

## Biblical Forgiveness

Exploring the Differences between Biblical and Secular Interpersonal Forgiveness

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The topic of forgiveness has become quite popular among secular psychologists and has been foundational to the religious community, particularly the Judeo-Christian faiths. In this paper, we will look to see how the concept of forgiveness as seen through the secular community is dissimilar to that of the community of faith. As we explore the topic, it will become evident that the concept of forgiveness in the secular world is categorically different than forgiveness as taught in the New Testament.

Specifically, we will examine how the motivation for secular versus Christian forgiveness is diametrically opposed. We will see how Christianity provides a liberating remedy for the seeming injustice of forgiveness that cannot be found in secular sources. Next, we will discuss how forgiveness is obligatory and mandated within the beliefs of Christianity, but is optional outside of the New Testament community of faith. Lastly, we will look into the concept of self-forgiveness to see whether it has any merit for followers of Christ.

It's hard not to hear the word forgiveness without making some immediate connotation with Christianity. "At the core of Christianity lies the doctrine of forgiveness".<sup>1</sup> In the increasingly hostile environment of our society, the secular world often seeks to stay clear of overtly religious concepts, particularly those that favor one faith over another, especially when that faith is Christianity. However, "the truth is that the topic of forgiveness is everywhere, in fields as diverse as sociology, anthropology, religion, and indeed, psychoanalysis".<sup>2</sup> So why would so many non-religious communities be interested in promoting forgiveness among their clientele and audience? The answer is obvious – forgiveness works.

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<sup>1</sup> Carnegie Samuel Calian. "Christian Faith as Forgiveness". *Theology Today*, (1981) Volume 37, no. 4, 443.

<sup>2</sup> H.F. Smith. (2008). "Leaps of faith: Is forgiveness a useful concept?" *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, Vol. 89, Issue 5, (October 2008), Retrieved April 5, 2012, from Research Library.

## Motivating Factors for Secular Forgiveness

The focus in secular forgiveness is primarily placed on the positive effects forgiveness provides the one who forgives. Forgiveness is no longer about the relationship, but about the forgiver and his or her well-being.<sup>3</sup> The verdict has come back unanimous; forgiving others is actually good for your physical and emotional well-being. That is awfully good news in a world that is seeking to feel better and be healthier.

Studies on the positive benefits of forgiveness are abounding. “The empirical literature on forgivingness and health is growing”.<sup>4</sup> An article by the Mayo Clinic suggests that those who do not forgive can in turn be the ones who pay the most dearly. The article provides many personal benefits to those who willingly let go of bitterness and grudges including healthier relationships, greater spiritual and psychological well-being, less anxiety, stress and hostility, lower blood pressure, fewer symptoms of depression and lower risk of alcohol and substance abuse.<sup>5</sup> Research has also shown that apologizing to others for offenses can produce emotional relief to offenders.<sup>6</sup> Studies are now being conducted to see if forgiveness can promote not just a healthier life, but a longer one.<sup>7</sup>

Since forgiveness works from a personal, physical and emotional standpoint, it is acceptable in the pragmatic culture of our day. The goal of forgiveness from a physiological perspective is to come into a place of positive emotional being and overcome feelings such as

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<sup>3</sup> Wilfred M. McClay, “Pinning Your Own Tail on Someone Else’s Donkey”. *In Character*, Fall 2008, <http://incharacter.org/archives/forgiveness/pinning-your-own-tail-on-someone-elses-donkey-guilty-feelings-got-you-down-let-dr-feelgood-help-you/>, (accessed March 30, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> Everett L. Worthington, Charlotte Van Oyen, Pietro Pietrini, and Andrea J. Miller. “Forgiveness, Health, and Well-Being: A Review of Evidence for Emotional Versus Decisional Forgiveness, Dispositional Forgivingness, and Reduced Unforgiveness”. *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, Retrieved April 5, 2012, from Research Library, 293.

<sup>5</sup> Mayo Clinic staff, “Forgiveness: Letting go of grudges and bitterness” <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/forgiveness/MH00131>, (Accessed April 4, 2012)

<sup>6</sup> Blake M. Reik. "Transgressions, guilt, and forgiveness: a model of seeking forgiveness." *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 38.4 (2010): *Academic OneFile*. Web. 5 Apr. 2012, 247.

