

# **The Way To Heaven**

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## **The Difference Between Islam and Christianity**

**By Thomas W. Bear**



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## **Similarities between Christians and Muslims**

Christians believe the Bible is God's authoritative Word to man. They read it and study it because they believe it is true and reliable. Muslims consider the Koran to be their holy book. Many stories in the Bible are also in the Koran but usually with some variation. For example, to the Muslim, when Abraham was told to sacrifice his son, he took Ishmael up to the mountain, not Isaac. But much of the story line of that event is intact.

This book focuses on what I consider to be the main difference between Islam and the biblical message- the way to heaven. But before we examine that, let me state that there are some beliefs that Christians and Muslims have in common.

- They both claim that there is one God.
- They both consider the God of Abraham to be their God.
- They both consider that this God created all things and that He rules over all creation.
- They both believe that Mary (Miriam) conceived Jesus miraculously while a virgin
- They both believe the story about Noah and the ark.
- They both believe God gave many commandments through Moses.

There are others, but these are given merely to inform the reader that Muslims and Christians do have some beliefs in common.

## Two opposing views about “the way to heaven”<sup>1</sup>

Though the Koran includes many stories that are found in the Bible, they teach completely opposing ways to heaven. The two opposing teachings about the way to heaven flow out of different understandings of God and man.

### The foundational difference: A different understanding of God

If you ask a Muslim, “Do you believe that God is perfectly righteous?” he will say, “Yes!” But his understanding of the description “perfectly righteous” does not line up with what the Bible teaches about God’s absolute righteousness. To see the difference, you can ask the same Muslim to explain how a man can receive forgiveness from God. He will say something like, “If a man asks God for forgiveness and stops sinning, God can forgive him.” Most Muslims, and in fact most people, do not realize that according to the Bible, God cannot forgive this way. I realize that this statement may seem shocking. But I make it purposely to draw your attention to a foundational truth taught in the Bible that I will now attempt to explain.

According to the Bible, because God is absolutely perfect in His righteousness, each and every sin must be punished because He is a God of perfect righteousness. *“The LORD is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him” (Psalm 92:15)* This makes it impossible for sinful beings to dwell in His presence. *“You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness” (Habakkuk 1:13 NKJV)*. He cannot judge according to human standards, He cannot accept plea bargains. *“For the LORD your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality nor take a bribe” (Deuteronomy 10:17)*.

Every human being has broken God’s laws. In other words, we are guilty of breaking the laws that God gave to us. The Bible says that though God desires to be merciful, He cannot violate His own perfect righteousness by excusing those who are guilty. *“The LORD will by no means leave the guilty unpunished” (Nahum 1:3)*. He cannot overlook our sin. It has to be punished. This is not only true for what some people call “big sins,” it is true for sins that everyone has committed at some time or another. For example, Jesus said that if we call someone a fool, we are guilty enough to go to hell. *“You have heard that the ancients were told, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER’ and ‘Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.’ ‘But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell” (Matthew 5:21-22)*. (Emphasis mine)

When I explain these things to Muslims, they often respond by saying something like, “God is all merciful and because He is God, He can do anything He wants to do, including forgive sins.” While this is how Muslims think about God, the Bible teaches that He cannot do anything that would violate His own HOLY essence. It teaches that in order to forgive, God made a way to do so while still punishing the sin.

While Christians believe that God is merciful and wants to forgive, they insist that God cannot violate His own righteousness in the process. This different view of God is the foundational difference between Islam and the teaching of the Bible. The Muslim’s view of God enables the

belief that as long as a person's good outweighs his bad, God can forgive their "mistakes" and accept him into His presence. This understanding of "the way to heaven" is completely different and in fact, opposite to the biblical teaching on the subject.

