

Fig. 5.1 Therapeutic vs. Biblical Forgiveness

**Therapeutic Forgiveness**

Forgiveness is a *feeling*. It is ceasing to feel resentment or bitterness.

Forgiveness is private or individual. It is “primarily an activity that goes on within individual persons’ hearts and minds.”<sup>4</sup>

Forgiveness is unconditional. Forgiveness should be granted regardless of whether or not the offender is repentant.

Forgiveness is motivated primarily by self-interest. You should forgive others for your own sake. According to Smedes, “Every soul has a right to be free from hate, and we claim our rightful inheritance when we forgive people who hurt us unfairly, even if their intentions were pure.”<sup>5</sup>

**Biblical Forgiveness**

Forgiveness is a *commitment* to pardon the offender.

Forgiveness is something that happens between two parties.

Biblical forgiveness is conditioned upon repentance.

Biblical forgiveness is motivated by love for neighbor and love for God. It is for God’s glory and our joy.



A standard of justice is not critical—it is about how the person “feels.” According to this definition, you can legitimately choose to forgive someone who has not done anything wrong.

Justice is the basis for forgiveness. You cannot legitimately forgive someone if he or she has not done anything wrong according to God’s standards.

Forgiveness can happen apart from reconciliation.

Biblical forgiveness is inextricably connected to reconciliation.