<sup>7</sup> Loren Toussaint, Amy Owen, Alyssa Cheadle. “Forgive to Live: Forgiveness, Health, and Longevity” *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, June 25, 2011.

guilt or condemnation. Suzanne Freedman, educational psychologist at the University of Northern Iowa, says that as a person forgives, negative thoughts, feelings and behaviors gradually decrease while more positive feelings towards the other party can increase.<sup>8</sup> As long as forgiveness works, it is deemed worthy. Forgiveness is not ultimately virtuous because it is right, but because it produces right results. Wilfred M. McClay writes,

We live in a therapeutic age, and nothing shows that fact more clearly than the way in which we have changed the meaning of forgiveness. Forgiveness is now deemed admirable and desirable for an entirely new reason: It makes us, the forgivers, feel better. Arguably this all began with Sigmund Freud, who sought ways to relieve in his patients the worst burdens imposed by their oppressive and hyperactive superegos, without rendering any judgment as to whether those guilty feelings were or were not justifiable. But the nonjudgmental therapeutic worldview whose seeds he planted has come into full flower in modern America, and the venerable moral transaction called “forgiveness” has been profoundly affected thereby.<sup>9</sup>

The world faces a great dilemma. It is strained to find escape from the gnawing feelings of internal guilt and yet desires to hold on to their belief in pluralism and rejection of absolute morality<sup>10</sup>. We live in a post-Christian world in which people have an interest in being free from the feelings and burden of guilt, the desire to be “right with the world” and yet seek to do so outside of any religious context.<sup>11</sup> From a theological perspective, however, guilt is a healthy emotion that God has given us to help us recognize our faults and see our need for forgiveness.<sup>12</sup>

It must be stated that not all secular sources believe that forgiveness is the ideal solution for wrongs committed against oneself. Henry F. Smith, editor of *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, describes forgiveness as “a kind of psychic compromise, a leap of faith, of wish, and of defense –

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<sup>8</sup> Ken Schroeder. (1998, November). “Teach kids to forgive”. *The Education Digest*, 64(3), 74. Retrieved April 30, 2012, from Research Library. (Document ID: 35608010).

<sup>9</sup> Wilfred M. McClay., “Pinning Your Own Tail on Someone Else’s Donkey”. *In Character*, Fall 2008, <http://incharacter.org/archives/forgiveness/pinning-your-own-tail-on-someone-elses-donkey-guilty-feelings-got-you-down-let-dr-feelgood-help-you/>, (accessed March 30, 2012).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, (accessed March 30, 2012).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, (accessed March 30, 2012).

<sup>12</sup> Blake M. Reik. "Transgressions, guilt, and forgiveness: a model of seeking forgiveness." *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 38.4 (2010): *Academic OneFile*. Web. 5 Apr. 2012, 247.

a leap over reason that short-circuits the psychoanalytic work that needs to be done”.<sup>13</sup> Even when forgiveness proves to work emotionally, some will reject its validity because of the religious, faith-oriented connotation of the concept.

### Christian Motivations

The fact that personal motivations for forgiveness exist in the secular world is not what differentiates it from Christian forgiveness. Christian forgiveness is not altruistic and without personal motivation. In fact, a person of the Christian faith has all the more reason to forgive another person than a man of no religious conviction. The Bible is not void of motivating factors for Christians to forgive, the motivations exist, but they are categorically different than those of the secular arena.

Motives are all important in the Christian life. Our motivation for forgiveness “must come from nothing less than a pure, surrendered response to the love of God”.<sup>14</sup> The love and mercy of God is the primary motivator for a person to forgive another. While the secular community cannot endorse something as subjective, immaterial and religious as the love of God, research does prove that love and good will make for better forgiveness. “In psychological research, interventions that have promoted selfishly motivated forgiveness seem to be more effective in the short-term, but interventions promoting altruistic forgiveness are more effective in the long-term”.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Henry Smith. “Leaps of faith: Is forgiveness a useful concept?” *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, Vol. 89, Issue 5, (October 2008), Retrieved April 5, 2012, from Research Library.

<sup>14</sup> Chuck Spong. “Love, Forgiveness, And Powerful Acts of Service” *Enrichment Journal*, (Winter 2012). [http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/201201/201201\\_EJO\\_Love\\_Forgive.cfm](http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/201201/201201_EJO_Love_Forgive.cfm) (accessed April 4, 2012).

<sup>15</sup> Everett L Worthington Jr, Constance B Sharp, Andrea J Lerner, & Jeffrey R Sharp. “Interpersonal Forgiveness as an Example of Loving One’s Enemies”. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, (Retrieved April 5, 2012, from ProQuest Religion).

Forgiveness is central to Christianity. When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, he intentionally included in the heart of his prayer, the need to forgive others.<sup>16</sup> Carnegie Samuel Calian states, “To say that Christianity is Christ is to understand the Christian faith as forgiveness personified in Christ.”<sup>17</sup> In other words, a Christian is motivated to forgive, by their understanding of the Christian faith and what it means to follow Christ.

