

Dr. Dan *for* Today

The Power of Apology

Proverbs 28:13 states, “He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.” The power of apology is taking the long view on life and realizing that there are both positive and negative consequences from our actions. The negative consequences are like barnacles that fasten themselves to the hull of a ship and can only be seen when the ship is in dry dock for repairs. Just because they are out of sight and below the water line does not mean they do not have effects on how the ship operates. The positive consequences or the power in apologies come from a freeing up of the added weight of the ever increasing barnacles. When they are removed, the ship responds more powerfully in the water and cuts through the waves cleaner and maneuvers with ease. An apology then, is an admission of error followed by the expression of regret for a mistake or wrong accompanied by a confession or admission of guilt or of being at fault. It is actually an admittance by the offending party that they were wrong and sorry for what they said or did. I John 1:9 states, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us of all unrighteousness.” St. Augustine paraphrases it another way, “The confession of evil works is the first beginning of good works.” There are consequences either way. William Shakespeare wrote in *Hamlet*, “Confess yourself to heaven; repent what’s past; avoid what is to come.” An apology or confession is like a solvent that is used to loosen one substance from another when they are stuck. The person who apologizes is taking the mature, responsible approach to the situation regardless of the consequences, and ridding themselves from the foreign substance that needs to be discarded. It is no wonder that people testify to feeling lighter after an apology; like a burden has been lifted. Most of us will look for the fat content of a food before eating it, but how many of us realize that harboring unrighteousness or sin is like storing up bad cholesterol in the heart of our soul. It leads to a heavy and hardened heart and a burdened spirit.

Dwight L Moody wrote of such confession when illustrating Daniel’s prayer in Daniel 9:4-19 and Psalm 32:5.

“There may be some confessions we need to make to be brought into close fellowship with God. We must cooperate with God. You may take a bottle and cork it up tightly, and put it under Niagara Falls, and not a drop of that mighty volume of water will get into the bottle. If there is any sin in my heart that I am not willing to confess and to give up, I need not expect a blessing. The men who have had power with God in Prayer have always begun by confessing their sins...”

This same theme of power in prayer is found James 5:16, “Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.” The power of apology restores connection with God to allow Him to give the repentant person mercy, blessing, healing, and power to live differently!

It is interesting and humbling to listen to people's apologies. They seem to happen most often during a difficult life transition, when the pressures of life shake up their hardened exterior. When the consequences and pain we have ignored all those days, weeks, months, or years can no longer be denied and they break through our resentment and pride they pale in comparison. Then, and for many only then, are we faced with ourselves. Our actions are displayed in the mirror of life as our mortality or immortality over shadows who we are and what we have done. When our hardened conscience is softened, and our feelings of regret and honest guilt are allowed to be felt, we confess and are often left with an infilling of God's Spirit to indwell the space where the unrighteousness once ruled. In contrast, the lightness and freedom that is felt can often lead to further regret in wondering why it took so long to let go so, we could experience being freed from this burden.

The power of apology also restores broken relationships. Keeping connected with those we care about is important so that our love can grow and be nurtured. By taking personal responsibility for ourselves, our feelings, and actions we come to realize that pride and the harboring of resentment only maintains the problem. In essence, this elevates the unresolved issue to a higher level than the relationship. When we spin our wheels thinking, justifying, or arguing who was right and who was wrong, we lose sight of what really is important—our relationship! Do you know what the best way is to have the last word in an argument? Apologize! I believe this is what the apostle Paul was referring to in Ephesians 4:26, 27, "In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold." The evil one wants to insert a wedge in any crack and cause more disconnection between us and God and one another. The power of apology realigns the priorities, equalizes the power, and brings a different perspective which can bring restoration as well as move our relationships from being so problem focused to being more solution focused. An apology leads to hope and provides an opportunity to start fresh in any relationship.

Dr. Dan Trathen is a minister, psychologist, international author, and national speaker. His counseling office is located at 19284 Cottonwood Dr., Suite 202, Parker, CO 80138. He can be reached by calling 303-593-0575 vm 111.

© Daniel W. Trathen 2009