

## **Early Gentile Christianity, Conversion and Culture-Shift in the New Testament**

by Terence Paige, Houghton College

### **Response by Georges Housney**

We are here at this consultation to deal with the controversy surrounding the theories and practices of what is called, by some, the Insider Movement and its various expressions. Both promoters and opponents of the Insider Movement rely on the scriptures to support their approaches. The problem is that our reading of the Scriptures and our interpretation of certain passages can be colored by our preconceived ideas or by our experiences on the field.

Therefore, it is extremely critical that we look at the scriptures as objectively as possible and let the Word of God speak for itself. We need a clear exegetical approach to the many texts used in this debate.

Exegesis is the discipline that helps us extract the accurate meaning of a text in its literary, historical and cultural contexts and background. It helps us come to the text not with preconceived ideas to find support in the scriptures but rather with an open mind that allows us to excavate the true meaning as it was originally intended. This is what Dr. Terence Paige does in this well researched, well thought through exegetical paper. It is not written from a pragmatic or experiential starting point. It is an excellent example of an exegetical work that has a biblical starting point. Having thoroughly investigated the pertinent passages under consideration, Dr. Paige appears to understand Paul and Gentile culture very well. He has a thorough grasp of the cultural atmosphere and the impact of the gospel on the prevailing cultures of the first century of Christianity.

The exegetical approach Paige uses helps us see the connection between the biblical texts used by Insider proponents and the broader contexts of Paul's other teachings in all the epistles. His approach is contextual, not speculative. When he quotes a verse he references the entire context, tells the story, looks at its historical and cultural backdrop and draws his conclusions. All of us, regardless of our position on the current issues, are far too often tempted to take verses out of context and piece scriptures together in an attempt to support our positions.

### **Culture-Shift in the New Testament**

The subtitle of this paper, *Conversion and Culture-Shift in the NT* indicates that the gospel produces change and transformation in the recipient culture. Both Gentiles and Jews who accepted Christ experienced a major shift in their distinct identities as they converged into one new community with a distinct and unified identity in Christ. They abandoned their worldview and their cultural heritage and became members of one new man, one flock, one body, one community, one holy nation, one Church.<sup>1</sup>

Paige takes us deep into Greco-Roman culture and shows how it conflicts with the new culture of the Church. Working with well established exegetical principles, Paige analyzes the

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<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 2:15; John 10:16; Romans 12:5; 1 Peter 2:9; Acts 2:44; Ephesians 4:4

intent of Paul, who dealt with the cultural clash between the newly formed community of believers, the Church, and the two separate and distinct cultures of the Jews and Gentiles. His description of the Greco-Roman culture of the time reveals that “*Gentile*” is not just an ethno-cultural identity.<sup>2</sup> Rather, it is primarily religious. Dr. Paige demonstrates that religion permeated every aspect of the social and private lives of the gentiles to the extent that they had a god for everything. “For the Romans and Greeks what we might call ‘religion’ was interwoven into all aspects of life.”<sup>3</sup> We conclude then that there was no clear cut separation between culture and religion among the gentiles. My reading then is that how Paul treated culture is the exactly same way he would treat religion. This is evident in Paul’s teaching and practices among both the gentiles and Jews.

Paul’s missiology was transformational. Conversion to Judaism before Christ, and later to this new group called “the Way,” meant a total transformation of worldview and lifestyle. This had two elements according to Dr. Paige; accepting the new and rejecting the old. Rejecting the old, Paige demonstrates, meant shaming their ancestors, rejecting their deities, refusing to revere the divine emperors, and withdrawing from social events such as civic rituals and festivities.<sup>4</sup> “conversion would bring immediate sharp socio-political consequences...”<sup>5</sup>

Comparing the cultures of Corinth and Thessalonica is perhaps one of the most insightful and significant contributions of Dr. Paige in this paper. “Clearly one of the main differences between the churches of Corinth and of Thessalonica is that the latter took a public stand, withdrew from pagan cults, and paid the price in persecution.” The Corinthians on the other hand were “badly influenced by their pagan culture...”<sup>6</sup> Paul praised the Thessalonians for “how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,”<sup>7</sup> but rebuked the Corinthians for flirting with idolatry. Eating meat sacrificed to idols was becoming a stumbling block to the “weak” by the “strong” who underestimated the danger of participating in pagan rituals. Corinthian believers experienced freedom by the grace of God but they went too far and found themselves participating in the worship of demons without realizing it. Paul stressed that though we are free, we need to exercise caution that our freedom would not become a stumbling block to the “weak.”<sup>8</sup>

