

# CWR *m*agazine

February 2023  
Volume 14, Number 1

CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION



## *How Sorry Are We?*

*by Greg Albrecht* page 2

Also in this issue

Our Choice of Words | Ed Dunn 5

Zaccheus Makes Amends | Brad Jersak 6

# How Sorry Are We?

by Greg Albrecht

## A SIGN OF WEAKNESS?

Were we to take our cues from Hollywood on the topic of being sorry, apologizing and seeking forgiveness, we might remember the message from a 1949 Western movie titled “She Wore a Yellow Ribbon” in which John Wayne’s character says, “Never apologize and never explain—it’s a sign of weakness.”

Or, if we persist in consulting movie “wisdom,” we might remember the line, “Love means never having to say you’re sorry,” from the classic 1970 tale “Love Story.”

With “apologies” to John Wayne, the gospel of Jesus Christ teaches us that making amends is incredibly important. As Christ-followers grow in Christ, we learn to apologize more readily. The gospel is about “no-matter-what” love—it’s about forgiveness over and over again. That teaching turns our world upside down.

With “apologies” to the classic movie “Love Story,” love means always being willing to admit our shortcomings and sins, and it means regularly saying we are sorry.

- If you have ever received a genuine apology, you know how healing a genuine apology can be.

*Love DOES mean having to say you’re sorry... regularly!*

- If you have ever given a genuine apology, you know how difficult it is to give a genuine apology.

Even when people use the word “sorry,” how often do they really mean it? When we say “sorry,” how sorry are we?

Apologies humble us—when we apologize, our image of who we are is diminished. A true apology means giving something up. It means we might lose something material or financial and it means that our pride may be damaged.

That’s why it is far easier to live in denial—to reconstruct reality and rewrite history about what we believe, which is nothing but a convenient lie about what really happened.

*It is far easier for us to accuse another person of being a sorry excuse for a human being than it is for us to seriously consider our own flawed and broken condition.*

## COUNTERFEIT APOLOGIES

While we all yearn to hear **authentic apologies**, we often hear **counterfeit apologies**—**counterfeit apologies** are no apology at all. Here are just three examples of **counterfeit apologies**:

- “Oh, you were upset by something I said? I was only kidding.”

Even a slip of the tongue can often reveal a speaker’s true motive or intention. In Matthew 12:34, Jesus said that the mouth speaks what is already present in the heart.

How sorry can someone be if all they can say is, “I was only kidding,” when someone lets them know how much their words hurt?

- “I’m sorry if you misunderstood what I was trying to say—that wasn’t what I meant.”

This lame justification has someone shifting blame back to us because according to them, it was our fault for not understanding them as we should have. It is a far, far different thing to say “I’m sorry, I probably did not explain and express myself adequately.”

- “I’m sorry IF I offended you. I apologize IF you got the wrong impression from something I said or did.”

Notice how all three “non-apology apologies” are actually subtle accusations that the other person somehow failed. “Non-apology apologies” are classic exercises in blame-shifting, a backhanded sorry excuse that lays blame totally on the person who was so sensitive they were offended.

A powerful illustration for such sorry excuses for

apologies comes from a comic strip called “Pearls Before Swine.” The rat in the comic strip says to his friend, the pig, “I’m going to start apologizing to all the people I have insulted by telling them ‘I’m sorry that you were offended.’”

His friend the pig asks him, “Is that a real apology?”

The pig responds, “No. That’s what’s so great about it. It allows me to retain the impact of the original insult while tacking on the implied bonus insult of ‘You are an insensitive ninny.’”

Vague and incomplete apologies are meaningless because the person who was wronged realizes that the person who caused the offense and pain takes no responsibility for causing it.

## HOW SORRY ARE WE REALLY?

**Counterfeit apologies** are essentially non-sorrowful apologies. **Counterfeit apologies** use the word “sorry” but reveal that the offender is really not sorry at all.

Saying “I’m sorry” without a genuine acknowledgment of wrongdoing is no apology at all. A Christ-centered apology involves repentance—and repentance involves an acceptance of responsibility for what was said or done and a determination to change one’s behavior. Apologizing without repenting can transform what masquerades as an apology into an insult.

