

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN APOLOGIZING AND SAYING SORRY

Bryan Matthew Dockens

Modern usage defines the word “apology” as “an admission of error or discourtesy accompanied by an expression of regret”, but that remains its secondary definition while its primary definition is “a formal justification: defense” (Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary). Thus, the English word “apology” is a contronym because it has two opposing meanings depending on context.

In classic literature, an apology is a defense, not a statement of remorse. The Apology of Socrates by Plato is a record of the philosopher’s legal defense at his trial in Athens in 399 B.C., culminating in his conviction and execution by poison. Socrates answered his accusers with justifications for his behavior, not regrets. That is what a classical apology is.

Hence, “apologetics” is a special area of study in Scripture devoted to the defense of creation and of the gospel. This is consistent with Greek usage in the New Testament.

The Greek verb “apologeomai” is defined by Strong “to give an account (legal plea) of oneself, i.e. exculpate (self)”, by Thayer “to defend oneself, make one’s defense”, and by Vine “verbal defense, a speech in defense”. This verb appears ten times in inspiration (Luke 12:11; 21:14; Acts 19:33; 24:10; 26:1, 2, 24; Romans 2:15; 2nd Corinthians 12:19), including three occurrences in a single chapter. Notice that passage where the word is used most frequently: “*Then Agrippa said to Paul, ‘You are permitted to speak for yourself.’ So Paul stretched out his hand and **answered** for himself: ‘I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because today I shall **answer** for myself before you concerning all the things of which I am accused by the Jews’... Now as he thus made his **defense**, Festus said with a loud voice, ‘Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!’” (Acts 26:1-2, 24). “Apologeomai” is rendered as “**answered**”, “**answer**”, and “**made his defense**”. Between verse 2 and verse 24, Paul made an account of his conversion from persecutor to Christian and, afterward, King Agrippa acknowledged the apostle’s intention, exclaiming, “*You almost persuade me to become a Christian*” (28). Persuading his audience to become Christians is how Paul apologized.*

The noun form of the Greek term is “apologia”, which appears eight

– Continued from page 2 –

times in the New Testament (Acts 22:1; 25:16; 1st Corinthians 9:3; 2nd Corinthians 7:11; Philippians 1:7, 17; 2nd Timothy 4:16; 1st Peter 3:15). Paul asserted, “*I am appointed for the **defense** of the gospel*” (Philippians 1:17) and Peter commanded, “*Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a **defense** to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear*” (1st Peter 3:15). Biblically speaking, and in keeping with classical understanding, an apology is a defense, especially a defense of the gospel, which is the hope of every Christian.

Clearly, the classical sense of an apology is a justification, and, in defense of Christ’s gospel, that is good. Using the word to describe one’s response to accusations of sin can be complicated, though. When the accused apologizes, is he defending the behavior, as in the classical but not archaic use, or is he expressing remorse, as in the modern use?

Sorrow is essential to genuine repentance, as Paul plainly stated, “*godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation*” (2nd Corinthians 7:10). It takes a humble heart to be in fellowship with the Lord. “*Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up*” (James 4:8-10).

If by “I apologize” a sinner means sorrow, lamentation, mourning, weeping, and gloom, then so be it. However, it is a potentially confusing expression. And the reality is that many sinners confronted with their wrongdoing truly lack sorrow and gloom. They will apologize by attempting to explain away their actions with mitigating circumstances and blame-shifting.

Since an apology can mean two opposite things and the way many people express an apology makes its application less than immediately clear, it may be most helpful to simply avoid the phrase altogether and stick to unmistakably plain words. “*David said to Nathan, ‘I have sinned against Jehovah’*” (2nd Samuel 12:13). The prodigal son said, “*Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight*” (Luke 15:21). According to Jesus, the goal is to hear the sinner say, “*I repent*” (Luke 17:4).

“I apologize” is not, necessarily, the wrong thing to say, but the words which follow that statement must be immediately and unmistakably clear or it can leave those who hear it in confusion and doubt.

***"WHAT MUST I DO
TO BE SAVED?"***

ACTS 16:30

LEARN THE GOSPEL

John 6:45; Romans 10:17

BELIEVE IN CHRIST

Hebrews 11:6; John 3:16

CONFESS CHRIST

Matthew 10:32-33; Romans 10:9-10

REPENT OF SIN

Acts 3:19; 17:30

BE BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST

Mark 16:16; Romans 6:3-6

REMAIN STEADFAST

1st Corinthians 15:58; Revelation 2:10

***"THE ASSEMBLING OF
OURSELVES TOGETHER"***

HEBREWS 10:24-25

SUNDAY

Worship @ 10:00 a.m.

Studies @ 11:45 a.m.

WEDNESDAY

Studies & Worship @ 7:00 p.m.

THURSDAY

Men's & Ladies' Studies @ 6:20 p.m.

75 Sherrod Boulevard
Belén, New Mexico

Seekers Welcome.
Members Expected.

***"IF A MAN IS OVERTAKEN IN
ANY TRESPASS...
RESTORE SUCH A ONE"***

GALATIANS 6:1

CONFESS TRESPASSES

James 5:16; 1st John 1:9

REPENT OF SIN

Acts 8:22

PRAY FOR FORGIVENESS

Acts 8:22

REMAIN STEADFAST

1st Corinthians 15:58; Revelation 2:10

***"A WORD FITLY SPOKEN IS
LIKE APPLES OF GOLD IN
SETTINGS OF SILVER"***

PROVERBS 25:11

"You'll never feel connected to a church you don't serve in. Attending keeps you growing, but only serving fulfills purpose."

– Chadwick Brewer

"WHOLE COUNSEL"

ACTS 20:27

VOLUME 4, ISSUE 31

AUGUST 2ND, 2026

THE DOCTRINE OF THE NICOLAITANS

Terry W. Benton

Revelation 2:15 mentions the doctrine of the Nicolaitans and says that God *"hates"* that doctrine. Whatever it was, the church at Pergamos had members that taught this doctrine as well as the doctrine of Balaam (Revelation 2:14). Because of these doctrines in the church, God had *"a few things against you"*. Whatever these doctrines were, they mattered to God and He was not going to tolerate them.

Contrary to what people today think, doctrine is important to God. John said that we must *"abide in the doctrine of Christ"* (2nd John 9-10) and that if you don't abide (stay put; don't venture into other doctrines that originate from men), then you *"have neither the Father nor the Son"*. Doctrine is equated with having God. You cannot have God without the right doctrine, the pure doctrine of Christ. When the doctrine taught is from men, it contaminates the relationship with God and causes a separation from Him. If the church tolerates such doctrines, they risk separation from God's fellowship.

Don't let anyone tell you that "that is just doctrine and doctrine does not matter". You cannot have God's favor without the pure doctrine of Christ.

RIO GRANDE VALLEY CHURCH OF CHRIST

505-864-0282

rgvcoc@gmail.com

Box 989, Belén, NM 87002

www.RGVChurchOfChrist.org

75 Sherrod Boulevard

Facebook.com/RGVChurchOfChrist