The apostle Paul alluded to this cultural aspect as he wrote, “Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to

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<sup>2</sup> Terence Paige, *Early Gentile Christianity, Conversion, and Culture-Shift in the New Testament*. page 3

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, page 3

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, page 6

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, page 6

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, page 7

<sup>7</sup> 1 Thessalonians 1:3-9

<sup>8</sup> The next two paragraphs are from *Jew to Jews, Greek to Greeks?* by Georges Housney <http://biblicalmissiology.org/2010/07/08/jew-to-jews-greek-to-greeks-part-i/>

an idol, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled.”<sup>9</sup> The word “accustomed” indicates that it became a habitual cultural practice.

Those who were strong caused those who had a weak conscience to stumble. The strong held that idols were nothing and that meat sacrificed to idols did not make any difference to those who had solid faith. Paul admonished the strong believers to be sensitive to those with a weak conscience. He argued that these had not completely broken away from the associations of their old religious practices. If a mature Christian begins to exercise his or her freedom in Christ and thinks nothing of meat sacrificed to idols, (we know that an idol is nothing), the weak brother could easily be caused to stumble. The association with idol worship is still there and that can endanger his new Christian walk.<sup>10</sup>

Paul warned that although idols were nothing, “the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord’s table and the table of demons.”<sup>11</sup>

Dr. Terence Paige, after comparing the Thessalonians and the Corinthians, draws this conclusion: “It is ironic then that some have tried to use Paul’s advice to the Corinthians as an example of ‘living out the good news of the kingdom within the religious framework of your own community...’”<sup>12</sup>

Paul’s warning is perfectly applicable to a Muslim context. Islam, like the Paganism of Corinth, is a total way of life that encompasses all aspects of thought, feelings, and behavior. Like Dr. Paige, I find it ironic that the weakness of the Corinthians is used by Insider proponents to promote the idea of believers remaining inside the community in order to leave their identity intact. Paul did not have such concerns. On the contrary, his concerns were to make sure the new community of believers remained distinct from the dominant religious community of the area. His main concern was to avoid contaminating the Christian community with idolatry and thus angering God.<sup>13</sup> When there is confusion, Paul asked that converts distance themselves from participation in pagan practices, i.e. eating meat sacrificed to idols. At the risk of offending the host, Paul wants them to take a stand that would not confuse or cause the new believer to stumble by endorsing idolatry.

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<sup>9</sup> 1 Corinthians 8:7

<sup>10</sup> 1 Corinthians chapters 8-10 contains the full discourse of Paul tackling this problem. If taken as a whole, the theme and conclusions are clear. Emphasizing certain passages within this discourse can result of missing the point.

<sup>11</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:20-21

<sup>12</sup> Paige, op.cit, page 7

<sup>13</sup> See 1 Corinthians 10

## **Idolatry in Islam**

Some proponents of the Insider Movement do acknowledge that perhaps folk Islam contains elements of idolatry. For example, Kim Gustafson applies Paul's distress about idolatry in Athens (Acts 17) as "a parallel to Folk Islam in the Muslim World."<sup>14</sup> Although this statement is partially true, it attempts to exempt formal Islam from categorization as idolatry by accepting it as legitimately monotheistic. It is my conviction that Islamic idolatry is not limited to merely folk Islamic practices, as Gustafson and other Insider proponents contend. Formal Islam is no less idolatrous.

Having grown up in a Muslim context and ministered among Muslims for over 45 years, it is overwhelmingly clear to me that demonic allegiance is part and parcel of being a Muslim. This is true not only of "folk" Muslims who dabble in occult practices, but also of "formal" Muslims. Converts from both folk and formal mindsets must undergo deliverance from demonic spiritual allegiances to Muhammad, the Qur'an, and Islamic religious practices. Remaining inside Islam is not conducive to radical change, especially if people are encouraged to continue to go to the mosque, use Islamic forms of prayers, and participate in other Islamic practices.

Now let us look at the major body of the paper. Dr. Paige looks at three aspects of life impacted by the gospel where Gentiles and Jews alike experienced cultural shifts.

