

Muslim Worldviews and the Bible: Bridges and Barriers

Part III: Women, Purity, Worship and Ethics

by Rick Brown

It is well-known that Muslims and Christians tend to misunderstand each other. When trying to explain their beliefs to one another, they usually end up “talking past each other.” In part this is because of unrecognized differences in worldview. The same problem arises when people first encounter the Bible, since they try to interpret Scripture through the filter of their traditional worldview. But the very purpose of the Bible is to challenge traditional worldviews and transform them, leading to faith and understanding.

Part I of this series outlined Biblical themes regarding God, creation, angels, spirits, mankind, God’s rule, and mankind’s predicament. It compared these themes with viewpoints common to various Muslim subcultures and noted the relationships. Part II continued this approach with attention to the person and work of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, prophets, revelation, salvation, misfortune, the Kingdom of God, paradise, and the end of this age. Part III concludes with the role and status of women, worship, ethics, politics, mission, defilement and purification, and commonly held values. Where the viewpoints of Muslims are already in alignment with a Biblical theme, this is indicated in the middle column with an equals sign ‘=’. Similarities are marked with an ‘~’. Both could be considered “bridges.” More obvious differences are marked with an ‘x’ or an ‘X’, where ‘X’ is more serious than ‘x’. “Barriers” occur where well-entrenched aspects of worldview are in conflict with the worldview revealed in the Bible. These mismatches can lead to a distorted hearing of the message or to a complete rejection of it. Barriers are represented in the chart with a ‘|’ or ‘||’ or even ‘|||’, indicating increasing degrees of obstruction to comprehension and belief. There is an important class of worldview differences which may be called “door-openers” or “points of appeal,” and these are marked with ‘>’. These are Biblical viewpoints that are attractive to Muslims once they have understood them.

The hope is that this comparison will lead Christians to a greater understanding of Muslims and of the difficulties Muslims have in understanding the Biblical message, so that Christians may dialogue with Muslims more knowledgeably and more effectively. For Muslims who believe in Jesus and the Scriptures, this chart could possibly alert them to assumptions they might want to reconsider. It would not be helpful, however, for Christians to give this chart to prebelievers, since it could just highlight the barriers for them and make them defensive. Christians also inherit worldviews that derive from their own cultures and traditions, and the Bible challenges elements of these worldviews as well. So Christians might want to ensure that their own worldviews are aligned with the Bible before trying to help others understand the Biblical revelation.

Rick Brown is a Bible scholar and mission strategist. He has been involved in outreach to the Muslim world since 1977.

The Role and Status of Women

A woman may own property.

Men and women are created equal in value and ability, although there are small distinctions in their responsibility towards God and one another.

The testimony of men and women is equally valid.

Jesus appealed to men and women equally; both are welcome. There is no indication that men are more acceptable.

A woman gains salvation in the same way as a man.

A husband's duty is to love his wife and be willing to die for her.

One husband and one wife should become like one flesh. Polygamy is discouraged in the Bible and forbidden by most churches. Sex outside of marriage is forbidden to both the man and the wife.

God hates divorce and strictly limits it. Believers should stay united.

There is no discrimination between men and women in heaven.

A person's own lust is the cause of temptation and sexual sin. Men and women are equally to blame.

A woman is not restricted in regard to leaving the house or traveling, but she should dress modestly and not entice men.

Men and women may socialize together in mixed company. They should view each other as brothers and sisters, not as sexual objects. In Christ there is neither male nor female.

Worship

The main purpose of worship is to thank and praise God for what he has done and to acknowledge his surpassing worth.

Mankind was created to praise and love God, but the manner of worship is not rigidly prescribed. *The greatest obligation is to love God with all one's heart, soul, mind, and strength, and after that to love others as oneself.*

Worship involves prayer, song, studying God's message in the Bible, celebrating the last supper, and fasting. All that one says, thinks, and does should bring honor to God. It encompasses the whole of life.

The Role and Status of Women

= A woman may own property.

X On the one hand, men and women are said to be equal except in responsibility towards God, but on the other, women are said to be deficient in intelligence, piety, gratitude, and reliability. Compensation for a woman's life is half that of a man's.

x The testimony of one man equals that of two women.

