

True Confessions

We all have a pet peeve or two. One of mine is the non-apology that is designed to give the appearance of an apology while carefully avoiding it.

Expressing “I’m sorry” is an important part of healthy relationships. But it’s hard. For all of us. Too often we resort to the iffy sort of apology, or the one that shifts the focus off of ourselves. Try these on for size:

- “I’m sorry if I did anything wrong”
- “I’m sorry if I offended you”
- “I’m sorry that you got upset by what I said”
- “I’m sorry that you feel that way”

These “apologies” give me a knot in my gut. I feel manipulated, trivialized, when someone uses them on me. The speaker recognizes the need to deal with an offense but is unwilling to accept responsibility for it. It’s really a non-apology.

A life-giving confession will accept responsibility for wrongdoing. Straight up. No angles. No “If” stuff. It will address a specific situation or offensive attitude. In spirit if not directly in words it will acknowledge the pain caused to others and take ownership for it.

One of the seemingly unfair things about offense and forgiveness is that the one who was offended must pay a price in order to forgive. That may seem unjust in a certain way but God modeled it for us. See Romans 5:8, “But God showed His great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.” (See also v-10)

I find empowerment to forgive by releasing the person and their offense into the hands of God. Every act has its consequences. Consider Romans 12:19, “Dear friends, never avenge yourselves. Leave that to God. For it is written, I will take vengeance; I will repay those who deserve it, says the Lord.” People *do* pay for their wrongs against us! There *is* justice! (I have found myself pleading for God’s mercy toward those who wronged me when I thought about the price they would pay!)

However, even our paying the price for another’s offense doesn’t restore a relationship. Only their confession and our forgiveness working together will cleanse a wound to the point of restoration.

Maybe it’s something like the way the Great Forgiver, forgives. God loves us regardless of our offenses. He already paid the price for our forgiveness and relates to us in a way that beckons us to receive it – but it is not effective in our lives until it is met by our confession. We don’t experience the blessing of walking with Him, with nothing between us, until we confess our offenses against Him. As 1 John 1:9 says, “But *if* we confess our sins to Him, he is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong.”

We accept a substandard quality of relationship; we cheapen forgiveness; and we condemn ourselves to ongoing murky relationships when we don’t see confession as a necessary part of the healing, restoration process.

We need to help each other in this. Offenses can go deep. We all need help to deal with them. The offender is responsible to take action. To feel sorrow for the pain or trouble we caused others and to humble ourselves to the point of sincere and effective apology. The forgiver helps the offender by extending kindness and mercy toward them even before confession is made.

True confession can be expressed in actions and/or words, but it must be felt by both parties. If the violated one is more the verbal type, the offender will need to recognize that and apologize accordingly.

These are principles of life. For those who are not Christian it's just the smart thing to do. Life is better this way. But Christians have a certain advantage and an added responsibility. If both the offender and the offended will walk with God we will find ourselves meeting at the place where restoration takes place. I John 1:7 speaks powerfully to this, "But if we are living in the light of God's presence, just as Christ is, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, cleanses us from every sin." Note the "if" and "then," there!

When we each do our part we'll see many broken relationships restored – not just reconciled to the point of being civil toward each other. When Biblical confession and forgiveness take place it offers potential for the relationship to be stronger than ever. We will all find ourselves living at new heights of freedom and joy, and the witness of the church will be greatly enriched! Anything less cheats everyone.

Born in 1940, Ken Stoltzfus has worked as a pilot, ordained Christian minister, businessman, missionary to Africa and writer. This is #6 in his series "The View from up Life's Path," and is one of many short articles that can be found at www.John2031.com. Bible quotations are from the New Living Translation, © 1996 by Tyndale House Publishers.

© 2010, Ken Stoltzfus, www.John2031.com, P.O. Box 228, Kidron, OH 44636 USA. May be printed for personal use and may be reproduced for non-commercial purposes without further permission as long as source is acknowledged.