

The 4 Parts of a Real Apology

The epistle of James informs or reminds us that “*we all stumble in many ways. If any one does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well (as the tongue, PCS), James 3:2.* This truth manifests our multiplied need of forgiveness, and thus the requirement of apologies. But simply muttering a compulsory “Sorry” isn’t a true apology. It lacks the essential elements. So, what are the constituent components of a true apology?

1. **Acknowledgement and Admission of Wrong, Psalm 51:3-4a.** This is the “I was wrong” and if appropriate, “You were right” part. It is important to acknowledge and admit error to yourself, and certainly to the one(s) wronged. In so doing, we should not seek to excuse or justify our wrong, but instead openly and honestly admit it. With this particular aspect, Saul struggled (cf. 1Samuel 15:15,20-21,24), but David excelled.
2. **True Regret, Psalm 51:4b-6.** “I’m truly sorry.” This is not the *apology*- that comes next. Instead, it is expressed remorse for the wrong done and the harm it has caused. True regret is not the “*sorrow of the world*” that is sorry they were “caught” or that their offence was made public. It is the “*sorrow that is according to the will of God*” which recognizes and is remorseful that sin has been committed against God and the one offended, 2Corinthians 7:9-10.
3. **Apology, Psalm 51:1,7-12,14a,16-17.** By definition, an apology is a plea for forgiveness. It needs to be a humble, remorseful, and sincere appeal for pardon from the guilt of offence. But it is an entreaty for mercy and clemency, not a guarantee. The offender is pleading for absolution based on compassion, not demanding it simply because they “went through the motion” of admitting guilt and making the appeal. Note David’s plea for *graciousness, lovingkindness, and compassion* in Psalm 51:1 particularly.
4. **Corrected Future Behavior, Psalm 51:13,14b-15.** A changed mindset and conduct should result because the conscience has been pricked with the admission of guilt and the recognition of the harmful consequences of our action(s). Therefore we not only determine to do differently and better, we do differently and better. “Repentance,” I believe, is accurately defined as “a remorseful change of mind regarding past action or activities that leads to changed future action or activities.” While it is true that although we change our minds and vow to change our future course, weakness and temptation may cause us to sin subsequently, such is certainly not our desire or intention, cf. Romans 6:1ff. A true apology requires that we want and intend to better!

A child being forced to say they’re sorry to their sibling, and doing so without any real understanding, remorse, or intention to change, is not a true apology. Perhaps it’s a step in the right direction until a little more maturity enables them to do better. Unfortunately, some of us never really *grow* into a better comprehension or application of our apologies. Let’s be and do better because eternity depends on it!

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