

SURAH 31 (LUQMAN)

FAITH: Islam | TEXT: The Holy Qur'an | VOLUME: The Meaning of the Holy Quran | AUTHOR: Rashad Khalifa (Translator/Commentator)

OVERVIEW

Surah 31, titled 'Luqman' after the sage whose advice to his son forms the chapter's core, is a Meccan surah focused on establishing the oneness of God (Tawhid) and the moral obligations of the believer. In this specific translation by Rashad Khalifa (1978), the text takes on a distinct theological edge by translating 'Lahwal-Hadith' in verse 6 as 'baseless Hadith,' thereby positioning the Quran as the sole source of religious authority in direct opposition to Islamic oral traditions (Sunni/Shia Hadith collections). The text juxtaposes the 'winners' who practice Contact Prayers (Salat) and obligatory charity (Zakat) against the arrogant disbelievers. Central to the narrative is Luqman's counsel, which establishes a hierarchy of duty: gratitude to God first, followed by kindness to parents—unless those parents compel idolatry. The text employs arguments from natural theology (creation of heavens, stability of earth, rain) to prove God's existence and sovereignty. It concludes with a stark eschatological warning: on the Day of Judgment, individual accountability is absolute; a father cannot avail his son, nor a son his father, leaving the individual to face God's omniscience alone.

KEY FIGURES

GOD (Allah), Luqman (The Sage), Luqman's Son, The Disbelievers/Arrogant, The Righteous/Submitters

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. ABSOLUTE MONOTHEISM (TAWHID)

Assertion: God is the sole Creator and Sustainer; associating partners (idolatry) is a 'gross injustice.'

"O my son, do not set up any idols beside GOD; idolatry is a gross injustice." (31:13)"

Evangelical Comparison: While Evangelical Christianity affirms Monotheism (Deuteronomy 6:4), it holds to a Trinitarian understanding of God's nature. This text explicitly frames the association of anything with God as the ultimate sin (Shirk). In the Islamic context, this often implicitly includes the Christian doctrine of Jesus as the Son of God. The text demands unitarian monotheism as a prerequisite for righteousness, creating a fundamental impasse with the deity of Christ.

2. SALVATION BY SUBMISSION AND WORKS

Assertion: Salvation ('Gardens of Bliss') is earned through belief combined with specific rituals (Salat, Zakat) and righteous living.

"Surely, those who believe and lead a righteous life have deserved the gardens of bliss." (31:8)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text establishes a conditional covenant: 'Those who believe AND lead a righteous life have deserved...' This is a merit-based system where the 'Contact Prayers' (Salat) and 'Obligatory Charity' (Zakat) are functional requirements for being a 'winner' (31:4-5). Evangelical theology posits that works are the fruit of salvation, not the root; this text presents them as the cause of the reward.

3. QURANIC SUFFICIENCY (ANTI-HADITH)

Assertion: The Quran is the sufficient 'beacon and mercy'; other traditions ('baseless Hadith') divert from God.

"Among the people, there are those who uphold baseless Hadith, and thus divert others from the path of GOD..." (31:6)"

Evangelical Comparison: Rashad Khalifa's translation is unique in rendering 'Lahwal-Hadith' specifically as 'baseless Hadith' rather than 'idle tales.' This reflects the 'Quranist' doctrine that rejects the authority of the Prophet's recorded sayings (Sunnah/Hadith). While structurally similar to the Protestant rejection of Catholic Tradition in favor of Scripture alone, the content of the scripture being elevated (the Quran) remains antithetical to the Bible.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the solution to the human problem. Surah 31 diagnoses the problem as ignorance, arrogance, and idolatry, offering the cure of education (wisdom), submission (Islam), and ritual performance (Salat). Evangelicalism diagnoses the problem as spiritual death and moral inability (Ephesians 2:1), offering the cure of substitutionary atonement and regeneration. Furthermore, verse 33's declaration that no father can help his son on Judgment Day, while true regarding human inability, is used here to deny **any** mediation, whereas the Gospel presents Christ as the sole Mediator who **can** help the 'son' on that day.

Shared Values:

Monotheism (existence of one Creator); Respect for parents; Humility and rejection of arrogance; Belief in a Judgment Day; Creation as evidence of God's power

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Theology Proper (Trinity) – Strict Unitarianism; associating partners with God is the unforgivable sin.
2. [Critical] Sola Fide (Faith Alone) – Salvation is 'deserved' (31:8) by those who perform rituals and lead righteous lives.
3. [Major] Sola Scriptura – Claims the Quran is the ultimate 'proof' and 'beacon,' superseding biblical authority.

