



Common Misconceptions about Forgiveness

One of the pillars supporting beneficial relationships is forgiveness. Paradoxically, there are few aspects of life more misunderstood or neglected. The definition and practice of forgiveness typically varies from person to person which leads to unrealistic expectations and, often, disheartening results.

The following misconceptions of forgiveness are often accepted as “truth” but are not supported by God’s Word.

- Personal feelings determine whether one should grant or receive forgiveness.
- Some mistakes/sins can be forgiven but other shortcomings are beyond forgiveness.
- Forgiveness removes the consequences that result from sinful behavior.
- An unwillingness to forgive has no bearing on one’s spiritual development.
- Broken relationships are completely restored by the statement, “I forgive you.”
- Granting or receiving forgiveness requires one to forget associated past sins.
- Forgiveness requires that no aspect of forgiven sin can ever be discussed again.
- Forgiveness only deals with “big” mistakes and is not necessary for “minor, everyday” wrongdoings.
- One’s willingness to forgive others must be precipitated by their confession/repentance.
- The person granting forgiveness determines if another is worthy of being forgiven.
- A person receiving forgiveness will no longer have to deal with guilt.
- The phrase, “I’m sorry” has the same meaning as “Please forgive me.”
- There is no perfect example of forgiveness to follow.
- Those who grant forgiveness as well as those who receive forgiveness will no longer have troublesome memories associated with forgiven sin(s).
- It is possible to “forgive yourself.”

An unbiblical understanding of forgiveness can also result from an unknown or ignored definition of forgiveness. Dictionaries describe forgiveness primarily from a judicial (legal, accounting) perspective, such as pardoning another or canceling a debt. The Bible defines forgiveness similarly: to send away, let alone, or set aside.

A correct definition eliminates many misconceptions of forgiveness that are linked to emotions. Feelings can be stirred substantially in situations pertaining to forgiveness, but forgiveness, at its core, involves a choice. Such a choice is a matter of the will. Thus, biblical forgiveness rests on the power of a purposeful decision as opposed to the intensity of strong emotions.

The Bible goes much further than defining forgiveness simply as a choice. God’s Word presents forgiveness in the context of sacrifice, a perspective that greatly impacts the decision to forgive. Since biblical forgiveness has a spiritual basis, only certain people can faithfully forgive as the Bible teaches. These persons must first respond to God’s love that is preeminently displayed by the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ (Romans 5:6-10).

Romans 5:6-10, For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but *God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. *[Emphasis added]*

Those who accept the love of God described in the above passage will believe in Christ, realizing that Jesus gave His life to provide forgiveness for their sins.

Ephesians 1:7, In Him [Jesus] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace

The awesome demonstration of God’s love—the sacrifice of Jesus—is the perfect example of forgiveness that sets the standard by which God’s children are to forgive others.

Ephesians 4:32, Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, *as God in Christ forgave you. [Emphasis added]*

The previous verse indicates that a person must receive God’s forgiveness in order to know how to forgive others biblically. In the framework of sacrificial love, biblical forgiveness becomes the “possible impossibility” for believers in Christ who trust God to help them forgive others.

The most profitable step believers can take when faced with the supposed “impossibility” of forgiving others is to review their own salvation. As believers grow in their understanding of God’s forgiveness and acceptance of them, their gratitude will increase for the price Jesus paid for their redemption. Thankfulness for Christ’s sacrifice will overshadow any personal cost believers may incur in forgiving others. When Christ is the foundation of forgiving others, misconceptions of forgiveness will soon disappear.

For a complete study on the many aspects of biblical forgiveness, click on the following—[Forgiveness: The Possible Impossibility](#).