### **Another major difference: A different view of man**

Muslims believe that all people are born with a clean slate (no sin) and have the opportunity while on earth to do good or bad. They consider this time to be a test to prove their obedience to God. They believe that the world is comprised of both "good" and "bad" people. If you ask a Muslim if he is a sinner, he will normally answer something like, "Of course I am sinner. Nobody is perfect." Muslims refer to sins as "mistakes." Having been taught to think this way, they have difficulty comprehending the detestable nature of sin before a Holy God. The fact that everyone "makes mistakes" serves as an excuse. Having this moving target, they fall into thinking that in some way, God grades on a curve. In their minds, some people fall below grade and are considered bad. Since they have not been taught that God must punish each and every sin, they hope God will weigh their good deeds against their bad deeds and when He does, He will find them acceptable and forgive their "mistakes." Like all people, they subconsciously compare themselves against other people and conclude that they are not as bad as most people. Yet, they also believe that in spite of any goodness they may have accumulated, God may still reject them. In addition, many (but not all) Muslims believe that everyone will still have to spend some time in hell or place of punishment before they are accepted into paradise. All of these teachings stacked up together buffer the Muslim from comprehending the weight of his sin and its ugliness before the Holy God. Since the holiness of God is such an important, yet misunderstood subject, further explanation is provided in [Appendix 1: The Holiness of God](#).

In contrast to the Muslim view, the Bible teaches that God deserves and commands that we love and obey Him with all our heart, with all our soul and with all our mind, ALL OF THE TIME, CONTINUALLY and PERFECTLY. When we fail to obey Him even in the smallest sin, we betray Him. We rob Him of the love/obedience He deserves and commands.

God deserves and has the right to command perfect obedience from a heart of love every second of our life. The Bible teaches that God created us and provided everything we need to exist all the days of our lives. He gives us each breath we take. We assume that food, water and shelter are things we provide for ourselves. While this may be true in some respect, God insists that He is ultimately the one who is providing the opportunity for us to get what we need to live. *Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground--everything that has the breath of life in it--I give every green plant for food. (Genesis 1:29&30)".* We take for granted the air we breathe but the Bible says that it is a gift from God. *This is what God the LORD says--He who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and all that comes out of it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it (Isaiah 42:5).* Since God created us and is the one who keeps us alive, and because He is God, He has the right to expect us to love Him with all of our being, perfectly, all of the time! This is why the Law says, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deuteronomy 6:5). The Bible teaches that if we fail to do so, we are wicked in God's sight no matter how we appear in comparison to other people.

Under this absolute demand for obedience, if a man commits just one sin in all his life, he has failed to love/obey God with all his heart and is considered unacceptable and unclean before the Holy God. For example, if just once, he looks at a woman (not his wife) with desire in his heart, he has failed to love/obey God with all his heart and is considered to be an adulterer in God's sight.<sup>2</sup> He has committed tyranny against the Almighty! If he lies just once in his life, he has disrespected the Mighty God and made himself unclean and unacceptable before Him.

In addition, the Bible teaches that all people are born with a driving desire to rule over their own lives and turn away from God.<sup>3</sup> It says that there is not even one person that is righteous in His sight. It says that no matter how religious a person might seem, he really does not seek Him. It teaches that all of us have turned away from Him rather than moving toward Him<sup>4</sup> and that our heart has a tendency towards violence and cursing.<sup>5</sup> It says that by nature, we do not know peace and we have not feared Him as the righteous judge who has given us life and preserved it.<sup>6</sup> It also teaches that no matter how many works of righteousness we attempt to do, they cannot make up for our uncleanness because the Bible teaches that any righteous act we do for the purpose of gaining acceptance by God is like filthy a rag in His sight.<sup>7</sup>

### **How can there be any hope?**

Most Muslims and in fact, most people, find this teaching unbelievable. Based upon this teaching by itself, God must and will cast all people into hell. After all, since all people fail to love/obey God as He deserves and since it is impossible for such sinful beings to dwell in the presence of the perfect, holy God, how can they have any hope? If God expects us to live in perfect obedience with a heart of love for Him every moment of our lives, how can there be any hope for us since none of us have lived that way? Before a person can completely comprehend the way to heaven described in the Bible, it is essential that he first understands what has been said so far. As an evangelist, I believe a person begins to comprehend this when they say something like, "So, based upon what you are saying....everyone is going to hell?" Such a question indicates to me that they are beginning to understand the biblical teaching about God and sinful man. Only after they understand these things are they then able to properly comprehend the good news of Jesus Christ.

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