more information about God and his plan was revealed by prophets over time, is not present in Islam.
 - It is through the prophecies that Jesus' claims and actions were validated during his lifetime, and now after. In John 5, Jesus pointed to them as one of the top three reasons we should believe him.

Islam claims that every prophet came with the same message.

- Knowing that Islam does not have or recognize these prophecies of Jesus, it is easier to understand why it does not accept the true Jesus, but made up its own.
- **Salvation through INTERCESSORS** is a process accepted by Shia Islam. By acts of devotion, Shia Muslims hope to gain merit from their saints and martyrs to be taken to heaven. They make pilgrimages to the tombs of Shiite saints in Iraq and Iran. Also:
 - **Ashura**. At times Shiite attempts to gain favor with their saints involves beating and cutting themselves, in ways which remind us of the priests of Baal on Mount Carmel (I Kings 18:28). This especially happens at their commemorative holiday of Ashura. You can

find many pictures of this on the internet, for example with bloody parades. Parents even cut their children so that their blood will attract the attention of their saints.

- **Hussainiyas**, named after Mohammed's grandson who was killed by Sunni, these buildings are for commemoration of him. The mournful ceremonies conducted there usually breed hatred for Sunnis.

However, at times they can open the eyes of Shiite Muslims. One Shiite who eventually left Islam told Dr. C that the rituals of mourning and self-beating in the Hussainiyas seemed pointless, and did not seem from God.

This reliance on intercessors accounts for why **Iranians**, who are mostly Shiite, are coming to Christ rapidly, probably the fastest of any Muslim group. Since they already have the concept of intercession, it is a much smaller step for them to accept Jesus Christ as their true intercessor than it is for Sunnis.

- Although **Sunnis** claim not to believe in intercessors, their sources describe early Muslims wearing Mohammed's saliva on their clothes, and drinking his urine to gain merit for paradise. To Christians, this seems an idolatrous form of adoration and intercession.
- **Christians' only mediator is God in the flesh, Jesus Christ.**

*For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind,
the man Christ Jesus. II Timothy 2:5*

- Since Shiite Muslims accept intercessors our challenge is getting them to see that ONLY Jesus Christ, God in human flesh, can intercede for humans.
- Sunni Muslims consider Shiite practices with intercessors to be heresy, nearly as bad as believing that Jesus intercedes for Christians. They call it *shirk*; the worst sin possible because it gives God a partner in salvation.

Verily, Allah forgives not that partners should be set up with him, but he forgives except that to whom he wills: and whoever sets up partners with Allah in worship, he has indeed invented a tremendous sin. Qur'an 4:48

It is so sad, and we would say *ironic*, that
the unforgiveable sin in Islam, is the only way to heaven.

- Our challenge with Sunni Muslims is getting them to accept an intercessor – God himself in human flesh as Jesus Christ.

Example of a Strange Muslim Request for Intercession:

On discovering that Jesus was the Savior and the only way to heaven, a saddened Shiite asked Dr. C,

“On the Day of Judgement will you intercede for me?”

This reflects the Shiite reliance on intercessors, yet a reluctance to accept Jesus as their Savior. Let us pray that more and more Muslims come to see that Jesus Christ is their only intercessor.

- **Salvation through Hajj.** One of the 5 Pillars of Islam is to make a pilgrimage to Mecca once during their lifetime. Some do it more often than that.
(Note: Although during the Middle Ages Catholic Christians believed that pilgrimage was a way to forgiveness of sins, with the Reformation and return to the Bible, that practice fell into disfavor.)
 - During hajj, it is believed that walking around the *Kaaba* monument takes away one's sins and makes them as if they were newborn. If a Muslim dies immediately after that act, theoretically all their sins are gone and their effort has gained them paradise.
 - Muslims are blind to see how this – saving themselves through their effort – **makes themselves partners with Allah in their salvation**, and is *shirk*.
 - We reasonably explain to them that hajj is shirk. Christians do not shirk: Since Jesus Christ saves us, and he is God in the flesh, only God saves us. We do not make a partner with God in our salvation. They do.

**Contrary to Muslims' claim,
it is not Christians who shirk, but Muslims themselves.**

- In the appropriate setting, who shirks is a good conversation to have with Muslims.
- **Salvation through JIHAD** warfare is a concept in Islam which does not exist in the Bible. This means of salvation supports the spread of Islam by the sword.

