

Class Notes – Week 5

Assignment 5

I. Introduction

Next week the topic of our class will be apologies – what is involved, how we approach apologies, what makes an apology more or less effective, and how we receive apologies. Sincere apologies are a key step in the forgiveness process. Spend time thinking how you have extended and received apologies.

II. Vertical Forgiveness (God to me)

In our study, we have talked about the foundation of forgiveness – our relationship with God and the fact that He has forgiven us. We are directed to confess to Him and ask for His forgiveness. His forgiveness through the atonement of Jesus on the cross dealt with our SIN and separation from Him. That secures our eternal destiny. We need to deal with our sins on a daily basis and claim the promise of I John 1:9. (Write this verse below.)

When we “apologize” to God, we confess the sin we have done and ask for forgiveness. He extends forgiveness to us. We will refer to this transaction between God and us as vertical forgiveness. He reaches down to us.

III. Horizontal Forgiveness (between people)

On a human level, we need to deal with hurts between ourselves and others. For many of us, it is more difficult to deal with these horizontal relationships than it is to approach God for His forgiveness. He freely grants forgiveness; people often don't. Meaningful apology has a significant role to play in working toward forgiveness, and yet it is the very act of sincere apology that often evades us.

- A. Look up the word apology in the dictionary and write out a definition in the space below.

- B. Is a superficial “I’m sorry” the same thing as an apology? With children, a parent often commands or instructs a child to tell a sibling that he is sorry. What is the typical response of a child? _____ In what tone of voice?

As we grow in age and experience and hopefully wisdom, we start to approach apologies in a more sincere way. We recognize the value of relationships and the need to deal with conflict. We learn empathy and seek to acquire the capacity to put ourselves in someone else's shoes. As believers, we learn that often both vertical and horizontal forgiveness needs to occur. We also come to realize that it is often harder to apply ourselves to the horizontal forgiveness between ourselves and others!

You may remember the story of David and Bathsheba. This is a good illustration of how a person can sometimes more readily approach God than the person he sinned against.

Do the study below to see what the Bible records about King David's confession to God and what seems missing in terms of apologizing to either Bathsheba or Uriah.

An Incomplete Apology

King David

Any sin is ultimately and "preeminently" a sin against God. However, sin often involves another person – and in addition to confessing vertically to God, we have horizontal work to do with our people in our lives. There may be infrequent times when an attitude or action is not known to the person and to bring it up in an apology may actually cause more pain than to keep it between you and God. However, King David's actions as recorded in II Samuel 11-12 had ramifications for many.

In II Samuel 2:4, we are reminded of David's being God's chosen one to be king of Judah. It was years earlier that God had revealed that choice to the prophet Samuel (I Samuel 16). In I Samuel 13:14, Samuel described David as a "man after His (the Lord's) own heart. David was not actually crowned king until he was 30 years old.

Read David's prayer in II Samuel 7:18-28 and comment on what kind of man David was.

Yet, even pillars of the faith have feet of clay – and are ultimately weak in the face of temptation.

Read II Samuel 11 and describe David's sin.

Against whom did he sin?

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

To whom did he confess? (See II Samuel 12:13 and Psalm 51) _____

In the context of this study on forgiveness, it is interesting to note that there is no record of any other confession about this incident nor is there an apology to the other two parties. In Psalm 51, David actually says to God, "Against you, and you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight." What additional forgiveness steps would have been appropriate?

IV. Why is it so hard to apologize?

A. **Hint:** look back at list of things Forgiveness IS NOT (page 2-2)

B. Does apologizing excuse a person from having to deal with the consequences of his or her actions?
Can you think of an example?

C. When someone apologizes to you, why do you still sometimes feel guarded and tentative with that person, even if you accept the apology?

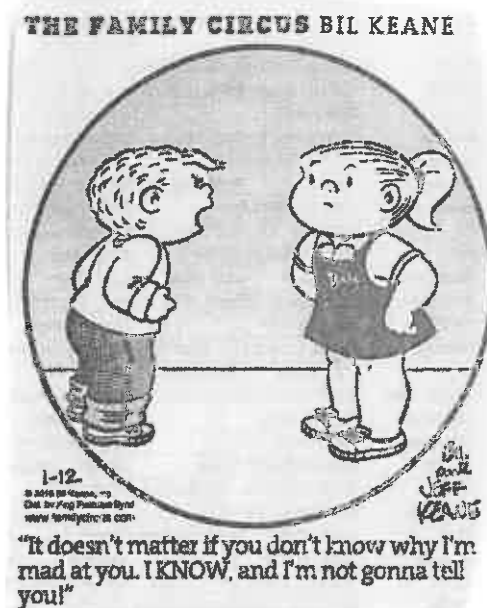
Does that mean you haven't really forgiven them? Is accepting an apology the same thing as forgiving someone? Why might it not be the end of the process?