### **I. The New Community:**

Dr. Paige asserts that Gentile converts "were regarded as fully part of the new covenant community which was called the 'church.'"<sup>15</sup> This was affirmed by the Jerusalem council in Acts 15. The resolution of the council was not about culture or freedom from Jewish law for the Gentiles. Rather it was aimed at preserving the unity of the Church which was threatened with a major schism between the Greek and Jewish Christians.<sup>16</sup> The paper develops the argument that both Gentiles and Jews left their separate communities and became members of one new covenant community, the Church.<sup>17</sup> Citing Ephesians 2:15, Paige stresses that God's "purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two..."

The two communities differed in their understanding of God, yet they shared in common their need to reject their cultural heritage and accept the Christian worldview. The Jews needed to give up their dependence on the law for their salvation. The Greeks needed to give up many cultural practices that contradict God's word. For instance, Christians are

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<sup>14</sup> Common Ground Workbook, 2009, Incarnational Ministry pg. 47

<sup>15</sup> Paige, op.cit, page 8

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, page 8

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, page 8

not to participate in eating meat sacrificed to idols.<sup>18</sup> Paul did not accept this “enculturation” of the gospel and treated it as idolatry.<sup>19</sup>

At the core, the people of God are distinct and stand out as different to all other nations. Peter lumps all the believers together, whether from Jewish or Gentile backgrounds and calls them a holy nation.<sup>20</sup> One holy nation, not two. Jesus calls his church a flock in his sheep pen. There are other sheep that must come and join this sheep pen and they will be one flock, not two.

We find in the scriptures many signs of this leaving one community and joining another. Even though “the Way” was still primarily Jewish in the initial stages of the growth of the Church, followers of Christ were viewed as a subset or a subculture, so to speak. This subgroup within the main group was distinct from it in certain significant ways.

Shortly after the day of Pentecost, “...all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade. No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people.”<sup>21</sup> What does this mean if they were not a clearly defined and separate group to the extent that everyone noticed them, knew them, and did not dare “join them” when they met together? As the text shows, they met not in the temple court but in Solomon's colonnade. This is an exterior structure<sup>22</sup> which was open to all people to use for shelter or a holding place while waiting for temple activities to commence. This is where Jesus used to meet with his disciples<sup>23</sup>. By then the number of believers in Christ had grown to 5000.<sup>24</sup> Although this is not mentioned until later in the book of Acts, most probably the Church met on the first day of the week (Sunday).<sup>25</sup> Increasingly, the new group was distancing itself from the mainline culture. When they came to the temple, it was to preach the new message of the gospel.<sup>26</sup>

Clearly the believers were distinguished from the other people, otherwise why would the people be afraid to join them? The phrase “used to meet” indicates that they began to have regular meetings in public and though some highly regarded them, they did not want to

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<sup>18</sup> 1 Corinthians 8

<sup>19</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:14, 18-22

<sup>20</sup> 1 Peter 2:9

<sup>21</sup> Acts 5:12-13

<sup>22</sup> For details and map visit, [http://bibleatlas.org/solomon%27s\\_colonnade.htm](http://bibleatlas.org/solomon%27s_colonnade.htm)

<sup>23</sup> John 10:23

<sup>24</sup> Acts 4:4

<sup>25</sup> Acts 20:7

<sup>26</sup> Acts 5:19-20

be identified with them. Conversely, those who dared join them became part of this new community that was forming.

The next verse is even more revealing. “Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.” The word added indicates that the group was growing in number. Over time it became completely separate.

This distinct group was called ‘the Church’ in verse 11, casting no doubt that this distinct group that meets regularly (often on Sundays) outside the temple courts in Solomon’s Colonnade is the Church that Jesus spoke about to Peter: “I will build my church.”<sup>27</sup> There is no question whatsoever that this church evolved to be a multiethnic, multilingual community with its own form of government, practices, and worldview that was totally distinct and separate from both the Greek and Jewish communities they once were part of.

This leaves no room for anyone to claim that Jewish believers remained inside the broader Jewish religious community. Nor did the Gentiles retain their religio-cultural identity.