In contrast, although battles are recorded in the Bible, neither Moses, nor Jesus, nor any Biblical prophet taught either of these two important teachings of Islam: spreading faith by force, or that fighting cancels sins.

- Spread Islam by force:

*Fight and slay the pagans where ever you find them, and capture them and besiege them, and lie in wait for them in every ambush...Fight them until there is no more disbelief and the religion will all be for Allah alone... **If you march not forth, he will punish** you by a painful torment and will replace you with another people.*

Qur'an 9:5, 29 & 8:39 & 9:39

- Paradise for fighting:

*Oh you who believe, shall I guide you to a trade that will save you from painful torment? That you believe in Allah and his messenger and that you strive hard and fight in the cause of Allah with your wealth and your lives, that will be better for you if you but know. **He will forgive your sins and admit you to Gardens** under which rivers flow, and pleasant dwellings in Eden Paradise; that indeed is great success.*

Qur'an 61:10-12

- According to a hadith of *at-Tirmidhi*, if you die in jihad you will not only go to paradise to receive the blessings we described above, but in addition you will receive a crown of jewels, enjoy 72 virgins, and intercede for 70 relatives.

FAITH and WORKS

In the video lesson, former Muslim Huda asks,

“What is the purpose of good deeds if Jesus paid for our sins?”



Jesus died for our sins. Salvation is the gift of God. If salvation truly is a free gift and we don't earn it through works, why should we be good?

Dr. C tells us that she respects how hard the Muslims work hoping to please God. But they can't be perfect. No one is. We cannot save ourselves.

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Romans 3:23

(Note: Because she is teaching Huda, an Arab, Dr. C occasionally uses the Arabic words. But she repeats them in English.)

Example of a Muslim Who Claimed to be Perfect:

Once after a women's study group that Dr. C attended at a mosque, she got into a discussion with the leader, Sarah. When Dr. C tried to explain that God had made a way to take away our sin, Sarah became angry.

“No!” she said forcefully, “I am not a sinner. Since I was a little girl I have been reciting the Qur'an. I don't need a savior!”

Are We Righteous through Good Deeds?

What a sad attitude Sarah had! She does not see her need for a savior because of points from her Islamic rituals. This is one of the problems with good works. Good works bring pride. Sarah's pride will keep her from God's gift of salvation. Pray for Sarah and others like her.

In Islam, you are taught that you receive good deed points for every letter you read or recite in the Qur'an, for your prayers, for giving alms, and for any other good deed. One Imam even told Dr. C that Allah gives good deed points for having sex with your spouse!

After attending many Islamic meetings, and talking with many Muslim leaders like him, Dr. C came to view see the intensity of the point system in Islam as similar to the point system of Eastern Religions. **Points, points, points!** Everything you do gives you good or bad points toward the Day of Judgement in one, or reincarnation in the other.

Is Life a Game?

QUESTION: Do Muslims and Eastern Religions think that life simply a game in which you try to “level up” in the next form of existence?

ANSWER: Actually, we have heard views like that from the practitioners themselves.

Examples of Life as a Game:

- Muslims commonly say that “Life is a test.” How well we perform here determines our eternal destiny.

- A follower of the Dalai Lama, the head of Tibetan Buddhism, told Dr. C that life is like a game where you use up your merit – money even – from your past life until it is all gone. Then “game over!”
 - That, Dr. C was told, is probably what happened to Princess Diana when she died in an accident in Paris. She had used up all of her merit from her past life.
 - This view is meant to encourage sober awareness and discourage extravagance. However, it certainly leads to a consciousness of works.

Islam has so many laws that it keeps Muslims busy trying to fulfil them all. You can see how they might get the impression that all the rituals and works they do will make up for their bad deeds.

But that is not what the Bible says,

There is not one righteous, not even one. Romans 3:10 (and Ecclesiastes 7:20)

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. Isaiah 53:6

God’s Standard is Perfection

Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. Matthew 5:48

If we go to court for breaking a law, the fact that we kept most of the other laws will not take away our guilt for the one broken. If we say, “Well, I may be here for drunk driving; but I haven’t driven drunk since then, and I didn’t even run a stop sign on the way here!” will the judge be impressed?

God’s standard is perfection. Does this mean that God does not care if we are good? No! He is happy when we are good. But we can never be good enough to deserve eternal life. By explaining it this way, we do not insult Muslims’ attempts to do good deeds.

