

RESPONSE TO DON LITTLE'S ASSESSMENT OF CGC

By Jim Nelson, CGC speaker and long-time Navigator staff

It is a privilege to respond to Don Little's article. He is a scholar with spiritual integrity in asking for and incorporating a response. I was asked to write a short response to this article, and will focus on the Biblical basis for CGC's teachings and justification for using the Qur'an.

CGC teachings

1. **The Kingdom of God** – CGC focuses on the Kingdom of God because Jesus did. It was Jesus' first message (Mt. 4:17, Mk. 1:15), his last message (Acts 1:3), and a major focus of his teaching (98 references). It was preached in Acts (Philip in 8:12, Paul in 14:22, 19:8, 20:25, 28:23, 31), and is mentioned in eight of Paul's letters, Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, and Revelation. Our focus on the Kingdom of God is Biblical. It is latent in the Qur'an (2:107, 247f, 3:26, 189, and 30 other verses), and it is intriguing to Muslims.

2. **Incarnation/becoming like** – Jesus is our model of incarnation (Jn. 1:14, Heb. 2:9-15), becoming like us in everything except sin (Heb. 4:15). Paul also 'became like' those he wanted to reach (1 Cor. 9:19-23) in everything except sin (1 Cor. 9:21).

3. **Disciples remaining in their socio-religious context** – Jesus never told a Jew to leave his socio-religious context. Nor did Jewish followers of Jesus in Acts ever leave their socio-religious identity as Jews. Rather, they continued meeting and worshiping in the temple (Acts 21:26, 24:11) and met and taught in synagogues (Acts 9:1, 20, 19:8, 26:11, etc). They never forsook Judaism (Acts 21:20, 22:3), Jewish customs (Acts 28:17), Jewish feasts (Acts 20:16), or even Jewish religious parties (Acts 15:5). Paul calls unbelieving Jews 'brothers' and talks to them as 'our people' (Acts 28:17).

Jesus' does the same in his Samaritan ministry (Jn. 4:5-42) and his four Gentile ministries (Mk. 5:1-20, 7:25-30, Mt. 8:5-13, Jn. 18:33-19:11). He never tells them to leave their socio-religious context. Had that been Jesus' goal, he missed some great opportunities (Jn. 4:20-24, Mk. 5:18-20)!

Believing Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles remained Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles, but were *not* mistaken for 'mainline' followers of those religions. Unbelieving Jews called followers of Christ a 'sect' of Judaism (Acts 28:22). Samaritans believing in Jesus as 'the Savior of the world' (Jn. 4:42) were no longer typical Samaritans who still expected Messiah to come (Jn. 4:25). Decapolis residents 'marveled' at the demoniac's message, (Mk. 5:20) but still considered him a fellow Gentile.

What happened? Movements! ‘How many thousand’ (Jews believed) (Acts 21:20). ‘Many’ and ‘many more’ (Samaritans believed) (Jn. 4:39, 41). ‘Four thousand’ (Decapolis Gentiles followed Jesus) (Mk. 7:31, 8:1-9). (Compare Mk. 6:30-44 with Mk. 8:1-10 for 10+ indications that they are Gentiles.)

Paul follows Jesus’ methodology and tells Corinthians to ‘remain in the state in which (they) were called’ (1 Cor. 7:17, 20, 24) whether marital/social (10-17), ethno-religious (18-20), or socio-economic (21-24). This was his rule in all churches (17), as affirmed in Romans 3:30, Galatians 3:28 & 6:13, Ephesians 2:11-16, Colossians 3:11, etc.

They remained in their ‘ummah,’ and became light and salt to those around them, but did not continue to practice works of darkness.

4. Evaluating cultural practices and either accepting, or rejecting them – Jesus sometimes accepted and followed the cultural norm (e.g. man-made custom of sitting down to teach (Lk. 4:20-21), and sometimes rejected it (man-made Sabbath regulations Mt. 12:3-6).

Paul did the same, rejecting some practices (1 Cor. 6:15-20) and allowing others, based on the conscience of the weak (Rom. 14:13-21, 1 Cor. 8:4-13).

Muslims who follow Jesus should similarly evaluate cultural practices (like going to the mosque) and follow their conscience. Their conclusions may vary.

5. Not insisting on ‘conversion’ from one religion to another – The Greek word for conversion from one religion to another is *prosylutos* (proselyte), and is used four times in the New Testament (Mt. 23:15, Acts 2:11, 6:5 & 13:43). Each time it refers to a Gentile converting to Judaism. It is never used to describe believing in Jesus. The three words in Little’s article do not mean ‘change religion.’ They mean ‘turn,’ ‘change one’s mind,’ and ‘repent,’ respectively. CGC totally agrees that these things are part of true faith. They have become associated with ‘convert’ because of the influence of the King James Version of the English Bible. In 1611, the word ‘to convert’ meant ‘to turn.’ English has changed, but the meaning of the Biblical words does not change when English usage does.

6. Not adding to the gospel – Acts 15:1-29 has parallels to the ‘insider’ discussion. Judaizers wanted Gentile believers to take on Jewish religious identity through circumcision (1,5). The council decided against adding that to the gospel (19-21), and freed Gentiles from having to change their religion and become Jews.

Paul calls Judaizers who changed the gospel ‘accursed’ (Gal. 1:6-9), referring to adding circumcision (changing religion) to the gospel (Gal. 2:3-5, 12, 3:3-5, 5:2-12, 6:12-15). Advocates of Muslims taking on Christian culture and religious identity (Christianizers?) should carefully consider whether they are adding to the gospel and falling under Paul’s curse.

