

How to Approach Muslims with the Christian Perspective?

Abstract

Muslims are increasing so fast and they are very keen on to keep their religious faith and practices. Muslims are the image bearers of God and they are not opponents of Christians. Christians must help their neighboring Muslims so that they can experience of the true knowledge, love, peace, and salvation of God. Since Islam is a unique monotheist religious group, Christians must approach them with contextualization methods, especially in the areas of greetings, language, and cultural issues of clothing, food, and worship styles. Moreover, an authentic relationship, sincere care, and trustworthiness can make a Christian the most reliable person to a Muslim, and by teaching the truth of the Scriptures can help him to turn back to the Lord Jesus. Nevertheless, approaching Muslims is not an easy task, so everyone must avoid controversial issues so that there will be peaceful communication. Still, there might be some possible challenges that cause some serious trouble, like unexpected reactions, threats, cultural shock, and syncretism. Christians must not force a Muslim to trust in the Lord Jesus, but rather with the love and care and continual prayer by asking the Holy Spirit's intervention to change Muslims' hearts for the Lord.

Introduction

Muslim¹ is the most rapidly increasing religious people group in this contemporary era. Michael Lipla and Conrad Hackett (April 6, 2017) mentioned, "In the next half century or so, Christianity's long reign as the world's largest religion may come to an end...Muslims will grow more than twice as fast as the overall world population between 2015 and 2060." Since Muslims are growing so fast, anyone will encounter them everywhere of this universe. So, there is no way to deny or escape them. This is the appropriate time to know the approaching methods for Muslims so that there will be a peaceful unity in the diverse world.

Muslim is a unique monotheist religion with some remarkable unique practices. They are usually so enthusiastic to keep their religious faith and practices. From the Biblical perspective we can understand them as Paul talked about the Jewish people in Romans 10:2, "For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge." In

¹ "A Muslim is one who submits to God [Allah] and God [Allah] alone" (Hasan, 2004: 11)

fact, this is a true scenario of the contemporary Muslims. They are really so zealous for God but it seems they are swimming in a dark ocean without the true knowledge and experience of God.

Christians must care about this fastest increasing people group (Muslims) because they desperately need to know the true God to find the right way of righteousness and eternal life. Many Muslims are practicing a very sincere religious life according to their pious duties to find real peace, but it seems they are far away from having their desired peace. However, without the true knowledge of God and sincere faith in the Prince of Peace it is impossible to have real satisfaction in their spiritual life. This essential need is challenging Christians to step up to approach Muslims with the true wisdom and love of God so that they can turn back to the right way of *Isa Al Messiah*².

Who Are Muslims?

Muslims are not hostile, not enemies or threaten people in the world. They are a beautiful people group with a unique religious faith and practices. Liepert (2010) mentioned, “Muslims call Islam the religion of peace, and we all claim that we’re only trying to make the world a better place” (p. 7). Muslim is not a religion but *Islam*³, and all the Islamic religion followers⁴ are called Muslim. The Muslim and Islam are inseparable parts. According to Stephen Juan (6 Oct, 2006) and C.L. Illsley (April 25, 2017), perception, Muslim is the second largest and fastest increasing religious group in today’s world. Muslim is a people group who worship One and Only God with the name of *Allah*⁵. Officially Islam was founded by the prophet Mohammad in the early seventh century. However, the Islamic fundamental belief is that the root of Islam is from the beginning of human history, and Abraham is considered as the Father of the Islamic faith (Neely 1995: 70 and Waines 1955: 2).

Muslims have some unique beliefs, culture, and practices which make a remarkable distinction from other religious groups. The following are some of the fundamental beliefs and practices of Muslims.

² Isa Al Messiah means the Lord Jesus Christ

³ “The word Islam, in Arabic, means ‘self-surrender’; it is closely related to salaam, the word for peace” (Ruthven 1997: 1).

⁴ Islamic religion followers include all the Islamic denominations such as Shia, Sunni, Sufi, Baha’is, Ahmadiyyas, Mohammadi, and so on and are called Muslims. However, the Sunnis are the majority (around 85–90%) of all Muslims. [Esposito & Mogahed (2007: 2).