The person who says, “I’m sorry IF I offended you” or “I’m sorry IF you got the wrong impression about something I said or did” may well be arrogant and filled with pride—there is nothing of a Christ-centered humility in such a statement, but rather there is a lack of remorse, a denial of being wrong and an unstated but added insult that the person making the non-apology is superior to the person who was so sensitive that they were offended.

People who don’t truly repent may use the word “sorry,” but they are actually proclaiming that they were not wrong at all. They shift the blame to the person they hurt or injured by accusing them of being overly sensitive.

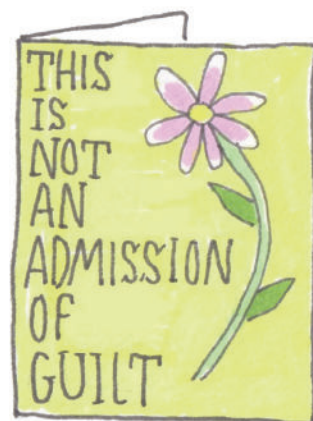
## DENY AND DEFEND!

One of the difficulties surrounding apologizing concerns the highly litigious society in which we live. When we have a car accident, lawyers and insurance agents advise against admitting we were in the wrong. Doctors are told by hospitals, insurance companies and malpractice attorneys never to admit they make a mistake. Never say you were wrong. **Deny and Defend!**

**Deny and Defend** is not only a tactic used when there might be financial implications—it goes to the human condition. Our nature, as humans, is to deny and defend.

Jesus fully realizes that in our flesh, we will fight with every fiber of our being to avoid giving an apology. We’re tempted to offer half-hearted non-apologies, serve up self-justifications and attempt to transfer blame.

## NON-APOLOGY CARDS



[Twitter.com/nonapologycards](https://twitter.com/nonapologycards)  
Art: Jamie & Thomas



# "OWNING IT" – A GOOD APOLOGY:

I AM SORRY.  
(no buts)

IT'S MY FAULT  
(full stop)

HOW CAN I  
MAKE IT  
RIGHT?

Jesus also knows how deeply we desire others to apologize to us, and how helpful and healing authentic apologies can be. Knowing that, he has us imagine bringing an offering in a religious setting, then realizing we have left some hurt or harm in our wake. In Matthew 5:23-24, he says, "Stop right there. First go and be reconciled" (paraphrase).

As Christ-followers, we have two commandments: 1) to love God with all that we are, and 2) to love our neighbors as ourselves. To apologize and mean it—to genuinely say "I'm sorry"—is a key aspect of those two imperatives.

Knowing we are healed and reconciled through others' apologies, how can we love our neighbors as ourselves if we avoid offering an apology ourselves?

How can we love God and love our neighbors as ourselves if we offer only counterfeit apologies and lame excuses or deny what we have said or done? How can we as Jesus-followers justify ourselves or transfer the blame to those we have wronged? Isn't that hypocrisy?

## AUTHENTIC APOLOGIES

A reporter wrote a blistering attack against a well-known

politician in his newspaper column. One day after his newspaper printed his vicious accusations, the reporter and the politician whom he berated happened to run into each other in the bathroom of a restaurant where they were both dining.

As they were washing their hands next to each other, the reporter felt some pangs of remorse and said to the politician, "I'd like to apologize for all those insulting things I wrote about you in my newspaper column yesterday."

The politician replied, "Thank you. But I would have preferred it

*had you insulted me in private and apologized for it to all your readers."*

By way of summary, it may feel easier for us to accuse another person for their flaws than it is for us to seriously consider our own broken condition. Further, unless and until we take responsibility and admit when we were wrong, we are not really sorry.

Let us follow Christ's call to love God and neighbor through **authentic apologies** that lead to healing and reconciliation. □

*Greg Albrecht is president of Plain Truth Ministries.*



butupalflickr

# Our Choice of Words

by Ed Dunn

***A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.*** —Proverbs 15:1

I have a neighbor, we'll call her Brenda, who has a teenage son at just the right age to know exactly how to push his mother's buttons. Over for dinner one evening not long ago, I was caught completely off-guard as I witnessed Brenda and her son get into a terribly heated argument.

