

How Do I Deal With Hurtful Sins From My Past?

Tim Conway | illbehonest.com

Question: This last one is a sensitive one too. This is from "Anonymous." He didn't want to put his name. He says, "When I was not saved..." Now, folks, I'm dealing with this because this is a real issue. And I don't think only for this guy. And because I want to draw some broader principles that I think will help all of us. He says, "When I was not saved, I sexually abused two people in my family. One was my step-sister. The other was my cousin. I've now repented from living a life of sin. I've given my life to Jesus Christ. But even now as a Christian, what am I supposed to do? My step-sister and my cousin were very young when I did this to them. Now, we talk together. We even get together like all is well. But they're growing up. These things I've done will likely come back to their memory. What do I do? As a child, I was also sexually abused by two people in my family. What do I do?"

Discussion

Tim: I would say this. I would say this to anonymous. I would say this to all of you here. And in fact, I would say this and begin this counsel especially with people that are likely to watch on the Internet. People that are likely to be removed away from San Antonio that will hear this. I say this with regard to all the questions that come in. You know what the Bible tells us? Hebrews 10:24, "Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near." That one coupled with Hebrews 13:17, "Obey your leaders and submit to them for they are keeping watch over your souls as those who will have to give an account."

You know what I want to say to everybody that's writing in to these Ask Pastor Tim's? My first counsel to you: you've got to be in a church. You've got to be in a good church where you're constantly and regularly meeting together with other saints, where you're being encouraged by one another. You've got to be in a situation like that. You need to be in a situation where you're submitting yourself to leaders, to good godly men who are keeping watch over your souls; men who will have to give an account for you. That is my first line of counsel to any of these folks. You know, trying to counsel people by these questions that come in across email - sometimes these people live a thousand or two thousand miles away. It is very difficult to counsel people whose face I don't see and whose exact circumstances I don't know. The most important thing is these people need - and Mr. Anonymous here - in this kind of situation, he needs to get face-to-face with some good godly men in a church where he can sit down and he can talk through these things. Because obviously some of these things are just so sensitive, and so many details get left out that I don't know anything about. Giving the right counsel in these matters can just be very, very difficult. And so many of these things, they need to be bathed in prayer and discussed in detail, really, before any type of final counsel should be given. So I

don't really want to give exact, specific details here, but I do want to throw some things out. And I want to do this in a broader sense. Not just concerning if we've sexually wronged somebody in the past.

Let me throw out some principles here. One thing is, folks, whether it's Mr. Anonymous and what he's done here, we cannot undo the past. And that's the first place I'd start with. We don't want to let the past drag us down. We don't want the past to be a hindrance to our running the race now. We don't want the past to basically be a reason to fall into despair and discouragement. We can't undo the past. And we've all got things in our past we wish we didn't have in our past. We've all done things we wish we hadn't done. The thing about the Christian is that all these things are under the blood. And so you know what? We can rejoice in the Lord no matter what we've done in the past. Our sins are under that blood. There is no condemnation if we're in Christ. God's never going to require these things of me. The third thing I'd say is this: That doesn't mean that there won't be consequences for what you've done in the past. Now, that doesn't mean that there always will be.

Let me just tell you this: When I was lost, I was a big liar, and I was a big thief among other things. And I was a vandal as well. So, Eric, I'll have some sympathy on you for all the devastation you caused in your graffiti life. There was one Saturday. It's amazing God didn't kill me. I was with three other guys. We had two golf carts. We're out on a golf course up in Kalamazoo, Michigan. And a thunderstorm moved in and they closed the golf course because the lightning was striking straight down. And we went into the bar and we drank a lot. And we were plastered. And the lightning is striking straight down out there on the golf course, and we, like idiots - lost idiots - out there tempting God to kill us. We snuck back out there and we managed to do it so that the guy running the golf course didn't see us. Because when they closed the course down, we were all the way in the back. We managed to run out and jump on those carts and get to the back of the golf course without the course manager seeing us. We're back there golfing. We can barely stand. Lightning is shooting straight down. You talk about tempting God. Golf clubs in hand - metal. We're out there just drunk. We smashed these golf carts to where all the tires on all the golf carts were flat. We tore up greens. Do you know how much a green on a golf course cost? You don't want to know. Like over \$10,000. We're smashing through the water stands. The lightning just "bang!" Smashing around. After God saved me, I was convicted about that. After that, it was all smashed up and they reopened the course and the people are walking out. We hightailed it - dove in the truck and got out of there. Well, here God comes and saves me. I'm just thinking, oh, I've got to go back to that golf course. And I did. And I went out there, and I told them, look, you can file charges. I'll pay for it or I'll work it off. I left my name and number. The course manager wasn't in right then. I left it with the bartender there in the clubhouse. They never called.

