

Do Not Follow Heraclius

(part 1 of 2): And the Truth is Made Clear



NewMuslims.com

In the history of Islam there are two prominent men who refused to convert to Islam even though the truth was made clear to them. These men understood and admired Islam and they, each in their own way, loved Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him. They were the Byzantium Emperor Heraclius and Abu Talib, Prophet Muhammad's beloved uncle. Both men recognized the beauty of Islam yet they yielded to external pressure and refused to accept it as their religion.

When a person considers converting to Islam they are often faced with external pressures. What will my parents, wife, or brother say, they ask themselves. What about at work, how will I tell them I can no longer go to the bar after work? These things may seem trivial but they can often grow into huge mountains that cause a person to consider and reconsider over and over again. Even after a person converts to Islam and the initial euphoria wears off they might find themselves faced with more external pressures.

Heraclius and Abu Talib are two very different examples of how easily one is able to put the Hereafter at risk for the sake of matters belonging to this temporary life.

Heraclius – Emperor of Byzantium

In the year 628CE Prophet Muhammad sent a letter to Heraclius inviting him to accept Islam. It was one of several letters that Prophet Muhammad sent to several heads of State. Each letter was designed specifically for the person Prophet Muhammad was writing to. The letter to Heraclius read in part as follows.

I am writing this invitation to call you to Islam. If you become a Muslim you will be safe - and God will double your reward, but if you reject this invitation of Islam you will bear the sin of having misguided your subjects. Thus do I urge you to heed the following: "O People of the Scriptures! Come to a word common to you and us that we worship none but Allah and that we associate nothing in worship with Him, and that none of us shall take others as gods beside Allah. Then if they turn away, say: Bear witness that we are Muslims." Muhammad, the Messenger of God.

Heraclius did not destroy the letter as the Emperor of Khosrau did, rather he read it out loud to his retinue and ministers. Heraclius also kept the letter, pondered on it and made enquiries into its truthfulness. He questioned Abu Sufyan, a staunch enemy of the Prophet and Islam, who happened to be in his lands for the sake of trade and business. He was summoned to the court for questioning. Abu Sufyan spoke truthfully about Muhammad and Heraclius was able to establish the truthfulness of Muhammad's claim to prophethood. Heraclius invited his court to Islam. Their reaction to his invitation is recorded by Ibn al-Natur.

"When his Grandees had assembled, he ordered that all the doors of his palace be closed. Then he came out and said, "O Byzantines! If success is your desire and if you seek right guidance and want your Empire to remain, then give a pledge of allegiance to the emerging Prophet! "On hearing this invitation, the Grandees of the Church ran towards the gates of the palace like a herd of wild asses, but found the doors closed. Heraclius, realizing their hatred towards Islam, lost hope that they would ever embrace Islam, and he ordered that they should be brought back to the audience room. After they returned, he said, "What I have just said was simply to test the strength of your conviction, and I have seen it. "The people prostrated before him and became pleased with him, and Heraclius turned away from faith."

Heraclius was obviously both convinced and impressed by both what he read, and the results of his investigation. So why did he turn away? Was it the fear of losing his power and position? Was it the fear of losing his life? Clearly his heart leaned towards embracing Islam and he certainly did try to convince his people, taking seriously Muhammad's advice to not misguide his own people. The hold this world of illusion had over Heraclius proved to be too strong. He died never having accepted Islam^[1].

This is a problem those who are considering conversion may come across every day. The decision to change religions should not be taken lightly for it is a life changing event. However the gift of Islam should not be rejected for one would not know if they would have a chance to study it again.

Abu Talib

Prophet Muhammad was eight years old when he came under the protection and care of his uncle Abu Talib. Muhammad and Abu Talib were very close and when Abu Talib fell on hard times Prophet Muhammad fostered one of his son's, Ali, who grew up to be Muhammad's son in law and the fourth Caliph of the Islamic nation. By preaching the message of Islam Prophet Muhammad put himself in great danger. Abu Talib, a man much respected in Mecca, protected Muhammad as much as he could. Even when he was encouraged to silence or control his nephew he staunchly took Muhammad's side.

Although he was one of Prophet Muhammad's most constant supporters Abu Talib refused to accept Islam. Even on his death bed when Prophet Muhammad begged him to accept Islam, he refused saying that he was happy on the religion of his forefathers. Abu Talib was fearful that his reputation and honour amongst the people of Mecca would be ruined if he at the last minute decided to forsake the religion of his father and grandfathers. The same honour that allowed him to protect and cherish Prophet Muhammad for over forty years, as well as go through periods of great deprivation for the sake of his nephew, would not allow him to embrace Islam.

