

Two Kinds of Forgiveness

We've all been hurt. Betrayed, abandoned, abused, kicked when we're down... Being human can be painful, even awful. Everyone will go through the stages of grief: shock, anger, denial, bargaining, depression, and finally, acceptance. If (or when) you are grieving a loss, give yourself the gift of time. The stages are not necessarily linear - you may be bargaining with God in the midst of your anger. But at your own pace and according to your own internal knowing, you will emerge in acceptance.

If you, dear human, are actively ANGRY right now, please mark this article to read later. It won't help right now.

But if you are ready to get on with the rest of your life, this article may be of help to you. When it comes to forgiveness, there are lots of misconceptions and bad advice out there. Let's skip ahead and get right to the point: Biblically, there are *two* kinds of forgiveness. Not just one. Two. Knowing about, understanding and applying the differences in forgiveness are keys to returning to life, renewed.

The two kinds of forgiveness

You know the **first kind of forgiveness**:

Unconditional and absolute.

Let's say someone does you or a loved one wrong. Significantly wrong, like murder or rape. In order to remain sane, *you must unilaterally, unconditionally forgive the person.* Period.

Jesus said, "And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins." Mark 11:25

The first kind of forgiveness is not given or even for the perpetrator. It's given to YOU for YOU, and is meant as balm for YOU, the injured party. Unconditional, unilateral forgiveness means that you choose not to be a victim. It means you choose the present, and reject living in the past as a 'survivor of.' The first kind of forgiveness frees you from seeking revenge, fighting back and getting even. The wrong is past and gone, and does not infect the present.

When you are ready, you will simply let it go. Reading things like this can help you become ready. At some point, you will profoundly realize that letting the wrongdoer control your life is just plain dumb. We've been there! But no matter

how long it takes, God's gift of unconditional, absolute forgiveness stands ready. Really, letting it go is that simple...and that complicated. But *you will*.

What is the **second kind of forgiveness**?

Conditional and relative

Just because you have unconditionally forgiven *does not mean* that you have to let the perpetrator back in your life!

In a long-term relationship like a sibling, you may be called to forgive or 'show mercy' a good 'seventy times seven' times (Matthew 18:21-35, paraphrased).

But with humans in the world at large, re-opening your life to the person who damaged you (so they can do it again) is irrational and *crazy*. Let's get real: use your **head** when allowing people near your **heart**. We could stop much of the abuse in our world if we weren't so eager to forgive that we throw away our very real doubts, questions and legitimate fears.

Jesus gave excellent counsel to get the balance right, "Be as innocent as doves, *and* shrewd as serpents." Matthew 10:16

To return to an illustration, let's say a member of the clergy rapes your child. The first kind of forgiveness relieves you from spending your life in regret, anger, vengeance and retribution...but it does not mean you allow the evildoer near your child!

The second kind of forgiveness is *conditional* because there are *conditions* placed upon it. In talking about temptations and sins, Jesus said, "Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him."

We call the conditions the "R's." The Perpetrator must:

- **Recognize** the wrong / evil that has been done
- Show genuine, actual **Remorse**
- **Resolve** to never let this happen again
- **Repent** of the wrong, turning to the right
- Take whatever steps of **Rehabilitation** might be **Required**
- **Repair**, to the extent possible, the damage done

Even if all conditions are fulfilled, in the most extreme conditions (such as child rape) the second kind of forgiveness remains **relative**. Forgiveness #1 is absolute, but even though all conditions of forgiveness #2 are met, that doesn't mean the wrongdoer is granted total access to your life. Remember, use your mind. Be rational.

Sadly, in our world there are crimes so heinous, so egregious, that it would be criminally insane to fully and freely forgive, this side of heaven. But these are extremes.

Most of the time, we are dealing with smaller, more 'real world' wrongs, like your brother-in-law gets mad and breaks your jaw. Just for the record, saying "I'm sorry" does not fulfill the conditions for forgiveness #2. You need to apply wisdom and discernment to determine when and how much you will allow him back in your life. Still, there might be extenuating circumstances, such as the fact that you insulted his wife (your sister) and you had it coming!

There are no simple, magic formulas. Forgiveness is from the heart, but requires the application of logic and reason from the head.

Forgiveness and the law

Even when you have forgiven unconditionally (type #1) that does *not* mean you are relieved from assisting the authorities to see that justice is done. The perpetrator may need to serve time as part of the **rehabilitation** that is **required** (conditions of forgiveness #2).

It is possible to have only unconditional forgiveness for a wrongdoer, extending nothing but love and compassion for him (or her) as you testify on the witness stand, doing everything in your power to make certain he is incarcerated.

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In summary, with forgiveness #1 YOU forgive for YOUR sake, not the other's sake. It's true: holding a grudge is like letting someone live rent-free in your head! With forgiveness #1 you free yourself to live life without that one event controlling you forever, even if (God forbid) there are long-term physical effects. With forgiveness #2, steps are taken to assure that the wrongdoer never does it again, to anyone (for major crimes), or at least never again has access to you until your inner knowledge and wisdom indicate the person is **rehabilitated**.

If you are grieving or seek further understanding, we strongly recommend Elizabeth Kübler-Ross' ***On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief Through the Five Stages of Loss***