



Does challenging superstition or faith protect people?

Is it mistaken to support organised religion in membership or donations?

If people do good because they are human, not because God prompts them, is it right to risk giving God any credit when they alone own their good?



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The VERY Dark Side of Forgiveness

What is forgiveness? Most of us take it as saying we are moving on after being hurt by someone. Many water down the need for forgiveness by saying it does not necessarily involve reconciliation. But real forgiveness will involve being reconciled to the other person if circumstances allow it. If you cannot be reconciled say because the person is dead at least you can still be willing to reconcile if you could meet them. You have a reconciliation attitude.

Time seems to heal. You can treat a person as if you have forgiven them simply because time has passed and the wrong they did does not have the same sting anymore. That is not forgiveness but half-forgetting or forgetting. It is not forgiveness for the passing of time is corroding the sense of hurt. Real forgiveness involves admitting you are hurt.

A person who expresses guilt and shame over hurting you will get forgiveness easier. That entails the person saying, "I was bad". It will be, "I am bad" not just "I did a bad thing." The admission that your badness makes you bad is to be the main thing. To say sorry implies you are only regretting the bad results of your action not the action itself. Love the sinner and hate the sin only makes forgiveness superficial and thus it is dangerous.

People say nobody can be against mercy or compassion but few like the thought of having to forgive. The difference between mercy and compassion is that mercy can be granted to somebody without them being forgiven. Mercy only means a lesser punishment than what they deserve. Forgiveness is a form of mercy but not the only form. Reducing the punishment is mercy too.

Notice that if you have to reconcile with the enemy or the victim if you are the enemy then they are being treated better than the vast majority of people. You will not have that kind of time for a stranger in another country. You are indifferent to the plight of most people and the person who hurts you is rewarded with your care and attention. Is it any wonder that those who say they forgive are often only pretending? Is it any wonder people get angry at being told to forgive for they feel that advice shows no concern for the harm the bad person did to them?

To be clear, what is forgiveness? Maybe it helps to see what it requires.

Forgiveness can be voluntary or involuntary.

What if it just happens and it is not a decision?

Nobody cares if it is a choice or not as long as it happens.

Christianity teaches that life is all about choosing God and being merciful like him so it needs forgiveness to be voluntary. That is an example of how people have been fooled to think that Christianity is the religion for them and humankind.

Anyway forgiveness requires two things.

+ There is how you decide that you move on in your head. That is an either/or.

+ There is how you change your heart so that move on in your emotions. That is a process that may grow one day and backtrack the next. It is not an either/or. You take each day as it comes. Eventually you hope you will no longer want any revenge and you hope things will be good for the person who did you wrong.

Forgiveness according to some does not mean a need to tell others they are forgiven. It is not about saying what happened is okay or that it is forgotten and in the past. It is about living through the hurt without wanting vengeance on the wrongdoers. That makes it about you not the enemies. There is no healing of relationships and thus it is not really

forgiveness at all. And surely evil people who receive your mercy and pardon need to see you give it so that they may be drawn to the beauty of mercy?

Forgiveness is fraught with complications.

The dark side of forgiveness is that as far as feelings go it may be very incomplete.

The dark side of forgiveness is when it is made the goal. In fact, healing yourself from past hurts should be the goal.

The dark side of forgiveness is how it has to be totally unpressured. There must be nobody telling you to forgive or worse commanding you to. You must not do it in order to feel you are morally better than the person who hurt you or anybody else. It has to be free. A God commanding you to forgive is more intrusive than a human being commanding just because the God can see your heart and the person cannot. He should not be telling you to forgive never mind commanding it!

The dark side of forgiveness is how it is about the evil person and not you.

The dark side of forgiveness is that it risks you being an enabler even if you don't mean to be.

The dark side of forgiveness is that it seems to demand reconciliation as well. Some say that forgiveness means you don't necessarily have to go out and befriend the enemy. But surely that would only be okay if you could not find the enemy? Reconciliation is about befriending.

The dark side of forgiveness is that it absolves the evil person who hurt you. We use absolve in the sense of justification. Justification is the Christian idea that the evil person's sins really cease to exist by God's power so that you become as if you never sinned and you are as if you never sinned.

The dark side of forgiveness is that if you forgive for you want a better future and you deserve it, it will be hard to feel you deserve it say for example you suffered at the hands of a neglectful parent.

The dark side of forgiveness is when it is seen as the only alternative to revenge or a vengeful attitude which sort of forces you to forgive for these are horrible things. They hurt the person who harbour those feelings the most.

The dark side of forgiveness is when it demands to be performed even at your expense.

The dark side of forgiveness is when it asks you not to give the evil person the benefit of the doubt.

The dark side of forgiveness is when it needs you have empathy towards the person who hurt you.

The dark side of forgiveness is recognising that an intended wrong was done to you and that it is a fact. Forgiveness is confirming and confessing that an intended wrong was done to you. Excusing the wrong is out. Those who say they never judge but just forgive are lying for you judge a person and then forgive. The two go together.

