

Don't Confuse Forgiveness With These 5 Worldly Mindsets

"Love flaunts not itself and is not puffed up, does not behave itself improperly, seeks not its own, is not easily provoked, thinks no evil" (1 Cor. 13:5b).

There's a lot of faulty thinking about forgiveness. The act of forgiveness gets watered down. It gets abused. It gets cheapened.

What is forgiveness really? Take a quick test by answering "true" or "false" to the following statements:

1. People should not be forgiven until they ask for it.
2. Forgiveness includes minimizing the offense and the pain that was caused.
3. Forgiveness includes restoring trust and reuniting a relationship.
4. You haven't really forgiven until you've forgotten the offense.
5. When I see someone else hurt, then it is my duty to forgive the offender.

If you study the Bible, you'll discover that all five of those statements are false.

Before we talk about what forgiveness really is, we have to talk about what it is not. Here are five things forgiveness is not:

1. Forgiveness is not conditional. In other words, it's not based on somebody else's response. Real forgiveness is unconditional. It's not earned. It's not deserved. It's not bargained for. It's not paid for. It's not based on some promise that you'll never do it again. If you say to someone "I'll forgive you if ...," that's not forgiveness. That's called

bargaining.

2. Forgiveness is not minimizing the seriousness of the offense. There is a big difference between being wounded and being wronged. Being wounded is something that is accidental and does not require forgiveness. When you are wronged, someone intentionally meant to hurt you, and that requires forgiveness.

3. Forgiveness is not resuming a relationship without changes. The Bible teaches that forgiveness and restoring relationship are two different things. Forgiveness is instant. Trust must be built over a long period of time. Forgiveness is your part in reconciliation. But for a relationship to be restored, the offender has to do three other things that are unrelated to forgiveness: Demonstrate genuine repentance, make restitution whenever possible and rebuild your trust by proving he or she has changed over time.

4. Forgiveness is not forgetting what happened. It's impossible to try to forget something. When you're trying to forget something, what are you focusing on? The very thing you want to forget. And whatever you focus on, you tend to move toward.

The key isn't forgetting. The key is learning to see it through the lens of grace and God's sovereignty and discovering how He can turn even bad things into good in your life if you'll trust Him and respond in the right way.

5. Forgiveness is not my right when I wasn't the one that was hurt. Only the victim has the right to forgive. You can't forgive people who haven't hurt you.

There is always a cost to sin. And there is always a cost to forgiveness. That's why you have to understand what forgiveness is not before you can look at what forgiveness really is.

Talk It Over

- Does it make it easier to forgive someone when you consider that forgiveness is unconditional? Why or why not?
- Of the five things forgiveness is now, which do you struggle with the most? Explain why.
- How do you think God can use your experience of being wronged to help others? {eo}

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This article originally appeared at.