



Trust - Earned or Given?

By [Tom Zempel](#), on December 1st, 2014

One thing every Believer found out early in their Christian journey was that they still sinned and are sinned against. Such experiences produced harmful wounds in some of their most meaningful relationships. Most serious wounds happen between husbands and wives. No couple thought that marrying the person that seemed so right could experience occasions of separation. Sometimes those separations are long and deep due to unfaithfulness.

The story is often the same with each case. The marriage has grown to a comfortable state. Each party has found their place in the relationship and become lax at allowing the marriage to grow them in their sanctification which God intends to bring meaningfulness and oneness. Instead, they become bored and easily distracted. One or the other meets someone who is willing to talk, listen, have fun, and so it begins. The tragedy is that most of these relationships end in infidelity. Then the most difficult and often, dangerous journey begins. The unfaithful spouse is found out and the other is now faced with one of the most difficult times in life.

If the unfaithful spouse repents, the other has what seems like the most unreasonable task. They are called upon to forgive. This feels so unfair! Why should the innocent have to pay the ultimate price? But, trying as one might, there is no biblical allowance to do anything else. The one sinned against is the only one who has the ability to not hold the offense against their mate. One must choose to not use it as an excuse to hurt the other, or to bring it up to others in a form of gossip, and to not dwell upon it in their heart if in fact they have forgiven. This is the way Christ forgives us and the pattern given for us to follow (Col. 3:13)

This is just the beginning of restoring such a marriage. Early in this journey and realizing there is no way out but to forgive, there is another weapon in the bag. It usually goes something like this. "I forgive you, but I do not trust you". Why is this so destructive?

One, it is destructive because the unfaithful spouse will never earn trust. They can get close only to do or say something that appears to the forgiving spouse that there is no change, thus, not trustworthy.

Two, it is destructive because the innocent spouse establishes the standard of trustworthiness. This prolongs the restoration process and often makes it impossible.

Three, it is destructive because it allows the forgiving spouse to feel righteous because, after all they did forgive.

Fourth, it is destructive because, the truth is; there is no forgiveness if the unfaithful spouse has to earn trust before restoration can happen. To forgive is saying that I am choosing to trust you.

Fifth, unless the one forgiving does not also choose to trust, the forgiven party can easily lose heart and begin to believe that restoration is impossible which often leads to another affair. There are good biblical responses to injustices against us. Lutzer states in his book, *When You've Been Wronged*, five basic principles to follow: one, live in the present vs the past; two, choose to free those who have injured you; three, keep in mind that in the injustices, God is present; four, bless those who have wronged you; five, do not retaliate because vengeance is Gods. Remember that full reconciliation occurs when trust, honesty, and respect are ones choice.

Ephesians commands the husband to love his wife, not because she is lovable, but simply because it is commanded. The wife is instructed to respect her husband, not because he is respectable, but simply because she is commanded to do so (Eph.5:33). I suggest that trusting one another is not because they are trustworthy, but because forgiveness without trust is not forgiveness. Granted, the more trustworthy one becomes, the easier it is to trust, but it is not necessary in order to choose to trust!

So, when one repents and the other forgives, the person forgiving must choose to trust. This sets the sinning person free and allows for rebuilding to take place.

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