

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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Don't Just Apologize!

"I apologize for my thoughtlessness," he said. "It's OK," I responded. But it wasn't OK. I knew it down inside. Three weeks later I was still stewing over what I was having to pay as a result of his careless actions. What was wrong? Why was it still eating at me? Why couldn't I just forget it?

Does an apology really put things to rest when a wrong is done? I don't believe so. An apology asks for nothing. Webster gives three definitions for "apology." The first is "an expression of regret for having committed an error or rudeness." The third definition, interestingly, is "an inferior substitute; makeshift." That sounds like a strange definition until you realize that an apology is indeed an inferior substitute for a fundamental Biblical principle: *Asking Forgiveness*.

When I say to you, "I'm sorry," I express regret, but I ask for nothing from you. When I say, "I'm sorry, will you forgive me?" I'm asking for something. I'm asking you to release me from the blame.

In Jeremiah 31:34, God says, "I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more." The Hebrew word translated remember is ZAKAR. Strong's definition for ZAKAR is "to mark (so as to be recognized), i.e., to remember; by implication, to mention." This is how God forgives us. He isn't speaking of a lapse of memory here. He is all knowing. Rather, He is promising that He will not mention our sins anymore. He won't bring them up against us. This is what practical forgiveness is. When I forgive another, I promise never to mention the wrong again. Said another way, I promise not to bring up the issue of blame.

When I apologize, I express my regret for a wrong done, but I ask for nothing. Thus, an apology is an "inferior substitute" for seeking forgiveness. When I ask, "Will you forgive me?" I am asking you to promise never to bring up or mention the issue again, to me (accusation), to another (gossip), or to yourself (brooding). If you keep your promise, the

memory of the wrong will grow dim with time. I'll have a chance to earn your trust again. Hard feelings will ultimately die. Our relationship can continue. Don't stop with an apology. Ask forgiveness!

- Dave Redick (1950 – 2009)

Sores of Discord

Where two or three are gathered together there is apt to be trouble. Or, so it seems from the distressing reports we hear of the many churches currently engulfed in turmoil and strife. There is seemingly no end to this Satan-satisfying discord and division, not to mention the bitter affliction it brings and leaves among God's people. Even apart from those problems that might be called doctrinal, many churches continue to suffer with some form of internal strife, often to the point of biting and devouring and division (Gal. 5:15). More often than not such problems will be traceable to trifles that have been inflated by pride and bad attitudes.

Consequently, the slightest disagreement between brethren, with a little nurturing, rehearsing, and advertising, can develop into a festering and sensitive congregational sore. Such things as hearsay remarks, imagined mistreatment or being crossed in the least way can easily become the germs for creating an epidemic of church troubles. As James writes concerning one aspect of such problems, Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! (Jas. 3:5). The best fire control is spark control. Related to people, this means self-control in the very beginning of real or imagined friction. Self-control is essentially keeping the heart, from whence are the issues of life (Prov. 4:23). It is here that potentially dangerous sparks such as evil surmising and vain imaginations are snuffed out; from here the sparks of pride and tongue are easily extinguished. Ignoring the germs and sparks of people-problems almost insures worse. But, we knew all along what THEY needed and what THEY had done in walking disorderly! If we could just get THEM to see—that's the problem isn't it? NO! The problem is getting ME to see! —to see that the first application of gospel truth must be to SELF. Isn't it strange that neither side of most disputes ever entertain the idea that they might be in the wrong? —or even partly to blame? Truly, it is much easier to be critical than to be correct (Disraeli). Vision is no poorer than in the man who is blinded to his own weaknesses. We see such a man in the self-righteous Pharisee (Lk. 18:9-14); we see such a church at Laodicea (Rev. 3:17). No wonder God says, examine yourselves (2 Cor. 13:5). No honest man can examine another better than he can examine himself. And only as honest men recognize and confess their sins will the ends of truth be served.