D. Think of a real life experience of being hurt and list things that could be said to make an apology meaningful to you.

E. Look back at your Application Page (in week 1) and compose an apology you might need to offer to or wish to receive from that person.

F. When you find yourself waiting for an apology, is there a possibility the person involved isn't aware that they've offended you? Do you need to be honest with that person? Is it a situation that is worth bringing up or something you can rather easily release?

Have you been expecting the other person to read your mind? Sometimes we belt out what is wrong; sometimes we clam up; and sometimes we keep them guessing!



What do you tend to do? What would be most helpful?

V. A Simple Model

I have never forgotten some advice that Pastor Dave Hannig offered a young couple at their wedding: He said "The three most important sentences for you to remember are:

1. I was wrong.
2. I am sorry.
3. Please forgive me.

These three simple sentences describe apology in a nut shell. They sound so easy, but they are so hard to say and have such great depth.

1. I was wrong:

The fact that forgiveness comes up as an issue means that something hurtful was done. If and when the Holy Spirit convicts us or when a person approaches us with a hurt, our posture should be to ask Him to also lead us to take ownership of our actions. Defensiveness, our tendency to make excuses or pass blame, and our strong wills often make us very stubborn and very reluctant admit wrong doing. Sometimes we don't realize we have done anything wrong or think of the other person's perspective. We sometimes dismiss our actions, thinking the other person is over reacting or

- c. How does his wife, Gayla, respond?

- d. Why is apology difficult and forgiveness evasive for them?

- e. What does a friend suggest? (Sort of like Job's friends)

- f. How did things turn out over time?

Apart at the Seams Quotes

The novel, Coming Apart at the Seams, follows the rocky course toward reconciliation for Gayla and Brian, who had an extra marital affair. Although not a “Christian” book per se, it has excellent illustrations of the journey involved in reaching forgiveness after serious betrayal.

Below are some excerpts from this book.

(On learning that her husband had an affair, Gayla rebuffs his attempt to gloss over it, even though he is seriously trying in his own way to apologize.)

“Any chance I can talk you into coming with me (on a business trip)?” he asked, and smiled *that* smile, the impish, boyish smile he always uses when he’s trying to get around me, to win me over, the one that almost always works.

“No,” she answered.

His smile vanished, replaced by an expression of disappointment. Too bad. Honestly, what did he expect?

We weren’t talking about him forgetting to pick up the dry cleaning like he’d promised or not calling to say his meeting was running late and he wouldn’t be home for dinner. We weren’t even talking about him neglecting to tell me that he was taking a job that would double his travel SCHEDULE OR MAKING UP HIS MIND TOBUY A COTTAGE IN THE COUNTRY without even consulting me first. This time we were talking about betrayal, about breaking his vows and my heart, making me doubt myself and everything I’d done with my life. That’s not something you get past with a smile and an apology....

“Gayla, hang on a minute. Just hear me out. Please?”

I turned around to face him, crossing my arms over my chest.

“I’m sorry,” Brian responded.

“You’re sorry?” I repeated, shaking my head at the inadequacy of his remark. “Am I supposed to forget everything you wrote and the fact that you slept with another woman because you’ve said you’re sorry? You can’t seriously think it’s that easy....” (P. 138)

Brian had an idea...”I was reading this book about...Well, about how to save a marriage in crisis, and I came across something I think we might want to try....”

Hearing that Brian was concerned enough about saving our marriage to actually read a book on the subject impressed me.... Saying he was sorry was easy enough. People say they’re sorry all the time, even when what they really mean is that they’re sorry they got caught, or a situation sorry that they’re being put in a situation where they’ve been forced to apologize. Apologies cost nothing. But taking responsibility for your actions comes at a price. It’s not about what you say; it’s about what you do.

Brian was here. He was trying. I had to give him points for that. (p. 175)

...Things have been going well. So well, in fact, that I decided to pull out my red fabric and make a birthday quilt for Brian....When I first saw the pattern, I thought it would be too hard, but Evelyn assured me I was up to it. The thing to do, she said, was take it step-by-step, deal with one block at a time and not try to look too far down the road. That seems like pretty good advice on a lot of levels. And it turns out to be true, certainly as far as quilt making is concerned. When I broke it down into steps, the block wasn't nearly as difficult as I'd thought at first..." (p. 214)

(Gayla's friend who has been betrayed herself thinks Gayla is being naïve to forgive Brian.) "Let me tell you, Gayla, when they break your heart a second time, there's not enough glue on the planet to put Humpty-Dumpty together again. After I got out of the hospital, I adopted a strict one-strike-and-you're out policy. No man gets a second chance to make a fool of me. Because no man *deserves* a second chance."

