

INTRO

How are we at saying “sorry” these days? It seems like we’re being taught by public figures that the best response to wrongdoing is to simply say, “It wasn’t me,” or “I didn’t do it,” or “that’s not true,” or “fake news,” and avoid apology. Or maybe you’re the opposite: you’re quick to apologize for everything to keep your home, family, friends, or workplace harmonious.

Saying “I’m sorry” was probably one of the early lessons you learned as a young child. But what does it really mean, and how do we cheapen ourselves and the deep gift of confession by “over-apologizing,” or simply passing off our deeds as “mistakes,” or minimizing our culpability by explaining it off due to circumstance?

Figuring Out FORGIVENESS

a Brewed Theology
conversation starter*

There’s the other side, too, where you are the one *from whom* forgiveness is sought. That can be messy, as it somehow puts you simultaneously in a position of vulnerability and power.

It seems like we’ve lost some of the gift of dealing with sin with the life-changing and life-giving process of confession and forgiveness. Part of the “good news” Gospel of Jesus Christ is that he came for the forgiveness of sin. We’ll ponder these and other aspects of apologizing and confessing, wondering how and where God gets involved in forgiveness.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

How often do you apologize? For what? How do you do it? We’ve all heard of “thank you” notes. Have you ever written an “I’m sorry” note? What action, inaction (or sin) did someone commit against you that you (have) held onto for a long time? Have you committed something that you need(ed) to confess and ask forgiveness for? Why is it so hard to say “I’m sorry”? How is admitting wrong and apologizing modeled (or not) in the public eye? Does your congregation practice Confession & Forgiveness in worship? Do they practice individual or private confession? What is your most powerful experience of being told “You are forgiven”?

BIBLE BASICS

Read these passages about sin and forgiveness.

- **2 Samuel 11 & 12:1-23** – David & Bathsheba. Read the story. Note the sins. Is forgiveness given? How?
- **John 20:19-23** – On Easter, Jesus appears, offers his peace, and gives his disciples the power to forgive sins.
- **Luke 15:11-32** – “Prodigal” means extravagantly wasteful. In this story of a father and son, who is the “prodigal”?
- **Matthew 18:21-35** – A parable of a forgiven servant who refuses to offer forgiveness.

ESSENTIAL READINGS and VIDEOS* (click the **headings** for links to knowledge)

(NOTE & Trigger Warning: some resources below reference sexual abuse and infidelity)

AN APOLOGETIC POPE

In 2018, Pope Francis apologizes for scandals in the Roman Catholic church, particularly by abusive priests. Francis condemns the actions and cover-up. How much does an apology on-behalf of others do?

A DENYING AND APOLOGETIC (?) PRESIDENT

US President Bill Clinton was caught up in a scandal in 1998. Read a portion of a deposition transcript (link above), and then **watch this response video**, regarding his denial and then “clarifying” reponse. Is there an apology here?

FORGIVE A**HOLES (2-min video)

In this 2018 video, Lutheran Pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber talks about how being wronged connects sinner and sinned-against. She wonders whether forgiveness isn’t a way of “wielding bolt cutters” and snapping away that connection.

SET FREE BY CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION (6-min video)

Lutheran Pastor and Professor James Nestigen tells the story of a pastor who committed adultery, admitted it, but struggled to confess his sin. Listen to how sin, confession, and absolution work here. Click **here for more message**.

BONHOEFFER: LESSONS ON FORGIVENESS

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German Lutheran Pastor who died in a concentration camp in 1945. In this 2010 article, Nick Nowalk explores Bonhoeffer’s ideas on living (and confessing and forgiving) together.

APOLOGIZE TOO MUCH? HERE ARE SOME ALTERNATIVES

This 2021 article by the Forbes Coaches Council looks at alternatives to “chronic over-apologizing.” How do these options strike you? Do they seem to unhealthily avoid apologizing? Or do they reempower actual apology?

WOMEN AND APOLOGY

Fran Hauser, author of *The Myth of the Nice Girl: Achieving a Career You Can Love Without Becoming a Person You Hate*, describes women as over-apologizing. Have you experienced this? Read what she says about it on Oprah.com.

BONUS: THREE PREACHER-TEACHERS ON FORGIVENESS

- **SINS FORGIVEN** – Rev. Dr. Rolf Jacobson on John 20:19-23, concerning downplaying sin and forgiveness in churches. Do we have “Christianity without sin and forgiveness as a religion of ‘designed obsolescence’”?
- **A GENEROUS FORGIVENESS** – Rev. Dr. Karoline Lewis argues that forgiveness is a theological necessity. Preachers must emphasize forgiveness while avoiding more advice-like to-do’s.
- **FORGIVENESS AS PUZZLE, RIDDLE, AND PARABLE** – Rev. Dr. David Lose likens not forgiving as being dragged into the past, and wonders how to insist that people forgive without being moralistic.

We at Brewed Theology claim no authorship or ownership of suggested readings, the links provided, or their host websites. Links connect to their original sources. If a link is broken, please contact your facilitator or report it to brewedtheology@gmail.com. Homework readings are proven (at least in our minds) to boost thoughtfulness and conversation. While not required, they are highly suggested.