- We do not deny that the existence of their deeds. We simply point out that they are not enough. We fall short of God’s standard. (In fact, *falling short* of the target is the origin of the word sin.)
- Saying this prevents the presentation of the gospel from being sidetracked into what deeds are best, and whether Christians or Muslims have more good deeds.

Be aware that **the Muslim concept of sin, *hateya*, is different than that in the Bible.** Under certain situations murder, adultery, sexual immorality, pedophilia, theft, violence, destruction, harassment, rape, cursing and hatred are all not only acceptable, but promoted. So sin in Islam is less a matter of true moral guilt, than of not playing by the rules of the game.

Armed with these insights now, you see how it can be difficult for a Muslim to accept salvation through faith Christ.

- You can understand how, after years or decades of hard work, it would be very, very hard to believe that it is all in vain, and to accept God’s grace through Jesus.
- This loss might be considered an “opportunity cost” of this change, meaning that they may be reluctant to trade their handful of hope for the limitless blessings of Christ.

Message from Rev. Bob Siegel on Faith and Works

Bob explains that works and religious rituals, will not save us.

*Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point
is guilty of breaking the whole law. James 2:10*

Bob says that the essence of our relationship with God is that he is going to rule in our hearts and we are going to obey him.

Bob's Example of the Unwanted Gift:

Bob asks, what if he wants to give you a watch, but he can tell by the look on your face that you don't want it? Then he does not want to give it. Likewise, if we do not want the special relationship that God offers us, he will not give it to us. We must choose to accept it.

The Gift of God is: a relationship with him that begins in this life, but continues through all of eternity. Heaven and hell are consequences of our decision. But we must decide if we will turn from our sins and let him make us into the kind of the person God wants to be.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness," not just heaven. Christians should want to live godly lives.

Rev. Bob says we can show our desire to be saved and follow Jesus by praying,

Lord, I turn from my sin. I need salvation through the cross of Jesus. I need the Holy Spirit in my life to give me the desire and power to obey you.

It is our decision to accept in faith the process which will help us become obedient to what God wants us to be.

Muslims Ask: So Why Do Christians Have to Be Good?

QUESTION: In the video, Dr. C asks Rev. Bob how he answers this Muslim criticism,

*"Since Jesus saves you, Christians don't have to be good.
Christians can do anything because God forgives them. So God isn't really just."*

ANSWER: How does Bob answer that? Actually, Bob has written a book on it. He shares the fact that the Greek language has different (fewer) words. So one word has more than one meaning. For example, in John 3:16,

... that whoever believes in him should not perish...

The word translated as "believe" in English, in Greek does not only mean intellectual belief. **Believe also means trust, cling to, rely upon, adhere to, essentially to obey.** That does not mean that we are saved by works. We will never be worthy. And we need the Holy Spirit to help us obey.

What is the Purpose of Christian Good Deeds?

QUESTION: You may ask, “So, if our good deeds do not save us, do they have a PURPOSE or are they just worthless exercises?”

ANSWER: Yes! They have several purposes –

1. They bring salvation to other people:

God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. I Corinthians 1:21

2. They bring glory to God:

Let your light so shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. Matthew 5:16

Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. I Peter 2:12

3. They show that God is with us:

By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. John 13:35

Whoever lives by truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done through God. John 3:20

4. They will gain eternal rewards for the believer, making heaven a richer experience:

God is not unjust; he will not forget your work. Hebrews 6:10a

The righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Matthew 13:43

Those who are wise will shine like the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness like the stars for ever and ever. Daniel 12:3

Use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings. Luke 16:9

Balancing Faith and Works

How do we live our lives balancing faith and works, and grace and deeds?

How do we avoid the extremes of living:

- any way we want
- or in fear that we must be perfect?

We need to recognize that **We are not saved BY good works, but FOR good works.**

Right after Paul tells the Ephesians that they are saved by God’s grace, not works and have no reason to boast, he says,

*For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus **to do good works,** which God prepared in advance for us to do. Ephesians 2:10*

And to Titus he said,

*He gave his life to free us from every kind of sin, to cleanse us, and to make us his very own people, **totally committed to doing good deeds.** Titus 2:14 NLT*

If someone truly is saved, you will see an eagerness to do good works.

Living by Grace versus Living by Works

Hannah Whitall Smith was married to Robert Pearsall Smith, a famous evangelist of the 19th century. He was very dramatic and popular, and a faith healer. By contrast, Hannah was down to earth and sensible. Eventually, when the miracles became less her husband started to lose faith. This however had no impact on Hannah, because her faith was based on God and his promises, not miracles.

