

Bridging to Muslims - Helps and Hindrances

(Dr. Jay Smith & help from Georges Housney)

In ministry to Muslims we encounter both bridges (helps) and blockages (hindrances) as we attempt to communicate the gospel to them. *The trick is to distinguish between the bridges and the blockages.*

Note: **We are not bridging to Islam, but bridging to Muslims**

On the surface it seems easy to bridge: whatever is similar are the bridges, and any differences we have with Muslims are the blockages. In reality it is not that simple.

BLOCKAGES TO MUSLIMS

Sometimes what we think are bridges, are in fact blockages. Similarities can be deceiving. Here are some areas that appear to be bridges but are in fact blockages. They are classified into five major areas:

- Cultural Blockages
- Political Blockages
- Spiritual Blockages
- Theological Blockages
- Missiological Blockages

- **Cultural Blockages** (Areas we tend to over-emphasize, which then become detrimental to the Gospel)
 - **Muslim Cultural Identity:** We assume that there is little distinction between religion & culture in Islam. To live in the ME is to be a Muslim by definition!
 - By whose definition? Not the Christians who live there.
 - Whose agenda is this really? Isn't this a Muslim agenda?
 - What about pre-Islamic Christian culture in the ME?
 - Must Christians remain Muslims, or do they enter a 'new family'?
 - Doesn't Christ give us that choice, to 'leave and cleave'?
 - Matt. 10 is all about persecution, & leaving the family (10:35-39)
 - **Arab Identity** (Based on a 7th century model, and imposed on all cultures)
 - Arabs only make up 15% of all Muslims, yet Arab culture is adopted by all Muslims...should we follow suit?
 - It's a false, and debilitating cultural identity, and against God's identity
 - **Muslim Bias** (24/7 – Brings Mosque & State together, unlike Christianity)
 - These are static and intrinsically Muslim Forms (i.e. family, dress)
 - **Western Bias** (Imposing Western forms – dress, worship, buildings)
 - These can also be static, and anti-Gospel (i.e. US cultural forms)

- **Political Blockages**

- Support of **Israel** (Zionism)
- **Political Alliances** (US nationalism, or zealous Patriotism)
- New **Crusades** and **wars** against Islam (Afghanistan & Iraq)

- **Spiritual Blockages**

- **Spiritual warfare**: “Satan has blinded their eyes”
 - ‘Like talking to a wall’
 - ‘They are always so aggressive’
- **Folk Islam** and superstition (problem with the ‘excluded middle’)
 - Senegal – ‘can’t go out at night for fear of evil spirits’
- **Depraved minds** (Rom 1:28)
 - Internet porn sites & Porn cards in Muslim areas
 - Turkey = 75% of women - sexually abused by family members

- **Theological Blockages**

The **theological gap** between Islam and Christianity is so vast that they are practically **un-bridgeable**. If our theology is not right, everything else is not right.

- Nature of **God**: Yahweh ≠ Allah
- Nature of **Christ**: Yesua ≠ Issa
- Nature of **Man**: Child of God ≠ Slave of God
- **Revelation**: Bible ≠ Qur’an
- **Sin**: Man’s fault ≠ God’s fault
- **Salvation**: God’s work ≠ Man’s work

- **Missiological Blockages**

The missionary Movement while looking for the most effective methods to communicate the gospel to Muslims have imposed blockages along the way.

- **‘Social Gospel’** & humanitarian work (‘Cargo Cult’ & ‘Rice Christians’)
- **Financial Dependency** (‘Prosperity Gospel’)
- Theological **Contextualization** (Insider Movement)
- **Eisegeting the Qur’an** (Imposing a Christian interpretation – S.4:157)
- **Eisegeting the Bible** (Imposing a Muslim interpretation – 1Cor.7 & 9)
- **‘Peace at any cost’** (Dialog that values peace over truth)
- **‘Friendship First’** only (No Biblical models & impedes the Gospel)
- **Timidity** vs Passion (Be bold, as Christ & the Church were bold)

BRIDGES TO MUSLIMS

The idea of bridging the Gap between Christianity and Islam was popularized in the mid-1950s and has remained popular ever since.

Appropriate Bridges

1. Dialogue, the Irenic approach, & Debates (which must lead to Gospel truths)

- Remember that '**Dialogues**' are a **Western** paradigm
 - Muslims don't understand them, and find them impractical
 - Muslims almost always quickly move into debate
 - Christians are ill-prepared & ill-equipped to move into debate
 - The audience leaves believing Christianity has all the problems
- **Irenics** must **open the door**, but never at the expense of the Gospel
- Sooner or later Christians are going to have to learn how to **debate**
 - It fits a Muslim audience best, as it is culturally relevant
 - Muslim societies are mostly **oral**
 - Orators are highly prized and trusted
 - **Muslims** are great **polemicists**, but hopeless apologists
 - **Christians** are great **apologists**, but hopeless polemicists

2. Biblical use of the Qur'an (Exegete it correctly & honestly)

'**Camel Method**' (used correctly)

- **Creation Story** (S.2,7,20) vs. (Gen.3:8-9)
- '**The fall of Man**' and 'imputed guilt' (S.7:24)
- Moses & the **Burning Bush** (S.20:10-14)
- The **Virgin Birth** and its significance (S.19:20)
- Jesus, the **righteous one** (S.19:19)
- **Jesus greater** than Muhammad (S.19:20; 3:46 & 49; 19:19)
- Jesus **birth, death & resurrection** (S.19:33) vs (S.4:157)
- The authority for the **Bible** (S.10:94; 21:7; 29:46; 4:136; 5:46-47, 68)

3. Careful contextualization

- a. Cultural awareness of **language** ('Form vs Meaning')
 - i. Make sure what we say is what they hear (i.e. Senegal example)
- b. Cultural **values** (Hospitality & moral teachings)
 - i. Muslims do 'love' better than Christians
 1. They are more social & event oriented
- c. **Honor and shame** context (Public vs Private)
 - i. Public bravado (SC) vs. private backrubs (KFC)
 - ii. Rarely do Muslims admit they understand or believe, that comes later
- d. **Bold and Courageous** (Model like a passionate religious Muslim)
 - i. We are taught to be '**Christ-like**', but it's a feminized European Christ
 - ii. Muslims prefer **passion**, while Western Christians prefer timidity