

Sharing your Faith to Believers of Islam

Richard Gardner
Missionary with Wycliffe in Nigeria

Published under "Featured Article" at www.globalmissiology.org, October 2007

Introduction

Islam is the fastest growing religion in some western countries. England has a large Muslim population and Islam is growing in popularity in America. Islamic countries are among the most unreached countries for Christ. In many of these countries it is against the law for Christians to proselytize, and it is even illegal for a Muslim to convert to Christianity. These two factors make it increasingly important for Muslims to be reached for Christ, and all the more essential that people who share their faith to Muslims be educated in the basic tenets of Islam and how to effectively reach them for the Lord.

A brief history of Islam

Islam started by Mohammad in Arabia. Mohammad was born in 570 AD. He was a successful business man. He was frustrated that there were no scriptures in the Arabic language, and he was frustrated with the way Arabs were living as a whole. They were idol worshippers. Christians and Jews both lived among the Arabs and were respected by Mohammad at least at times, but his desire for his people drew him into having a religion for the Arabs. He received his first revelation when he was 40 years old. The revelation was given to him by the angel Gabriel established him as the last and most authoritative prophet. Islam spread mostly by conquest. In 630 AD Mohammad and his followers captured Mecca, his hometown and most holy city in Islam. After Mecca and Medina were captured, the Arabian Peninsula was firmly established for Islam, and Islam became an established religion.

Key points of Islam

In order to be able to share your faith with Muslims it is important to understand the Muslim world view, which includes some of their basic beliefs. Understanding helps us know how to properly approach a Muslim (or a person of any religion for that matter) and gets us and our particularities out of the way so that the only stumbling block is the cross.

Five Pillars of Islam

The five pillars of Islam are the basic elements of Islam. Even though there are different types of Islam each one would agree on these five pillars.

The first pillar is the creed. The creed is the basis of their faith. It reads, "There is no god but Allah, and Mohammed is the messenger of Allah." To deny this creed is to deny Islam. When a baby is born, the father whispers this creed into its ears.

The second pillar is prayer. The act of praying is very important to Muslims. They are required to pray five times a day. Before they pray they must purify themselves with water in specific cleansing ritualistic ways.

The third pillar is almsgiving. Giving alms to the poor is central to Islam because it makes up for the bad deeds one has committed, and it reflects the graciousness of Allah. Muslims are required to give at least 2.5 percent of their income after expenses.

The fourth pillar is the fast. Every year for the month called Ramadan, all Muslim are required to fast during the daylight hours. They are not supposed to eat or drink anything, and they are required to abstain from sexual activity. The sick, elderly, youth before puberty, and menstruating or pregnant women are exempt from the fast.

The fifth pillar is the Hajj. Once in a Muslim's lifetime he is suppose to visit Mecca. This is a spiritual pilgrimage (Hajj) and is suppose to atone for many sins he has committed. There are many requirements during the Hajj that one is suppose to do. The climax of the Hajj is visiting the Ka'aba, a stone building which has a black stone in the corner of it, and participating in a ceremony there with hundreds of thousands of other fellow pilgrimagers.

A Muslim's view of Christians

How does the average Muslim view a Christian? It is good to know so that when you share your faith you can try and break down the barriers he has put up against you. Being a Christian is a very negative thing to most Muslims. It is even verging more on a political view than a religious one. All that Christians have done in the time since Mohammed has been carried over to Christian of today. This is especially true of all the evil that was done against the Muslims during the crusades. Any westerner is a Christian. There is no denominational distinction to them and no real variance. Because "Christian" is such a loaded term among Muslims it is even advisable to avoid using it and instead use a descriptive phrase like "a follower of Jesus" or something to that effect.

Before you begin you already have 2 strikes against you. Some might even say 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ strikes. In any case, definitely, to most Muslims, Christians are real adversaries.

Christians are infidels, a very serious negative category of people who are to be brought under the authority of Allah.

Christianity is a step backward from Islam. Mohammed was the last and most authoritative prophet to Muslims. Jesus was a prophet, but not as important as

Mohammed. So offering them to become a Christian is actually a regress. Who would want to go back to what Jesus taught and not want to go forward 600 years to what Allah revealed to his greatest prophet Mohammed?