⁵ Allah is the Arabic term for God. The one and only God for the Islam religious people. Reference. Abdurrahman, R. S. (20 Feb, 2006). *Who is Allah?* Retrieved from: <https://www.islamreligion.com/articles/195/who-is-allah/>

Common Beliefs of Muslims

According to Neely (1995), these are what Muslims believe:

- the oneness of God (*God the Allah is the only God. However, he has ninety-nine names.*)
- the oneness of humankind (*All forms of racism, caste, or ethnic superiority are rejected.*)
- oneness of the messengers and the message (*Muhammad was not God's only prophet. He was the last and final prophet of Allah.*)
- innocence at birth (*Everyone is born innocent and without the infection of sin.*)
- the existence of angels, final judgment, heaven, and hell (*There are invisible beings—angels—created by God for God's work. All Muslims believers will face the final judgment for the things they have done in their earthly lives, and how they live will determine whether their eternal destiny is heaven or hell.*)
- Islam as more than a religion; it is a perfect way of life (pp.72–73).
- belief in the Holy Books⁶, miracles, vision, and dreams
- the need for each male Muslim to be circumcised; polygamy allowed by the prophet⁷ (Armstrong 1988/2009: 14).

Also, Muslims have some special celebrations according to their religious festivals and calendar. Moreover, the foundation of the Islamic faith is based on the five pillars.

The Five Fundamental Pillars of Islam

These five tenets compose the framework of obedience for Muslims. Every Muslim must follow all of these five fundamental requirements of Islam.

1. The testimony of faith (shahada): “*la ilaha illa allah. Muhammad rasul Allah.*” This means, “*There is no deity but Allah. Muhammad is the messenger of Allah.*” The shahada shows that a Muslim believes in Allah alone as deity and believes that Muhammad reveals Allah. If anyone wants to be a Muslim, he/she must confess and trust the *shahada*.

2. Prayer (salat): Each day five ritual prayers have to be performed properly.

3. Giving (zakat): A certain percentage of wealth must be shared each year with the poor.

⁶ Muslims believe in the Holy Books such as *Tawrat, Jobber, Injil, Quran* and other writings which are called “*saifa*” or small books.

⁷ Prophet Muhammad disallowed Muslims to marry more than four women; however, he married thirteen women (Gabriel 2004: 7).

4. Fasting (sawm/ramadan): Muslims have to keep fasting during the month of Ramadan (*it is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar*). They must not eat or drink from dawn until sunset.

5. Pilgrimage (hajj): If a Muslim is physically and financially capable then he/she must make the pilgrimage to the most holy place of Mecca in Saudi Arabia at least once. The hajj is performed in the twelfth month of the Islamic calendar⁸.

There are some other important issues in Islam. Muslims have some universal rights. According to Latif Sarkar⁹ (a folk religious singer of Bangladesh) there are **Six universal rights of a Muslim**, such as: i) **Salaam** (*Assalamalikul* and *walaikumassalaam*) and the recipient must reply salaam; ii) **Care for sick people** (If a Muslim believer is sick, another Muslim has to visit him/her, whether he/she is a relative or not, or even an unknown person; iii) **Funeral prayer** (A Muslim must join the funeral service of other Muslim); iv) **Responding to a Muslim's invitation** (If a Muslim invites other Muslims they must keep the promise of the invitation); v) **General care and support for a Muslim** (If a Muslim is in trouble other Muslims have to help and rescue him); vi) **Sneezing blessing (dua)** (If a Muslim sneezes and says "*Alhamdulillah*", other Muslims who hear this sound have to reply *Yeah Rahamak Allah*) (Sarkar L, & Dewan K: Sep 13, 2017, YouTube time: 14:00~16:02).

Why Must Christians Approach Muslims?

The Yahweh God created all people in his own image. Moreover, God's common grace and mercy are for all the people of this universe. He wants to be the God of every race of people, including all tribal Muslims, and he wants to bless all the nations of the world (Genesis 12:3). The Yahweh is the God of all nation (Psalms 2:8; 110:6). The Lord's kingdom is requiring unity in diversity. Nevertheless, heaven is the place for all races, all tribes, all language groups even from pagan, and other religious groups of course including Muslims (Revelation 7:9), but they must trust in the Lord Jesus. In fact, without Jesus no one can reach to the Father therefore, Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6, NIV). Moreover, The God of the Bible even loves those people who are far away from him in fact, the hostiles. For example, God cared and showed his great love for the hostile

⁸ *What is Islam and what do Muslim believe?* Retrieved from: <https://gotquestions.org/Islam.html> [4th paragraph]

⁹ Latif Sarkar, Kajol Dewan- Hindu Musolman Pala Gan. Time duration: 14:00~16:02. Retrieved from: YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j_inaqzeWOY

people of Nineveh who persecuted God's chosen nation (Israelites). God sent his messenger to the people of Nineveh so that they could change and turn back to him from their wickedness. Most importantly, the Lord Jesus commanded his followers to make disciples from all nations of the universe (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15). Without reaching Muslims it is impossible to fulfil the Great Commission of the Lord Jesus. Also, the Christ's second coming will be on that when the gospel will be preached among all the nations of this universe (Matthew 24:14). Therefore, it is Christians' most required duty to help their Muslim neighbors so that they can have the opportunity to know about the true loving God. Unless Christians step up to share the good news of salvation, perhaps it will not be possible for Muslims to know the truth of salvation.