Since the dawn of Muhammad's prophethood, those wanting to embrace the new religion have faced personal distress and made hard decisions in order to submit to the will of God. External pressures, such as upsetting ones family and friends, or losing a job have meant that many risk their wellbeing in the Hereafter. It would be a great mistake to trade one's eternal Paradise for the fleeting and temporary benefits of this world.

In the next article we will discuss how a person can face contemporary pressures and offer some guidelines to make the transition to Islam an easy one.

Footnotes:

[1] There are those who believe Heraclius secretly accepted Islam, however this knowledge is with God alone.

(part 2 of 2): Contemporary issues and external pressures

Prophet Muhammad's dear uncle and supporter Abu Talib, and Heraclius, the Emperor of the Byzantine Empire both chose not to accept Islam. In both cases we can be fairly certain that it was a decision they did not take lightly, however they both chose to bow to external pressures. Instead of fearing God alone they

found themselves afraid of what others would think, say or do. Today, more than a millennium later many people find themselves in the same position. They know or sense that Islam is the correct or true religion yet they refuse the gift that God has bestowed upon them.

There are many pressures in contemporary society that make converting to Islam a daunting issue. External pressures can put modern day people in the same position as Abu Talib and Emperor Heraclius. However, God does not call someone to Islam and then abandon them. If a person knows beyond doubt that Islam is the right religion they can also be sure, beyond doubt, that God has the authority and power to continue to guide them and ease their journey. Sometimes the mountain in front may look large and looming but what is a mountain except a part of creation totally submitted to the will of God?

“See you not that whoever is in the heavens and whoever is on the earth, and the sun, and the moon, and the stars, and the mountains, and the trees, and living creatures, and many of mankind prostrate themselves to God...” (Quran 22:18)

God makes converting to Islam easy but we, human beings, the sons and daughters of Adam have an uncanny way of making our own lives difficult and filled with obstacles that in reality do not exist.

“...God does not want to place you in difficulty...” (Quran 5:6)

“...Whoever puts his trust in God then He will be enough for him...” (Quran 65:3)

This Quranic statement about trust is easy to say and easy to understand however when it comes to putting that complete trust into action it is not always easy. This is for two reasons. Of course, when a person is close to accepting Islam, Satan bombards him or her with tricks and illusions designed to lead the person away from the straight path to God. And secondly, people who do not fully understand the nature of God tend to fear the reaction of their family, friends or colleagues. Abu Talib was afraid that he would be thought of as a man without honour if he rejected the religion of his forefathers, and Heraclius thought he would lose his position, his power or his life. These things are of little consequence when compared to eternal bliss or damnation, however human beings are constantly fighting a battle to detach themselves from this illusionary world.

When a person converts to Islam some big changes are bound to happen. The transition to Islam is emotionally charged. Each person begins to feel like a changed person and consequently begins to act differently. Questions, thoughts and scenarios fill our minds, and Satan works overtime. Abu Talib might have addressed the same issues, Heraclius may have wondered whether his life would

be in danger if he pressed the point or revealed his intentions to follow the teachings of Muhammad.

Nowadays we ask ourselves a different series of questions but they disturb our rest just the same. Should I dress differently? Should I tell my family? Am I still allowed to go out, drink alcohol, date? Hundreds of questions, but the reality is that these questions are really not relevant to whether a person wants to convert to Islam or not. If a person believes Islam is the truth then he or she should convert to Islam without delay. The details come later when a person establishes a relationship with God, when he understands the nature of our Creator.

Each person has a predetermined lifespan. We do not know when we are going to die and the next minute might literally be our last in this world. For this reason alone a person must not be like either Heraclius or Abu Talib. Both men let their love of this illusionary world dictate their Hereafter. Conversion should take place and trust in God should guide the new Muslim towards a lifelong relationship with Him.

Revealing that you are Muslim is not a condition of accepting Islam. At the same time however we must be mindful of the changes Islam requires and ask God to ease the way. Old habits must be broken slowly but surely and learning about the nature of God and His laws will allow each person to change into the type of person God loves. Although becoming a Muslim is an instantaneous event becoming a better Muslim requires a good, continuous effort on the part of anyone of us.