

Gospel conversation transcript

The following conversation was with a Muslim university student named Hussein. In this conversation, I reasoned with Hussein about God's desire for righteous lives to show him that his level of righteousness is not acceptable to God.

Hussein considers himself to be a serious Muslim. Since he had talked with Scott's group on prior occasions, **I decided to start by talking about righteous living since most Christians don't seem to talk about that very much.** I said that if he is serious and is sincere with himself, he should not be satisfied with the level of righteousness that is being produced in his life. I said the Bible teaches that it is impossible to achieve a righteous life by trying to conform it to God's commandments. The typical religious approach holds up God's laws as the goal and motivation to live godly. Any person who attempts to keep God's laws as the way to a righteous life in his own strength will always fail. This includes any Christian who attempts it that way. But through Jesus' death, God's promise of remission of sins to those who trust in His work alone, God has made a way for Christians to be released from sin's bondage and live in newness of spirit rather than living according to the letter of the law. If I walk in the Spirit, I will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh.

He agreed that the flesh is always pulling us toward evil. But he said that God does not reward on the basis of actual results, but on our effort to live godly. I said the Bible teaches otherwise. God desires actual results, a righteous life. Jesus said that unless your righteousness exceeds that of the most holy Imam's (my paraphrase), you will not be in heaven. Hussein said, "So you believe that you should be able to judge whether a person is righteous based upon the degree of righteous acts in his life?" I quoted Jesus saying, "You shall know them by their fruits. A good tree will produce good fruit and a bad tree will produce rotten fruit."

Hussein then said that because God is merciful, He can forgive our sins. Then, we can continue trying to do righteous things. The way he explained this made it seem as if it is okay that our righteousness is lacking. His attitude reminded me of the mindset of Muslims that retort, "Everybody makes mistakes." In other words, no big deal, this is the way God made us.

I told him that this way of thinking ignores God's intense desire that people achieve actual righteousness in their life. God made a way for this to happen but only for those who come to Him through Jesus Christ. There is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. Because the condemnation is removed, that heavy burden is lifted. Now, I do the things that please God, not to get to heaven (Jesus paid already), but because I WANT to do them. He is in the process of increasing my love of righteousness and hatred of sin.

Hussein asked how the Christian deals with sin in his life when it occurs. What is that like? I told him that the true Christian is most miserable when sin enters his life because he hates sin and recognizes its destructive power and deception that can obscure his view toward God's glory.

Hussein kept coming back to the false notion that because God is merciful, he can simply forgive sin. I then explained that God's righteousness is absolute. Yes, He is merciful, but because He is absolute in His righteousness, he cannot forgive sin as Islam teaches. He must punish all sin. This is why Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life, no man may come to the father except through me." The sins had to be punished and God punished them upon Jesus when He died on the cross. Now, whoever stops leaning on his own righteousness and trusts solely in Jesus' righteous work receives remission of sins and eternal life.

Hussein told me repeatedly that he does not accept the message we bring. I told him that I did not expect that he would believe it because it is impossible for me to convince him. But God is able to convince him. I then explained how God drags people to Jesus in a supernatural way by orchestrating events and moving them to suddenly realize that they are headed for eternal punishment. I could never convince him of this by mere intellectual reasoning. But in the future, I pray that God will show you that your life is not at all righteous in his sight. You will become utterly miserable and frustrated that you cannot achieve righteous living. You will be made to tremble and fear God for real. You will then begin to beg him to save you. You will suddenly realize that God has demonstrated his love for you by sending Jesus to die for you.

I gave Hussein a copy of my book, "The Way to Heaven" and continue to pray for him daily.