

What is Forgiving?

Forgiveness implies "Judge first"

Then "Decide to give the person a second chance BECAUSE you have judged them as having been bad and UNWORTHY of forgiveness."

Social benefits of forgiving:

Its generous to one who does not deserve it so that is good for society.
Society does not need the bad example of me being bitter and merciless.

Society is more united.

Religious benefits of forgiving:

It is pro-God for he forgives and wants you to be like him.

It is doing something nice for a child of God who has wronged you.

It is serving my religion of which I am a part.

It is refusing to choose Hell which is rejecting the love of God and others for all eternity

WHAT IF?

What if Jesus or Catholics priests who say they forgive sins cannot really forgive sins? If a sin is grave and you get forgiveness from a non-existent God or non-existent forgiveness from a real God that is very serious. Forgiveness needs to be real and really from a real being otherwise it is just an insult to the victim of the sin and a fake fresh start is a fake fresh start. Only real forgiveness gives a fresh start. Forgiveness means you judge the person as evil and then you bestow mercy - you refuse to hate them or punish them as they deserve in order to give them a fresh start. Only a real being who really exists and really forgives can do these these things. If I ask God to forgive me for murdering a baby and I am not forgiven at all then that trivialises forgiveness and its consequences. Forgiveness involves a relationship. No relationship no forgiveness.

God's forgiveness is not like the forgiveness between people. God's is just God changing his attitude to you but it leaves you exactly as you are. Forgiveness between people hopes to and perhaps works to change bad people into better ones. The way religion makes out that God's forgiveness is what matters and the way it thinks it can give you such forgiveness is a disgrace. To call amnesty and pretence that the evil never was done forgiveness is just EXTREME CONDONING. Condoning means you see a person as bad but choose to excuse it but this stuff is worse. And belief in God is evil for the notion that God cannot feel the way about evil the way we do is intrinsic to the idea of God.

God's forgiveness is bad for these reasons:

Its an extreme way of condoning evil

You cannot grow from it for you miss out on the struggles real forgiving entails

It cannot feel the same as forgiveness from another person

And it suggests it just matters to be forgiven by God even if you need forgiveness from others so forgiveness from others is turned into an unimportant extra

And God demands you condone the evil of his forgiveness

Telling people they must forgive for it pleases God who loves the enemy is asking them to bear the burden of trying to forgive for a God you cannot be totally sure exists. They have been hurt enough already. When believers say God forgiveness heals it blames those who do not feel healed. Those who tell you even on secular grounds to forgive are adding to your struggles.

Religion messes around with what forgiveness means.

For example, a grave hurt in time can be gradually forgotten and you can forget how it feels at least to a point. It does not wound the same any more. This is memory distorting things. It is not forgiveness though it feels like it. In fact the ability of time to erase and alter is more important than forgiveness. Religion will take advantage of how your brain works to make it an example of how its message leads to forgiveness and peace.

For example, sometimes you are busy that you seem to forgive the evil person simply because you don't have the time or energy to resent them or be angry. Distraction is another thing that religion can use to pretend it helps you to forgive. When the person gets the time to let the evil done to her hit home the religion blames her saying she forgave and then reversed it.

So what is forgiveness?

The following six things are said to be forgiveness.

One, it is the letting go of the desire to see the offender suffer the same evil as he or she has done to you or to a loved one. You cease wanting to hurt them back. This is an emotion and it can be slight or very severe.

Two, it is letting go of intending evil to happen to them. This might not be accompanied by the actual feeling of desire at all. We intend to do things we feel nothing about.

Three, it is letting go of the anger. Anger can range from being nearly harmless to you when it is weak but very destructive to you when it is strong.

Four, it is letting go of the feelings of hurt. Again these feelings can hurt you a tiny bit but if they get stronger the more harm they will do to you.

Five, it is an act of love for the one who wronged you. In doing this, you prove your own dignity.

Six, forgiveness does not encourage the harming of others or the wrongdoers to hurt themselves. If it is necessary to prevent the wrongdoers harming themselves in illegal ways or harming others then justice comes in. This means doing something that ensures they will be deterred or others will be protected. You may forgive the burglar but still have to report him to the police to stop him hurting somebody else if you are sure he will not stop.

Forgiveness does not necessarily require you to forget about justice. No its the complete opposite. You can forgive a person and ask them to pay for damaging your car. If this is about helping them this is not against forgiveness but a manifestation of mercy. To bless them by giving them the chance to prove themselves better than the wrongdoing they did and yourself is forgiveness in action.

One, Three and Four are not forgiveness at all. They are feelings. If you have bad feelings towards someone, you simply can't just switch the feelings off. Having the feelings does not mean you have failed to forgive. You can have them while practicing Two, Five and Six. Just see the feelings as not good or bad but as facts. Let is just call One, Three and Four "emotional healing of past hurts".

What is Forgiveness?

Christianity Says

It is letting God help you think of an treat the past evil deed as if it never happened. God treats the sinners sin like that and expects you to do the same.

Reason Says

That is not forgiveness at all for it leaves you exactly as you are and pretends and lies that the past did not happen. That is not moving on.

It is letting go of anger and past hurts and restoring the relationship. It is not about merely wiping the slate.

It is not forgetting the sin or pretending it never happened. Its not a "business as usual" attitude.

Christianity says

Other people come before you so you must let go of anger for their sake. God said you must love him first of all so you love him best by serving others even at your own loss for the more of his children are looked after the better he is pleased. Love sinner: hate sin. Hating sin is more important than loving the sinner for loving God comes first.