"Brian does," I said quietly. "I know you don't think so, but you're wrong. He's genuinely sorry for what he's done. He keeps apologizing, but it's over now. I've forgiven him."

"I don't believe you," she said. "Forgetting to put the milk back in the refrigerator, or even drinking it all and putting the carton back in empty; that you can forgive. Even forgetting your birthday is a forgivable offense. But when they forget they're married? No. that's a bridge too far, my friend. Even for you."

"But I have. I've forgiven him completely."

"If you've been able to forgive him, then why does he feel like he needs to keep apologizing?"

I took a breath and held it for a moment, not knowing how to answer. (p. 248)

(This introduced doubt into Gayla's mind, and when Brian innocently went on a brief trip, she believed the worst and was sure he had reconnected with his old flame. Now she was sure their marriage was over, even when Brian made every effort to clarify and correct her wrong suspicions. Trust is so hard to re-establish, and he had not been clear about his destination. Now he was exasperated – feeling like he had tried everything to show his loyalty – and he decided he couldn't do it anymore.)

"I have bent over backward trying to make up for what I did to you, Gayla. I've done absolutely everything I could think of to earn your forgiveness and regain your trust. And I thought I had. But I was wrong...."

“That’s not true, Brian. I have forgiven you. If you had just –”

“No you haven’t. Because if you had, he said, his voice rising again, “then you would have talked to me, given me the benefit of the doubt. Instead, you got a lawyer!”

He shook his head again, frowning. “I shouldn’t have lied to you,” he said, sounding almost as angry with himself as he was with me, “but I was honestly trying to protect you. And you lied to me, too, you know. You promised me that you wouldn’t make any further moves toward a divorce until the end of the summer and that if you *did* start having doubt, you’d talk to me about them first. You said you were capable of forgiving me and making a fresh start, Gayla. But it wasn’t true. It was never true.”

He turned away and started walking to the car.

“Back to New York,” he said, opening the car door.

“Where are you going?” I asked, following behind him.

“Don’t go, Brian. Please don’t. I’m sorry. Come inside. Let’s talk about this.”

“I can’t do this right now, Gayla. I’ve had enough.”

He turned on the ignition, backed the car up, and started heading down the driveway. I ran after him; I couldn’t stop myself.

But it was too late. By the time I got to the road, he was gone. (pp. 274-275)

(Gayla was sure it was over – that it was too late. As she packed, her pastor, Philippa – who had known of their struggles, stopped by. After Gayla shared what had just happened)

And when I had finished, Philippa asked, “Do you believe you truly forgave Brian?”

I took a big breath and let it out again, considering her question. “No. I *said* I did. I think I even believed I had. But no. Everything was fine as long as Brian was nearby, taking me to dinner, coming up every weekend, picking up the phone ten times a day, so I knew exactly where he was every second, but the minute he was out of my sight, I was sure he was back to his old tricks. I was an idiot.”

“No, you weren’t,” Philippa replied. “Brian had given you cause for suspicion before. It was perfectly reasonable and right for you to feel the need to keep tabs on him at first. Gayla, you wouldn’t be human – or very smart- if his behaviors hadn’t raised some red flags in your mind,” she said, twisting slightly on the bench so she could look me in the eye.

“Contrary to the old adage, forgiveness *doesn’t* mean forgetting or turning a blind eye. In some instances, doing so can actually mean enabling someone to engage in unethical or sinful behavior, which can be a kind of sin unto itself. Jesus told us to be as wise as serpents and as innocent as doves.”

I lifted my brows and gave her a skeptical look. She laughed.

“Yeah, I know. That’s a tough one to get your head around. My point is, when we truly forgive another person, we don’t pretend that nothing happened. We just choose to believe the best about them until we’re faced with proof of the worst.”

“I wish I’d done that with Brian,” I said, giving a heavy sigh. “If I had brought my suspicions to him right away and asked him what was going on, we wouldn’t be halfway to divorce court now. Of course, I’d still have chewed him out for not telling me the truth from the start,” I said, still irritated that he hadn’t done so.

“And you’d have been justified,” Philippa said evenly. “You deserve complete honesty from Brian, just as he does from you. That has to be a nonnegotiable for the two of you.”

“Yeah. I’ll remember that next time,” I said, unable to keep the bitterness from my voice. “Not that there’s going to *be* a next time. It’s too late for us now.”

“Well,” Philippa said in a regretful tone, “if what you’re telling me is accurate, that’s probably true. Even so, it’s not too late for you to forgive Brian.”

I shot her a look. Hadn’t she been listening? Brian wouldn’t answer my phone calls. He’d put our apartment up for sale.

“My marriage is over,” I said. “What’s the point?”