> Those in hell-fire are mostly women; those in paradise are mostly men.

| A woman gains salvation by pleasing and obeying her husband.

x A husband's duty is to provide food and clothing for his wife, after he has fed and clothed himself, and to beat her if she rebels.

x A man may marry four wives and have slave concubines. A woman may not marry more than one husband at a time.

x A man may divorce his wife at will and may threaten her with divorce. A woman may not generally divorce her husband.

x In paradise, a man may have many concubines (*hurr*) and the sexual strength of a hundred men, whereas nothing is promised for the few women who reach paradise.

x Immodesty and lust on the part of women is the cause of temptation and sexual sin. Men cannot be expected to resist a temptress. Therefore the visibility and accessibility of women need to be controlled.

x A woman should ideally remain at home. If she goes out, she must be covered and accompanied by close relatives or other women. She should never be seen uncovered by a man who is not a close relative.

x Men and women live in different social worlds. Although they marry, homes are divided into separate men's and women's sections. Role distinctions are strictly defined. Men work outside and deal with public affairs and finances while women serve in the home and manage the family.

Worship

x The purpose of ritual worship is to acknowledge submission to God's will.

Popular: Ritual worship helps to ward off evil, as does use of the rosary, etc.

x Worship is obligatory, and specific acts of devotion are prescribed in the 'five pillars': witness, ritual washings and prayer, fasting during Ramadan, alms, pilgrimage.

~ Worship encompasses the whole of life. It includes prayer, chanting the Qur'an and observing the law. Singing (as opposed to chanting) is inappropriate.

Worship draws the believer closer to God and helps purify his life.

Worship is only acceptable if it is done sincerely, from the spirit.

Ethics (a small selection of contrasts)

The basis of ethics is love for God and gratitude for what he has done. Ethical behavior is an expression of love for God and man, in response to the experience of God's grace. It is motivated by a changed nature, the result of one's spirit being born again through the Holy Spirit, Who dwells in those who are in Christ. The Holy Spirit is a continual source of motivation.

The ideal person which believers should seek to emulate is Jesus Christ.

God wants his people to love him as children, to love others, and to be holy as he is holy. They show their love for God by making him their highest priority and by obeying his commandments.

The divine law is a schoolmaster that should increase awareness of sinfulness and lead one to Christ.

Humility is required for true love for God and others. Humility is more important than promoting and preserving one's honor among men.

A believer is free to eat or drink anything in moderation, even pork or wine, but he should limit his freedom to avoid hurting others.

Fasting is encouraged but not required.

Believers should talk often to God and also be attentive for his guidance. This is what they mean by "prayer". They should also make their petitions known with thanksgiving and intercede for those in authority and for those in need.

Believers should gather often for worship and fellowship, but personal prayer and fasting are better done in private.

The Old Testament prescribed one day of rest each week, and although this is not required under the new covenant, it remains a common and valued practice.

Acceptable types of clothing are not strictly defined, and cultural diversity is approved, but believers should dress modestly.

Believers are free to pray at any time. They should not make a show of their prayers or repeat their words needlessly.

Believers are not required to make pilgrimages.

~ Ritual worship reminds the believer of his obligation to God and paves the way for his entrance into paradise.

x Worship is only acceptable if the rituals are performed correctly, with sincere intent.

Ethics

| The basis of ethics is fear of God and the desire to please him and gain his approval. Ethical behavior is a fulfillment of duty and obedience to God's laws. It is motivated by learned rules of behavior and by fear of the Last Day.
Popular: Major components of motivation include the fear of public dishonor and the fear of the consequences of uncleanness.

x The ideal person which believers should seek to emulate is the Prophet of Islam.

X God wants his people to submit to him as slaves. They show their submission by observing his laws.

X The divine law prescribes how one should behave.

X Popular: Preserving one's honor is a more important duty than humility.
Philosophical Sufi: Absolute humility and selflessness are required to perceive fully the truth of the Absolute Reality of God.