Coming to Christ requires an identity-shift, and a transfer of allegiances. It is not enough to just purge unbiblical behavior while maintaining an Islamic identity. Of course, those who accepted Christ and joined his body, the Church, did not somehow instantly lose their culture. But a key difference between the early church and Insider models is that new believers belonged to a distinct new group, in the context of which they could sort out their new lives, aided by the Holy Spirit. Even for those who were able to remain in their families, they now had a new family. Now, “Whoever does God’s will” had become their “brother and sister and mother.”<sup>28</sup>

## 2. The Law:

There is no dispute, Paige contends, that the Gentile converts were not required to adhere to ceremonial requirements of the Mosaic law. He points out that the coming of Christ made these laws obsolete. Paul preached a message of justification by faith, not works. However, Dr. Paige does not see this action as endorsing two separate communities. He states: “it would be a mistake to assert that Gentile believers were allowed to have “Gentile culture” and Jewish believers “Jewish culture” without qualification.”<sup>29</sup> In Christ neither Gentiles nor Jews are under Mosaic law. Both are justified by grace through faith in Christ. This “leads to a new life...”<sup>30</sup> New life implies that the old is gone, “the old covenant is now null and void.”<sup>31</sup> I agree completely with these observations. But I want to stress that believers in Christ from Jewish background were also not required to follow the law of

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<sup>27</sup> Matthew 16:18

<sup>28</sup> Mark 3:35

<sup>29</sup> Paige, *op.cit*, page 9

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, page 9

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, page 10

Moses. Paul stresses in Colossians 2:17 that these things were shadows of what was to come, but the reality is in Christ. A modern analogy would be that the ordinances of the OT were photocopies. Jesus is the original. Since Christ came we now look to him, and we no longer need the photocopy. Therefore, the law of Moses was not a requirement for the Christians of both Jewish and Gentile backgrounds. Both socio-religious groups were expected to abandon their religious identities and adopt a new identity in Christ.

### 3. **The Covenant with Israel:**

Insider Movement proponents, Paige observes, tend to think of Islam as analogous to early Jewish Christianity. He disagrees. In fact Dr. Paige agrees with Waterman, who argues that the Jewish nation is unique in its election and that this election is not transferable to another nation or community. Therefore, he concludes that we cannot take what happened to the Jews as an example of what should happen to Muslims.

The Jewish people are the people of the covenant through Isaac. This happens only once. "God chose Israel."<sup>32</sup> No other nation has the privileges that the Jewish nation enjoyed. "For the LORD has chosen Jacob to be his own, Israel to be his treasured possession."<sup>33</sup>

A new identity is not only required of the new covenant community. The Old Testament is filled with commands by God for his people to be distinct from the other nations. God repeatedly reminded them of his promises to be their God and that they will be his people, his treasured possession.

Jeremiah reveals that one element of the covenant is the special status of God's people: "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel... declares the LORD. I will be their God, and they will be my people."<sup>34</sup> The NT confirms this truth in Hebrews.

Amazingly, when Jesus spoke about himself as the good shepherd in John 10 he was referring to a passage in Ezekiel that sheds great light on this subject:

"I will take the Israelites out of the nations where they have gone. I will gather them from all around and bring them back into their own land. I will make them one nation in the land...There will be one king over all of them and they will never again be two nations or be divided into two kingdoms. They will no longer defile themselves with their idols... and I will cleanse them. They will be my people, and I will be their God. My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd."<sup>35</sup>

Undoubtedly, Ezekiel was prophesying to the coming of the shepherd king Jesus, not David—who had been dead for over two centuries. Jesus applies this prophecy to the

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<sup>32</sup> Paige, op.cit, page 12

<sup>33</sup> Psalm 135:4

<sup>34</sup> Jeremiah 31:33, quoted in Hebrews 8:10

<sup>35</sup> Ezekiel 37:21-24; Jon 10:16

church, his one flock. In this passage lies the connection between God's people in the Old Testament, and the church in the New Testament. Both are called out of other nations to constitute one new nation, or one flock, with Jesus as the one king and shepherd. This connection alone defeats any argument that the church can retain the identity of other nations, since God clearly speaks about taking them out of other nations.

