

## **Real Apologies Have Four Elements**

The epistle of James informs or reminds us “*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) in 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 real apology. It lacks the essential elements. So, **what are the constituent components of a true apology?** Please note the following from David’s *plea for forgiveness* regarding his sin with Bathsheba in Psalm 51 (so please get your Bible and read the verses cited)...

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, King Saul struggled (cf. 1Samuel 15:15,20-21,24), but King David excelled.
2. **True Regret, Psalm 51:4b-6.** “I’m truly sorry.” This is not the *apology* as that comes next. Instead, it is expressed remorse for the wrong done as well as 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 the compassion of the one offended, rather than merely expecting or demanding such simply because they “went through the motion” of admitting guilt and making an appeal. Note specifically David’s plea for *graciousness, lovingkindness, and compassion* in Psalm 51:1.
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. True “repentance” 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 do 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 additional maturity enables them to understand their culpability more fully and thus take accountability more seriously. However and unfortunately, some of us never really *grow* into such improved comprehension or

application regarding our apologies to God or one another. Let's be and do better because eternity depends on it, cf. Matt.5:21-26 and 1John 1:8-9! (Philip C. Strong; Viking Drive Church of Christ; 3791 Viking Drive, Bossier City, LA; online at [vikingdrivechurchofchrist.com](http://vikingdrivechurchofchrist.com); email to [mrpcstrong@hotmail.com](mailto:mrpcstrong@hotmail.com))