The dark side of forgiveness is that it does not necessarily help you or the other person. It affects only your inner life. It is trying to help the inside not the outside.

The dark side of forgiveness is when it does not ask the offender to do something to correct the wrong she has done. Forgiveness needs a wrong healed so it wants the healing of both perpetrator and victim.

The dark side of forgiveness is how hard it is to forgive a person who you cannot help seeing as somehow better than you, somebody who is too great to be your equal. Many relationships by definition are not relationships of equals.

The dark side of forgiveness is how it can stop you understanding your pain and how it is healing. Forgiveness does not mean you are dealing with the pain or that the pain will not get worse. At times you may not be aware of the pain or something is dulling it. But it is still there. Thinking you have forgiven adds to that pain.

The dark side of forgiveness is that religious leaders do not really care how you feel towards the person who hurt you. They want you to tell yourself they have been forgiven by you though you seethe with anger. Aristotle taught that morality is about what will make you happy and about fulfilling yourself. Thomas Aquinas agreed but added that spiritual happiness is what matters most. Both argued that happiness is not about how you feel but about how you act. If you are miserable but doing the right thing by others and by God and yourself then you are happy. You are well in the way it counts.

If forgiveness is good, then it often leads you to rationalise or make excuses for the people who hurt you. You are told to

think of the most positive interpretation of what the person did and why and then forgive it. And why are you encouraged to water down the evil another did to you or to risk watering it down and not encouraged to water down and accept the fact that you do not forgive.

“I am trying to forgive you” is better than “I forgive you”. Why? Because it admits that real pardon is a day to day struggle.

If there is a God we have to forgive. Jesus said that we cannot ask God to forgive us if there are people who we refuse to forgive. That is bullying. In the light of the doctrine that rejecting another person leads to everlasting damnation unless repented this is bullying too. Telling a person to forgive something that was done particularly something terrible is putting pressure on them and making them feel like dirt. The person will feel they are being asked to forget about justice. Surely forgiveness and justice should always work in a way that one does not undermine or weaken the other? Pressing people to forgive can lead to them thinking they do forgive when they do not and they end up trying to make themselves believe the bad person is not so bad or did not mean to do the terrible thing they did to you.

Some say that if you pressure a person to forgive the problem is not with forgiveness or forgiving but with your approach. They say that giving into injustice and trying to justify or excuse what the person has done to you is not forgiveness but you victimising yourself. Some say the answer is to forgive at a distance – don't let the person near you to hurt you again.

If there is no God we do not have to forgive though we should forgive those who we may need in times of trouble. God makes forgiveness a form of bullying because then you have to forgive no ifs or buts.

Jesus said that if you do good and are not taking reasonable precautions to avoid people knowing it then you have your reward but will get no reward from God. That would seem to tell you to forgive at a distance. Others say that forgiving should be a step towards reconciling. Reconciling would bond people while forgiveness in itself would not. It is clear that Christianity does stress forgiveness more than reconciliation which makes it a bad religion.

Jesus cried, “Love your enemy.” You are meant to forgive not for yourself but for the other person. No wonder it has been so difficult for believers that he may as well have said nothing. His religion has been so passive-aggressive that his teaching on forgiveness could be to blame.

To forgive you have to condemn and judge the person first so it is not as sweet as it seems and implies a forgiving but also nasty God if you don't let him forgive.

The Christians say that as God is the source from which all good comes it is worse to offend him than to hurt a person. Indeed the only reason hurting a person is wrong is because he bans it and is offended by it. Thus it follows that offending God is always bad and terrible and you can never say, “I cannot or will not forgive x for I was never as bad as him.” That is not the point. The Church teaches that if there is a choice then get God's pardon not that of others. Thus the religion is not a true religion of peace.

Also all letting go of hurts is not necessarily forgiveness. It could be that you let it go not because it is forgiven but because time heals it or makes the memory of the experience less caustic or because you have new troubles to focus on. The accurate view is that time does not heal or cure but distracts. It does not help us forget. The forgetting helps itself and if it happens over time that does not mean time had a role. Time is not the great healer. It certainly does not heal any wound never mind all wounds.

Forgiveness as preached by Christ is very victimising. It victimises the forgiver and the person forgiven who is given begrudged forgiveness that is more cognitive dissonance than anything else. And its cruel to have somebody think they are forgiven when the forgiveness is not free, generous and authentic. Christianity will only produce fake forgiving that will show its true colours. It often does!

Religion certainly invites and encourages you to forgive others. It is unwise to encourage a person to forgive somebody who hurt them terribly or endangered them as there is a risk that the offender could be looking for a chance to re-inflict suffering on them and damage them even more. In religion, God is seen as the one who heals the bad person and also the bad situation. This is a dangerous doctrine for it makes your letting the bad person into your life again about God not them. Its made a matter of trust in God. The rationale is that if the person attacks you again it is not God's fault for the person just stopped letting God help. In that way the healing is reversed. You are now told you were right to forgive for how the person reverted after was their own responsibility.