

SURAH 107 (AL-MA'UN)

FAITH: Islam | TEXT: The Holy Qur'an | VOLUME: The Meaning of the Holy Quran | AUTHOR: Rashad Khalifa

OVERVIEW

Surah 107, titled 'Al-Ma'un' (The Small Kindnesses/Charity), presents a sharp critique of religious hypocrisy. In Rashad Khalifa's translation, the text opens by interrogating the reader's understanding of what it means to 'reject the faith.' It immediately pivots from theological assent to ethical behavior, identifying the rejector as one who mistreats orphans and fails to advocate for the poor. The text then pronounces a curse ('Woe') upon those who perform the 'contact prayers' (Salat) while being 'heedless'—performing the ritual without spiritual presence or intent. It culminates by condemning those who pray only to 'show off' while simultaneously withholding charity. For the believer, this text serves as a terrifying warning that outward religious observance is nullified by inner insincerity or social apathy. It establishes a theology where orthopraxy (correct action) and inner motive are the ultimate validators of one's standing with God.

KEY FIGURES

The Rejector of Faith (The Hypocrite), The Orphan, The Poor, The Observer of Contact Prayers (The Worshiper)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. VALIDATION OF FAITH THROUGH WORKS

Assertion: Rejection of the faith is defined by the mistreatment of orphans and neglect of the poor, rather than solely by intellectual disbelief.

"Do you know who really rejects the faith? That is the one who mistreats the orphans." (107:1-2)

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, a person is justified by faith alone (Sola Fide), and good works follow as evidence of regeneration (Ephesians 2:8-10). This text, however, creates a functional equivalence between 'rejecting the faith' and 'mistreating orphans.' It implies that the absence of specific social works constitutes a negation of faith itself. While the Bible agrees that faith without works is dead (James 2:17), it maintains a distinction between the root (faith) and the fruit (works), whereas this text conflates the two, suggesting that one's standing before God is forfeited by ethical failure.

2. CONDEMNATION OF HEEDLESS WORSHIP

Assertion: Performing ritual prayers (Salat) without proper focus or intent brings a curse ('Woe') rather than blessing.

"And woe to those who observe the contact prayers (Salat) - who are totally heedless of their prayers." (107:4-5)

Evangelical Comparison: The text pronounces 'Woe'—a severe judgment—on those whose minds wander or who lack sincerity in prayer. In Evangelical thought, while hypocrisy is condemned, the believer's acceptance is based on Christ's perfect righteousness, not the quality of their own prayer performance. The Christian admits they do not know how to pray as they ought, relying on the Spirit to intercede (Romans 8:26). This text places the burden of perfect mindfulness squarely on the worshiper, with judgment as the consequence of failure.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the solution to the problem of hypocrisy. Both traditions agree that hypocrisy is evil. However, Surah 107 threatens the hypocrite with 'Woe' and implies that acceptance by God is contingent on the successful performance of sincere prayer and charity. Evangelicalism teaches that all humans are naturally hypocritical and 'heedless' to some degree (Romans 3:10-12). Therefore, the only hope is the imputed righteousness of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21). This text leaves the believer under the weight of the law: 'Perform perfectly or face Woe,' whereas the Gospel says, 'Christ performed perfectly; believe and be saved.'

Shared Values:

Condemnation of hypocrisy; Importance of caring for orphans and the poor; Rejection of performative religion

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Fide (Faith Alone) – The text suggests that faith is nullified by works-failure (neglecting orphans), implying justification is by faith plus works.
2. [Major] Christology (Mediatorship) – There is no mediator mentioned to absorb the 'Woe' for the heedless worshiper. The worshiper bears the full weight of their ritual imperfection.

Semantic Warnings:

"Faith (Deen)"

In Text: A system of obligation where belief is validated or invalidated by social works and ritual sincerity.

Evangelical: Trust and reliance on God's character and Christ's work (Hebrews 11:1).

Example: *In this text, 'rejecting the faith' is synonymous with mistreating an orphan. In the Bible, rejecting the faith is rejecting the testimony of God concerning His Son (1 John 5:10).*

"Prayer (Salat)"

In Text: A ritual duty ('Contact Prayers') that can be a source of condemnation if done heedlessly.

Evangelical: Relational communication with God, made acceptable through Jesus' name, regardless of the petitioner's weakness (Hebrews 4:16).

Example: *The text warns of 'Woe' for heedless prayer; the Bible encourages the weak to pray for strength.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implicitly defined as escaping the 'Woe' pronounced on the heedless and the deniers.

How Attained: By combining correct ritual (Salat) with correct motive (not showing off) and social ethics (feeding poor).

Basis of Assurance: Self-evaluation of one's own sincerity and charitable acts.

Comparison to Sola Fide: Directly opposes Sola Fide. In this text, works are the determining factor of whether one is a 'rejector' or not. See Galatians 2:16 for the biblical contrast.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Do not mistreat orphans
2. Advocate for the feeding of the poor
3. Do not be heedless in prayer
4. Do not show off in worship
5. Do not forbid charity

Implicit Obligations:

1. Maintain constant mental focus during ritual prayer
2. Examine inner motives to ensure they are free from vanity
3. Actively seek out the needs of the vulnerable

Ritual Requirements:

1. Observance of Contact Prayers (Salat)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. The text warns against being 'heedless' in prayer. Have you ever found your mind wandering during Salat? How do you deal with the fear that those prayers might not be accepted?
2. If 'rejecting the faith' is defined by mistreating the poor, how much charity is enough to ensure you aren't a rejector?

3. The text says 'Woe' to those who show off. Since we all have mixed motives sometimes, how do you find peace knowing God sees every imperfection in your intent?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Heedless Worshiper – We are all the 'heedless worshiper.' No human can maintain perfect focus on God. We need a Representative who offered perfect prayers and perfect obedience on our behalf. [Hebrews 4:15-16 (Jesus as the sympathetic High Priest)]
2. The Need for Ma'un (Charity/Kindness) – We often withhold kindness because our hearts are selfish. We need a new heart, not just a command to be generous. The Gospel gives us the 'heart of flesh' promised in Ezekiel. [Ezekiel 36:26]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Uncertainty/Fear [Severe] – The believer must constantly monitor their own psychological state during prayer. If they are distracted ('heedless'), they risk falling under the curse of 'Woe.' This creates a cycle of anxiety where the fear of invalid prayer causes more distraction.
2. Performance Pressure [Moderate] – The definition of 'faith' is tied to social performance. The adherent bears the weight of being the sole provider of their own justification through their treatment of orphans and the poor.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Direct Revelation (The text asks a rhetorical question to impart divine knowledge).

Verification Method: Behavioral observation. One 'knows' who the rejector is by observing their treatment of orphans and their attitude in prayer.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the revelation of God in Christ as recorded in Scripture (Hebrews 1:1-2). While the Bible also uses fruit to identify false prophets (Matthew 7:16), it grounds truth in the written Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16), whereas this text relies on the authority of the Quranic voice.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: Meccan Period (Early)

Authorship: Attributed to Muhammad; Translation by Rashad Khalifa (1978).

Textual Issues: Khalifa translates 'Salat' as 'Contact Prayers,' a term specific to his 'Quran Alone' theology which rejects Hadith tradition. He emphasizes the number 19 code in the Quran.