Points of similarities

It may seem strange to discuss points of similarities, but since each religion seeks to quench the inner desire for a relationship with God, they solve it in some areas similar to the Christian faith, and so they share some views similar to Christianity.

1. Religion is an integral part of life. You don't have to convince a Muslim that religion is integrated into everyday life. There is no distinction between Church and State. Every part of a Muslim's life is integrated with Islam. Christianity believes the same. Integrating your faith with all of life is scripturally taught.
2. There is one God. When you speak of a creator God, Muslims know exactly what you are talking about. You don't need to spend time convincing them there is a God and that there is only one God.
3. The word of God is authoritative. They believe every word of the Qur'an is true. Revelation was delivered by the angel Gabriel from Allah to Mohammed. The Qur'an was compiled from 646-650 from materials written by Mohammed. Since Allah doesn't make mistakes, neither does his Word contain any.
4. There is a need to get right with God. Muslims know they do wrong and that they need the forgiveness of Allah. In fact, all of their religious

activities including the five pillars of their faith are done so that they will find some way to receive forgiveness from Allah.

Points of differences

1. Triune God. This is one of the biggest conflicts with Muslims. How can Christians believe in three gods? Muslims don't grasp the three persons in one God concept. They think the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit add up to three gods. This concept of the God of scriptures should be presented later since it is even difficult for Christians to understand. There are many analogies people use to illustrate the trinity, and they can be used, but not right away. In explaining it Christians need to make it clear that God and his creation are different. In creation there is one person to one being, but God, even though he is reflected in creation, is different in that he is one being with three persons.
2. Impersonal God. Allah is a god who is far off and cannot be approached. He is the master. There is no intimate relationship to be had with him. He is the one who determines everything. There is not room for human responsibility. Anything that happens "It is the will of Allah."
3. Qur'an vs. the Bible. The word of God for Muslims is the Qur'an. Although it contains many items that contradict Christianity there are true statements within it. This is due partly because Mohammed was influenced by the Bible. There are some verses that describe Jesus (Isa), Mary, and many Old Testament figures in positive ways. Because of this one of the strategies of some Christian evangelists is to use the Qur'an as

a bridge to the Bible. In other words, they quote passages in the Qur'an to help the Muslim see some truths about God and our Lord Jesus. Then as trust begins they suggest reading more about Jesus in the gospels (injl). It would be important to know some of these passages to share with those Muslims who would respond to this approach.

4. Means of Salvation. The difference is good works vs. substitutionary atonement. Muslims must do more good deeds than bad to be accepted by Allah and make it into paradise. They try and make up for their sins by doing good through religious activities such as, giving alms, praying, and making the pilgrimage. Christians believe Jesus paid the penalty for sins by taking them on himself on the cross and satisfying the righteous requirements of God completely. When talking to a Muslim about this, be patient. Remember Peter had a hard time understanding it.¹ Jesus had to explain why he had to die even to his disciples.²
5. Assurance of Salvation. Even though a Muslim does good most of his life, he is not assured of salvation. No one is assured of salvation. He still must depend on the mercy of Allah to let him into paradise. Mohammed wasn't even assured of salvation. No one knows when they have done more good than evil. "Consequently, the devout Muslim makes every effort to please Allah and thereby obtain heaven. But fate (kismet) in the hands of the all-powerful Allah will decide the outcome."³

Sharing points

¹ Mat. 16:21-23

² Luke 24:25-27

³ Mehmet and Emir Fethi Caner, *Unveiling Islam* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002), 144.

1. Grace – salvation is not earned. Even though Allah is called the gracious one, the real need of every Muslim is to experience grace. He needs to understand that salvation is not earned but freely given through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross.
2. Assurance of salvation. Muslims go through their life in doubt they will receive salvation. Part of the good news is we can be sure we are saved. “He who has the son has life.” We can lay the question of salvation to rest and be free to live a life of service out of gratitude to our loving God.
3. A relationship with God. We can have a personal relationship with God. He cares about us as individuals and wants to hear from us. Prayer to the Muslim is not personal, but we can be personal with God. We can relate to him. This is not only particular to Muslims but it is a human need created by God. As Augustine said, “We are restless until we find our rest in thee.”

