

Forgiveness: my kingdom for a break

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Forgiveness can begin by simply refraining from killing the bastards.



A man steals \$10,000 from the loose change basket on his father's dresser. He spends most of it on blackjack, vodka shooters and fast women.

The rest he squanders.

Too ashamed to go home, he becomes a drifter. After sinking to the depths of degradation, and weary of his job tuning pianos in whorehouses, he returns to his father, to the family home with a remorseful heart.

He hands back the \$9.81 left over.

The father tearfully embraces the son, and orders that the fatted calf be killed for a feast. This is your basic meat-and-potatoes forgiveness. Forgiveness is something that was invented by God, and adopted by people, simply because it had to be. I don't think forgiveness was part of "Plan A" because I don't think the Creation Planning Committee even had a clue that such a thing would ever be necessary.

God (over lunch on Day Five): "Alrighty now, Earth is nearly finished. Then we'll make beings. We'll call them people and they'll come in two sizes – men and women. They'll have sex and everyone will be good friends."

Head Angel: "Cool."

What could possibly go wrong? You don't design a building thinking how difficult it will be to implode when the time comes. You design it to last forever. I feel certain nobody was thinking things would get as out of control as they have.

But here we all are, eight-hundred gazillion years later, hating and forgiving each other all over the place. Parents forgiving sons and daughters, and vice versa. The Hatfields and the McCoy's. Forgive Nixon? Forgive Andrew Jackson for betraying the Cherokees? Forgive O.J. Simpson?

Forgive your no good, lying, cheating, wife-beating slut of a husband? (Most sluts are men. Seriously.)



It gets harder. Consider forgiveness for entire races and nations. How do you forgive Genghis Khan or the Nazis? Put pillage, rape and burning in your pipe and smoke it. I'm telling you the fun never stops.

Forgiving yourself is a good place to start. Some people can never manage this one.

And not everybody even wants forgiveness. Nations and people are pretty good at denying their historic atrocities, enslavement of others and massacres, and then they rub salt in the wounds with insufficient atonement and flaccid language like, "we regret..." or

"mistakes were made..." in speeches delivered a hundred years too late, and that fall way short of the full grovel that needs to include expressions like "deeply, deeply sorry."

Furthermore, the atonement speech should be uttered from behind a wall of tears and snot streaming down the face of the offenders' ranking representative. That's how you do it. Everything else is marketing.

Offenders would do well to also pay for a concrete and bronze monument that honors the victims, that further acknowledges the perpetrators' blame, and carries the victims' names on it if they'll fit. In

addition, they should pony up for a few scholarships, endow a university chair or library, and have a moment of silence at a football game on significant anniversaries.

Is that enough? Maybe, maybe not. It's case by case.

Only the victims' families have the right to tell the offenders when they can get off their knees and receive an embrace.



Forgiveness saves your bacon

When the surviving families moisten their stone cold faces with their own tears, and reach out, only then can closure happen and life continue. Atoning for big atrocities is a long, drawn-out process. It can take decades, because the apologizing party is not qualified to say when they have repented enough.

Truly begging the forgiveness of another is hard to do because it makes you vulnerable. You gotta suck eggs and mean it. But it's complicated. Even if the evil-doers are sincerely contrite, their attorneys will counsel them against accepting full blame. It's like hanging a "please sue me" sign around your neck. That's why you get this "mistakes were made" crap.

I hate it, but at some point you and your decedents have to move on, apology or not, if only for your own sake. You don't want to hear this, but I have to tell you, life becomes easier when you are finally able to accept an apology you never received.

There are tons of work-arounds for this grace thing. A friend's assistant borrowed his laptop and accidentally corrupted umpteen files, including a third of an unfinished novel. After inventing curses that would have been the envy of an Irish poet, my friend bought her a damn GIFT. He told me it was the only alternative he could think of to ripping her head off. Gotta hand it to him for creativity. That's a guy who should have gotten the Nobel Not Murdering Prize.

The invention of forgiveness is the only reason some of us still have any bacon left. A conversation that took place the day after California and Colorado legalized smoking dope:

Head Angel: "I got an idea. Why don't we just wipe 'em out with a bigass flood? We clean the slate, start over, and God's your uncle."

God: "We already tried that. Remember?"

Head Angel: "Uh... oh yeah... okay... cool."

And, by the way, you're also the problem. Right this minute, someone, somewhere, is struggling to find a way to forgive you.

The problem is you thinking you have no blame. Coming toward you through the door is your brother, and he wears your face. "Hey there, Mark of Cain, come and sit down inside me," you say to you.

In the end we are judged by our own crystal clear consciences. The only truth is Truth. Truth always bats clean-up, even if it takes its own sweet time doing it.

Reckoning ultimately happens. And forgiveness. Only then can the swirling waters settle over the sunken wreckage and sorrowful spirits be liberated.