But then another dear brother that we know, he was pretty plastered one night. He owned a club up on the north side of this city. Two guys walked in one night and started creating problems. He pulled out a gun and shot one of the guys. He didn't kill him. Time goes by, God saves him. More time goes by - 3 1/2 years go by. The man's saved. Somebody identifies him and he has

to go to prison for 3 1/2 years. Let me tell you, just because you're saved doesn't mean the consequences might not have to be paid. And sometimes those consequences can be bad. There is no condemnation - God may, in His mercy, even take away the consequences in this lifetime. But He might not.

The first thing I would say, this guy asked the question about those who have sinned against us. Obviously, we can forgive them. Jesus Christ told a parable in Matthew 18, did He not? About the man who was forgiven. A man owed a tremendous amount, and he was forgiven. And then the man that was forgiven, the servant that was forgiven, came across another servant that owed him money and required that he pay it. When it was found out, the master of those servants wasn't real pleased. And you know, basically, that whole thing is a picture of us. How much has the Lord forgiven us of? Can't we forgive others? Mr. Anonymous says that he was sexually abused by people in his family. What should he do? He should forgive them. I mean, hands down, we should forgive. All the crimes we've committed against God, (incomplete thought). Look, you know what it says. If you don't forgive others, you will not be forgiven. Bottom line. Lay it down. There is no sin that's been committed against us that we have a right to harbor. God says put them all away. Look, you've been forgiven so much. Whatever somebody has done to you is small in comparison to all that full weight of sin you've been forgiven of. So, as far as that goes, we just need to let those things go wherever we've been wronged.

Now, when it comes to those we've wronged, let me just tell you. I want to say this to everybody. We already talked about repentance. Look, one of the things that you folks need to realize about repentance, repentance means turning from sin. And you know what? Some of those sins you turn from, you may have to make restitution for. You may have to fix. Let me just give you a little bit of Scripture here. Zacchaeus - guess what? Tax collector. Defrauded a lot of people. Got saved. What's the first thing he says? "He stood up and said, 'Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I've defrauded anyone of anything I restore it fourfold.'" Restitution. He says if I extorted from anybody, I'm going to give them four times as much. That's an indication of salvation. That's an indication of true repentance. You want to prove your repentance? If you've wronged people; if you've stolen things, go back and pay for it. Go back and admit it and pay for it. If it's something that you've stolen that you can return the object and it's still in the same condition, return it. Ezekiel 33:15 says, "If the wicked restores the pledge, gives back what he's taken by robbery, walks in the statutes of life, not doing injustice, he shall surely live. He shall not die." There's a picture of true repentance.

Let me tell you this. What should he do? What should you do? What about it? What does repentance look like? You know what it looks like? It looks like going back to the crimes that I've committed and the things that I've done in my past life and looking at those things, and making restitution where restitution is possible. Now restitution isn't always possible. There are some situations that it may not be possible. You may never be able to find the person you stole the thing from. You may not know where they are, where they live. The person you lied to, you can't go back and tell the truth to them about some major lie you told that sticks out in your mind,

because maybe they've died already. There's a number of reasons why restitution can't be made, but where it can be made, it should be made. Now what should this guy do? I mean, what in the world do you do when it's some kind of sexual sin? Especially with little children? Well, I would say this, this is a thing that's not real clear cut. I don't know that I have exactly the answer for this guy, but I would say this. For one, you definitely want to be much in prayer. I guarantee you, when God saved me, oh brother, I had so many things I stole and so many lies I told. I went through all my possessions and piled them all together, and anything that would come to my mind that I stole or that I vandalized, I made a list. And I basically made a determination, I was going to take care of one a day. That I thought was reasonable, otherwise I felt I would be overwhelmed by it. And I had to go back and tell people some ridiculous embarrassing things. But you know, a lot of prayer went into that.