Caveats and attitudes in sharing your faith

These caveats and attitudes are general guidelines. There may be some Muslims whom God has prepared in advance that just need a simple presentation of the gospel before receiving Christ, but most Muslims will need to be slowly brought to the kingdom gates. It will take time for them to see the truths of Christianity.

1. Build Trust. They won't believe the message until they trust the messenger. Authors have written a lot on how to befriend and make Muslims feel comfortable with Christians, everything from reading the Qur'an with them to visiting a mosque, but the fact is it all comes down to taking away the distrust that is already against the Christian and

establishing a trusting relationship in its place. This is not easy, but absolutely key if a Christian wants to have any impact in a Muslim's life.

2. Avoid political discussions. National pride has its place, but not when you are sharing your faith. Paul said when reaching out to the Corinthians, "For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified."⁴
3. Don't defend Christian abuses. When confronted with Christian abuses throughout the centuries don't defend them or explain them away, but confess them and remember that abuses have been done by tenets of all religions. Jesus never advocated abusing people and neither should his followers.
4. Don't use church language. Christians are full of religious language which has no meaning to the uninitiated. Explain every Christian term when sharing your faith.
5. Be careful of taboos and offenses to their culture. Hospitality is very important to Muslims. So don't turn an invitation to their homes down. Don't shake hands or give anything to a Muslim with your left hand. When having them over to dinner don't serve pork, lard-based products, or shellfish. Be careful when speaking to the opposite sex. If a husband is out of the room do not address his wife. When one has built up trust there may be more freedom, but be careful.
6. Think what you are asking them to do. Receiving Christ is a life changing event for everyone, but when a Muslim receives Christ he has not just his

⁴ 1Cor. 2:2

changed his religion. Since everything is connected together in Islam, he has rejected his former life and his identity. He has separated himself from a community and in most cases he is rejected by that community and by his family. In some cases his life is in danger. He has turned his back on the almighty Allah, and become an infidel. Abul A'la Mawdudi said, "Islam is a one-way door, you can enter through it but you cannot leave."⁵

7. Don't rush them into Christianity; don't invite them to receive Christ until they understand who Christ is and what he has done for them. To put it succinctly – No invitation without proclamation. Unfortunately most Christians are interested in converting a person and not helping him understand the wonderful news that is offered in the gospel. During the hard times that follow conversion, Muslims need to sustain themselves with the great hope of the gospel, and they can only do that if they understand it well before they receive Christ.
8. Believe that God can reach them. A local pastor came up to Charles Spurgeon and asked, "How come people don't receive Christ when I share the gospel like they do when you share the gospel?" Spurgeon answered, "You don't believe every time you share the gospel people will receive Christ, do you? The pastor replied, "Of course not!" Spurgeon said, "That's your problem." The gospel is the power of God to salvation. His word won't go out and return empty. Believe not in your own abilities to share and to reach out, but that message that you share will be used by God to draw people to himself. It is the good news the Holy Spirit uses. Have faith

⁵ Colin Chapman, *Cross & Crescent* (Leicester: IVP, 1995), 270.

in God otherwise you are not pleasing him in any activity whether evangelist or otherwise. (Heb. 11:3)

9. Finally be prepared for when Muslims do receive Christ. It will mean a commitment on your part to see them through being integrated into the faith and into fellowship. It doesn't mean you alone will disciple them to completion, but as far as possible you need to make sure they are being disciplined and integrated into the family of the Lord.

Conclusion

Despite all the challenges a Christian faces in sharing his faith to people of Islam, it is worth the effort because it is of eternal value. One man said, "If England was made of broken glass I would crawl on my knees from top to bottom for an opportunity to save one soul." It is the Christian's commission to reach the lost souls among the people of Islam and it is the power and grace of God in using our "earthen vessels" that will bring them to himself.

References

Caner, Ergun Mehmet and Emir Fethi. *Unveiling Islam*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002.
Accad, Fouad Elias. *Building Bridges*. Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1997.
Chapman, Colin. *Cross and Crescent*. Leicester: IVP, 1995.