How to Approach Muslims?

Since Islam is a fundamental, unique religion, it is bit tough to approach them with another faith apart from Islam. Even though Muslims are friendly, they rarely allow other cultural¹⁰ people to teach them. The good news is, there are many common beliefs among Christian and Muslim religious practices. If a Christian can properly approach a Muslim, then surely there will be great change. There are different ways to approach Muslims. However, it is always good to communicate to a Muslim with common issues such as the Oneness of God, creation, the Fall, judgment, the last days, prophetic history, angels, salvation, faith, heaven and so on. The communicator (missionary) must be wise to escape controversial issues. Missionaries goal must not be to have debate and defeat a Muslim logically, but the goal should be to win his/her soul for the Lord. The communicator has to understand the circumstances, social setting, needs, and cultural aspects of the Muslim. The following are some of the best ways to approach Muslims.

Using the Contextualization Method

The contextualization method is one of the best ways to contact a Muslim. Contextualization means, "*delivering the message into the audience's own context and cultural understanding*". Contextualization makes the best and easiest bridge to communicate to any types of audiences. So, to communicate with a Muslim, the contextualization method would be one of the best ways to make him/her deeply understand the message.

¹⁰ Cultural in this context means "*other religious people*" such as Christians or other religions apart from Muslim

Ferguson, Wright, and Packer (1988: 164) mentioned, “Contextualization is a dynamic process of the church’s reflection, in obedience to Christ and his mission in the world... It is essential to our understanding of God’s self-revelation.”

Rick Love (2000: 55) stated that, “Contextualization is like planting a seed without the flowerpot.”

Parshall (1980: 31) said, “The gospel of Jesus Christ must be attractively presented into the context of any given group of people.”

Moreau¹¹ stated, “[The goal of contextualization] is to ensure that we do not add unnecessary cultural layers onto the gospel which confuse people who are not of our culture. Rather, we find ways to plant the unchanging gospel in local culture soil” (p. 407).

There are many contextualization examples in the Bible. In fact, from the beginning to the end of the Bible the Creator God contacted mankind with the contextualization approach. The most phenomenal one is the Holy God becoming a human being. Then the apostle Paul said, “To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law... To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings” (1 Corinthians 9:20–23).

From the author’s¹² experiences with the Muslim evangelism, the following are the most common issues that a Christian must consider contextualizing to communicate with Muslims: greetings, language, clothing, food, worship style, and using Quran verses during teaching times.

Greetings: A greeting is the first step to communicate to anyone, but to communicate a Muslim greeting keeps a significant role for the next conversation. The universal greeting for the Muslim is same “*As-salaam-u-aliikum*”¹³ or just “*salaam*”. Then the reply is, “*Wa-alaikum-assalaam*” which means “*Peace be with you*”. Moreover, Muslims practice “*shaking hands*” and a “*hug or embrace*” between two men or two women during their greetings. However, in Islam it is prohibited to approach different gender to shaking hands or a hug. If someone can approach a Muslim with the proper contextualization greeting¹⁴, then it will open the next door to continue

¹¹ Moreau, A. S. (n.d). Comprehensive contextualization. In Barnett, M., Martin, R. (Eds.). (2012). *Discovering the mission of God*. Downers Grove, ILL: IVP Academic. (p. 407).

¹² Author of this paper

¹³ The Islamic greeting. Cited from: <https://www.wikihow.com/Greet-in-Islam>

¹⁴ This should be the Islamic greeting “*As-salam-u-aliikum*” rather than good morning/afternoon/evening/hello/hi or any other cultural greetings.

unless it is sacrifice in the name of Allah, is forbidden food for Muslims. Sometimes some Muslims are not even comfortable to eat with other religious people, and women must not eat with the men. Therefore, anyone must not force them to eat everything or with everyone (Rom 14: 14, 20-21).

Worship style: Muslims have some unique styles of worship. Even though they have five different times of prayer each day, Friday is their official worship day. During worship times Muslims use body language. If someone wants to offer some prayers (*dua*) with a Muslim, he must have external cleanness. A missionary must be careful in his language (as mentioned earlier, using some Arabic words/ phrases are good to avoid traditional Christian phrases), and body expression is very important. For an example: Muslim people lift both their hands together during prayer times, they like to kneel down, and they do not close their eyes during prayers. Generally, Muslims do not allow song and music during worship time, so Christian missionaries have to fully understand being patient. However, after good and proper training hopefully they will adopt the Christian's traditional worship style.