However, even with my best efforts there is no guarantee that I will not be mistreated by others. What then? Do I complain loud and long and peddle my ill will? Quit? Go elsewhere? No, there is a better alternative; one suggested by Paul to other brethren who had been wronged: Why not rather take wrong? (1 Cor. 6:7) Doing so proves one to be like Christ and acceptable with God. (1 Pet. 2:20-23) It is the proof of genuine love —the kind that suffers long, does not behave itself unseemly, seeks not its own; the kind that is not provoked, bears and endures all things (1 Cor. 13) and which is the bond of perfectness (Col. 3:14). What better balm for the sores of discord? May God help ME to apply it.

- Dan S. Shipley, via Plain Talk, March, 1974

INCORRIGIBLE

This word cannot be found in Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, but its concept is found. An incorrigible person is one who is "incapable of being corrected ... not reformable" [Webster's Dictionary]. In the setting of New Testament Christianity, the Hebrews writer says this regarding the incorrigible: "...it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame." (Heb. 6:6).

The ones in this passage have been Christians in the past, but have fallen away. (Keep in mind that falling away from the Lord begins in the heart before it ever becomes obvious in the behavior.) The apostle Paul specifically named such incorrigibles: Hymenaeus and Alexander, who "suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith." (1 Tim. 1:20), and Philetus, who had "gone astray from the truth" (2 Tim. 2:17).

Two notable instances where the incorrigible person has the occasion to reveal himself are Matthew 18:15-17 and Galatians 6:1. In Matthew 18, a Christian approaches another Christian who has sinned against him, but he will not hear the charge, thus thwarting the fault-showing brother's efforts to preserve the brotherly relationship. This incorrigible brother refuses to be corrected in this manner, which necessitates further, the involvement of one or two more brethren. Ultimately, when the Lord's pattern is followed, uninterrupted by other misguided brethren, the incorrigible brother will be dealt with by the church when his refusal to be corrected is fully established.

In Galatians 6, one caught in any trespass is to be restored by those who are spiritual. But just as in Matthew 18, their efforts to do so can be sabotaged by the incorrigible. It thus becomes a situation of casting pearls before swine (Matt. 7:6).

In most situations, one or two incorrigible brethren can be dealt with in the Lord's way, and the harmony and holiness of the church is preserved. However, once the incorrigible have entrenched themselves, many times with the aid of others (enablers, biased family protectors, authoritarian sympathizers, obscured powerbases, de-facto leaders, the spiritually weak, etc.), they are difficult, if not impossible, to keep from spoiling the entire local church (cf. 1 Cor. 5:6; 3 John 9-10). Their incorrigible personality seeks to be hidden in the shadows with only minimal exposure. By their words and actions, they attempt to deflect attention from their own sins by producing counter-charges and accusations against the spiritual brethren who have attempted to bring them to repentance. For the incorrigible, refusing to hear a brother who seeks to preserve brotherly love is equivalent to refusing to hear the Lord!

The incorrigible are to be removed from the body (1 Cor. 5:13; cf. Matt. 18:17). Those faithful to the Lord will do it, even when painful. Think!

- Gary Smalley

Going from Nowhere to Somewhere

Exodus 13:17 – 15:21

Although the Israelites could have left Egypt and taken a more direct route to eventually reach the promised land, they did not. The Lord took them in a direction that was indirect and probably appeared to be a “road to nowhere” But while the people may have thought they were going nowhere, God was taking them somewhere. He took them in a direction where: His power would be displayed (by the crossing at the Red Sea), they would not become afraid, turn around and go back, and where they would learn to rely on Him. He would provide for them in difficult circumstances (e.g., in the middle of the wilderness). Sometimes we too may think we are on a “road to nowhere” in our lives – we might become fearful, lose faith, or question God. However, we need to remember that God is faithful even in hard times, sad times, and when we feel like our lives are going nowhere. We need to remember that we might experience circumstances that will teach us to better rely on and trust in God, circumstances that may test our faith, and circumstances that will help us grow. The Israelites didn't get to take the direct route and we might not either. But we're not going “nowhere” if we always trust in God. He's taking us “somewhere” just like He did the Israelites – a promised land (cf. Matthew 6:25-34).

- Nathan Lee & Eric Wallace

THIS WEEK'S LESSONS: Sunday morning: *“Whoever does not receive you ...”!* (Text: Matt. 10:5-15); Sunday evening: *Bi-monthly Singing!*