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## BE BIG ENOUGH

### to Admit a Mistake

**“W**E ALL stumble many times. If anyone does not stumble in word, this one is a perfect man, able to bridle also his whole body.” Thus wrote a leading Christian in Jerusalem more than nineteen centuries ago. And is there any gainsaying his words? Of course not! —Jas. 3:2.

“Stumble” is just another word for “make a mistake.” And though we all make mistakes, how difficult it is to admit making one! It goes against one’s pride. When one is charged with making a mistake one is prone to want to justify oneself, to make excuses, to shift blame onto others, or to deny having made the mistake. It takes bigness to admit a mistake, to shoulder the blame, to admit that one has been wrong, or used poor judgment.

At times youngsters have a valid complaint against their father in this regard. Thus once some of them said: “We like Dad; sure we do. But when we have discussions, he never, never admits to being

wrong or having made a mistake. Now, everybody makes mistakes, sometimes!”

This Dad may have felt that to hold on to his authority he should never admit to having made a mistake or having been in the wrong. Whatever the reasoning, his attitude was not one fostering communication and harmony within the family. By taking this ill-advised course, rather than strengthening his authority he was lowering himself in the eyes of his children. By admitting that at times he had been in the wrong he would have shown himself big enough to take the blame for mistakes!

Refusing to admit that one has made a mistake is like claiming infallibility. The heads of the world’s largest religious organization have for a century claimed that they were infallible, that they did not make any mistake—nor that any popes ever had—when speaking officially on matters of doctrine and morals. But more and more voices are being raised within that very same religious organization questioning this claim. Thus the Roman Catholic bishop, F. Simons, at Indore, India, stated:

“When, even though in good faith, the church exceeds the apostolic testimony about Christ, she has no right to expect that she can teach such additional views with unerring certainty. The Apostles themselves, when demanding faith, appealed to evidence, to what they had heard and seen. . . . Nor is there any divine promise or assurance that the church re-

ceived such an endowment by virtue of which she can have certainty about Christ independently of the assured contents of the apostolic witness. As soon as she leaves the sure foundation laid by the Apostles, she is subject to the ignorance and errors of her age, which extend, as experience has shown, even to her understanding of the scriptures.

"The claim to infallibility does incalculable harm to the credibility of the church's teaching authority. It unduly restricts her ability to accept new evidence and makes her the victim and champion of past errors."—*Commonweal*, September 25, 1970, pp. 480, 481.

In striking contrast to the position taken by the popes is that taken by the Christian witnesses of Jehovah. They readily admit to having made mistakes as to doctrine and worship. Thus for a time, in common with Christendom, they celebrated Christmas until they learned of its pagan origin. Then again, because Romans 13:1 had been construed to mean that the governments of the world must be given unqualified obedience, the Witnesses interpreted the 'higher powers' or "superior authorities" there mentioned as applying to Jehovah God and Jesus Christ. However, a closer examination of the context revealed that Romans 13:1 does indeed refer to the political governments of this world. But by comparing this scripture with others, such as Acts 5:29, which states, "We must obey God as ruler rather than men," it was seen that the "subjection" mentioned at Romans 13:1 must be a *relative* subjection, not an unqualified one. That is, Christians are to be in subjection to the governments of this world so long as these do not ask Christians to go contrary to God's laws. When such governments do, then the Christian must obey the higher law.—Acts 4:19, 20.

Does this admission of making mistakes

stamp them as false prophets? Not at all, for false prophets do not admit to making mistakes. In fact, the book of Acts gives more than one example of early Christians being mistaken as to their beliefs and needing to be set straight, but they are spoken of with approval in God's Word. All of this is in keeping with the Bible principle that "the path of the righteous ones is like the bright light that is getting lighter and lighter until the day is firmly established."—Prov. 4:18.

In view of such examples, why should it be so difficult for individuals to admit to making mistakes? No human knows everything; we all keep learning. Time and again, due to insufficient knowledge, we make mistakes. Or, then again, we may make mistakes due to our emotions getting the better of us; we may have let some prejudice or wounded vanity cause us to respond without first using our thinking ability to evaluate the consequences of our words or actions.—Prov. 5:1, 2.

Being willing to admit a mistake is the right course, for it leaves one with a clear conscience. It keeps us from being on the defensive or attempting to justify our mistakes by saying, "Nobody is perfect."

Being big enough to admit a mistake is also the wise course. Even as noted with the children who complained about their Dad's not admitting a mistake, by our admitting we made a mistake we make for better relations with others, be they our fellows, our superiors, or inferiors—that is, organizationally speaking. And by admitting the mistake it will impress it so on our own mind that we will be less likely to repeat that mistake, if for no other reason than because of the humiliation that was involved.

So be big. Be big enough to admit a mistake. Be willing to say, "Yes, that's right. I did make a mistake and I'm sorry." Then try very hard not to repeat it.