Building a deep personal relationship of communication

This is called the 'Christ like' perspective. A sincere, strong relationship helps in becoming trustworthy and dependable to a Muslim. Unless a Christian missionary or evangelist becomes trustworthy to a Muslim, they will not believe him or her. Usually Muslim culture is based on the interpersonal, family, community, and religion relationships with each other. They consider relationships the highest priority. Therefore, it is good and important to build a deep relationship to gain a Muslim. Business (BAM) is a good and easiest media to contact a Muslim. There are many Muslim Businessmen who are having international business and trading around the world. Christian businessmen must consider their business as a media of world mission and approach Christian ethics through the business contracts. Nevertheless, we must use all the possible ways as a privilege to witness Christ to Muslims.

Also there are some other ways to contact Muslims, such as: verbal contact by visiting or meeting, contact through the internet, social media such as: Facebook, Instagram, Email, WhatsApp, Kakao, YouTube, and so on. Moreover, through print & electronic media, personal letters, email, phone calls, and even through personal business one may make a good relationship with a Muslim to win his/her soul.

Sincerity and Love

During evangelism times the evangelist/messenger must be genuine, loving and patient. Sincerity and love itself is a communicational language that even the blind can see and the deaf can hear. These days' people are interested to see what Christians do rather what they say. Our speech and deeds must have same message. So, the challenge for Christians is to love their neighbors (Muslims) with deeds and word. To win a Muslim for the Lord's kingdom is requiring sincerity and a loving attitude. The Lord Jesus required to his followers to love others and that should be selfless love. If a Christian can approach a Muslim with his loving, kind, and caring attitude most possibly there will be a great, positive result.

Quran References

The author of this paper believes that if someone wishes to have effective and fruitful evangelism with contemporary Muslims then that evangelist must have at least some knowledge about the Quran. Using the Quran's reference to a Muslim means "*using one's opponent's weapons to attack him*". Muslims will refuse the Bible and messages unless those are supporting their holy Quran. The good news is that the Quran itself testified about the Christ, Christianity, and the Holy Bible. On the other hand, there are different translations of the Quran available these days, so the missionary only needs to remember some of the important verses that are related to his message. If someone can use Quran verses, then it will work like a tonic of medicine for Muslims.

Challenges

Once again it is not an easy task to approach a Muslim, but it is not impossible, either. Surely there will be several challenges to overcome. The Bible says, "In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Timothy 3:12, NIV). The missionary must need these two things: i) fully dependence on the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5-8); ii) unceasing prayer (Philippians 4:6; 1 Thessalonians 5:17). During evangelism times the messenger must remember to always avoid controversial issues and be very wise in speech. Surely there will lot of traps for the missionaries but must not be tempted by their temptations. Moreover, Muslims do not allow anyone to insult their prophet Muhammad or Islam (Medearis 2008: 33). One may have unexpected reactions (physical, emotional, social) to several extra

possible challenges such as serious culture shock, threats, miscommunication, and or disappointment. Very often you may hear some sad news of persecution, killing, burning, and other social pressures from fundamental Muslims for Christians around the world.

The author of this paper has several experiences of unexpected reactions from his mission fields. Beside all other challenges the most vital challenge is syncretism. Everyone has to be careful not to syncretize with the Islamic religion and culture.

Application

Muslims are God's image bearers. Indeed, Muslims are thirsty and very enthusiastic to have the true peace of the Lord. Unless they hear the true message of salvation how then they can trust and enjoy the real peace and love of God (Romans 10:17)? Unless Christians approach them with the message of the loving God, they will continue remain in darkness, and they will approach Christians with their faiths.

In the Great Commission, "The Lord Jesus commissioned us to be his witnesses around the world [to the contemporary Muslims]" (Hiebert 1985: 27). Even the Quran clearly mentions to Muslims to trust in the Scriptures of Torah [*Mosaic law*], Zabur [*Psalms*], and Injil [*the New Testament*] (Surah 10:94; 2:136; 4:136; 5:68; 35:31; 46:12). Moreover, the Quran clearly asks Muslims to believe in Jesus Christ: "And there is none from the People of the Scripture but that he will surely believe in Jesus before his death. And on the Day of Resurrection he will be against them a witness" (Surah 4:159, Sahih International²²). This is Christians' time to approach them with the love and message of God so that they can easily understand our message, and can come to know the true knowledge, love, and peace of God. As a Christian we must not shock them or force them by any means. The Lord wants to redeem them to make them a part of his kingdom through our sincere ministries. Volf, Muhammad and Yarrington (2010: 53) mentioned, "Muslims and Christians together make up well over half of the world's population. Without peace and justice between these two religious communities, there can be no meaningful peace in the world." Let us do our part and let the Holy Spirit do the rest in the midst of Muslims surrounding us.

²² Sahih International. Retrieved from: <https://quran.com/4/159>

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