But they have to separate themselves from the nations. "Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you."<sup>36</sup> The purpose of this separation is that they will glorify their God and be light to the nations.<sup>37</sup>

"The nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory; you will be called by a **new name...**" Yes, a new name. This is what God intends for his people. "You will be a crown of splendor in the Lord's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God."<sup>38</sup>

God is honored when you openly identify with Christ. To be named a Christian is our honor and privilege. "However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name."<sup>39</sup>

Islam is a counterfeit community that competes with the nation of God. "The Gentiles" Paige continues, "have been incorporated into the promises of Abraham and... the new covenant." This happened though their identification with Christ. In contrast, the Jews who were the natural descendants of Abraham "have nullified their privileged position as Israel" because they tried to obtain the promises through the law. "The unity of the believing Jew and Gentile is what constitutes the one new-covenant community, the Church.

The conclusion of this paper can be summed up in this quote: "Nor is there any such lesson proffered in scripture as a Christianity which surrenders itself to a particular social or (non-Christian) religious construct."<sup>40</sup>

### **Learning More from Paul**

The teachings of Paul do not stand on their own. They must be viewed in context of his normal patterns of his life and practices. His personal encounter with Jesus was transformational. The enemy of Christ turned into his servant. He describes his own conversion as losing something and gaining something far better.

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<sup>36</sup> 2 Corinthians 6:17,18; quoting Isaiah 52:11

<sup>37</sup> Isaiah 49:6, 1 Peter 2:9-11

<sup>38</sup> Isaiah 62:2-3

<sup>39</sup> 1 Peter 4:16

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, page 15

### **Losing Everything to Gain Christ**

In his Epistle to the Philippians, Paul reflected on his former life and declared that he gave it all up for the sake of winning Christ. He did not talk about forsaking his sins, or the acts of his flesh. In fact, he had every reason to boast in his identity as a Jew. From the people of Israel, Hebrew of Hebrews, and specifically from the tribe of Benjamin, he had a very good socio-religious standing. As a Pharisee, he had reached the highest levels of religious devotion. Paul was not lacking in zeal as he persecuted the Church, and as to legalistic righteousness, Paul said he was faultless.

Notice in the following verses, the words “everything”, “loss” and “all”:

“..whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ.”<sup>41</sup>

Why then does Paul say that he lost all these great things and considered them rubbish compared with what he gained in Christ?<sup>42</sup> It’s because he truly did lose a lot by following Christ, including his religious position within Judaism, and yet gained so much more. If Paul lost his position in the Jewish religious community, is it too much for a Muslim who comes to Christ to lose their position in the Islamic religious system?

Paul did not hang on to his Jewish religious identity. He considered all he had before Christ as rubbish in order to gain Christ.<sup>43</sup> This means that gaining Christ takes precedence over culture. This echoes the words of Jesus: “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”<sup>44</sup>

Paul preached a gospel of transformation and renewal, and expected converts to break away with the past. There is hardly a chapter in the all the epistles that does not address the need for change from the old to the new.

When we come to Christ we come totally bankrupt, naked. We cannot hold back anything from Christ. Did Paul literally lose everything? He did not lose his education, his ethnicity, and he certainly did not lose his zeal. But he surrendered it all to Christ. Paul did not come to Christ saying: “Jesus, you can have all of me except my Jewish identity or my Greek citizenship.”

When I became a Christian I did not lose my green eyes. But had I said to Christ, “You can have me all but not my eyes please,” that would have been a different story.

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<sup>41</sup> Philippians 3:7,8

<sup>42</sup> Philippians 3:7-8

<sup>43</sup> Philippians 3:8

<sup>44</sup> Matthew 6:33

### **Jesus demanded Total Commitment**

When one man wanted to follow Christ, but only after he fulfilled his family duties to his father, Jesus said to him: "Let the dead bury their own dead..."<sup>45</sup> Did Jesus teach that we must not care for our parents? Absolutely not. Jesus affirmed the commandment to honor father and mother. In one instance Jesus rebuked the Pharisees harshly for perverting this commandment by embezzling money from people, allowing them give to the temple instead of their parents.<sup>46</sup> The problem with the man was that he used his family as an excuse to dodge the call.

In the same passage another person used his family as an excuse. He was reasonable in his request to go to his family and say goodbye but Jesus did not accept that and, quite harshly, he said to the man: "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."<sup>47</sup>

Similarly, when Muslims come to Christ, they must do what Jesus asked his disciples to do: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."<sup>48</sup> Paul calls that putting off the old self.<sup>49</sup> "Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules."<sup>50</sup>

Dying to self is a prerequisite for the living part. Although when we come to Christ we do not literally lose everything, everything needs to be surrendered. If I hold anything back from God, good or bad, then I am not dying to self. God wants total commitment. Amaziah did everything right in the eyes of God, but not wholeheartedly.<sup>51</sup> He had an ignoble end to his life. Wholehearted devotion is the only way to please God.

