

Bridging to Muslims - Helps and Hindrances

(Dr. Jay Smith & 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, & are detrimental to the Gospel)
 - Muslim Cultural Identity: 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)
 - It only makes up 15% of all Muslims, and yet is adopted by all Muslims...should we follow suit?
 - It's a false, and debilitating cultural identity, and against God
 - 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, all 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 & 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 a European Christ
 - ii. Muslims prefer passion, while Christians prefer timidity