7. Not adding Christian language, culture, and practices to the gospel – The word ‘Christian’ is used in the New Testament only 3 times (Ac 11:26,26:28, 1 Pet 4:16). Each time, the word is applied by non-believers to followers of Christ. I believe all three cases are intended negatively. With no instance in the New Testament where believers used ‘Christian’ about themselves, making Muslims who trust Christ use it is adding to the gospel, especially since the Muslim understands ‘Christians’ as immoral, wine-drinking, pig-eating, loose-dressing, corrupt, materialistic, polytheistic, unclean infidels. Muslims see Hitler and Stalin as ‘Christians.’

8. Using culturally-relevant material in our sharing – Acts 17:28 is one well-known example of using a non-Scriptural text in witnessing, but the New Testament has 500 other quotations and allusions from non-OT sources (New English Translation, Novum Testamentum Graece, New Testament (ISBNs 0-7375-0060-3 and 3-438-05420-5, pp 802-808).

This and Acts 8:35 are what we follow when we begin with Muslims in their book, which has a lot more ‘bridges’ than polytheistic Greek poetry!

Some ‘bridges’ the Qur’an contains

The Qur’an itself is very pro-Jesus and pro-Bible. Islam has become anti-Jesus and anti-Bible.

9. Jesus in the Qur’an has at least 40 unique names, titles and qualities, including: born of a virgin (19:20), Messiah (4:172), the blessed one (19:31), sinless (19:19), aided by the Holy Spirit (2:87), highly exalted (3:45), predestined mercy of God (19:21), life-giver and creator (3:49), and Word of God (4:171). His death and resurrection are called blessed (19:33), and he is alive (5:117), ascended to God (3:55), a sign of the Hour (43:61), and a witness on the Day of Judgment (4:159).

10. The Bible is mentioned in the Qur’an hundreds of times. The Qur’an confirms it (5:46, 4:47, 3:3, etc.), and calls it inspired (16:43, 4:163), revealed by God (3:5, 4:136), given by God (6:154, 17:55, 5:46), authoritative (10:94, 2:213, 5:43, 44, 47), and unchangeable (10:64, 34, 18:27, 6:115, 15:9, 5:48). It says it has light and guidance (5:46, 6:91), truth, leading and mercy (11:17, 46:12), and gives assurance of salvation (2:4). It is called the Book and Wisdom (3:48), the Clear Book (37:117), the Criterion, Shining, and the Reminder (21:48). Muslims are told they must believe in it (10:94, 16:43, 21:7, 42:5, 2:285, 4:136), and if they don’t, they are going to hell (4:136, 5:44, 45, 47, 40:69-72, 2:81, 3:11, 59:17, 35:36).

To keep to the word limit assigned to me, I have drastically summarized. For more details, attend a CGC consultation.

LITTLE'S RESPONSE TO JIM NELSON'S RESPONSE

By Don Little

I will make just one point in reply to Jim Nelson's response, in which he attempts to provide Biblical *validation* for CGC perspectives, rather than responding to my stated concerns. I understand his attempt to demonstrate that their approach has NT *textual* support. After all, if CGC could demonstrate such biblical support, then what further objection could anyone have? However, it is not that simple.

My objection to CGC is *not* that they use the Qur'an as a bridge to help draw Muslims to Christ (cf. Nelson's points 1, 8 – 10 above). That is fine, so long as it is done wisely. Rather, my core concerns have to do with the *spiritual* and *religious* identity of Muslims who follow Christ, and how they relate to their Muslim *religious* heritage and *spiritual* environment after believing (Nelson's points 3-7), given the true spiritual nature of the Islamic religion.

I cannot accept CGC's assumption that contemporary Muslim *religious experience and context* closely parallels the experience and context of 1st century *believing* Jews. I reject the unstated hypothesis, underlying Jim's third to seventh points, that the experience of first century Jews, who believed that Jesus was their Messiah, can be used as a *model* to instruct Muslims who come to believe in the Jewish Messiah, about how to relate to their Muslim religious heritage. This wrongly confuses religious-spiritual categories.

The faith that we have come to know as 'Christianity' is a continuation and fulfillment of truth that Yahweh had been revealing to his chosen people for more than 2000 years before Christ. Gentile believers in the Messiah were grafted into this ancient faith; they did not start a new 'religion'. It is theologically *unjustifiable* to take the way that 1st century believing Jews were taught to relate to the emerging community of non-Jewish Christ-followers (in the NT, e.g. as in Jim's numerous NT references), or vice-versa, and use it as a *model* for the way that believing Muslims are to relate to 'Christians' and Christianity today. We are simply not dealing with parallel *spiritual* realities.

Instead, it is more accurate to see Muslims coming to faith in Christ *today* as *spiritually parallel* to non-Jewish pagans coming to faith in Christ *then* (and now)-such new believers were fully expected to stop going to temples, praying to idols and offering sacrifices to demons. *They had to leave their spiritual religious practices, just as Muslims must.* Of course pagan Gentiles were not asked to become Jews! However, they were, as were Jews, called to repent, and believe in and obey Christ fully. A pagan Gentile, coming to faith in Christ, was expected to live an increasingly transformed life (morally and spiritually) and to leave behind all idol worshipping and demonically tainted, religious practices. This call to obedience still applies to Muslims who believe in our day.