Semantic Warnings:

"Believer"

In Text: One who accepts the Quran, performs Salat/Zakat, and rejects Shirk.

Evangelical: One who trusts in Jesus Christ alone for salvation.

Example: *In 31:8, 'those who believe' are promised gardens, but the prerequisite for this belief includes rejecting the divinity of Christ (implied by Shirk).*

"Wisdom (Hikmah)"

In Text: Insight leading to strict monotheism and gratitude to Allah.

Evangelical: Christ Himself is the wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:24); fear of the Lord leading to biblical righteousness.

Example: *Lugman's 'wisdom' (31:12) is defined as being appreciative of Allah, whereas Biblical wisdom points to the Cross (1 Cor 1:18-25).*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Entry into 'Gardens of Bliss' (31:8) and avoiding 'shameful retribution' (31:6).

How Attained: By belief, observing Salat, giving Zakat, and leading a righteous life (31:4, 31:8).

Basis of Assurance: Based on the 'truthful promise of God' (31:9), but contingent on the believer's performance of the 'strongest bond' (submission).

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text explicitly states rewards are for those who 'believe AND lead a righteous life' and that they have 'deserved' the gardens. This is the antithesis of Romans 4:4-5, where salvation is credited to the one who does not work but trusts God.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Observe the Contact Prayers (Salat) (31:4, 31:17)
2. Give the obligatory charity (Zakat) (31:4)
3. Do not set up idols beside God (31:13)
4. Honor parents (31:14)
5. Advocate righteousness and forbid evil (31:17)
6. Do not walk with arrogance/pride (31:18)
7. Lower your voice (31:19)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Reject religious traditions outside the Quran (implied by 31:6)
2. Study creation as evidence of God (31:10-11)
3. Maintain absolute certainty of the Hereafter (31:4)

Ritual Requirements:

1. Salat (Contact Prayers)
2. Zakat (Obligatory Charity)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 33, it says a father cannot help his child on Judgment Day. Does this worry you, that you must stand entirely alone before God?
2. Verse 16 says God brings forth deeds as small as a mustard seed. How do you deal with the 'mustard seeds' of sin you've already committed?
3. The text mentions the 'strongest bond' (v. 22). If that bond depends on your submission, what happens when your submission is weak?
4. Verse 6 warns against 'baseless Hadith.' How do you determine which instructions to follow if there is disagreement on what is baseless?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Helpless Father – The text correctly identifies that no human lineage saves. This creates a vacuum of hope that the Gospel fills: God the Father sent the Son to do what our earthly fathers could not–save us from judgment. [Psalm 49:7-8, John 3:16]
2. The Storm at Sea – The text acknowledges that desperation drives humans to sincere faith. In the Gospel, Jesus not only receives this prayer but has the authority to calm the storm, proving He is God. [Mark 4:39-41]
3. The Mustard Seed of Accountability – This establishes the terrifying precision of God's justice. The Gospel accepts this precision but offers the blood of Christ to cover even the hidden sins. [Hebrews 4:13, 1 John 1:7]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Isolation/Fear [Severe] – The believer is told that on the most terrifying day of existence, they are utterly alone (31:33). No family, no intercessor, just them and their deeds against an Omniscient Judge.
2. Performance Anxiety [Moderate] – The requirement to 'deserve' the gardens (31:8) through constant ritual observance creates a treadmill of works without the assurance of 'It is finished.'
3. Cognitive Dissonance [Moderate] – For followers of Khalifa, the command to reject 'baseless Hadith' (31:6) cuts them off from the majority of Islamic history and practice, creating community isolation and theological confusion regarding how to practice the faith (since details of Salat are in Hadith).

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Revelation (The Book) and Natural Theology (Signs in Creation).

Verification Method: Observation of the natural world (rain, ships, biology) serves as empirical verification of the theological claims.

Evangelical Contrast: While the Bible affirms natural revelation (Romans 1:20), this text claims that natural observation leads to Islamic Unitarianism. It lacks the epistemological reliance on the historical Resurrection of Christ as the cornerstone of truth (1 Corinthians 15:14).

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: 7th Century AD (Original Arabic); 1978 (Khalifa Translation).

Authorship: Attributed to Muhammad (Divine Revelation); Translated/Interpreted by Rashad Khalifa.

Textual Issues: Khalifa's translation of 'Lahwal-Hadith' in 31:6 as 'baseless Hadith' is a sectarian interpretation. Standard translations render it 'idle tales' or 'distracting speech.' Khalifa used this to buttress his 'Quran Only' theology.