

## APOLOGIES

Matthew 5:23 ... “Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”

James 5:16 ... “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”

The purpose of an apology is to repair an offense against another person. It seems like a simple thing to do, but in truth, apologies can be complicated because there are actions and reactions that need to be in harmony for an apology to actually work. If I accidentally step on your toe, you might yell out and call me clumsy, even if I quickly apologize. If I say or do something that is much more offensive, you might slap me or call me a bad name or even end our friendship. If I admit I was wrong and say “I’m sorry,” you might be unwilling to accept my apology because of your anger.

Unfortunately, both making an apology and rejecting an apology can be used as weapons. Some people use apologies to pretend to be humble and sorry. The words are easy to say and they think their apologies must be accepted so they can get out of trouble easily, which leads them to offend often. On the other hand, some people use the opportunity to punish a person who apologizes to them, even when the apology is genuine and sincere. A sincere person apologizing for something, makes him or herself vulnerable which can lead the person hearing the apology to take advantage of the situation and beat down the apologizer to make them feel small.

The Biblical perspective on apologies goes something like this: It is a sin to offend someone and not offer an apology AND it is a sin to reject an apology. Jesus understood this weakness in men and said in today’s verse from Matthew that we should not worship God if we have not reconciled a damaged relationship. Our verse from James instructs us to confess our sins to one another and pray for one another so we can be healed of the guilt from our offenses. But in all cases, our apologies and our acceptance of apologies must be sincere. If you say “I’m sorry,” without meaning it, or you say “I accept your apology” without meaning it, both are dishonest, which is a sin. If you have trouble apologizing or accepting apologies, you should know that one person can remove his or her guilt through an apology, while the offended person can become guilty by rejecting the apology. And, saying you accept someone’s apology while remaining resentful toward that person, is also a sin.

There is an added benefit from sincerely apologizing for something you do or say. The Holy Spirit uses your humility to reveal something in you that should change. It might be an attitude, a behavior or a character flaw. The benefit in accepting someone else’s apology is that it helps heal your relationship and make it stronger. The Holy Spirit might also speak to your heart about your role in the situation and show you something that could be improved in your own behavior. When practiced correctly and Biblically, apologies can make us better people and better Christians. Used incorrectly, they can create more tension, more anger and divide people.

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