

Salvation in Islam

(part 1 of 3): What is Salvation?



Islam teaches us that salvation is attainable through the worship of God alone. A person must believe in God and follow His commandments. This is the same message taught by all the Prophets including Moses and Jesus. There is only One worthy of worship. One God, alone without partners, sons, or daughters. Salvation and thus eternal happiness can be achieved by sincere worship.

In addition to this Islam teaches us that human beings are born without sin and are naturally inclined to worship God alone (without any intermediaries). To retain this state of sinlessness humankind must only follow God's commandments and strive to live a righteous life. If one falls into sin, all that is required is sincere repentance followed by seeking God's forgiveness. When a person sins he or she pushes themselves away from the mercy of God, however sincere repentance brings a person back to God.

Salvation is a powerful word that the dictionary defines as the act of preservation or deliverance from destruction, difficulty, or evil. Theologically it is spiritual rescue from sin and its consequences. More specifically, in Christianity it is associated with redemption and the atonement of Jesus. Salvation in Islam is a very different concept. While it does offer deliverance from the fires of hell, it also rejects some of the basic principles of Christianity and states clearly that salvation is attained only through submission to the most merciful, God.

“Those who remember God (always, and in prayers) standing, sitting, and lying down on their sides, and think deeply about the creation of the heavens and the earth, (saying), "Our Lord! You have not created (all) this without purpose, glory to You! (Exalted are You above all that they associate with

You as partners). Give us salvation from the torment of the Fire.” (Quran 3:191)

According to Christian doctrine, humankind is considered wayward and sinful. The doctrine of original sin states that humankind is born already tainted by the sin of Adam and therefore separated from God, and in need of a redeemer. Islam on the other hand out rightly rejects the Christian concept of original sin and the notion that humankind is born sinful.

The idea that innocent babies or children are sinful sounds completely absurd to a believer who knows that Islam is about original forgiveness not original sin. Humankind, according to Islam is born in a state of purity, without sin and naturally inclined to worship and praise God. However, human beings are also given freewill and are thus capable of making mistakes and committing sins; they are even capable of committing great evil.

Whenever a person commits a sin, he alone is responsible for that sin. Every person is responsible for his or her own actions. Consequently, no human being who has ever lived is responsible for the mistakes made by Adam and Eve. God says in the Quran:

**“And no bearer of burdens shall bear another’s burden.”
(Quran 35:18)**

Adam and Eve made a mistake, they repented sincerely, and God in His infinite wisdom forgave them. Humankind is not doomed to be punished, generation after generation. The sins of the father are not visited upon the sons.

**“Then they both ate of that tree, and so their private parts appeared to them, and they began to stick on themselves the leaves from Paradise for their covering. Thus did Adam disobey his Lord, so he went astray. Then his Lord chose him, and turned to him with forgiveness and gave him guidance.”
(Quran 20:121-122)**

Above all Islam teaches us that God is the most forgiving, and will go on forgiving, repeatedly. Part of being human is making mistakes. Sometimes the mistakes are made without deliberation or a bad intention, but sometimes we knowingly and deliberately sin and do wrong to others. Therefore as human beings, we are constantly in need of forgiveness.

The life of this world is fraught with trials and tribulations, however God did not abandon humankind to these tests. God equipped humankind with an intellect and the ability to make choices and decisions. God also gave us words of guidance. As our creator, He is well aware of our nature and eager to guide us on the straight path that leads to eternal bliss.

The Quran is God's final revelation and it is applicable for all of humankind; all people, all places, all times. Throughout the Quran God continually asks us to turn to Him in repentance and ask for His forgiveness. This is the road to salvation. This is our rescue from destruction.

