

“Sorry” By Doug Warren

How do we say, “I’m sorry” and mean it?

Why is it so difficult to apologize? Every day we make lots of mistakes, as do others around us, and yet if you take a moment to notice it is rare that we hear (or offer) sincere apologies. Granted we may hear many excuses but few real, unqualified apologies. Why?

Let me give you three examples. You may remember the horrific story of the miners trapped in West Virginia. The Portland Press Herald was one of the many morning papers that mistakenly reported their survival. The next day the paper ran a “note to reader” explaining that many, many papers had been ill informed and went to press with the unfortunate mistake. What struck me was the lack of clear ownership. Instead of admitting, “We blew it and we are sorry” there was blame shifting and excuses. It is like they were saying, “Hey, if even the New York Times got it wrong, we certainly can’t be blamed!”

Likewise I was recently in a meeting with an associate who had been accused of wrongdoing. He couldn’t figure out how he could be so slandered and went to great lengths to protest his innocence. When asked about some specifics that, while not showing his guilt, certainly questioned his wisdom, he responded with incredulity.

Not only do I see this in other people, I also wrestle with it myself. When something that I have done or said is pointed out or questioned, I often find that my immediate response is self-defense. I can rush too quickly to try and explain myself or defend my actions rather than pausing to consider if I have offended or hurt another.

The first thing we need to do is admit that we blow it. We often do things (unintentionally sometimes sure, but let’s be honest, many times intentionally) that hurt, inconvenience, or anger others. We make mistakes that cost other people time, energy, or money. We neglect to do things that we should and sometimes that adversely affects the people around us. We all know it, but often we have a very difficult time facing it or at least acknowledging it out loud.

The good news of the gospel is that the God who knows us best with all our faults, weaknesses, and failings is the One who loves us best. When we come to terms with our true failure against Him and discover the transforming joy of real forgiveness—not avoidance and excuses, but real look you in the eye and pay for all the brokenness—we are freed to admit our faults to one another.

This is what King David discovered in his repentance before God. When he grappled with being found out for adultery and murder, he was able to say to God, “Against you, you only I have sinned.” (Psalm 51) How on earth could he say such a thing?! Certainly

he also sinned against Bathsheba and her husband Uriah. But recognition of sin first and foremost before God puts everything else into perspective.

If the King of Kings forgives us, why do we need to fear our coworkers, neighbors, and friends or even our superiors, critics, and enemies? In dealing with our faults before God we find not only forgiveness, but also restoration. Jesus did not only wipe our sins away, He gave us His own complete holiness. We don't have to defend ourselves. If others think poorly of us, we know the truth—they don't know the half of it. In fact, we're far worse than they think! But also, if we have despaired of our own abilities and clung to Christ, than we have been made sons and daughters of the King.

The gospel thus produces meekness. That doesn't mean wet noodles with no backbone. It means a gentleness born of grace. I can admit my failures and joyfully make restitution because I am not looking to others for my affirmation. My security in Christ's love for me evidenced at the cross emboldens me to be merciful to others in their weaknesses too. Not only should I be freer in admitting my own faults, but also I should be more receptive to others admitting theirs.

The conservatives say, "Own your mistakes and try better!" The liberals say, "Don't be so hard on yourself; we understand." Jesus says, "Cast all your worries upon me and I will give you rest." And if the son has set you free, you are free indeed.