

The Crescent and the Cross: Engaging Muslims for the Sake of the Gospel

by William D. Barrick, Th.D.
The Shepherd's Conference
March 10, 2016

Introduction

- Conflict
- Fear
- Solution?

I. Luke 5:17-26)

1. It is “the **power** (*dunamis*) of the Lord” (v. 17) that worked in this situation, not the power of men. Cf. Romans 1:16. Only the power of God in the Gospel has the authority and force necessary to convert anyone.
2. These men exhibited **partnership** in their compassion for a fellow citizen (v. 18). The Muslim *ummah* is united in more ways than it is divided (72 different factions). Muslims have a sense of community and also have compassion. God uses compassion to get the attention of Muslims.
3. **People** crowded into the home to hear Jesus (v. 19a). This is reminiscent of conditions in many third-world Muslim nations today: Indonesia, Bangladesh, Nigeria, and Malaysia.
4. **Persistence** marked these men as they found a way to help their brother (v. 19b). For Muslims such persistence is a product of the basic characteristic of Islam: submission to Allah's will.
5. Note the **priority** from the divine viewpoint (v. 20). Jesus *forgave the man's sins* rather than healing him. Clearly, God's purpose and goal in this situation was different than mankind's. Jesus knew what the man really needed even more than physical healing.
6. **Polarization** took place (v. 21). Immediately, the religious sensibilities of the Jews at the scene condemned what they believed to be blasphemy. *Only God can forgive sins*. Muslims react to Christ in much the same fashion today.
7. Jesus offered a **proposition** (“Isn't it easier to heal than to forgive?”—vv. 22-24) challenging the people's thinking by both a logical conundrum and by the declaration of His authority (“power,” *exousia*, in v. 24 is a different Greek word than in v. 17) to forgive sins.

8. The **product** of this encounter: glorifying God and religious awe (vv. 25-26). A right understanding of who Jesus is and what He came to do results in the same two mindsets today among Muslims.

II. Characteristics of Islam (see #4, above)

A. Islam means *submission*.

A **Muslim** is one who is *submitted* to the will of God.

- For a Muslim, it is more important to submit to all that Allah has decided rather than to obtain forgiveness.
- Result: Fatalism—submission to *kismet* (divinely predestined fate).

B. Muslims are **theocentric**—centered or focused on God.

Inshallah = “If Allah wills”; *bismillah* = “in Allah’s name.” Cf. the materialistic orientation of Americans and Europeans. This mindset presents the Christian witness with a great opportunity—far greater than that offered by members of our own materialistic and self-centered culture.

The Muslim world is extremely theocentric. Its focus is on God. In Islamic communities the phrases, “Lord willing,” “Praise God,” “In the name of God,” “There is no God but God,” are heard daily. However, in the Western world, with its materialistic, secular, and humanistic viewpoints, God is left out of almost every area of life.

—Patrick O. Cate, “Islamic Values and the Gospel,”
Bibliotheca Sacra 155/619 (July 1998): 356

Both Christians and Muslims believe that God created the world in six days, and that there is a hell and a heaven, angels and devils. They believe in all the prophets of the Old and New Testaments, the virgin birth of Christ, the Second Coming of Christ, the Resurrection, and the Day of Judgment.

—Samuel Shahid, “Christianity Vis-à-vis Islam,”
Southwestern Journal of Theology 44/2 (Spring 2002): 73

C. Muslims view Islam as the **final revelation**.

- The *Taurat* of Moses, *Jabur* of David, and *Injil* of Jesus have been superseded by the *Qur’an*.
- Popular Muslim belief holds that the OT and NT have been corrupted and have been abrogated.
- The *Qur’an* (5:72) indicates that the OT and NT of the 7th century A.D. were authoritative and uncorrupted: “Say thou: ‘O People of the Book, ye are [founded] upon nothing, until ye observe [or establish] the Taurat and the Injil and that which hath been sent down unto you by your Lord.’”

- Muslims acknowledge four sources of authority: (1) The *Qur'an*, (2) the *Hadith* (traditions of the prophet), (3) *Qiyas* (analogy taught by Muslim scholars and based on the first two sources), and (4) *Ijma* (consensus of the Umma and especially of Islamic scholars).
- Most Muslims think of the current Bible (Old and New Testaments) as being different than those to which the *Qur'an* refers. They think of them as corrupted and, anyway, abrogated.

III. Compassion for Muslims

- A. **Hope:** “Abandon All Hope” is the title of a documentary on Afghanistan and the Taliban. Muslims have no real, certain hope and seek it by earthly means.

Cf. 1 Peter 3:15 – What are we doing to bring hope to Muslims?

- B. **Grace & Forgiveness:** Every chapter (*sura*) except one (the ninth) in the *Qur'an* commences with “In the name of God, the gracious, the merciful.”

The Muslim concept of merciful involves Allah’s benevolence or providential care—not His gracious mercy in not punishing people as they deserve.

- Men and women cannot have a close relationship with Allah—He is too distant and impersonal, too powerful and sovereign.
- Forgiveness is earned, not granted. If even one of the five daily prayers is missed, a Muslim is believed to be sentenced to thousands of years of purgatory before he can qualify to enter the presence of Allah.
- Allah’s forgiveness is inscrutable . . . He forgives whom He will.
- In Islam, no one can be certain until the Day of Judgment.
- There is no example of a direct confession of sin in the *Qur'an*.
- Islam has no developed personal analogies like Hosea or the Prodigal Son.
 - The *Qur'an* has no highly personal confession like that of Psalm 51:4 (“Against you, you only, have I sinned”).

