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## Muslim Converts in the Church

by D. N.



Mark 9:31

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God has beautifully made one true believing church of people from different backgrounds. Yet, these differences often cause tensions within a fellowship. This can be painful to Muslim converts new in the faith who join a well-established congregation.

### Cultural Barriers

Muslim converts often feel lonely in the church, not due to religious background but to cultural differences. For example, at a Christian conference I observed two individuals serve themselves food, both from the same

country and of Christian background. The villager piled huge amounts of food on his plate in a disorganized way. The city-dweller viewed such unrefined table manners with visible disgust and avoided sitting at the same table or even getting near him. Likewise, difficulties between believers of Muslim and Christian background in the same church can often be essentially cultural. The lack of a shared cultural life and communication style distances people. This plus the absence of any communal ties creates a chasm between them.

So, a Muslim convert can

feel isolated within his new social milieu, even though the problem is actually not related to his religious background. This was my personal experience. After first joining the church, I suffered greatly because of cultural differences. As I learned the ways, expressions and behavior patterns of my new environment, I felt increasingly accepted.

Both Muslim and Christian background believers can easily confuse cultural differences with trustworthy faith. I have personally experienced how interpreting the cultural behavior of one another leads each side

to doubt the genuineness of the faith of the other. It could take a long time for believers to overcome the cultural barrier.

*“Eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism.”*

— Ephesians 4:3-5



*"If anyone would be first,  
he must be last of all and servant of all."*

Mark 9:35

إِنَّا أَرَادَ أَحَدٌ أَنْ يَكُونَ أَوَّلًا فَيَكُونُ آخِرَ الْكُلِّ وَخَادِمًا لِلْكُلِّ



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### Sectarian Barriers

In societies strained by sectarianism, it is even more difficult for Muslim converts to know which local church to join. Where will they will be accepted? Which church would allow a convert to marry one of their sons or daughters? A believing young person of Muslim background is not easily considered marriageable. So, converts often cannot fully integrate since marriage is a more sensitive issue than church fellowship and friendships. In countries with a history of Muslim persecution of Christians, this is more so. Christians may even remember serious injustices, such as past murders by Muslim fanatics. Yet, Christian minorities can rejoice in the conversion of a Muslim to faith in Christ. It

is a great victory, overcoming losses of the past.

### Opportunity Barriers

The prophet Jonah ran from the Lord because he didn't want foreigners to receive the same privileges enjoyed by God's people. Likewise, in the church milieu there is usually much zeal and activism in evangelism to Muslims. Prayers are answered and Muslims do receive faith in Christ. Yet, Muslim converts can remain deprived of the use of their gifts. This is so even when spiritual gifts of leadership are clear and commendable. Converts sense that they are being told, "It is good that you are now a believer as long as you keep in mind that we are the means, not you. It is unacceptable for you to exercise spiritual lead-

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ership in our midst. You are not really equal to the household you joined. You remain a guest from faraway."

### Mutual Acceptance

Problems faced by Muslim converts, like other church problems are a natural reflection of human sin. The corruption that we all inherited from Adam is the real reason for rejection of different customs or sectarian and ethnic prejudices. Sin breeds pride and leads to estrangement. The heart of the matter is not background, but our sinful nature. To work together within the same body of Christ, we need to keep this in mind, always remembering that in the Lord Jesus, there are no religious or ethnic background distinctions. The body of Christ is one.

Being the minority, it is easier for Muslim converts joining a local church to build bridges to the group rather than to expect the group to change. Yet, believers of Christian background must let the fire of the gospel purify the remnant of past pains and resentments. They must take to heart the reality of the oneness of faith in the body of Christ. This tie is far stronger than that of marriage. Real unity enables believers of different backgrounds to accept others as brothers and sisters in Christ, enjoying the same standing within the one body.

We all can remember that, without exception, we are poor and miserable apart from Christ's saving grace. We all need to earnestly pray for the integration of God's people to serve Him together in harmony and mutual encouragement.

إِنْ قَدِمْتَ هَدِيَّتَكَ (لِلَّهِ) عِنْدَ مَنَصَّةِ الْفَرِيقَانِ،  
 وَهُنَاكَ تَذَكَّرْتَ أَنَّ أَخَاكَ لَهُ شَيْءٌ عَلَيْكَ، فَاتْرِكْ  
 هَدِيَّتَكَ هُنَاكَ عِنْدَ الْمَنَصَّةِ،  
 وَأَذْهَبْ أَوَّلًا وَصَالِحْ أَخَاكَ،  
 ثُمَّ تَعَالَ وَقَدِّمْ هَدِيَّتَكَ.



*"So if you are offering your gift at the altar  
and there remember that your brother  
has something against you,  
leave your gift there before the altar and go.  
First be reconciled to your brother,  
and then come and offer your gift."*

Matthew 5:23-24

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هَيِّئْنَا لِلْوَدَعَاءِ لِأَنَّهُمْ يَرِثُونَ الْأَرْضَ  
 (عيسى المسيح)

**"Blessed are the meek,  
for they shall inherit the earth."**

Matthew 5:5

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