

ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE

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How to Reach Islam for Jesus Christ

Many remember this tragic 2010 story: In Gainesville, Florida, Pastor Terry Jones threatened to burn copies of the Qur'an on 11 September 2010 (he called it "International Burn a Koran Day"). He said that his purpose was to "bring awareness to the dangers of Islam and that the Koran is leading people to hell. Eternal fire is the only destination the Koran can lead people to so we want to put the Koran in its place—the fire!" Although I believe that Jesus is the only way to eternal life (John 14:6; Acts 4:12), I question whether Pastor Jones was laying out an effective strategy to give witness to the truth about Jesus. I find nothing in the Bible that would view this as an effective kind of witness. Let me suggest two thoughts:

- First, because Christianity is exclusivist truth, Christians must know how to build bridges to the Muslim world. Christians must understand the Muslim worldview and know how to make connections to that worldview. As Jesus counseled, we must "be in the world but not of the world" (John 17:13-18). The task of "building bridges" to the Muslim world is very much a New Testament idea. Alister McGrath writes that the New Testament church is really a "colony of heaven. . . an outpost of heaven in a foreign land." It speaks the language of that homeland and is governed by its laws. Yet, as Paul demonstrated in Acts 17:22-31, we are to seek common ground with citizens of earth, to be all things to all people that we might win some. Our task is to speak and live the truth of the gospel into the world and life view of others. 1 Peter 3:15 suggests a pattern for building bridges:
 - "Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts." In other words, we must be certain that Jesus is Lord of our life; we must affirm our utter dependence on Him, and remember that when we are talking with someone of another worldview, it is really a spiritual battle. Our task is not to change that person; this is God's business. Our task is to be faithful in proclaiming the truth.
 - "Always be ready." Among other things, this means to know God's Word and to know how and when to use it. In doing so, we will be prepared to correct misconceptions about biblical Christianity.
 - "To make a defense." Always keep the discussion on Jesus and His finished work on the cross. Stay away for minor issues and we must do our best to not allow the other person to focus on his/her misconceptions. Stay focused in a friendly, God-honoring manner, and do not be sidetracked by the other person's unique claims or errors.
 - "To everyone who asks you." Pray that God will give opportunities to share our faith. Above all, we are good listeners; we ask permission as we progress through our discussion. We are not pushy or arrogant.

- “To give an account for the hope that is in you.” It is our personal relationship with the living God that is the source of our power and strength. Thus, we are not afraid to share from personal experience all that God has done for us. He is our hope and strength.
- “Yet with gentleness and reverence.” As we talk, we exude patience, respect and love. Always look for common ground and seek to develop a relationship of trust and confidence that God can use to bring that person to Himself.
- Second, how do we build bridges to the Muslim? By burning their Qur’an? Charles R. Marsh, a pioneer missionary in Algeria, stipulates several general principles when communicating the gospel to Muslims. Each is an effective bridge to Islam:

Bridge #1. Avoid condemning Islam or speaking in a derogatory manner about Muhammad. Instead of criticizing Islam outright, one must seek to understand it. This involves being a good listener. When speaking with a Muslim, it is generally wise to allow the Muslim to speak first. Courtesy, respect and honor are important in Islamic culture.

Bridge #2. Remember that a Muslim is a believer in God. Islam is monotheistic and Allah shares many of the same attributes as the true God of the Bible. This is the common ground upon which a relationship can be built.

Bridge #3. In the heart of every Muslim is the fear of Allah. The Qur’an teaches that every Muslim will someday stand before Allah. For most Muslims, there is always the anxiety that they are not doing enough to merit Allah’s favor. For the Christian, the concept of grace is so important and here the bridge of grace must be built. For the Christian, the fear of God is not horror and terror; it is reverence and awe for the One with whom we have a personal relationship. This point is crucial for Muslims, because they have no concept of a personal relationship with the living God.

Bridge #4. Most Muslims have a certain sense of sin, rooted largely in their failure to attain Allah’s high standards. Islam gives no assurance for the pardon of sin and here is where the Christian message takes hold, for Jesus did that on Calvary’s cross.

Bridge #5. Make use of the truth that Muslims know to lead them to the whole truth about God’s Word. Muslims already know that God is light and that in Him there is no darkness at all. They know Jesus is the Son of Mary and that one of His titles is the Word of God. They know that Jesus will soon return to reign. They know that humans must be pure to approach God. Once a relationship is established, the Word of God can be used to corroborate what Islam teaches and provide further instruction regarding the true nature of Christianity.

Bridge #6. Because the Qur’an rejects God as Trinity, it is difficult for Muslims to grasp the deity of Jesus. For that reason, once a relationship of trust is established, it is imperative to focus on the deity of Jesus, perhaps using such verses as Matthew 3:16,17; 17:5; 28:19; John 10:30; 14:6; 8:58; Romans 8:26,27; 1 Peter 1:2, etc.

Muslims also stumble over Jesus as the Son of God, because often they teach that God cohabited with Mary to produce Jesus. What we as Christians must do is demonstrate that Jesus’ sonship describes His relationship to the other members of the godhead and not that He had a point of origin or beginning. Jesus is the manifestation of the unseen God (see Hebrews 1:1-3 and Colossians 1:15-20). Islam is one of the most difficult religions to penetrate with the gospel.

For that reason, the establishment of a relationship with Muslims is imperative. Once trust and confidence are present, the Holy Spirit will have the freedom to move in the heart of Muslims through us. Bottom line: We must know Islam and we must be willing to spend time with Muslims—not burn their Qur'an.

See “Breakpoint” (8 September 2010); James P. Eckman, *The Truth About Worldviews*, pp. 6-7; 70-78.

