

Forgive Us Our Sins

We need to tell Muslims: “We confess that [we] have sinned against you.”

Presenting the gospel to Muslims has been famously difficult. Why? One overlooked factor is that many Muslims believe they have been horribly wronged by Christians. The Muslim psyche is steeped with the history of conflicts between Muslims and those perceived to be Christians or representatives of the church. Though Muslims generally started the conflicts, today’s Muslims ignore this fact and remember only their own offenses.

For example, Muhammad ordered his army to attack the Byzantine Christian army of more than 80,000, but Muslims remember only how 7,000 Muslim soldiers were slaughtered and just 3,000 returned home. Later, Muhammad’s successors continued to fight against the Byzantine Empire until they captured Turkey and converted the majestic Ayasofia Cathedral into a mosque.

Muslims seethe over stories about Crusaders from the West who came and conquered Jerusalem in 1099, riding their horses through Al-Aqsa Mosque, where the blood of thousands of Muslims covered the horses’ hooves. They bitterly remember the disaster of 1918 when British General Sir Edmund Allenby declared victory over Palestine and brought about the end of the Ottoman Empire, which had united and ruled the Muslim world for more than 600 years.

Americans may say: “That is in the past. We have to move on.” That might be true from the American point of view, but in the Muslim culture, an offense against a Muslim in the past is like an offense against all Muslims today. As a result, Muslim ears are closed to the gospel message because of their anger

about actions of those perceived to be Christians.

What can we do? Two things, primarily.

We must humble ourselves and confess the sins of our past. We need to tell Muslims: "We confess that Christians have sinned against you. We will not defend or excuse what was done. The Crusaders and those like them have violated the teachings of Jesus. We ask your forgiveness for what they did. We covenant to honor and respect the Muslim community in every way." These words need to be said one-on-one and on public platforms every chance we have.

A person who knows history may respond: "These apologies are unnecessary. What about the atrocities that Muslims have committed against Christians? The Muslims threatened the West first, and the Crusades were a response."

This is all true. Yet the response from Christians was not always Christlike. What did Jesus teach in the Lord's Prayer? "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us" (see Matt. 6:14-15, Mark 11:25, Luke 6:37). As the church forgives Muslims for their sins against us, the church must also repent for the actions of Christians.

For example, the churches in Muslim countries have suffered so much that many of them have abandoned evangelism. Or, in an effort to make peace, some Eastern churches try to blur the lines between Christianity and Islam.

On the other hand, in the West I have noticed an interesting phenomenon. Conservative Christians love to hear my testimony and how I was persecuted by Muslims. My story helps them to

reinforce their beliefs about the danger of Islam. But often these Christians are not looking for ways to help Muslims know about the truth.

In contrast, liberal Christians seem to think, "Maybe Muslims are worshiping the same God we are and everything will be OK if we just leave them alone." If the church knew anything about Allah, the God of the Quran, they would know that he and the God of the Bible could never be the same.

Both attitudes in the Western church produce the same result: weak support for Muslim outreach. How I pray the Holy Spirit's conviction will be felt by every believer in Jesus and that the love of Jesus will begin to flow through them to the entire Muslim world.