One major issue with the Insider Movement is that it gives the false impression that a Muslim can be a follower of Christ without dying to self, family, and religious and cultural customs. They are told: "You can keep your Qur'an, your prophet, your mosque, your prayer rituals and/or your feasts. In fact, we will encourage you and participate with you in all these things. We will go with you to the mosque and fast Ramadan with you and break the fast with you."

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<sup>45</sup> Luke 9:60

<sup>46</sup> Mark 7:9-13

<sup>47</sup> Luke 9:59-60

<sup>48</sup> Luke 9:23

<sup>49</sup> Ephesians 4:22, Colossians 3:9

<sup>50</sup> Colossians 2:20

<sup>51</sup> 2 Chronicles 25:2

The rich young ruler came to Christ with that attitude and left empty.<sup>52</sup> What was wrong with this rich young ruler? He wanted to add eternal life and keep the earthly life. He was not willing to give it all to Christ. After the man left, Jesus had a discussion with his disciples about this situation. Peter assured Jesus on behalf of all the disciples: “We have left all we had to follow you!”

Jesus did not say: “Oh no, you must go back to your families. I am not here to take you away from your loved ones, so that you can be more effective in your socio-cultural context.” On the contrary, Jesus affirmed the disciples: “no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life.”<sup>53</sup>

## Transformational Model

For a Muslim, coming to Christ is often the most dramatic experience in their lives. It is usually accompanied by doubts, hardships, disillusionment, rejection, and persecution at various levels. Sadly many cannot handle the challenges that come with their new life and fall away. Some mission strategists try to mitigate this problem by preserving the socio-religious identities of Muslims. I believe that this approach is unbiblical and counterproductive.

No individual, family, group, or culture is exempt from the transforming impact of the gospel. For the word of God is “living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”<sup>54</sup> Significantly, God’s words in Genesis 6:5 already judged man’s thoughts and attitudes with these words, “The Lord saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.”

The word for “transformation” in Greek is μεταμόρφωσις, “metamorphosis”, which has two aspects: Meta (above, or beyond), and morphosis (form). Some of its synonyms are reconstruction, transfiguration, and remodeling. Just as the silk worm breaks out of its cocoon and emerges as a beautiful butterfly, converts are expected to break loose from the old and rise in the newness of life.<sup>55</sup>

What does it mean for Muslims to be transformed by the gospel?

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<sup>52</sup> Luke 18:18-23

<sup>53</sup> Luke 18:28-29

<sup>54</sup> Hebrews 4:12

<sup>55</sup> Romans 6:4

**T1 to T6, below, is not a spectrum. It is a model that represents six areas of transformation that every believer needs to undergo in their new life in Christ. These are only accomplished through an intentional process of discipleship and training.**

### **T1. Spiritual Transformation: Born of the Spirit**

**I Corinthians 15:45**

*Our mission is to preach and teach the gospel, that Muslims would be born again by the Spirit of God and become children of God.*

- Regeneration or being born of God
- Born again by the living word
- From slaves to sons

**John 1:11-13, 25; John**

**3:3**

**I Peter 1:23**

**Romans 8:14,15**

**Galatians 3:26; 4:5**

**Ephesians 1:4**

### **T2. Heart Transformation**

*The heart is the seat of emotions and represents the human condition. God sees the heart and finds it to be “deceitful above all things and beyond cure.” (Jeremiah 17:9) Converts need a total cleansing of their hearts, which Paul calls circumcision of the heart.*

- From heart of stone to heart of flesh
- Hearts opened
- Circumcision of the heart
- Hearts were far off and defiled

**Ezekiel 11:19-20**

**Hebrews 8:10**

**Ephesians 1:18**

**Romans 2:29**

**Mark 7:6-8, 15**

### **T3. Mind Transformation**

*The mind is depraved and needs to be restructured. Muslims need to learn the mind of God and change the way they think about almost everything by a process of sanctification through the Spirit and the Word.*

- Mind of the flesh to mind of the spirit
- Not conformed to the world but transformed
- Having the mind of Christ

**Romans 8:5-9**

**Romans 12:2**

**Philippians 2:5**

### **T4. Character Transformation: Becoming mature and strong.**

*Many converts never grow up. They remain dependent for many years, and are often characterized by fragility, weakness, and a spirit of complaining and grumbling. They need to become strong, able to tackle hardships and persecution with strength and maturity.*

- We're being transformed into his likeness
- Maturity through suffering
- Perfect (mature) in Christ
- Beautiful and gentle in spirit
- The Fruit of the Spirit.

