

# A Biblical Response to Islamic Violence and Muslims

## Why This Paper?

The purpose of this paper is to explore our response to escalating Muslim violence and to the growing presence of Muslims among us. Biblical responses will open up to us doors of opportunity to identify with Jesus and to follow Him in ways that fear, anger, isolation, and suspicion may be preventing.

The Lord of the Harvest is sovereignly at work in the hearts of Muslims worldwide, calling them to Himself and giving them faith in His Son. “One of the greatest recurring motivations for Muslims coming to Christ is a rejection of the militant expression of Islam itself.”<sup>1</sup> However, many of us are unaware of this great work of God. Instead, the enemy of our souls uses another message to keep us from contact with—and witness to—Muslims.

## Sound Bites

We’ve all heard the sound bites. “Islam is a religion of peace.” “Our religion has been hijacked.” “Muslims are peaceful people.”

Muslim disavowals of terrorism and violence often seem hollow and off topic, if not inflammatory. A Muslim-sponsored event<sup>2</sup> titled “Should We Fear Islam?” begs the question, claiming “to call ISIS Islamic is like saying the KKK is Christian because it uses Christian symbols – burning crosses – and cherry-picked Bible verses to justify its violence and hate.”

And we’ve heard the demographic sound bites: “The fastest growing religion”; “In a matter of years, Europe, as we know it, will cease to exist.”<sup>3</sup>

## Natural Responses

What’s your gut reaction, the feelings, the words? Where does the barrage of violence, bad news, claims, and counter-claims take your mind and heart? Anger? Fear? Avoidance? Confrontation?

As “informed” citizens, we feel a responsibility to make value judgments about the news we hear. We have plenty of reason to be concerned about the safety and future of our nation.

What about as citizens of God’s Kingdom? How are we to navigate the news flashes, the discussions and commentaries, the seminars on the danger of Islam, our own fears and emotional turmoil over graphic videos of violence committed in the name of Islam? And alongside our raw emotions, how are we to navigate the way of the gospel, the way of our Savior, our call to discipleship and disciple-making?

All of us have probably heard the more extreme responses to Islam and Muslims, like, “The only good Muslim is a dead Muslim!” While we may agree that they don’t sound like things Jesus would say, there is still a huge amount

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<sup>1</sup> Garrison, V. David. *A Wind in the House of Islam: How God is Drawing Muslims around the World to Faith in Jesus Christ*. Monument, CO: WIGTake Resources, 2014. P. 58

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/MuslimAmericanMedia/posts/608603215907512>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ucnHU276eX0> Rebuttals are many, including an article titled “Religiousness and Fertility among European Muslims”, *POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT REVIEW* 33(4):785 – 809 (DECEMBER 2007 )

of fear and apprehension about Muslims. A prominent outcome of our fear and anger is a reluctance to reach out to Muslims with the gospel.

## **A Question of Authority**

Do we filter our news sources, or do we simply allow the media to influence us without question or clarification? Are we subject to a kind of naivety that views all Muslims as potentially violent, or to an equally naïve acceptance of Muslims' claims that true Islam is "a religion of peace"?

What "authority" do we allow to determine our attitudes and actions? We are inundated with a lot of informed people giving their studied opinions about Islam and with a range of Muslim ideologies. Are we, as disciples of Christ, more interested in those opinions than in Jesus' call on our lives to disciple the nations? Do we, the Church, allow our attitudes, and even our actions, to be ordered by current expert opinion and debate?

Another way to ask this is, "How much does the Bible really inform our theology, and our practice?" We who are otherwise clearly committed to biblical truth need to ask to what extent we are willing to follow Jesus' teaching and other teaching in the Bible about how to relate to the lost, to the nations, and even to those who are considered enemies. Is it truly the Bible, or is it our human sense of a need for security, that informs our beliefs and practice?

## **Us and Them**

So what do we do with the unbroken and tangled stream of "incoming" information about violence, Muslims, and Islam?

Our responses are often structured in a "we"- "they" form, where "they" is Islam, and so, by association to some degree or another, all Muslims. "We" is all of "us" who are not part of "they", in which we conflate our national and our Christian citizenships. In doing so we can easily let the safety and security concerns that trigger much of the "incoming" information dominate our view, diverting us from the biblical promises and mandates that should be informing our processing of incoming information. We find it easier to speak to the concerns of state than to the state of our concern for the proper roles of the Church and the gospel.

## **Overcoming Our Fears**

Since 9/11, many churches, rightly looking for alternative sources of information, have been clamoring for presentations about Islam and Muslims. Ignorance, confusion, silence, and lack of awareness perpetuate fear and our unbiblical avoidance or ignoring of Muslims that is so prevalent among us. But awareness and information about Islam and Muslims are not the antidotes for fear. In fact, there is a whole stream of information, much of it "true", that will affirm and even increase fear, anger, and resentment. This kind of true information about current and historical Islam is designed to discredit and dismantle the doctrines and beliefs of Islam. The underlying assumption is that this will simultaneously bolster and preserve the beliefs and doctrinal integrity of the Christian listener.

Consider the parallel to an American missionary family living in a "Muslim" city where shootings, carjacking, and bombings are commonplace. What if fear were allowed to rule? What if the real and true accounts of the day's murders, carjackings, and bombs isolate the family from the 99.9% of the city not directly impacted or involved? Would they ever accomplish their calling? Would they ever experience the hospitality, kindness, friendship, and openness of so many among the 99.9%? Would the 99.9% ever consider the gospel?

