

TEN STUMBLING BLOCKS TO REACHING MUSLIMS

by *Waleed Nassar*



Since September 11th, 2001 many churches have increased their attention to reaching Muslims and many books have been written on this subject. Some offer a narrow, “prophetic,” Armageddon-type perspective on the Middle East and Muslims. Others approach the subject more positively, emphasizing spiritual warfare and mission strategies. My concern is that many of our efforts are likely to prevent the Western church from reaching Muslims, unless we make some drastic changes in our attitudes and conduct. Speaking as a Middle Easterner and as one who has had the privilege of discipling Muslim converts here in the West, I see ten major hindrances to reaching Muslims:

1. **The church’s political bias toward Israel.**

The Western church often fails to see the Middle East conflict as more than an Arab-Israeli conflict. In reality, it is a Muslim-Jewish conflict that dates back to the friction between Muhammad and the Jews of Arabia in the seventh century.

If the church wants to reach Muslims, it must refrain from taking sides. It must leave the politics to God and concentrate on sharing the gospel with Muslims in a loving and unbiased way.

2. **Insensitive teaching of prophecy.**

This is the kind of teaching that sees the Muslims as “fuel for Armageddon.” Bible teachers who see Arabic countries as enemies of Israel and Muslims as the people of the Jihad, or “Holy War,” do more harm than good. We cannot insult Muslims in our interpretation of the Bible and still expect them to respond to our message.

3. **Extreme nationalism.**

The nationalistic pride of believers often supersedes their Christian humility. If we are to boast, we must boast only about the Lord (1 Cor. 1:31). This kind of narrow, zealous “patriotism” is way out of biblical proportions. It is offensive to all non-Westerns and particularly to Muslims, who consider Western policies unfair toward them.

4. **Loose morals.**

Nothing offends a Muslim more than “talking the talk” while not “walking the walk.” Their religion is a legalistic one with heavy emphasis on punishing moral offenses.

For many Muslims, the blatant, open sin among some Christians is a great stumbling block. We must remember—and demonstrate—that while there is freedom in Christ, it is not freedom to sin.

5. **Immodest lifestyles.**

Other stumbling blocks include the unbalanced “prosperity” teachings and materialistic lifestyles of many Western Christians. Another is immodest dress, particularly among Christian women. All the Muslims I have disciplined have been uneasy with this at best—and disgusted at

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worst. These are people who have lived in the West for many years, so the issue is not merely one of cultural adjustment. They simply expect the values of the church to be higher than those of society at large (see Rom. 2:24).

6. Low degree of reverence.

In the eyes of Muslims, the way we talk to and about God reflects our reverence for him—or our lack thereof.

Westerners are virtually addicted to entertainment, and, unfortunately, this has invaded the church both practically and theologically. Muslims are turned off by this lack of reverence. Even excessive humor from the pulpit offends them. After their conversion, former Muslims would like to keep revering God while enjoying him as Father (see Mal. 1:6).

7. Ignorance of Islam.

Most Western Christians know very little, if anything, about Islam or its history, beliefs, and practices. As a result of this ignorance, people unfairly project the media images of Iran, the Taliban, and al-Qaeda upon all Muslims.

This lack of understanding is reflected in the pulpit as well. I have seen preachers receive standing ovations as they shouted, “Allah is not God! Jesus Christ is!”—not realizing that “Allah” is the only word for God in the Arabic language.

8. Lack of compassion.

Most Christians have as much compassion for Muslims today as first-century Jews had for the Samaritans. At best we show our apathy and carelessness. This lack of sensitivity or concern for their souls must be transformed by the Spirit of God if we are ever going to reach Muslims.

9. Lack of prayer and outreach.

Sadly, the church is too often a prayerless church. Life is so fast-paced and hectic that people do not know how to make time to pray. Added to the hindrances above, one can understand why outreach to Muslims is the weakest of all missionary efforts.

10. Disdain for Muslims’ culture.

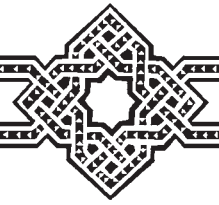
I once heard a pastor say to his congregation, “I’m glad I was not born in Iran



ISSUES THAT AFFECT MUSLIM PERCEPTIONS

1. Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
2. Military intervention by the UN in Libya (2011) and in Mali (2012).
3. Foreign military presence in places like Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, and Iraq.
4. United Nations’ sanctions against Muslim nations.
5. International Monetary Fund and World Bank restrictions on Muslim economies.
6. Qur’anic stereotypes of non-Muslims.
7. Legacy of Crusades and colonialism.
8. Effect of the global economy.
9. Phobia of the West in Muslim media.
10. Conspiracy theories.

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or one of those other countries.” In a sense, I understand his feeling, but I do not believe it is an appropriate Christian attitude—certainly not one to be expressed from the pulpit. What if an Iranian were there that day?

The church has a tendency to look down on all other cultures. We need to begin appreciating the positive aspects of Muslim tradition—close relationships and hospitality, for example.

Ultimately, our call is not to present our adaptation of Christianity to our Muslim friends. We must show them Christ. They will respond to him. ♦



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Do we regularly pray for the needs of Muslims?