

“Building Bridges”
July 16, 2017

Contrast Acts 9:1-2 with Acts 17:19-26

CORE- Paul’s approach radically changed from antagonist to bridge-builder. In the same way, God is teaching us how to reach an ever-changing culture with the never-changing Gospel. From “breathing threats” to “speaking life.”

Just as Paul built bridges to reach the Greek polytheists & philosophers—God is teaching us to make intentional connections with Muslim seekers of truth.

1. FINDING COMMON GROUND

(NOTE: Paul met on Mars Hill in Athens, Greece in the Areopagus Court—important meeting place where religion & philosophy were discussed. He connected with their hunger to “hear more” (Acts 17:19-20). These Epicurean philosophers generally believed that God existed—but He was not interested or involved in their lives. He met them on “common ground” as seekers of truth. Some believed & were saved; others mocked him, yet others remained open-minded, desiring to hear more.)

- There is so much conversation about religions/philosophies...with the punch line often be either **strong hatred/fear** OR **passive tolerance/acceptance**.
- But, like Paul on Mars Hill, there are places to connect with people on a spiritual journey who are **hungry, seeking**, and longing for true spiritual life.
- Approaching people like **enemies** to challenge/debate or mere **tokens** to convert—we will miss the heart of God for people. To be influencers on the planet—we must move beyond the us/them so we can **connect with people in the course of connecting them with Jesus**.
- If we place all Muslims in the same category, we can lose the capacity to connect with them and introduce them to Jesus. NOTE: “**Islam**” is the religious philosophy; “**Muslims**” are the people who follow Islamic beliefs.

2. A FEW THINGS TO UNDERSTAND

a. The QURAN

- i. The authoritative book of Islam that calls people to revere God, who created the universe**
- ii. Declares that we are accountable to God**
- iii. Identifies Him as compassionate and just**
- iv. Refers to Him as the “God of Abraham”**
- v. Acknowledges Adam, Abraham, and Moses**
- vi. “ALLAH”- means “the one and only God” (NOTE: Arabic Christians use the same name for God)**
- vii. High view of God—worthy of worship; often see Christians as polytheists who have a less reverent view of God**

- b. JIHAD
 - i. Means “*struggle*” (for many, the struggle to overcome sin)
 - ii. Also can include military war—with just & humane guidelines (*i.e., never attacking women, children, the elderly, or the unarmed*)
 - iii. Not all Muslims believe Jihad is a good idea
- c. JESUS
 - i. Acknowledged in the Quran as a wise man; born of a virgin; yet, not acknowledged as God or the Son of God
- d. HEAVEN & HELL
 - i. Believed to be real; there are eternal consequences of our choices
 - ii. Determined by two factors: beliefs & good works (*i.e., daily prayers, fasting during Ramadan*)
 - iii. No one—including Muhammad—lives in certainty RE the afterlife

3. SEPERATING THE PEOPLE FROM THE PHILOSOPHY

- Just as not all Christians are the same—**not all Muslims believe the same way**. NOTE: Many people are a **controversy inside** themselves.
- Many sincerely desire to know God—and they work with the material they have been taught/exposed to.
- Many people in Islam are desperately looking to **belong**, to be **forgiven**, and to **know God**.
- Muslims often define Christians by American television and media.
- Understand **the roots of the divide began as a relational offense**:
 - In Genesis 16, Hagar—Sarah’s servant—was given to Abraham in order to produce a son. Sarah initially doubted God’s ability to miraculously restore her ability to bear a child. After Hagar gave birth to Ishmael, Sarah severely mistreated them.
 - The Lord told Sarah that there would be constant hostility, friction, violence, and hatred between the children of Ishmael and the children of Isaac—rooted in a sense of betrayal
 - NOTE: The way back to truth—is love.
- **Hospitality is huge to Muslims**:
 - Invite into your homes—seen as an invitation into your heart
 - Don’t serve pork or wine
 - Offer your best (*i.e., china, great food*)
 - Listen, honor—yet, be unafraid to be who you really are and share the love & life of Jesus with them—we are His “re-presentatives”

4. PRACTICAL EXAMPLE.

Example- Pastor speaking to 50 Muslim leaders—including the local imam and his younger followers:

- When questioned, “**Explain the Gospel of Jesus to us,**” he illustrated it with the story of his pursuit of his wife. He did not send a representative. He personally pursued her until she received his promises and trusted his love.
- The imam responded passionately: “**As you were** (before receiving Jesus)—**I am now. But as you are now** (having received him)—**I will be.**”
- The imam continued, “If there were more Christians like you in Lebanon—sharing your story with love, conviction, and humility—there would be more Christians in Lebanon.”
- Several other younger men told the pastor, “I, too, will find this Jesus who came for me.”

Let’s face it, **we too can be Islamic in our thinking—uncertain** of God’s love, working to **earn it**. Not trusting that Jesus did the work we could not do for ourselves—living in the “not good enough yet to be loved by God” mindset. We have been called to be set free from the vain attempt at earning God’s acceptance—and to set others free!

The journey toward wholeness is not about trying to find God—but advancing because we have **found the One who sought after us!** Trusting our lives to Him! Confident in the power of His love to change us!

“**Islam**” means “*submission to the laws of God.*” Yet, at the heart of Islam, no one lives with the assurance that they have ever done enough to please God. For many, this is a **devout lifestyle plagued by unrelenting uncertainty**. W/o freedom—“submission” is all we have in the form of fearfully cowering before a God you never trust you can please.

Only Jesus’ love can set us free—to be loved and to love in return.

PRAYER: Let every Muslim be overwhelmed by the love of God pouring forth in and through our hearts—so they may come to know the unconditional love of Jesus.