

Prideful Heart, Sensitive Heart

Here is a description of the great Day of Judgment which, to many people, seems perfectly accurate:

“In that day, the human soul will receive the punishment or the reward which will be due him. Neither the money of the rich, nor the strength of the powerful, nor the arguments of the eloquent will be of any avail to them. Good works will be the only witness and the only defense, either for or against the one who has done them. In that day, no one will be the victim of an injustice, and no one will receive anything that he has not deserved.”

At first glance, all of that sounds right. But we have seen that such a description is incomplete. It leaves no room for the mercy of God. The Qur'an tells us, “Ask God's forgiveness. God is ever forgiving and most merciful... God promises His forgiveness and His bounty. God is bountiful and all knowing” (Surah 2:199,268 – *al-Baqarah*). “As for those who believe in God and hold fast to Him, He will admit them to His mercy and His grace” (Surah 4:175 – *al-Nisa*). Grace is favor that one receives but has not deserved. Forgiveness necessarily implies that one has committed unworthy acts, bad deeds, but that God chooses to forget these sins and not punish them. Salvation will therefore not simply be on the basis of good works.

If salvation were strictly by our works being placed on a divine set of scales, several negative consequences would result.

THE DANGER OF PRIDE

We have considered the example of the man who tells himself, “I am confident that I have done enough good works so that the scales will speak in my favor. My sins are minor, and I will not need to have some of them removed from the scales in order to avoid the fire of Hell.” Probably without realizing it, this person falls into one of the most detestable of sins in God's eyes, and that is the sin of pride. The Bible tells us, “Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for ‘God

opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you” (1 Peter 5:5,6). We must have an attitude of humility in our dealings with one another. But this attitude is just as important in our relations with God. Jesus told a parable that memorably demonstrates this principle. We read in the Gospel of Luke 18:9-14:

“Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: ‘Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, “God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.” And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, “God, be merciful to me a sinner!” I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.’”

Human pride is offensive to God; whoever believes himself to be righteous before his Creator is blind to the seriousness of his sins, and his pride causes him to commit other sins. If we teach that the salvation of a man is strictly the reward for his own righteousness, we are saying, in reality, that this man earns eternal life as the wages for a task he has accomplished. If you accept a contract for work—whether it be in an office, in a factory or in a field—and you meet all the standards the employer has set for you and fulfilled the tasks that were assigned, the employer owes you your salary; it is your right. The employer does not really have a choice in the matter. He has an obligation. If this were the way things worked in regard to works of righteousness on the earth, it would mean that God owed us salvation. Instead of being grateful, we could be proud and boastful. God has certainly not established a system that would encourage pride in the hearts of sinners like ourselves.

On the contrary, God has decided to offer men salvation on the basis of his grace, his favor that we have not deserved. The Injeel teaches in Ephesians 2:8,9, “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this [salvation] is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

THE DANGER OF DESPAIR

There is another danger in the belief that our eternal destiny depends entirely on our personal righteousness. Some people, rather than being filled with pride, are very much aware of their faults, their failings, their inner impurity, their hypocrisy, the mean things they have said—in short, their sinful condition before God. These people live in continual doubt concerning their relationship with God and the fate that awaits them on the day of judgment. They desperately want to know that they will be received into Paradise, but they wonder every day if their good works will weigh more than their sins. When you have a bank account, you can always request a bank statement that tells you what your balance is. But no passage in the Qur'an and no story among the Hadiths will let you know how God is going to do his calculations. If I have eaten something that was “haram,” what exactly must I do to compensate for my failing; of course, it would be something beyond my usual obligations, because I am needing “extra credit” to make up for what I did wrong. If I neglected to say my mandatory morning prayers for a whole week, I need to do some good works to fill up the other dish of the scales, but what kind of deeds, and how many, will suffice? Can I know that my account is debt-free, that I have a healthy balance? It is not that I want to take it easy for a while and reduce my efforts to do what is right. No, but I would like to sleep in peace and not be terrified of death and the Judgment to follow.

To tell the truth, if one rejects the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross for our sins, one will never have a right to peace of mind in regard to salvation. The prophet Muhammad himself did not have any assurance of his salvation, so how would you? In the Qur'an, Allah gives this order to the prophet, “Say: ‘I am not an innovation among the messengers, and I

know not what shall be done with me or with you. I only follow what is revealed to me; I am only a clear warner” (Surah 26:9 – *Al-Ahqat*). This uncertainty in Muhammad explains what he said one day according to a well attested Hadith: “In the name of Allah, I ask forgiveness of Allah and I repent before Him more than seventy times a day” (Sahih al-Bukhari, Volume 8, Book 74, Number 319, Page 213). What man today could be righteous enough to have the least bit of confidence concerning his place in Paradise? We are all sinners, and our good works are not enough to remove even one of our sins. This is why the apostle Paul said that his deepest desire was to be found in Christ, “not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith” (Philippians 3:9). This perspective sets a person free from uncertainty and from the fear of death and the Judgment. It allows one to have the confidence expressed in Romans 8:33,34,39:

“Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us... [Nothing] shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

DO YOU WANT PEACE?

Jesus actually did die on the cross. The prophets had predicted it, history attests to it, and contrary to popular opinion, neither the Qur'an nor the oldest Hadiths contradict it. According to the Bible and, it seems, the Qur'an, the death of Jesus was part of the plan of God, conceived by Him even before He created the world. And why would Allah have wanted His holy servant, Jesus the Messiah, to die in this way? Very simply because it was the only way to redeem sinful men; for centuries God left unpunished the sins of great men of faith such as Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses and many others. But this debt of sin had to be paid someday. The wages of sin is death. Everyone has deserved it. A sacrifice was necessary as a ransom. With the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness. But the blood of animals cannot take away a man's sin. The blood of

a sinless man was necessary. This is what God provided. He did for man what man could never do for himself. So there is no room for human pride. No man must boast before the Almighty God. Neither is there a reason to despair or live in extreme fear.

In John 14:27 Jesus made this promise before going to the cross: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." Do you want this peace?