X A Muslim must never eat pork or drink anything alcoholic.

x Fasting is required during Ramadan.

x Muslims should observe the five scheduled times of ritual worship, which they call "prayer" (*ṣalāt*). Afterwards they can make petitions to God (*du'ā*).

x Muslim men should pray in a mosque, if possible, but women should pray at home. On Friday men should pray the noon prayer in the mosque; women may pray at the same time if there is a special place for them.

x There is no required day of rest.
Popular: Friday has become a day of rest in many places; also Thurs, Sat., or Sunday.

x Muslims should dress very modestly. In conservative communities certain kinds of clothing are often prescribed as "Islamic".

x Muslims must wash and remove shoes before praying. A Muslim's ritual prayers (*ṣalāt*) will not be acceptable if he/she is unclean in any way. A petitionary prayer (*du'ā*) may be made at any time.

x Every Muslim who is able should make the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once.

Believers should consider all of their property to belong to God. Giving to those in need is a reflection of the believer's gratitude to God for his gift of Jesus Christ. Many follow the Old Testament example of giving at least ten percent for ministry.	~	Muslims should pay the alms-tax (<i>zakât</i>); they should also be generous to guests, to those in need, and to the cause of Islam.
Believers are free to relieve themselves in any practical position.	x	Muslims should relieve themselves in prescribed ways, taking care not to contaminate their clothing or skin.
Murder is forbidden.	X	Orthodox: Muslims should not murder anyone except the enemies of God, whom they are obliged to kill. This includes the enemies of Islam and apostates from Islam. Popular: A father or responsible male relative may kill anyone in the family who brings shame to the family, especially converts and women who are indiscreet.
Politics		Politics
Believers should obey secular laws and all those in authority as much as possible.	x	Muslims should obey authentic Muslim leaders. It is not sinful to disobey those in authority or break secular laws.
The Kingdom of God is not of this world. A theocracy is not possible until Christ returns.	x	Muslims should establish a Muslim state. Ideally they should establish a world-wide utopian theocracy ruled by a Caliph.
Believers can live anywhere.	x	Muslims are encouraged to live in a Muslim state.
Mission		Mission (Da'wa)
All followers of Christ have a duty to proclaim the Gospel.	~	All Muslims have a duty to defend and propagate Islam.
The purpose of mission is to make the Gospel of the Kingdom known to every person, to disciple those who repent and believe, and to incorporate them into effective fellowships (churches). Mission involves proclaiming the Gospel, baptizing believers, training disciples, etc.	x	The purpose of <i>da'wa</i> is to extend Dar al Islam and enlarge the <i>Umma</i> . It involves bringing people into submission to God, and should eventually include everyone.
Genuine conversion is the work of the Holy Spirit. It cannot be forced or enticed by worldly means.	X	Conversion is a result of re-education. It can be fostered by threat, pressure or reward.
Defilement and Purification		Defilement and Purification
Under the old covenant (OT), one could be defiled (made ceremonially unclean) to various degrees by eating or touching ceremonially unclean things. If one was defiled, his worship and prayers were not acceptable to God. Many animals, such as pigs and dogs, were unclean to eat, as was blood and any animal improperly slaughtered. Anything contaminated by leprosy, seminal emissions, or blood from childbirth and menstruation was unclean to touch.	=	Orthodox: Mostly the same as the OT. In addition an unbeliever or other unclean person cannot read or touch the Qur'an. Popular: Being unclean brings the curse of God, which leads to punishment and suffering.
OT: A human corpse was unclean to touch, as were infidels.	x	(Shi'ites agree; Sunnis don't.)
OT: Excrement is unclean and must be buried.	x	Defecation and urination render one unclean until ritual washing (ablution, <i>wudu'</i>).
Wine is clean, although drunkenness is prohibited. (In the OT, priests were prohibited from wine and intoxicants while serving in the tabernacle. Lev. 10:8)	X	Wine and all spirits are unclean.
OT: Sinfulness, especially idolatry, rendered a land unclean.	X	The unclean person defiles the ground he walks on; his personal angels record this and curse him for it.

OT: Purification usually involved washing or bathing.