Now, allow me to interrupt my story for a moment to say that, when I get into an argument, I believe in rules of engagement. Like the British army of our American history, which fought in highly organized ranks, followed established tactics to gain position, and exchanged measured volleys under the guiding hand of senior officers in command, I believe that an argument should have some order to it. There should be a civility to a disagreement.

Not so for Brenda and her teenage son, however. When the two argued, they were more like the ragtag American colonial militia, which fought with few rules of war in mind. The two came at one another *from all sides, from behind the trees, dense grass thickets and tall wheatfields*, if you will, to extend the analogy.

Brenda and her son tore into one another with a fierceness and fury that showed little regard for order, civility or each other. Let's just say both the exchange and

the dinner were both quite hard to digest that evening.

The effect of such an argument, of such harsh words exchanged so carelessly, left both Brenda and her son reeling emotionally. Both had taken a strong position and dug in deeply. Both had used their words in whatever way necessary in order to win the war. And, after all was said and done, neither mother nor son could say a simple *"I'm sorry."*

***Like a sword with two edges, your word can create the most beautiful dream, or your word can destroy everything around you.*** —Don Miguel Ruiz, *The Four Agreements*

The choice we have to use our words wisely or carelessly usually comes at a moment in time when we least expect it. Often, the choice comes at some sort of an *emotional intersection*, where we are upset and might not be as present as we'd like to be. Our words can just seem to *jump out of us*, and be out of our mouths before we've had the chance to consider them more carefully. At times, we can be completely caught off-guard by something we've just said. We had no intention of saying something harsh and causing such hurt or harm. Before we know it, the *two-edged sword* of our words has been used to destructive ends.

Our words can be one of the greatest sources of healing in any relationship in our lives. Our

words carry that weight. We can choose to say just the right thing, to just the right person, in a moment of true need. We can choose to turn a bad situation to good, and to repair hurt and harm caused by past carelessness. Our words have that power. Before we know it, the two-edged sword of our words have been used to create a beautiful dream—a powerful Christ-centered image of peace—around us.

***Words, I do believe, are our most inexhaustible source of magic.*** —Professor Dumbledore, *The Harry Potter Series*

Have you ever seen someone's face brighten at the sound of a kind word? Have you ever experienced someone's body language, closed and hardened in the face of criticism, suddenly soften, relax and open-up at a word of praise? Our words do indeed carry weight. Our words do have power. In that sense, our words can be like *magic*. They can turn away wrath and begin the process of *healing*. As they are inexhaustible, there is no limit to the amount of good we can do in choosing and using our words well.

As Christ-followers, we have been invited into a life of using our words carefully. In Christ, we are empowered to pass on the beautiful "dream"—the peace of God—to all around us.

We can be direct with our words, and say what needs to be said in relationships we hold dear.

*(continued on page 8)*

# Zaccheus Makes Amends

by Brad Jersak

## LUKE 19

<sup>5</sup> And when Jesus came to [Jericho], he looked up and said, *“Zaccheus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house.”*  
<sup>6</sup> And he hurried and came down, and received Him, rejoicing.  
<sup>7</sup> When the people saw this, they all began to complain, saying, *“He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner!”*  
<sup>8</sup> But Zaccheus stopped and said to the Lord, *“Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I am giving to the poor, and if I have extorted anything from anyone, I am giving back four times as much.”*  
<sup>9</sup> And Jesus said to him, *“Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham.”*  
<sup>10</sup> *For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”*

## TRANSFORMING GRACE

Zaccheus' story provides an excellent demonstration of how grace transforms the heart and life of a lost and alienated human being. Christ and this tax collector engage in a mutual act of hospitality anticipating Revelation 3:20.

*“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. When anyone who hears my voice opens the door, I will enter and have supper with them, and they with me.”*

So it was for Zaccheus. God's grace filled his deepest longing and out of Zaccheus' newfound sense of belonging, he was “saved”—from alienation to communion. Christ in his home, Christ in his heart—the living connection that changes us.