Isolation is exactly what has been happening to so many people in the Church, especially in the West. We have "stayed in the house," fearful of going out to live life normally, and have allowed our fear of violent Muslims to

dictate our view of Muslims in general. The result is a discipleship that looks very different from the bold, courageous, love-empowered walk of faith that our Master calls us to live out among the nations. John tells us, “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love” (1 John 4:18, ESV). How will the love of God be manifested in our prayers for Muslims, among whom God has His own elect people, who will be counted with us around the throne of God, with people “from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Revelation 5:9, ESV)? Will not our prayers for Muslims transform our fearful hearts toward them and give us new energy in walking with our Savior into new paths among people we have neglected to include in the gospel?

What kind of courage did Jesus require of His disciples? He told them, “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves” (Matthew 10:16, ESV). He told them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Matthew 16:24, ESV). Jesus’ first disciples were very aware of the dangers associated with following Him. Our secure and tolerant culture has dulled our memory of those dangers.

### **Cracking Open Islam**

What does it take to follow Jesus, knowing that true commitment to Christ could cost us all we have, including our lives, as our brothers and sisters in Muslim lands have learned through hard experience? It takes real, vibrant faith to follow Jesus with a cross on our shoulders. What does it take for Islam to give way to the truth that this kind of faith embraces?

We are already seeing some of the wonderful works that God is bringing out of the most gruesome violence of ISIS. In the first week after the beheading of Egyptian Coptic Christians by the sea in Libya, a record-breaking 1.65 million copies of “Two Rows by the Sea”, a Christian tract of relevant Bible verses, were distributed to Muslims and Christians alike in Egypt.<sup>4</sup>

Iran is another shining example, though many are unaware of what God does when men take a religious and political system to its logical extreme: people get very fed up with that system and their hearts are opened up to spiritual realities and to the search for truth. The nightly news, or the hourly news app, will not tell you that Iranians are coming to faith in Christ all over the world in ways a very precious few did before the Iranian Revolution.

In our angry awareness of violent Muslims, we are increasingly willing to stand with our brethren in the Middle East. Are we prepared to stand with them in faith that God will crack open the very force that threatens their lives and move Muslim hearts to call on Jesus as Savior? This has begun to happen, even as some young people in Istanbul, Turkey are forsaking Islam and embracing Jesus’ good news, clearly crediting current violent acts by Muslim terrorists as their reason for leaving their inherited faith.

### **Islam and the Great Commission**

Does it matter whether or not “Islam is a religion of peace?” What does the answer have to do with Jesus’ call to discipleship? We are tempted to say, “If it is a religion of peace, I can talk to Muslims, witness to them, and include them in the gospel.” But what if we conclude that although the vast majority of Muslims are people just like us, who make life decisions based on what is best for their family, what will best guarantee their health and safety and a good education and future for their children, the evidence still points to an undeniable violence inherent in Islam? Will we then say we don’t need to talk to Muslims, share the love and truth of Christ with them, or include them in our

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<sup>4</sup> The Witness of the Egyptian Martyrs, International Journal of Frontier Missiology, October-December 2014, p. 218.

missions endeavors? Will we, in our practice, if not in our speech, reword Jesus' Great Commission so that it says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all *peaceful* nations" (Matthew 28:19, ESV)?

Perhaps the biggest irony in all this is that if we hold on to the view that all Muslims are potential terrorists, and that we have no reason to engage them in relationship, we will actually contribute to the slow decline and weakening of the Church. The Church in retreat is the Church loosening its grip on faith, on power in witness, and even on relevance to the society around us.

## **Service to Christ**

The only biblical place to end up is in a posture of repentance toward our Lord Jesus Christ for the sins of fear, apathy, and love of life and limb that have kept us from obedience to His unqualified command to call all nations, all people groups, to faith in Him. The heart attitude becoming of true followers of Jesus is a generosity which mirrors Jesus' words when He said, "You received without paying; give without pay" (Matthew 10:8b, ESV). We are called to adopt the servanthood of Jesus who told us, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45, ESV). The only position that is consistent with the whole body of revealed truth we are given in the Scriptures is one of renewed—and new—commitment, in whatever way Jesus calls us, to enrolling in His global team of workers who are sent out in His unlimited authority to disciple the nations for His glory. If loving Muslims enough to get close to them for the sake of the gospel seems strange to us, it is not at all out of place in Jesus' thinking. He included Muslims in His atoning work on the cross and in His Great Commission. We must include them in our own response of obedience and sacrifice.

## **Loving Muslims**

How do we do this? Currently 60% of Muslims in America were born outside the United States. The opportunities to welcome them and help them adjust to life here are endless. Refugees, international students, and immigrants respond very well to our friendship, help with learning English, getting around, getting settled, and navigating new and bewildering ways of doing things. This could be as simple as applying for a library card or a driver's license. It could be giving an hour a week to an Arab student who needs practice speaking the English language. Maybe it's just giving a newcomer from the Muslim world a ride to Wal-Mart for shopping, or loading a sofa on a pickup truck to help move a refugee family into an apartment.

The second-generation Muslims who are born here will vastly outnumber immigrants and international students within a very short time. They experience identity tensions, being caught between their parents' culture and the culture of North America, but are able to reason in ways their parents have a very hard time doing. This often gives them the ability to consider the evidence for the gospel. We can meet them at mosques, on university campuses, among other parents at PTO meetings, or among our colleagues at work. They are not expecting us to reach out to them or befriend them. Doing this often surprises them and builds a bridge for friendship and the gospel.

Many thousands of Muslims in North America are deeply disturbed by the same images of Islamic violence that we see. The obvious contrast to the words and ways of Jesus and the good news of the gospel open a door for our loving and humble witness to them.

Let us dare to see the harvest Jesus sees when He looks at the masses of lost humanity, and ask in all sincerity, "How and where does the Lord of the Harvest want me to serve Him?"