IV. Conflict with Islam

- A. Different viewpoints:

- To the Muslim, Christians represent lascivious life styles.
 - Parents mourn when their children convert to Christianity because they believe they have thrown off all moral restraints.

- The future of Muslim nations is threatened by degenerate cultural influences through TV, movies, and other music. Hindu-dominated India is the propagator of such media in South Asia.
- Muslim young men boldly approach Western women, regarding them as not much more than prostitutes—after all, look how they dress and act!
- To the Muslim, Christendom is inconsistent regarding their judgment of “terrorists.”
 - America helped place Sinn Fein terrorists in government positions in Northern Ireland and encouraged the release from prisons of convicted terrorists.
 - America appears to turn a blind eye to every “terrorist” act of Israel—Israel can do no wrong (they are the fulfillment of prophecy as interpreted by the Church).

B. Comparative World Views:

Concept	Muslim	“Christian”*
Unity	Emphasized— <i>umma</i>	Only if pragmatic
Time	Respect past**	Orientation to future
Family	Solidarity	Individualistic
Peace	Integration, external	Contentment, internal
Honor	All important	Not the priority
Status	Family, name, age	Wealth, accomplishment
Individualism	Subordination to group	Independence a priority
Secularism	Totally unacceptable	Largely acceptable
Change	Undesirable	Desirable
Efficiency	Little or no concern	Imperative

* Not necessarily biblical.

** Arabic poet:

He in whose heart no history is enscrolled,
 Cannot discern in life’s alloy the gold.
 But he that keeps the record of the Deed,
 Adds to his life new lives a hundred-fold.

V. Just the Facts

Witness & Missions to Muslims:

- Forgiveness—what they desire deeply.
- Assurance—what they lack completely.
- Compassion—what they need as evidence of Christian faith.
- Time—what it takes.

It takes time to demonstrate true compassion and it takes time to remove all the false concepts and suspicions. Even after three terms of service in Bangladesh, we found some Muslim friends still convinced that we were paid to be missionaries by the U.S. government and were really CIA agents.

Ask the following questions, listen carefully, interact by quoting Scripture—don't say, "The Bible says," but "God says.":

- What is sin?
- How does sin affect one's relationship to God?
- How do you obtain forgiveness for your sins?
- What does the Quran say about how we should forgive others when they sin?
- What does the Quran say about God forgiving our sins?
- How can you know that your sins have been completely forgiven?

That brings up the current trend to so-called Limited Access Missions, secret missions to lands hostile to Christian missions. I am not convinced that such an approach is either biblical or pragmatic. An Indian college president told E. Stanley Jones that the first time Christ came to India He came in the company of a trader, a business man (William Carey). They did not like his company. They shut the door.

The second time Christ came to India he was flanked by a diplomat and a soldier. They did not like them. They shut the door.

The third time Christ came to India He came as an uplifter of the outcast and the poor. He came as an educator, a relief worker, and a doctor. They liked Him better, but were not certain of what was behind it—was it just the religious side of Western imperialism and colonialism?

When Christ comes to India disentangled, with nothing but the Gospel and the forgiveness it offers, they will open the door.

Cf. 1 Thessalonians 2:1-7. Paul declared that they spoke the Gospel openly, not secretly ("bold," v. 2) even though there was conflict. Nor did they use any "decoy" (basic concept in "deceit," v. 3).

Secret missions:

1. Confirms the suspicions of Muslims.
2. Ignores the respect Muslims have even for Christians who live according to convictions rather than convenience.
3. Produces added persecution of nationals who must remain even after a missionary is expelled or voluntarily departs.
4. Gives in prematurely to gaining access to a so-called closed nation. (Some missionaries have openly declared their identification as Christian missionaries to the police and government officials in Muslim countries. They have been open concerning their purpose

and work and have been allowed to remain in those countries. God has given them unprecedented opportunities to witness to high officials and success in protecting national Christians from harassment and persecution.)

5. Fails to be opportunistic in reaching closed nations by establishing work on the borders of such nations rather than within if access is denied. Borders are porous—citizens of closed nations freely pass over borders (cf. Afghanistan’s border with Pakistan, Myanmar’s border with Thailand, Indonesia’s proximity to Singapore, etc.).

- Scripture—without which nothing will happen: “Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God” (Romans 10:17).

Conclusion

- ✓ Encourage the individual to read the Bible for themselves and to ask questions about what they have read.
- ✓ Begin with the Gospel of John.
- ✓ Remind them that even Muslims call Jesus (Isa) *Kalimatullah* (“Word/Speech of God”)—cf. *Qur’an* 3:45.
- ✓ Love them unconditionally.
- ✓ Pray fervently for them.

Recommended Reading

Denny, Frederick Mathewson. *An Introduction to Islam*, 2nd ed. New York: Macmillan Collier, 1994.

Geisler, Norman L., and Abdul Saleeb. *Answering Islam: The Crescent in Light of the Cross*, 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2002.