In Zaccheus' case, the natural overflow of his encounter with Jesus resulted in a tangible response. He became a willing

participant in his freedom and salvation, prompted by the Spirit to make amends.

In the addictions recovery community, “making amends” refers to personally apologizing to those harmed by our behavior or our treatment of them.

Zaccheus had done great harm in his community. His complicity with Rome as a collections agent for the empire was a great betrayal of his own people.

In *Jesus and the Disinherited*, Howard Thurman wrote that tax collectors *“became the grasping hand of Roman authority, filching from Israel the taxes which helped to keep alive the oppression of the gentile ruler. They were Israelites who understood the psychology of the people, and therefore were always able to function with the kind of spiritual ruthlessness that would have been impossible for those who did not know the people intimately. They were despised; they*

*were outcasts, because from the inside they had unlocked the door to the enemy. . .*

*The tax gatherer had no soul; he had long since lost it. When Jesus became a friend to the tax collectors and secured one as his intimate companion, it was a spiritual triumph of such staggering proportions that after nineteen hundred years it defies rational explanation.”*

As alarming as Jesus' overture of friendship was to his disciples, his opponents, and to Zaccheus' victims, no one was as staggered as the taxman himself.

As Paul would say, *“The kindness of God leads to repentance”* defined not as self-loathing or as a mere change of mind, but a total reorientation of one's life—*conversion* from self-centeredness to the real-life expression of other-centered love.

This is where Zaccheus' amends (and ours) come in. Zaccheus' amends were substantial. He lays his intentions out before Jesus:

- *First, Zaccheus assesses his wealth in relation to the poverty he was complicit in creating. He makes amends to his community, giving half his possessions to the poor.*

This reminds me of a friend who made a habit of stealing from a center where she volunteered in order to pilfer money for her addiction. Years later, she needed to make amends, not because *they* needed her money, but in order to participate in her grace-transformation. She first apologized to someone in authority, then they worked out a plan for her to make restitution, whether by service or repayment.

- *Second, with what remained of his wealth, Zaccheus identified specific people who he had extorted.*



He did not simply say, “Sorry, folks. I really messed up. But I’ve cleared it up with Jesus and I’m forgiven now. So, we’re all good now, right?” Rather, he actually calculated how much he had squeezed from them, repaid them, and added 400% interest. Why so much?

I can think of two reasons.

- For one, Zaccheus saw that the harm he caused exceeded the cash he’d taken. The cost of his sin to those he’d robbed had compounded. What had they lost in time, potential income, additional hardships, and emotional impact? *Effective reparations take into account the toll to the whole person and their family.*

caused to the “how much more” grace he had received from Jesus. The 400% was measured by the superabundant mercies we experienced.

## PRINCIPLES FOR AMENDS

- **Amends demonstrate that we own what we have done.** No blaming. No sidestepping. Yes, there are reasons for our misdeeds, but when shared in amends, they come across as excuses and justifications.

Zaccheus names his sin: *extortion.* NOT “I was just doing my job” or “The Romans made me do it.” Instead, “I did this. I did it to you. That was wrong.”

impacted their financial stability. But he may still need to hear how his actions also humiliated them, brought hardship to their family, and introduced fear and hatred into their hearts.

- **Amends are NOT about extracting forgiveness from the other so we can feel better.**

Those we hurt may be years away from the healing they need to release us, if ever. Those we harm have experienced broken trust that may or may not ever be restored. Our amends need to be a *unilateral* expression of sorrow for the harm we caused, *not contingent on any response*, including forgiveness or reconciliation. We may hope for that, but must not use our amends with those expectations. Otherwise, we’re still guilty of manipulating or minimizing.