“And whoever does evil or wrongs himself but afterwards seeks God's forgiveness, he will find God Oft Forgiving, Most Merciful.” (Quran 4:10)

“And O my people! Ask forgiveness of your Lord and then repent to Him, He will send you (from the sky) abundant rain, and add strength to your strength, so do not turn away as criminals, disbelievers in the Oneness of God.” (Quran 11:52)

“Say: ‘O My slaves who have transgressed against themselves (by committing evil deeds and sins)! Despair not of the Mercy of God, indeed God forgives all sins. Truly, He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.’” (Quran 39:53)

Quran is not only a book of guidance, it is a book of hope. In it God's love, mercy, and forgiveness are obvious and thus humankind is reminded not to give in to despair. No matter what sins a person may have committed if he resolutely turns to God, seeking forgiveness his salvation is assured.

Prophet Muhammad described sin as black spots covering the heart. He said, **“Indeed if a believer sins, a black spot covers his heart. If he repents, stops the sin, and seeks forgiveness for it, his heart becomes clean again. If he persists (instead of repenting), it increases until it covers his heart...”**^[1]

Salvation in Islam is not required because of the stain of original sin. Salvation is required because humankind is imperfect and in need of God's forgiveness and love. In order to understand the concept of salvation correctly we must understand other topics embedded in salvation. These are, understanding the importance of *tawheed*, or the Oneness of God, and knowing how to repent sincerely. We will discuss these topics in the next two articles.

Footnotes:

^[1] *Ibn Majah.*

(part 2 of 3): Worship and Obey God

In part 1 of this series ‘Salvation in Islam’, we learnt that salvation is attained by worshipping the One God. We worship Him alone and we follow His commandments. We also learnt that Islam does not recognise the concept of original sin, thus Muslims believe that all people are born sin-free. In the following article we will discuss the Christian concept of atonement, that is, Jesus dying for the sins of humankind, and we will discover that this concept is totally rejected by Islam. Salvation in Islam is through *tawheed*, monotheism.

Tawheed is an Arabic word that means oneness, and when we talk about *tawheed* in relation to God it means realising and affirming God’s oneness. It is the belief that God is One, without partner or associate. There is no god worthy of worship but Allah, and this is the foundation of Islam. To profess such a belief along with the belief that Muhammad is His messenger is what makes a person Muslim. To believe in *tawheed* with certainty is what guarantees salvation.

“Say (O Muhammad): He is Allah (God), (the Unique) One. Allah, the Eternal (Foundation). He begets not, nor was He begotten; and there is none co-equal or comparable unto Him.” (Quran 112)

“Verily! I am Allah! None has the right to be worshipped but I, so worship Me...” (Quran 20:14)

“ He is the Originator of the heavens and the earth. How can He have children when He has no wife? He created all things and He is the All-Knower of everything. Such is Allah, your Lord! *La ilaha illa Huwa* (none has the right to be worshipped but He), the Creator of all things. So worship Him (Alone), and He is the Trustee, Disposer of affairs, Guardian, over all things. No vision can grasp Him, but His Grasp is over all vision. He is the Most Subtle and Courteous, Well Acquainted with all things.” (Quran 6:101-103)

Muslims worship God alone without any intermediaries, He has no partners, associates, sons, daughters, or helpers. Worship is directed solely to God, for He is the only One worthy of worship. There is nothing greater than God.

The Christian belief that Jesus is the son of God or God himself is in direct opposition to *tawheed*. The concept of a Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is also firmly rejected by Islam. The idea that Jesus atoned (or saved our souls) by dying is a concept completely at loggerheads with Islamic belief.

“O people of the Scripture! Do not exceed the limits in your religion, nor say of God anything but the truth. The Messiah Jesus, son of Mary, was a Messenger of God and His Word,

which He bestowed on Mary and a spirit created by Him; so believe in God and His Messengers. Say not, ‘Trinity!’ Cease; it is better for you! For God is One God, far removed is He from every imperfection, Far Exalted is He above having a son. To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth. And God is All Sufficient as a Disposer of affairs.” (Quran 4:171)

The idea of Jesus dying on the cross is central to the Christian belief. It represents the conviction that Jesus died for the sins of humankind. In other words a person’s sins have been ‘paid’ for by Jesus, and one is free to do as he pleases, for in the end he will attain salvation by belief in Jesus. This is absolutely rejected in Islam.