Oh, I remember one landlord I went back to. It was the very first one on the list. I was just a brand new Christian, and I was just scared to death. And I sat down the road in my car. It was a landlord that I moved my stuff out when he wasn't home and didn't pay the last month or two or three rent. I forget what it was. And I had the money now, and I was down the street. And I was just scared to death. And I was praying and praying and praying. And I went up there to the door, and you know, I almost thought that the guy would be dead because he was old. But he looked just the same. He came to the door and I said, "Sir, you know, I used to live in your house next door here, and I bailed on the rent." And I forget how much I actually had to give to him. I think I had three or four hundred dollars, probably like a stack of twenties in my hand. And he said, "Oh, don't worry about it." Then he looked down and he saw that wad of cash in my hand. He grabbed it. But you've got to pray. And you've got to acknowledge the Lord. You need help to do these things. And you know what the Lord says? If you acknowledge Him, He'll direct your path. You really need the Lord to direct your path in these things. And I'll tell you what, love has to dictate. There are certain things, love may dictate not to go back and reopen a wound. You've got to weigh these things out.

I'll tell you what, and I would say this to Mr. Anonymous, you never want to make any of your decisions about restitution or correcting past sins based on self-preservation. You don't make decisions based on what's easy on you. You make decisions based on what's right and what love dictates. And you need to be honest. Because when you get in those things and you start confessing things and you get put on the spot, you need to be honest. It's time to confess just exactly the way it is. And I would say to Mr. Anonymous, because these are little children and these little children might likely grow up with this, my sense in this is that he has a responsibility to go to the father. Because those little kids might grow up messed up about this, and I'll tell you, if they were my children, I'd want to know. And I'll tell you why I'd want to know, because I would not want them to have to bear that alone. And because I might be able to help them if it's something that they're struggling with, and a lot of kids, they grow up with these kinds of things and they never tell anybody. And oh, they remember. And when they get older, it comes out, and it leads to all sorts of problems. If I was the father, I would want to know. And you know what Scripture says, and I would say Mr. Anonymous, you need to think about this this way, the Scripture says that we need to do unto others what we would have them do unto us. And if

these were your two daughters and somebody did this, would you want to know? And you need to be honest with yourself and you need to act based on that. And I can tell you, if they were my daughters, I would want to know. (incomplete thought) See, love dictates, and I think there's ways that those two little girls can be helped if the parents know. And that would be my take on it. That would be my counsel.

But I lay this out to all of you. Look, if you're a professing Christian, one of the ways you make your repentance known, one of the ways that repentance is real, is if there needs to be restitution made, then by God's grace, seek to return the things stolen. Seek to settle matters. Seek to get things right. You've got some little thing in there that's been burning on your conscience for a long time, go back and take care of it. And these things are not easy. They're not. I stole stuff from some family members and I can remember going back to my grandparents. Oh, it was horrible. But the Lord helped.

Well, that's my counsel there. God will help you. With God all things are possible. You might think, oh, I can't do that. Well, you can. You can't do it just like I couldn't do it. I got to the place where I was making restitution more than once, because I would forget. I actually worked at a place. I was convicted because I worked at a place and I called in sick one day because my roommate and I stayed home and we drank whiskey. And I called in sick. And I felt like, later after the Lord saved me, I felt like I really stole a day's wage. And so, I sent a check and I paid for it. I was already down here when I remembered that. So I sent a check up there. And then I forgot that I paid it. And it came to my mind again. And so I sent a check up there again. And the guy from the accounting department sent me back the check with a note in there, "stop sending us checks!" And see, every time I'd send it up there, of course I'd give the Gospel in there and how radically the Lord converted me and all this stuff. I think I irritated some people. It's embarrassing.

I just told my son the other day, I said, "Joshua, if I would have known that I was going to have to go make restitution, and confess various lies when I committed those sins, I wouldn't have done them. It's embarrassing." Our sin is shameful. It really is. Mr. Anonymous, your sin is shameful. But if it's under the blood, then we need to walk and we need to do what's right. Well, that's it for tonight. Do you guys have any questions or anything? Okay. Well, Lord willing, we have one more week of this. I don't know what it is. I only take them in the order they come and I don't even look ahead. So, I don't even know really what we're going to get. So, next week, same time. Another set of these.