

Three Types of Forgiveness

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“If we say we have not sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sin, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” **1 John 1:8-9**

Anyone who is familiar with Italian operas or the plays of Shakespeare knows the terrible price paid for grudges, vendettas and revenge. Under the sway of these emotions, painful incidents linger in the mind zapping our ability to find peace and happiness. The 18th century English poet Alexander Pope gave us the antidote, “To err is human...to forgive, divine.” But finding a way to forgive without giving up our principles is often no easy task. **The objective of this writing is to define what forgiveness is and how to implement it.** I will be speaking about forgiveness where it is most often needed;

- Everyday Personal Life.
- With Family Members.
- With Friends.
- With Co-Workers.
- With Business Associates.

One of the challenges in understanding the process of forgiveness is because the word forgiveness is inadequate to explain a very complex concept. Forgiveness actually embodies three different things. Each of which applies to a different situation and provides different results.

The Three types of forgiveness are;

1. Exoneration.
2. Forbearance.
3. Release.

The First type of forgiveness is called Exoneration and it is the closest to what we usually think of when we say “forgiveness.” Exoneration is wiping the slate clean and restoring a relationship to the full state of innocence that we had before the harmful incident took place. **There are three common situations** that take place before exoneration applies. **The First** takes place when you rely that the harmful action was a genuine accident for which no fault can be assigned. **The Second** takes place when the offender is a child or someone else who for some other reason did not understand the hurt they were still inflicting and to you have loving feelings. **The Third** takes place when the person who hurt you is truly sorry and takes full responsibility without excuses for what they did. They ask for forgiveness and give you confidence that they will not knowingly repeat the action in the future. In such situations it is essential to accept their apology and offer them the complete forgiveness of exoneration. You will feel better and so will the person who has hurt you. In fact, to not offer forgiveness in these circumstances would be harmful to your own well-being. It might even suggest that there is something more wrong with you than with the person who caused your pain.

The Second type of forgiveness is called Forbearance. Here things get a little more complicated. Forbearance applies when the offender makes a partial apology or mangle their expression of sorry with blame that you somehow caused them to behave badly. An apology is offered but it is not what you hoped for and may not be authentic. While you should always reflect if there was a provocation on your part even when you bear no responsibility, you should exercise forbearance. We need to cease dwelling on the particular offense and do away with grudges and fantasies of revenge but retain a degree of watchfulness. This is similar to “forgive and not forget” or “trust but verify.” By using forbearance you are able to maintain ties to people who while far from perfect are still important to you. Furthermore in some cases after a sufficient period of good behavior, forbearance can rise to exoneration and full forgiveness.

But what do you do when the person who hurt you does not even acknowledge that they did anything wrong or gives an obvious insincere apology making no reparations whatsoever. These are the cases of

forgiveness that are the most challenging. In my ministry I find this in such examples as; survivors of child abuse, business people who have been cheated by their partner or friend or relatives who have betrayed one another. Still even here there is a solution.

The Third type of forgiveness called Release. Release does not exonerate the offender nor does it require forbearance. It does not even demand that you continue the relationship, but it does ask that instead of continuing to define your life in terms of the hurt done, you release your bad feelings and your preoccupation with the negative things that happened to you. Release does something that is critically important, it allows you to let go of the burden of the silent tax that is weighing you down and is eating away your chance for happiness. If you do not release the pain and anger and move past dwelling on old hurts and betrayals, you will be allowing the ones who have hurt you to live rent free in your mind reliving forever the persecution of the original incident started. Whether you get there through your own efforts, counseling, religion or some other method. Release liberates you from the tyranny of living in the traumatic past, even when the other forms of exoneration and forbearance are not possible.

Exoneration, Forbearance and Release are the three types of forgiveness. To forgive may be divine, but when we understand its dimensions, we find that it is within our ability to do it.