## LIVING AMENDS

- **Finally, amends are lived, not merely spoken.**

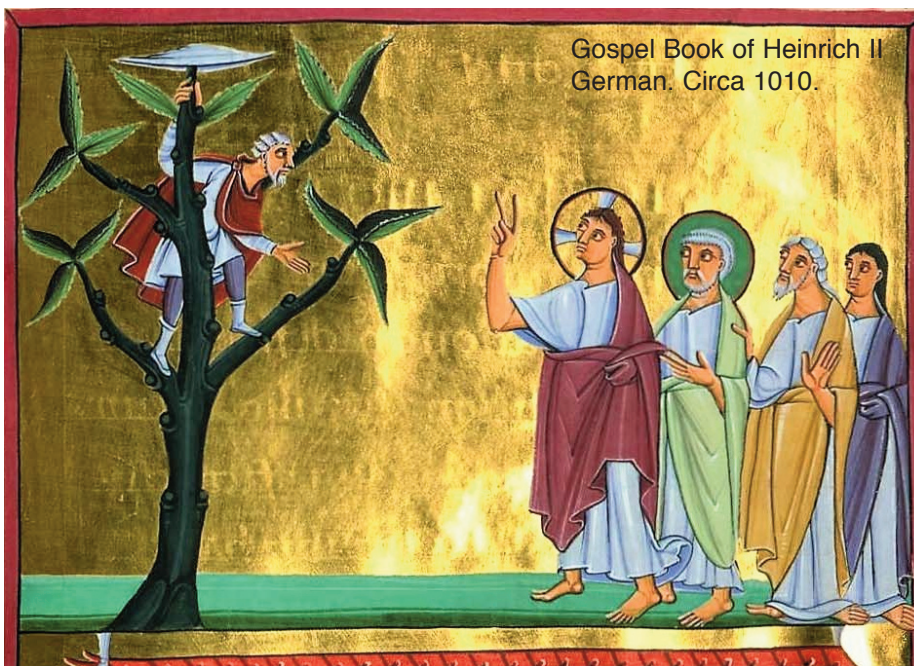
Sometimes “sorry” doesn’t help much. Even a payment can feel like payoff. Or maybe you’ve fallen a thousand times and spoken apologies lack credibility.

No matter. As Zaccheus continues to be faithful, his sincerity will prove itself.

So beyond specific word, *acts of restitution, repentance and amends are a new way to live every day*, empowered by grace as a grateful response to God’s mercy.

Zaccheus’ amends were a real demonstration of the inner change that was occurring—of the new man he was becoming. His story challenges us to yield to the transforming impact of the gospel, courageously and joyfully making and living our amends. □

*Brad Jersak is the author of CWRpress’ More Christlike series.*



Rarely do we see that outside of civil lawsuits, but Zaccheus did so without being sued. Why?

- This speaks to a second reason for his generosity. The law may demand proportional amends: eye-for-an-eye, dollar-for-a dollar. But *grace motivates us to pay forward the generosity we’ve received.* So Zaccheus’ calculous went beyond the harm he had

- **Amends are strictly about cleaning up my side of the street, even if those we wronged have also wronged us.**

Amends demonstrate that we recognize the harm we have caused. It should also include listening to those we’ve harmed to hear what they experienced.

Zaccheus may have known that he extorted someone and

## OUR CHOICE OF WORDS (continued from page 5)

But, we do so with care, with kindness and with concern for the other person. We do so as Jesus did, as he lives his life in us. When we do use our words carelessly, as all humans do from time-to-time, we say *I'm sorry* and repair the hurt and harm we've caused. We use our *two-edged sword* and our *magic* for good and for *healing*.

As Solomon concludes, "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver" (Proverbs 25:11, NKJV). Our words are precious, and carry both weight and power. Our words can be set beautifully, and given to someone in need at just the right moment. Even if we find ourselves in a heated argument, we can use our words carefully, with an order and a civility to it. The choice of how we use our *two-edged sword* and our *magic* is open to us. Our choice of words is truly ours. □

*Ed Dunn is a vice-president at PTM and an editor of CWRm.*

## MISSION STATEMENT

**Plain Truth Ministries proclaims Christianity without the religion. Our Christ-centered ministry is based on faith alone, grace alone and Christ alone.**

### TO SUBSCRIBE OR UPDATE YOUR ADDRESS

**Electronic subscription:** [www.ptm.org/sub](http://www.ptm.org/sub). We serve readers around the world digitally.

**Print subscriptions** to *CWRm* are a benefit for those in North America who generously support *CWR/PTM*. To contribute, visit [www.ptm.org/give](http://www.ptm.org/give).

