

The gospel according to the Emmys: A good apology

By [Darian Duckworth](#)

September 19, 2016

At Sunday night's Emmys, I was thrilled to see Sarah Paulson win an award for her work in *The People v. O.J. Simpson: American Crime Story*.

I was not as thrilled to see Paulson pull out a sheet of paper for her acceptance speech.

I understood why the nominees have a prepared list of folks to thank, but I don't listen as closely to an acceptance speech when the person reads from a sheet of paper. However, since I loved the miniseries and especially admired Paulson's work, I swallowed my personal preference and decided to listen.

Then I realized why she had the sheet. It was not only to ensure she called all the right names. Paulson [had an apology that she wanted to get right](#).

And she did:

The responsibility of playing a real person is an enormous one: You want to get it right not for you but for them. The more I learned about the real Marcia Clark—not the two-dimensional cardboard cutout I saw on the news but the complicated, whip-smart, giant-hearted mother of two who woke up every day, put both feet on the floor, and dedicated herself to righting an unconscionable wrong: the loss of two innocents, Ron Goldman and Nicole Brown—the more I had to recognize that I, along with the rest of the world, had been superficial and careless in my judgment. And I'm glad to be able to stand here today in front of everyone and tell you I'm sorry.

When the O.J. Simpson trial overtook our televisions in 1994, a glaring spotlight zeroed in on Marcia Clark. There were nightly news reports on her hairstyles. Her divorce proceedings were front-page headlines. Criticism swirled around this lead prosecutor as the case fell apart. Words spoken about her and to her were often nasty and mean-spirited.

Twenty years later, an actress who took the time to know the real Marcia took advantage of an opportunity to apologize—and showed us an example of a good apology.

Paulson took responsibility for her unkind judgments. She spoke the truth about the woman whose public image was smeared by rumors and false information. She acknowledged that the error was not only hers personally but a mistake shared by a larger audience. She concluded with the two words that her apology had already sealed: "I'm sorry."

Years ago, I read a news article about how bad we are at apologizing. We make statements like, "I'm sorry if you got offended," or "I didn't mean to do hurt you, but I'm sorry if I did." We shun responsibility for wrongdoing and immediately try to place the blame on how someone else might or might not feel.

As Christians, the basis of our hope in Jesus Christ is a good apology:

If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

How will we ever find reconciliation unless we learn of our deep need to confess our wrongs, to apologize for those wrongs, and to accept the forgiveness offered?

How will we find unity as the body of Christ unless we profess with Sarah Paulson when we are "superficial and careless" with our words and actions?

Apologies are not easy. It's no wonder that Sarah Paulson needed to write it down to get it right. But apologies are necessary. They are part of the fabric of who we are as Christians. Every true apology from the heart is an opportunity for resurrection: new friendships, second chances, and hope for better relations with God and each other. Apologies help set us free to love and know God—and one another—more deeply.

Let us not neglect the power of apology. Let us embrace the second chances that Christ Jesus offers us each new day.

And, Ms. Paulson, for my own superficiality in scoffing at your sheet of paper: I am sorry.

*Originally posted at [Duckworth's blog](#)*