In the long run, because of Hannah's sound **reliance on God's promises, and her clear and simple** way of explaining theological concepts, it was her faith that left the greater Christian legacy to the world. Several of her books are Christian classics, and highly recommended as reading for serious Christians.

Believe your beliefs and doubt your doubts.

Is one of her simple proverbs. She pointed out how few people really live out what they claim to believe. We should step out in faith upon what we say we believe. That is the way to see God work.

Hannah was part of the Keswick movement in England which was influenced by John Wesley. It encourages Christians not to stop at salvation, but to go on to holiness and the **Higher Life** of sanctification. Many great Christian workers like Hudson Taylor, Amy Carmichael and Billy Graham were part of the movement. Hannah emphasized along with the movement that,

"You died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God." Colossians 3:3

Her teaching emphasized trusting and doing, without relying on our works and self-righteousness.

This chart, which contrasts the difference between living by works and living by grace, is adapted from Hannah's most popular book, *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life*, published in 1870.

Living by WORKS

Living by GRACE

<i>Do and you will live</i>	<i>Live and then you will do</i>
<i>Pay what you owe</i>	<i>I forgive you all</i>
<i>The wages of sin is death</i>	<i>The free gift of God is eternal life</i>
<i>Demands holiness</i>	<i>Gives holiness</i>
<i>Demands the service of a slave</i>	<i>Wins the loving service of a child</i>
<i>Blessings a result of obedience</i>	<i>Obedience a result of blessings</i>

Or, as another wise Christian said about GRACE,

Most of the problems with Christians are the result of not fully accepting God's grace, or not giving it to others.

We agree. We need to live in the freedom of not needing to earn God's grace, and we need to give it to our fellow beings.

Back to Huda's Bible Lesson on Faith and Works

The Bible tells us,

Whoever claims to live in Jesus must walk as Jesus walked. I John 2:6

Jesus told us that not everyone who claims to be his really is, only **those who follow his teachings** (Matthew 7:21).

In Genesis (*Taqueen* in Arabic), Abraham believed God and his faith was counted as righteousness. His faith was so strong, that he was even willing to sacrifice his son. Muslims celebrate this day as the Feast of the Sacrifice, *Eid al Adha*. (Genesis 15:6 & 22:12, James 2:18-24).

The book of **James** in the New Testament talks a lot about the relationship of faith and works. The author, James the brother of Jesus bluntly says,

Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead... As the body is dead without the spirit, so faith without works is dead. James 2:17, 26

James points out that people may say that they have faith, but without works, how can they prove it? On the other hand, someone who says, "I have faith, and here are my works," can prove it.

Belief alone is not enough, says James,

You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder!
James 2:19

Paul's Parable of the Building and the Fire

In I Corinthians 3:10-13, the Apostle Paul tells us that the foundation of the Christian life is Christ. We can build on that perishable things like wood, stubble, or hay. Or we can choose to build on it gold, silver, or precious stones. He says our works will be tried as with fire. If Christ is our foundation we may be saved, but as if escaping a fire with virtually nothing.

In the video lesson we illustrate this using a rock with a central hole, called a geode, as a foundation. Huda illustrates building upon this by putting sticks and gold inside of the geode.

This is the meaning:

Foundation –	Christ
Building with wood, stubble, and hay –	Worldly and selfish deeds
Gold, silver, and precious stones –	Good deeds
Fire –	Day of Judgement

Example of Applying the Parable of the Burning Building:

For years, Dr. C had felt burdened with guilt for all the religious deeds she could not accomplish because she was so busy with her work as a doctor and her family. She knew that she was saved by faith in Jesus, but she felt she was not keeping up with Christian works.

At an important moment in her life, Dr. C came to see the positive side of this passage. It became a blessing! Works turned **from a guilty negative to a happy positive**. They became the carrot rather than the stick.

WHY? The mistakes and bad deeds are not held against us. Upon judgement they will burn up and be forgotten. But whatever good we do, however little or however much, will be preserved. Does that encourage you also to do good deeds?

So, what are the kind of good deeds that would be gold, silver, and precious stones? In the video lesson, Dr. C and Huda read Galatians 5:13-14,

*You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the **entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command**: "Love your neighbor as yourself."*

Another way of looking at is expressed by Paul in I Corinthians 6:12,

"I have the right to do anything," you say – but not everything is beneficial. "I have the right to do anything" – but I will not be mastered by anything.