Please notify us immediately of any change in your address by phone at 1-800-309-4466, online at [www.ptm.org/contact](http://www.ptm.org/contact) or by mail at *Christianity Without the Religion*, Pasadena, CA 91129.

### TO MAKE A DONATION

*Plain Truth Ministries* gratefully accepts donations (tax deductible in the U.S.) to further the ongoing work of proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We accept donations in U.S. funds by check, money order or credit card. Please visit our secure website [www.ptm.org/give](http://www.ptm.org/give), call us at 1-800-309-4466, or write us at *Plain Truth Ministries*, Pasadena, CA 91129.

### TO SEND A LETTER OR E-MAIL

Write to *CWR magazine* at Pasadena, CA 91129, email us at [managing.editor@ptm.org](mailto:managing.editor@ptm.org). The editors reserve the right whether or not to publish comments, in whole or in part, to print your name and edit for clarity and space.

We protect the confidentiality of correspondence we deem to be of a personal nature.

### COPYRIGHT

*CWRm (Christianity Without the Religion magazine)* is published six times a year by Plain Truth Ministries, Pasadena, CA 91129. Copyright © 2023 Plain Truth Ministries. Printed in U.S.A. All rights reserved. Vol. 14, No. 1: February 2023.

Unless noted otherwise, scriptures are quoted from the Holy Bible, NIV. © International Bible Society. UBP of Zondervan. *Christianity Without the Religion* is a U.S. trademark.

### SUBMISSIONS

*CWRm* does not publish unsolicited manuscripts. The publisher assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited artwork, photographs or manuscripts.

### PLAIN TRUTH MINISTRIES

*CWRm* is published by *Plain Truth Ministries (PTM)*. To learn more about *PTM*, visit our website at [www.ptm.org](http://www.ptm.org) (and email us) or write us at *Plain Truth Ministries*, Pasadena, CA 91129.

### EDITORIAL STAFF

**EDITOR-IN-CHIEF:** Greg Albrecht

**EDITOR / ART DIRECTOR:** Brad Jersak

**MANAGING EDITOR:** Laura Urista

**PUBLISHING / CIRCULATION:** Dennis Warkentin

**ASSOCIATE EDITOR:** Ed Dunn

**ASSOCIATE EDITOR:** Monte Wolverton

## CWR audio



## Podcast

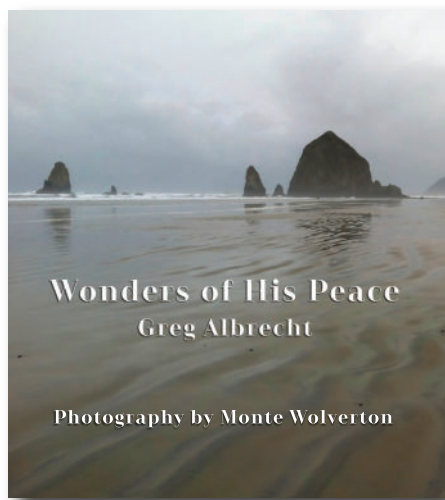
Join us daily and listen to audio teaching from a grace-based, Christ-centered perspective on your phone, tablet or iPad.

For an easy-to-follow listening guide, visit [ptm.org/audio-ministry-instructions](http://ptm.org/audio-ministry-instructions)

## Now Available! WONDERS of His Peace by Greg Albrecht

### JESUS IS THE PRINCE OF PEACE

When our Lord Jesus Christ came into the world, he revealed and embodied the peace of God. In *Wonders of His Peace*, Greg Albrecht and photographer Monte Wolverton offer readers uplifting thoughts, scriptures and scenes in which to experience God's peace.



Order your copy at  
[www.ptm.org/books](http://www.ptm.org/books) or  
by calling **1-800-309-4466**

