

## The Idea of Forgiving Yourself

Forgiving yourself is a bit of a fad in today's self-help world.

You can forgive yourself and another in order to heal pain or dull it which means you cannot be sure if you are really thinking clearly. You need to be clear otherwise the pain will rebound. Only time can tell if you are trying to wriggle off the hook or being too hard on yourself.

It has become a philosophy that unless you forgive yourself first and foremost you cannot then think about forgiving others to do it. It turns forgiving into narcissism. Forgiving others may benefit you and them but it is still all really about you.

It seems that as forgiving yourself is solely or mainly about you it risks turning into narcissism and selfishness. But if you really forgive yourself you won't need to take all day to do it. It is about being free to move on so it cannot turn into a self-absorbed maladaptation. If you have to become self-absorbed to forgive yourself then that is a sign you do not really forgive yourself. You forgive and move on and become a valued member of society. That is what happens.

Now if I have to forgive myself to be free to have relationships with others or interpersonal connections with those whom I have hurt it follows it is more important for forgiveness to be about me only than for it to be about others. It looks like the end goal is relationships yes but rather shallow ones at that. Secular and religious liberals who forgive forgive forgive end up like that. At the end, things are made worse and the wicked go about their business laughing at the outrageous freedom allotted to them by do gooders.

Richard Swinburne in Faith and Reason page 172 writes, "I cannot literally 'forgive myself', since forgiveness is the remission of a debt incurred by a failure to do what we owe it to someone to do; and I cannot incur a debt to myself." He may talk as if he is thinking of some kind of court of law, but he is not. It is about your relationship with yourself which strictly speaking is a turn of phrase not a relationship. Court or not, you cannot act both as your own judge and defendant.

Christianity applauds forgiveness but what if you get so good at it that you can kill millions and then forgive yourself and be at peace? The way the Church seeks to grant peace to the likes of Hitler and Stalin and Herod is alarming for it seeks to use natural and supernatural/sacramental ways of putting peace in the person. If Hitler were at peace in jail would the jail really be a punishment? If somebody seriously believed that "sins" such as masturbation and sex outside marriage were gravely evil that person is being trained by religion to see sin as hugely evil and then forgive himself or herself. Murder is trivialised by being made not much worse than those sins.

To forgive yourself is silly for it implies you are both the victim and the wrongdoer. It confuses trying to learn from your mistake and letting regrets go with reforming with forgiving yourself.

Interestingly most people confuse letting go of hurt feelings and resentment with forgiveness as well. It is dangerous to stress that tranquility for the bad feelings can rush back any time for feelings have minds of their own.

We are commanded by Jesus and advised by therapists to forgive for its best way to avoid the agony of a festering grudge which is alleged to be a way of letting the bad person continue to hurt you. Self-forgiveness is impossible if forgiveness is about getting rid of a grudge for nobody holds a grudge against themselves.

The idea of forgiving yourself implies that if you hurt anybody you are a victim or the victim. That is insulting to the real victim.

If you are really the victim then there is nothing to forgive. To forgive what is not to be forgiven but excused is just an abuse.

Some say you must forgive yourself first if you do something bad before you can expect the possibility of forgiveness from others. Again that cares about how you feel about what you did and not about those who you hurt. They will only forgive and forget if they are stupid.

Bringing God into it implies that his forgiveness and power to free you through it from evil is all that matters or is of supreme importance. God is about forgiving you. If forgiving you is so important that God should exist to give it to you and give it to you then how important are you? It must be far more important to forgive yourself. It makes you a user of God not a worshipper.

What if God is just you talking to something you have made up in your head? You can do that even if there is a God. You can honour the image you have of John and that is not honouring John but yourself for you just love what you want him to be. It is not really about him. Then you asking for God's pardon is only another way of forgiving yourself. It could be that that is what mostly happening or only happening during Christian prayers for mercy.

The notion of self-forgiveness is nearly universal and universally adored but it is toxic and evil. Those who say they forgive for God have no right to ask or expect or encourage others to think they tell the truth.