“Forgiveness isn’t just something you do for someone else,” she countered. “It’s something you do for yourself as well. Forgiveness has a lot more practical value than most people realize.”

Seeing my confusion, she tried to explain.

“In the book of Matthew, there is a parable about a king whose servant has incurred an enormous debt. He owed his master ten thousand talents, which basically translates into hundreds of millions in today’s dollars, an astronomical amount. Even so, the king decides to forgive the debt. Why? Because the King is just incredibly noble and selfless? Because he doesn’t care about money?”

She looked at me as if she actually thought I might have an answer to this. I gave it my best guess.

“None of the above?”

She smiled. “Right. The king forgives the debt because he knows that there is no way in the world that he can collect on it. Some debts are just too big to be repaid.”

“You see,” she continued, shifting her weight and pulling one knee up on the bench, “this king was smart enough to realize that if he insisted on repayment, not only would he never live long enough to see the debt satisfied; he would spend the rest of his life worrying and thinking about that debt. By releasing his debtor, wiping the slate clean, he was really releasing himself.”

“Brian owes you an unforgivable debt. Nothing he can do or say can wind back the clock or make his offense disappear completely, not even divorce. Even though Brian has done all he can to make things right, he can’t. Think about it. What could he possibly do to balance the scales?”

“Nothing,” I said softly, letting my gaze drift out over the garden.

“Right. Which means that, finally, logically, the job of forgiveness lies with you. No one else has the power to release this debt.”

“How am I supposed to do that?” I said, spreading my hands. “I get it in theory, but how does that really work?”

“It’s a process; I can tell you that,” she said, tilting her head slightly to one side and giving me a sympathetic look, as if she truly understood the challenge she was putting before me. “When those stray thought, doubts, and suspicions come into your head, you have to shut them down, say, ‘No. That debt is paid. I’m not going there. I chose forgiveness.’ If you do, those thoughts will become less frequent. In time they’ll disappear completely.”

“But what if you forgive someone, and then it turns out it was a mistake?” I asked. “What if they go out and make a fool of you again?”

Philippa nodded slowly, her warm brown eyes filled with compassion. “Well, that’s what it all comes down to, isn’t it? When someone betrays us, we feel like fools, and so we want to hold them accountable to prevent them from doing it again. But the thing is, if someone is determined to betray you, they will, no matter how tightly you hold the reins. Think about it; you were trying your very best to keep tabs on Brian every moment of every day, but it isn’t possible, is it? Not for any length of time. And so, the second he slipped from your control you went into a tailspin, causing yourself all kinds of unnecessary anguish and anxiety. And if it turns out that your forgiveness was undeserved, it only proves that he was the foolish one, not you.

“Don’t you see, Gayla?” she asked urgently, leaning toward me. “If you truly release Brian from the burden of a debt he has no possibility of repaying, you’re not just freeing him but freeing yourself. There’s no profit in doing anything else. Every debt we choose to hold on to actually has a hold on us.” (pp.289-292)

(Brian and Gayla were able to start again. They came to this conclusion about going forward.)

“Gayla, let’s make a deal. Instead of going through yet another course of apologies, why don’t we agree to wipe the slate clean; forgive each other for any of our past transgressions, be completely honest with each other from here on out, no matter what, and love each other madly until the day we die. Is that something you could live with? Because I think it would work for me.”

I smiled' "You're a pretty tough negotiator. But I think I can manage that." (p. 312)

Earlier, in her anger, Gayla had ripped apart the birthday quilt she had been making for Brian. He found the remnants in the closet. This is the way the book ends:

He met me at the door with the remains of my ravaged quilt top.

"What happened here?" he asked, holding up the quilt to display the enormous tear down the sashing and another along the border.

"Oh. That." I cleared my throat. "That happened a couple of weeks ago. It is supposed to be your birthday present, but I had a bit of a meltdown..."

He frowned, giving me a quizzical look. I took the dish towels from his hand, draped the torn quilt over the back of a chair, and went back to the sink.

Brian walked over to the chair. "So it's ruined? That's too bad," he said, looking down at the ragged red edges. "I like these colors."

I smiled and wiped water from the platter. "Not ruined," I said. "It can be repaired."

"How?" he asked doubtfully, reaching out to touch the rent patches. "It's a mess."

I put the platter back in the cupboard and came up behind him, wrapping my arms around his waist and laying my head between his shoulders. "I know, but the tears are only along the seams. The fabric itself is still strong. I can sew it together again. And by the time I'm finished, it'll be just as good as it was before, maybe even better."

Brian turned to face me, draping his arms over my shoulders.

"Are you sure?"

I rose on my toes, wrapped my arms around his neck, and kissed him.

"I'm, sure," I said. "I'm absolutely sure." (pp. 317-318)

THE END