



1. Epic story versus topical instructions

The Bible is written as an epic story on a grand scale, formed along a narrative arc starting in a glorious creation (Genesis 1-2), then a catastrophic betrayal (Genesis 3), then slow movement toward the Redeemer (Genesis 4 to the New Testament), finally resolved in a glorious re-creation (Revelation 20-22).

The Qur'an is not structured as narrative with an overall plot. Its chapters are formed around topics, with snippets of stories here and there. But the Qur'an is primarily instructions, with promises of eternal reward and warnings of eternal hellfire.

This makes a difference. The Bible develops its doctrines as it moves toward Jesus. For example, marriage is defined (Genesis 2), then disrupted (Genesis 3), then regulated by the law (for example, Deuteronomy 24:1-5), and finally unveiled as a picture of the gospel itself (Ephesians 5:22-33). But marriage in the Qur'an does not move beyond a male-dominated institution (4:3, 34; 52:20; 55:70-74; 56:22, 36-37).

Too many Christians read their Bible as if it were structured like the Qur'an. So they try to apply Old Testament laws to their lives today without gospel wisdom.

2. Free grace versus earned grace

The Bible's message of salvation is, to use traditional Protestant language, "justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, apart from all our works." In other words, God pronounces full righteousness on all sinners who receive Christ, their atoning Substitute, with the empty hands of faith. Romans chapters 3 through 8 teach this as *the* central message of the entire Bible.

The message of salvation in the Qur'an depends on the grace of God too, but with this key difference: "He will give his grace to everyone who has merit" (11:3). In the Qur'an, God's mercy is more like a matching grant for all who do their own good deeds.

There is a reason why the Bible and the Qur'an differ in this way. In the Bible, our problem is original sin (Romans 5:12-21). That is, our flaw goes deeper than a choice; it is more like a hereditary disease, traceable all the way back to Adam. So by now, we *cannot* be the human beings God meant us to be. Obeying the law of Moses could save us from the evil we *do*. It could mask the symptoms of the disease within. But we needed God himself to come down in Christ in order to rescue us from the evil we *are*. He atoned for our sins at his cross and creates in us new hearts by his Spirit.

In the Qur'an, however, "man was created weak" (4:28). Weakness is less serious than inability. But through the Qur'an, we are alerted to the prophet's guidance, so that we can live a life submissively "mindful of God." By following the Qur'an, therefore, we can tip the scales of the balance in our favor. Then we will be saved on the Day of Judgment.

Too many Christians think in a Qur'anic way. They think Jesus has given us a shovel so that we can dig our own way out of our sins. The truth is, our Savior both forgives us totally and works miracles of his grace in us, re-creating us from the inside out.

3. A divine Son versus a prophetic voice

The Bible's deity is Triune – one God in three Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Moreover, the Bible presents Jesus as Son of God and son of man, both divine and human, God incarnate (John 1:14).

By contrast, the Qur'an's deity is single and sole in an absolute sense. The Qur'an denies the deity of Jesus and condemns all who say that God has "partners." In the Qur'an, Jesus stands in a line of prophets, leading to Muhammad: "Jesus, son of Mary, said, 'Children of Israel, I am sent to you by God, confirming the Torah that came down before me and bringing good news of a messenger to follow me whose name will be Ahmad,'" that is, Muhammad (61:6).

But in the New Testament, Jesus claims something far grander for himself:

"Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." John 8:58

"Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life." John 5:23-24

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." John 14:6

The New Testament rejoices in both the majesty and the meekness of Jesus:

"All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Matthew 11:27-30

C. S. Lewis made the alternatives clear: "I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."