Dr. C says this is the way we **balance** our gift of freedom with works:

We should use our freedom to love and serve others.

Since our salvation is secure, **we don't need to spend our lives focused on ourselves and our good works list**. No! Since we don't need to worry about that, we can focus on living for God.

*For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live **should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again**. II Corinthians 5:14-15*

HOW? As we discuss elsewhere, before Jesus ascended to heaven, **he gave us primarily two commands:**

1. Love one another –

Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. John 13:34

2. Share the gospel –

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. Matthew 28:19, 20

Jesus said, *Freely you have received, freely give.* Matthew 10:8

In many countries, Christians are in trouble for sharing the gospel. They are in jail or killed for it. Yet they do it to obey Jesus and live a life of love.

Many of us are tempted to live a Small Story – only for ourselves and our families – rather than as part of Jesus' Big Story. The secret of how we can live for him was given to us by Jesus after the Last Supper. **The Parable of the Vine.**

*I am the vine; you are the branches. **If you remain in me and I in you,** you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.* John 15:5

Dr. C says she is surprised by the power of abiding in Christ. Sometimes people ask her how she does what she does. She answers that it is not so much that she is trying, but that Jesus does it when we let the Holy Spirit live in us.

*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but **Christ lives in me.** The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.* Galatians 2:20

Dr. C summarizes:

- The old way was to obey the law
- The new way is to live a life of love through the Holy Spirit

Guaranteed Salvation

The video lesson did not get around to explaining this, but there is another great benefit of being a Christian: assurance of our salvation. In Islam, **Muslims never know for certain if their works are enough to get them to paradise.**

Praise God! Our salvation does not depend on us. Our salvation depends on God's work, his truth, and his character. That takes a lot of pressure off of us.

As with all theology, there is a variety of opinion in the church about how secure eternal security is. Most Christians believe that once and if you truly believe, you are forever saved. Jesus said,

I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish;

no one will snatch them out of my hand. John 10:28

His disciple John said it this way,

*These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God,
so that you may know that you have eternal life.* I John 5:13

The Apostle Paul tells us that we are sealed,

*In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation –
having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise,
who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to
the praise of His glory.* Ephesians 1:13,14

Some churches believe that if you really turn your back on Jesus, if you seriously no longer want him, he will not force himself on you. You are not snatched, you leave. He will let you leave. Most say that if you do this, you were never truly a believer in the first place.

As a neutral stance, one famous preacher said,

“I believe in eternal security, but I live like I don't.”

That meant that he was not going to live just anyway, in the flesh. No. He would stay close enough to the Lord that he could point to his works as evidence of his faith.

Christmas Celebration

Neither Jesus nor the Bible says we must celebrate Christmas. The tradition was set by Christians long after Jesus returned to heaven.

Sometimes Muslims will criticize Christians for celebrating Christmas and Easter, and point out that we do not even know for certain when those events occurred. We do not need to get defensive over this. We can agree with them. We do not need to celebrate these holidays. A few branches of Christianity even avoid it.

Jesus did not command that we commemorate these important events in his life. He only asked us to remember him with the Communion Service, or Eucharist.

One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. Romans 14:5

This verse gives us freedom as to whether or not we celebrate these – and other – holidays. Most Christians want to celebrate special days like Christmas and Easter, so we do. The exact day that we do it on does not matter. Those in liturgical denominations celebrate more holy days, as a way to remember and teach events in the Bible and church history.

(Note: Liturgical churches follow set readings and events through the calendar year. These include: Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran, Anglican, and some others.)

Christian Childhood Christmas

To close the video lesson, Dr. Cynthia stands in front of the Christmas tree that she and Huda decorated. She tells us about her experience of Christmases growing up, explaining especially to any Muslims watching, that Christmas for Christian children is magical. They love the scent of Christmas trees and cookies, the bright lights and receiving presents. (*Eid al Fitr*, the feast which ends Ramadan brings excitement something like this for Muslim children.)

But through all of this celebration, she says, the truth of Christmas starts to come through: Jesus Christ came from God into the world. He came to save us and to teach us how to live!

**This indeed is the Greatest possible Gift and is worthy of celebrating –
at Christmas, and every day!**

(Note: We discuss more about Christmas, its significance, and its symbols in our study guide and *Lesson on Christmas: God Becomes Man and is Three in One.*)

Scripture References for this Lesson:

Unless otherwise stated, New International Version is used. Some are New Living Translation.