God has made people and foods clean for believers in Christ. Ac 10:15; Rom 14:20; Titus 1:15; Mark 7:23

Christ said that *what really defiles people is the sinfulness of their hearts*, not what they eat. Mk7:18-23

In the New Covenant, the power and holiness of Christ is stronger than uncleanness. When he touched lepers he was not defiled; rather, they were cleansed.. Mark 1:40-44. The guilt of sin is cleansed once for all time by baptism with faith in Christ (Ac 22:16). *The hearts of believers are purified by the Holy Spirit through faith in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ* (Ac 15:9, 1Co 6:11, Tit 3:5), and regularly cleansed by confession of sin (1 Jo 1:9) and by the word of Christ (Eph 5:26, John 15:3) This is possible because of the sacrificial blood/death of Christ which cleanses our hearts. Heb 9:13, Re 7:14; Col 2:16-23

Values commonly held

Believers should seek unity within diversity.

Impartiality towards all is commanded, but there is a greater obligation to love those within the household of faith. (In practice, partiality has been a problem from the beginning.)

Nevertheless, the Bible foretells the growth of the Kingdom until it exists in every nation, tribe, and tongue, and this is what is seen in history. Nevertheless, the Kingdom of Christ has always faced opposition in this world. Among its constant opponents have been religious authorities (like the Sadducees) and religious traditionalists (like the Pharisees), (Acts 7:51).

Creativity is valued as an attribute of God's image in man.

Individuals may make their own decisions with due respect for the counsel of fellow believers and the effect on others.

Individuals should grow in conformity to Christ, especially with regard to holiness, love, obedience, and understanding.

Adversities (trials) are an opportunity for spiritual growth.

Peace is valued as an inner condition produced by the Holy Spirit in those reconciled to God through Christ.

Loyalty is owed to fellow believers in the family of God.

Personal honor is based on individual character. A person of honor is characterized by wisdom, dependence on God, loving and serving him.

- ~ Purification of minor defilement, such as touching the skin of a person of the opposite sex or relieving oneself, involves ablutions with clean water and formulaic prayers. Purification of major defilement (sexual emission, blood) requires a complete washing. "Purity is half the faith." (Hadith)
- x In the absence of water, sand may be used.
- > Unclean foods always defile a person and may never be eaten.
- > (These concepts are unknown, but they could answer a felt need for inner cleansing.)
- > (Islam has no cleansing from sinfulness. It cannot purify the heart and mind.)

Values commonly held

- x The Muslim community should promote uniformity.
- x There is official inequality between sexes, languages, religious communities, and—unofficially—between races, clans, classes.
- X The first Islamic society was the best, and it has been downhill since then. The early practices, teachings and interpretations are the best. Hence tradition is sacred, and innovation is profane. Submission to Islam means submission to a whole body of legal, social, ritual, textual and doctrinal traditions.
- x Creativity violates tradition and uniformity.
- | Decisions should be made by leaders in the family or clan.
- X Individuals should conform to Islamic society and family and should follow the example of their prophet.
- x Adversity is to be avoided or else accepted as fate.
- x Peace is valued as the absence of adversity.
- x Loyalty is owed to one's extended family.
- x Personal honor is based on the honor of one's family and clan.

One should bring honor to Christ, by honest means, even if one appears foolish to others or displeases one's family.	x	One should, by almost any means, promote and protect the honor of one's family and of Islam.
One should seek guidance from God through the Bible, prayer, and the Holy Spirit.	x	One should seek guidance by learning the Islamic law and following it. Popular: One can seek divine guidance from saints and others who have a gift for this service.
<i>Believers should feel ashamed if they dishonor or displease God.</i> However, if they are following Christ, then they expect reproach and persecution from worldly people.		The Muslim generally feels ashamed when others reproach him or his family or a member of his family. Avoidance of shame is perhaps the strongest factor affecting social behavior. The family should keep its womenfolk from shaming them by committing a sexual indiscretion; shame can be alleviated by strictly punishing the offending woman.
One should practice hospitality even to strangers.	~	The practice of hospitality and generosity bring honor to the family; its lack brings dishonor.
One should work and not be idle. Work with the hands is honorable.	X	A man should not work if it is not necessary. Manual labour is not honorable. IJFM

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