**2 Corinthians 3:18**

**James 1:2-4 Romans**

**5:3-5**

**Colossians 1:28**

**I Peter 3:3-4**

**Galatians 5:19-23**

### T5. Moral and Ethical Transformation

*Morality in Islam is ceremonial and legalistic. The Bible teaches us that purity is the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We need to expect, and encourage, a hunger and thirst for holiness and righteousness before God. Moral transformation touches on personal, social, and cultural patterns of living.*

- The old is gone; the new has come. **2 Corinthians 5:17**
- Genuine, God-given righteousness. **2 Corinthians 11:15**
- Put off the old and put on the new way of life. **Ephesians 4:22-24**
- Not conformed to former lusts but obedient. **1 Peter 1:14**

### T6. Cultural Transformation: Kingdom of Darkness to Kingdom of Light

*What is darkness? Is it the condition of the heart? Of course it is, but much more. It is the domain of Satan who works his deception through the systems of the world. False religions, evil political regimes, and ungodly cultures.*

- From darkness to children of light **Ephesians 5:8-14**
- Called out of darkness to light **1 Peter 2:9**
- The inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light **Colossians 1:12**
- God chose us to inherit the kingdom **James 2:5**
- A kingdom and priests to serve our God... **Revelation 5:10**

“And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

**2 Corinthians 3:18**

### Conclusion

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”<sup>56</sup> “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away... He who was seated on the throne said, ‘I am making everything new!’”<sup>57</sup>

From Genesis to Revelation, from beginning to end, God is seen as the master artist who is constantly creating and recreating, making and remaking. He takes a broken pot and reshapes it into a new and more beautiful piece of pottery. He makes beauty out of ashes, gives new life to decaying bones, and turns the dry land into streams of water. Jesus is the means by which the lost image of God is restored. His redemptive work on the cross provides for us the power to change and be transformed into his likeness.<sup>58</sup> The nature of the gospel is change and transformation. No one impacted with the gospel remains as he or she is. Jesus called his disciples away from Galilee and brought them to Judea, away from

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<sup>56</sup> Genesis 1:1

<sup>57</sup> Revelation 21:1,5

<sup>58</sup> Romans 8:28

their family structures to a new place. He pulled them out of their cultural comfort zone, to prepare them for the great task of preaching the gospel to all nations.

The Church, though it began as a subgroup of the Jewish community, developed her own multicultural identity, which came to be known as the Church. The Insider Movement sees Islamic culture as analogous to the Jewish community. This is wrong. It is more accurate to liken them to the Greeks, who were outside the fold and needed to be brought in. Jesus alluded to this when he said: “I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.”<sup>59</sup>

Jesus promised us:

“I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.”<sup>60</sup>

The building blocks of this new and holy “temple”<sup>61</sup> are living stones from the quarries of all the nations. Jews and Gentiles who have been cleansed, carved, and chiseled are brought out of their separate mountains and lands to be united in him. The Church is always other, separate and distinct. Its witness depends on its being different. It stands out like a light on a hill. In the Old Testament God calls it “my people,” “my treasured possession.” The very designation “Gentile” is used to distinguish God’s “nation” from other nations. Jesus calls it “my flock,” “my body,” “my disciples,” “my bride.”

Muslims are invited to join a new community of the saints. All of us in Christ must submit to the transforming power of the gospel that causes us to break away with the old and embrace the new. The old encompasses every area of life, individual, family, social, and cultural. We are made new as we are being transformed daily into his likeness.

“...if anyone is in Christ,  
he is a new creation;  
the old has gone, the new has come!”<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> John 10:16

<sup>60</sup> Matthew 16:18

<sup>61</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:16; Ephesians 2:21

<sup>62</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:17