II Corinthians 5:17 & 9:14	Matthew 5:16 & 13:43
Romans 3:23 & 6:23 & 5:8 & 3:10	I Peter 2:2
Ephesians 2:8-10 & 1:13-14	John 13:35
Revelation 21, 22	Hebrews 6:10a
Genesis 15:6 & 6:9	Daniel 12:3
Hebrews 6:18-19	Luke 16:9
Job 1:1	Titus 2:14
Micah 6:8	Colossians 3:3
John 3:16, 20 & 13:35 & 14:6	Matthew 28:19,20 & 10:8
Psalms 1 & 145:9	John 15:5 & 10:28 & 5:16-47
I Kings 18:28	Galatians 2:20
II Timothy 2:5	I John 5:13
I Corinthians 6:12	Matthew 7:21
Isaiah 53:6	Genesis 22:12
Matthew 5:48	James 2:18-24
James 2:10, 17, 26, 29	II Corinthians 5:14,15
I Corinthians 1:21	Romans 14:5

Islamic References:

Descriptions of Paradise: Qur'an 52:17-25 & 55:38-76
Allah only loves those who obey: Qur'an 3:31,32
Saved by works and faith in Mohammed: Qur'an 47:2,7
Angels record good and bad deeds: Qur'an 50:16-18
Good and bad deeds weighed at the Day of Judgement: Qur'an 99:4-8
Giving Allah a partner in salvation is the unforgiveable sin in Islam: Qur'an 4:48
Fighting in battle for forgiveness of sins: Qur'an 61:10-12
Rewards for martyr: *Jami at-Tirmidhi* (Book on the Virtues of Jihad, Regarding Rewards for the Martyr online at Sunnah.com)
Mohammed unsure of his eternal destiny: Qur'an 46:9 and hadiths

Sahih Muslim 2818 (also vol 4 p 318, no 78 in Sahih Muslim's "Book of Description of the Day of Judgement" by Dar al-Kotob Al-illmiyah, Beirut Lebanon)

Note: as in other lessons, although our examples are true, for safety we change the names of the people involved.

Study Questions:

1. In the opening reality segment of the video we see gifts being exchanged. Former Muslim Huda asks why we exchange gifts at Christmas?
 - What did Dr. C answer?
 - How would you answer that question?
 - Can you think of a way that you could use Christmas gifts or another holiday activity to share the gospel with:
 - Muslims that you know
 - Someone else that you know who does not know or accept the gospel?
2. Regarding salvation, what is the main difference between Christianity and every other religion, including Islam?
 - Give a Bible verse to support salvation through faith.
 - Give an example of the way to salvation in any other religion that you know.
3. In Islam,
 - What is paradise like?
 - How does it differ from heaven?
 - How does one get to paradise?
4. What is the gift of God?
 - How do we receive the gift?
 - What is the basis of the gift?
 - What does Bob Siegel say about salvation?
5. Regarding good works, which religion tends to say,
 - We are saved BY good works – Christianity or Islam?
 - We are saved FOR good works – Christianity or Islam?
6. The next time a Muslim challenges you that Christians can sin all they want because Jesus died for their sin, how will you answer?
7. If we are saved by God's grace, what are the purposes of good works?
 - Name at least 2 purposes, and
 - give scripture references
8. Do Christians have assurance that they are going to heaven?
 - Give a Bible verse to support your position.
 - Can Muslims be sure that Islam will get them to paradise?
 - If you were saved as an adult, was this assurance part of what appealed to you?
9. Hannah Whitall Smith wrote classic books on Christian living.
 - Her life experiences helped her relate to others. What experiences of yours might help you explain some concept of today's lesson?

- What from her chart on living through grace versus living by works particularly struck you.
- Hannah's circle desired and worked towards holy living.
 - What do you think might be good about seeing life this way?
 - Can you see any disadvantages?

10. This study guide gave you several examples of Muslim thinking about faith and works.

- Which example(s) especially struck you and why?

11. The lesson ends with a description of how Christmas feels for Christian children.

- What holiday excited you the most when you were a child?
- Dr. C says although most of the Christmas festivities are secular, the meaning of Christmas starts coming through. What do you think this means?
- What might you say to a Muslim, or other critic of Christianity the next time they point out that:
 - It is pagan to celebrate Christmas?
 - We don't know when Jesus was born so it is fake to celebrate it?

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