

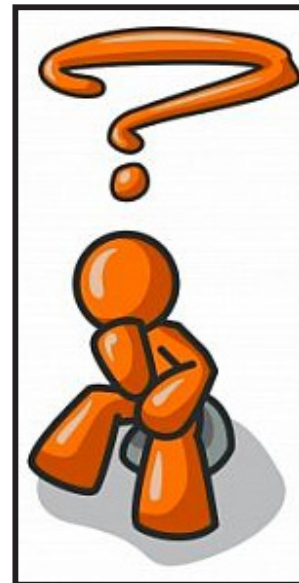
What About ... Works Righteousness?

BY CHUCK MAY

All religions, except Christianity, teach that people are saved by good works. They believe that a person will get to “heaven” if one’s good works outweigh his bad. Islam, for example, teaches: “Then those whose scales are heavy, they are the successful. But those whose scales are light, have lost their souls; in hell will they abide” (Sura 23:102-103).

Usually the critique of good works offered by Christians is that “no human can ever do enough good to satisfy the requirements of God.” The focus is on man’s inability. But here we will look at “works righteousness” from another perspective; namely, what does such a system, if true, say about the character of God?

The above quote from the Koran says that if good works outweigh bad, then you’re OK. In theory, this is being “good” 51% of the time. So if during your life you were good 51% of the time, then you will have earned your way into heaven—for your good works outweighed your bad. While this is the implication, no religion admits that 51% is good enough. They would say it is much harder than that. Well, how hard? Is 90% good enough? For argument’s sake, let’s assume that a person was sinless 99% of his life. All religions that believe in works righteousness would say that this person absolutely has earned his way into heaven—he did enough good works!



But notice, if we say that a non-perfect person (even the 99% man) is acceptable to God, we are affirming that God looks the other way at some sin. Works righteousness teaches that some sin will not be judged because God will compromise Himself by having some fellowship with evil.

But if God can overlook a little sin (say 1%), then who’s to say He can’t overlook a lot of sin? For if God can overlook any sin at all, then He is not righteous. And if He is not righteous, then why couldn’t He overlook a bunch of sin? In fact, why would we do good works at all? For if God is not righteous, then good works aren’t even definable. It makes no sense to try to do good works when you can’t define what “good” is. And even if you could define good, why do good to please a God who isn’t good? Therefore, any system of works righteousness really has a God who is not righteous. That system is self-defeating, for it teaches that we should do good works to please a God who is not good.

However, the Bible says that God is all righteous and can’t tolerate evil (Psalm 11:7; Habbakuk 1:13). So the above works system will not work. God demands payment for sin. You can either pay for it yourself in hell or accept Jesus’ payment made on your behalf. Notice that if you accept Christ’s payment for your sin, several things happen. First, God maintains His righteousness,

for He demanded payment for sin and sin was paid for. Second, we can be justified (declared righteous) because God places Christ’s righteousness on us, and therefore, we are covered by Christ’s righteousness (imputed righteousness). Third, since we are righteous, we have access into God’s presence (Ephesians 2:18).

For people to be in the presence of a righteous God, He requires them to be perfectly righteous. The righteousness that God requires is that righteousness which His righteousness requires Him to require. And this type of righteousness is a total/100% type righteousness. It can only be obtained by freely accepting God’s imputed righteousness made available in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 3:23-24; 5:1).

So, in summary, any religion which has salvation based on good works has a God which is not righteous. For all of these religions admit that man CANNOT be perfect—he sometimes sins. And yet their God will accept sinful people who do enough good. But if God can accept sin, then He is not righteous, and if He is not righteous, then doing good works to please Him is self-defeating and a waste of time. Sadly, all the religions of this world, except biblical Christianity, fall into this camp. Some of those are: rabbinic Judaism, Mormonism, Hinduism, Islam, and Jehovah’s Witness. These religions do NOT have a righteous God.