Reason says

Let go for your own sake. Forgiving will be three times harder if you are expected to do it for God or Jesus or somebody else. Religion puts a burden on people.

Christianity Says

God justifies us when he forgives meaning he considers us good though we are not. God forgets so we should forget too.

Reason Says

Asking people to forget is asking them to put themselves at risk of harm from the person that hurt them and to blind themselves to what that person is like. It is psychologically harmful as well. We need to remember the torments of life to grow from them.

Christianity Says

Forgiveness is realising that there is a bigger picture with the person who has done you wrong. They are not all bad.

Some Churches agree. Others hold that sin is something you become so it defiles all the good you do meaning it is not impressive goodness.

Reason Says

Sin is about what the sinner is not what the sinner does. You cannot oppose the sin and not the sinner. If you hate one you hate the other. Forgiveness must be a moral obligation if it is based on seeing that the person isn't so bad. It implies you are evil if you don't forgive.

Christianity Says

It is freely given

You can't get forgiven unless you forgive. It is a duty to forgive.

Reasons says

Blackmail. You go to Hell if you don't forgive. The Church has pleaded for paedophile priests to be forgiven and welcomed back to their communities even if the priests showed no remorse. This has led to the Church doing more to get the priests forgiven than helping the victims when it did so little or nothing to stop their crimes.

Christianity Says

Forgiveness has to be constantly renewed so one is under the threat of blackmail all the time.

It is refusing to let the wrong done to you hurt you any more

Forgiveness is love

Reason says

Forgiveness is not necessarily loving. You can forgive a person because you want to get back at them by coming across as better than they are and as if what they did to you can't hurt you any more. Such forgiveness is really revenge in the garb of forgiveness. But it is very healthy and good for you. It is better than the saccharine and flowery alternative the Church and Jesus Christ require of you.

Christianity Says

I am angry and I disapprove of how X treats Y.

Reason says

We are to hate the sin.

Some say, "Why should you get annoyed about it at all? It has nothing to do with you." But it is not X's action you are annoyed about but what it says about X. It is X you disapprove of. It is X you harbour anger and you harbour it even if there is a small risk it can make you erupt and attack X. It is the sinner you hate for the sin in a sense is the sinner.

Christianity says

Even therapists agree with our gospel on the value to me of forgiving

Reason says

Telling people they must forgive or move on emotionally after being hurt terribly by a malicious person for if they don't they are letting the person win and defeat them is very common. Even therapists beat on about this great wisdom ad nauseam. But it is just spite in a new form and has bottling up hate masquerading as love and wisdom and mercy. Many wonderful examples of forgiveness may be fooling us. It tries to force you to "forgive" which means it respects never victim or the enemy.

CONCLUSION:

Forgiveness only makes sense for non-believers. The God belief only makes things worse.

In The Gospel According to Atheism I wrote,

“Forgiveness is deciding that some wrong you believe a person did of their own free will does not matter anymore. You become their friend again and refuse to treat them with the anger they deserve. People say forgiveness is not weak and is not pretending that the wrongdoing was not so bad after all but is about freeing yourself and hopefully the offender from bad feelings to live better in the future. In practice it is saying the wrongdoing is nothing to worry about. A bit of anger can be a good thing. It is what you do with it that counts. There is no doubt that forgiveness has the same results as condoning which is pretending that the past evil does not matter. In practice and in theory they are the same so forgiveness is hypocritically rewarding evil. You can be upset at the loss of life a murderer caused but not be upset about the abuse of his will which led to that so forgiving does not mean you will be upset no more about the deaths. To say a past evil you did with your free will does not matter is the same as saying that you don't matter for you can go beneath yourself and should. Forgiveness is evil. The excuse for making a distinction between forgiving and condoning is that you can forgive and still punish for punishment is intended for the person's own good and everybody else's. The punishment has nothing to do with the evil act for it has been pardoned. It's done for other reasons so it is not really punishment but glorified revenge. At the same time we are still dealing with condoning here. It's a confused mixture. Sometimes people who condone have to send the criminals they condoned to jail. You should punish because you condemn and you have decided not to condemn therefore to punish would be revenge and inconsistent with heartfelt forgiveness.”

A popular definition of forgiveness is: restoration of relationship and not just wiping the slate clean. If you rebuild your relationship with your wife or parent and do it for God mainly or solely for God then it is not about building your relationship with them. Forgiveness is essentially atheist but because it is good it has been hijacked by the believers.

Forgiveness in the sense of condoning freely done evil is bad.

Forgiveness in the sense of restoring relationships is good.

Forgiving usually is tied to moving on. What matters most or what is the one thing that matters if there is a choice? Is it forgiving or moving on? The two are not the same thing. Is forgiveness about the past more than the future. Yes. It says the event happened and you will think of it as if it never happened. Then as a result of that you say you will move on. If there is no future what then? Religion urges you to forgive anyway. So clearly clearing up the past matters more than the future. Forgiveness then condones the past. Surely moving on would be enough but it is not. It is not even as important as the past!!

The feeling we have that there is something dodgy about forgiveness is correct. Religion complicates things with its forgiving God thus making a bad thing worse. And it gives us a God who approves of our self-serving "mercy." Forgiveness is promoted in very pragmatic and practical ways – for example if you want to have a better life then let it go. In fact pragmatic forgiveness and principled forgiveness are totally different things. You can have one without the other.