There is no need for God, or even a Prophet of God to sacrifice himself for humankind’s sins in order to buy forgiveness. Islam refuses this view entirely. The foundation of Islam rests on knowing with certainty that nothing should be worshipped but God alone. Forgiveness emanates from the One True God; so, when a person seeks forgiveness, he must turn to God submissively with true remorse and ask for forgiveness, promising not to repeat the sin. Then and only then will sins be forgiven by God Almighty.

Islam teaches that Jesus did not come to atone for the sins of humankind; rather, his purpose was to reaffirm the message of the Prophets before him.

“.. None has the right to be worshipped but God, the One and the Only True God...” (Quran 3:62)

The Islamic belief about Jesus’ crucifixion and death is clear. He did not die to atone for humankind’s sins. There was a plot to crucify Jesus but it did not succeed; he did not die but rather ascended into heaven. In the last days leading up to the Day of Judgement, Jesus will return to this world and continue to spread the belief in the Oneness of God. The Quran tells us that on the Day of Judgement Jesus will deny ever asking the people to worship him instead of, or along with God.

“And (remember) when God will say (on the Day of Resurrection): ‘Jesus, son of Mary! Did you say unto men: Worship me and my mother as two gods besides God?’ He will say, ‘Glory be to You! It was not for me to say what I had no right (to say). Had I said such a thing, You would surely have known it. You know what is in my inner-self though I do not know what is in Yours; truly, You, only You, are the All-Knower of all that is hidden (and unseen). Never did I say to them aught except what You (God) did command me to say, Worship God, my Lord, and your Lord. And I was a witness

over them while I dwelt amongst them, but when You took me up (to heaven), You were the Watcher over them; and You are a Witness to all things.” (Quran 5:116-117)

God tells us in Quran that there is only one unforgiveable sin, and that is if one dies having associated partners with God and did not repent from it before his death.

“Verily, God forgives not that partners should be set up with Him in worship, but He forgives except that (anything else) to whom He pleases, and whoever sets up partners with God in worship, he has indeed invented a tremendous sin.” (Quran 4:48)

In his traditions Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, informed us that God said, **“I am the Self-sufficient, I am in no need of having an associate. Thus he who does an action for someone else's sake as well as Mine will have that action renounced by Me to him whom he associated with Me”.**^[1]

However, even the grave sin of associating partners with God can be forgiven if one truly turns to God, sincerely and with full repentance.

“And verily, I am indeed forgiving to him who repents, believes (in My Oneness, and associates none in worship with Me) and does righteous good deeds, and then remains constant in doing them (till his death).” (Quran 20:82)

“Say to those who have disbelieved, if they cease (from disbelief), their past will be forgiven.” (Quran 8:38)

Every human being can attain salvation by worshipping One God. Staying connected to God and repenting from mistakes and sins is the road to salvation. In the next article, we will talk about conditions of repentance.

Footnotes:

^[1] *Saheeh Muslim*

(part 3 of 3): Repentance

The road to salvation is through certain belief that there is only One God and that He is Oft Forgiving and Most Merciful. Islam states unreservedly that there is no such concept as original sin and that God does not require a blood sacrifice in order to forgive humankind for their sins and transgressions.

“Say: "O My slaves who have transgressed against themselves (by committing evil deeds and sins)! Despair not of the Mercy of God, verily, God forgives all sins. Truly, He is Oft Forgiving, Most Merciful.” (Quran 39:53)

Making mistakes, falling short in our obedience to God, forgetting, and committing sins are all part of the imperfect nature of humankind. No human being is free from sin, no matter how good we appear to be and every human being is in need of God’s forgiveness. Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, was keenly aware of this when he spoke to his companions.

“By the One in Whose hand is my soul, if you did not commit sin God would do away with you and bring people who would commit sin then pray for forgiveness.”[1]

“Every son of Adam sins and the best of those who sin are those who repent.”[2]

We are all vulnerable, we all commit sins, and we all need to be forgiven. We have an innate need to feel close to God and God in His infinite wisdom has made the path to forgiveness easy. Prophet Muhammad himself experienced the sublime joy that came from feeling “right” with his Lord. He said, **“By God, I seek the forgiveness of God and I turn to Him in repentance more than seventy times each day.”[3]**

God, the Creator knows humankind perfectly, He knows our imperfections and our shortcomings, and thus He has prescribed repentance for us and left the door to repentance open until the sun rises from the west (near Judgement Day).

“And turn in repentance and in obedience with true Faith to your Lord and submit to Him, before the torment comes upon you, then you will not be helped.” (Quran 39:54)

“O you who believe! Turn to God with sincere repentance! It may be that your Lord will expiate from you your sins, and admit you into Gardens under which rivers flow (Paradise)...”(Quran 66:8)

“And all of you beg God to forgive you all, O believers, that you may be successful.” (Quran 24:31)

Repentance is as easy as turning to God and seeking His mercy and forgiveness. In the darkest hour or longest night, God is waiting for all to ask of Him, and to repent to Him.

“God spreads out His hand at night to accept the repentance of the one who sinned during the day, and He spreads out His hand by day to accept the repentance of the one who sinned during the night, (and that will continue) until the sun rises from the west.” [4]

There are no transgressions too small or sins too big that God will not be merciful to the one who calls on Him. Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, told the story of a man whose sins seemed to be too big for him to ever have hope of mercy, but God is most wise and oft forgiving. Even those whose lives seem shattered beyond compare and blackened by sin, find comfort.

“There was among the people who came before you a man who killed ninety-nine people. Then he asked about the most knowledgeable person on earth, and was directed to a hermit, so he went to him, told him that he had killed ninety-nine people, and asked if he could be forgiven. The hermit said, ‘No,’ so he killed him, thus completing one hundred. Then he asked about the most knowledgeable person on earth and was directed to a scholar. He told him that he had killed one hundred people, and asked whether he could be forgiven. The scholar said, ‘Yes, what could possibly come between you and repentance? Go to such-and-such a town, for in it there are people who worship God. Go and worship with them, and do not go back to your own town, for it is a bad place.” So the man set off, but when he was halfway there, the angel of death came to him, and the angels of mercy and the angels of wrath began to argue over him. The angels of mercy said: ‘He had repented and was seeking God.’ The angels of wrath said: ‘He never did any good thing.’ An angel in human form came to them, and they asked him to decide the matter. He said, ‘Measure the distance between the two lands (his hometown and the town he was headed for), and whichever of the two he is closest to is the one to which he belongs.’ So they measured the distance, and found that he was closer to the town for which he had been headed, so the angels of mercy took him.” [5]

In another version from the traditions of Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, it says, the man was closer to the righteous town by a hand span, so he was counted among its people. [6]

Repentance is essential for a person to lead a peaceful life. The reward of repentance is a good life close to God and covered with contentment and peace of mind. However, there are three conditions to repentance. They are, giving up the sin, feeling regret forever having committed the sin and resolving never to go back to the sin. If these three conditions are fulfilled with sincerity then God will forgive. If the sin was to do with the rights of another person then there is a fourth condition. That is to restore, if humanly possible, the rights taken away.

God's mercy and forgiveness are so all encompassing that He will go on forgiving. If a person is sincere, God will forgive him until the moment that the death rattle reaches the throat.

The noted Islamic scholar Ibn Kathir said, "Surely, when hope in continued living diminishes, the Angel of Death comes forth to collect the soul. When the soul reaches the throat, and is gradually pulled out, at that point there is no accepted repentance."^[7]

Genuine repentance marks the road to salvation. Salvation is attained through sincere worship of God. There is no God but He, the most powerful, the most merciful, the most forgiving.^[8]

Footnotes:

^[1] *Saheeh Muslim*

^[2] *At Tirmidhi*

^[3] *Saheeh Al-Bukhari*

^[4] *Saheeh Muslim*

^[5] *Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Saheeh Muslim*

^[6] *Saheeh Muslim*

^[7] *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, Chapter 4, verse 18.

^[8] For more information about God's forgiveness please see the articles entitled Accepting Islam parts 1 & 2. (<http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/3727/viewall/>)