The goal of Biblical forgiveness is ultimately to bring restoration and wholeness to both the offender and the offended. Christians are charged by their Lord to be peacemakers and to win their brothers over. (Matthew 5:9, 18:15)

Stephen knew the power of redemptive forgiveness. His act of forgiveness and prayer ultimately led to Saul’s conversion (Acts 7:60).<sup>18</sup> Paul went on to teach the church of Galatia to handle those who had fallen into sin by restoring them in a spirit of gentleness. (Galatians 6:1) The act of forgiveness itself opens the door to healing and unity with God and others.<sup>19</sup> Biblical forgiveness is not solely about the removal of condemnation, but also about the amendment of life.<sup>20</sup> Calian suggests that forgiveness centered in Christ has the power to humanize our existence.<sup>21</sup> James wrote about the healing power of forgiveness when he stated, “confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed”. (James 5:16)

Christianity is not opposed to the relational and personal benefits of forgiveness, but it does not make these benefits the primary motivation. The goal is not personal benefit, but human and divine restoration. The point is not to simply feel better about oneself, but to bring

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<sup>16</sup> Lori, O’Dea. “Choosing Forgiveness: A Bold Choice For a Peaceful Heart”. *Enrichment Journal*. (Spring 2011), [http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/201102/201102\\_066\\_forgive.htm.cfm](http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/201102/201102_066_forgive.htm.cfm), (accessed April 4, 2012).

<sup>17</sup> Carnegie Samuel Calian. “Christian Faith as Forgiveness”. *Theology Today*, (1981) Volume 37, no. 4, 439.

<sup>18</sup> George O. Wood., “Steps to Forgiveness” *Enrichment Journal*, (Spring 2009), [http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200902/200902\\_078\\_Forgiveness.cfm](http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200902/200902_078_Forgiveness.cfm) (accessed April 4, 2012).

<sup>19</sup> Carnegie Samuel Calian. “Christian Faith as Forgiveness”. *Theology Today*, (1981) Volume 37, no. 4, 443.

<sup>20</sup> Stephen N. Williams., *What Christians Believe about Forgiveness. Studies in Christian Ethics, Training*, May 2011, Volume 24, Issue 2, 150.

<sup>21</sup> Calian, Carnegie Samuel. “Christian Faith as Forgiveness”. *Theology Today*, (1981) Volume 37, no. 4, 439.

restoration to relationships that have been wounded. To be honest, true and total forgiveness is often tough work. Yet, the positive outcomes and results of forgiveness to the human emotions and well-being are a bi-product of God's blessing upon obedience to His Word and His Ways.

Beyond the horizontal motivation of restored relationships, New Testament Christianity also emphasizes the vertical motivation of relationship with God as a driving motivator to forgive. Forgiving others starts with finding forgiveness from God. It is in being forgiven by God (vertical forgiveness) that a person of faith has the power and motivation to forgive others (horizontal forgiveness). "Altruistic forgiveness should well up in us out of the gratitude for having been forgiven by God".<sup>22</sup>

The Scriptures support the idea that our forgiveness of others is directly tied to the forgiveness we have already received from God. "Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. *Forgive as the Lord forgave you*". (Colossians 3:13, italics added) "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, *just as in Christ God forgave you*". (Ephesians 4:32, italics added) Divine love of humanity and forgiveness of others are inseparable from the redemptive story of the Bible.<sup>23</sup>

Some would even suggest that our forgiveness from God is dependent upon our own willingness to forgive others. Elizabeth A. Gassin writes,

God will extend us the same kind of forgiveness that we extend others. And as distasteful as it may be to our modern ears, this is exactly what Christ says in his interpretation of the Lord's prayer (Matthew 6:14-15): For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins (NRSV).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Everett Worthington Jr., et al, "Interpersonal Forgiveness as an Example of Loving One's Enemies". *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, (Retrieved April 5, 2012, from ProQuest Religion).

<sup>23</sup> Robert K Cheong, and Frederick A DiBlasio. 2007. Christ-like Love and Forgiveness: A Biblical Foundation for Counseling Practice. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 26, no. 1, (April 1): 15. <http://www.proquest.com/> (accessed April 30, 2012).

<sup>24</sup> Elizabeth A. Gassin "Are Christians obliged not to forgive? A response to Martin" (1997). *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, Spring 2000. Vol. 28, Issue 1, Retrieved April 5, 2012, from ProQuest Religion.

While some may disagree with this viewpoint from a soteriological perspective, it is hard to argue that at a minimum, one's unwillingness to forgive will have a negative impact on their relationship with God.

### The Injustice of Forgiveness

Another difference between secular concepts of forgiveness and those of Scripture has to do with justice. One general agreement among secular and Christian sources is that forgiving others is not contingent upon the offender admitting their wrong or having any remorse. From a purely economical or mathematical perspective, this causes a major issue. If a man were to be robbed of one-hundred dollars and never to find or reconcile with the guilty party, forgiveness is possible, but he is still out of a hundred bucks! Neither a secular or Christian counselor could help bring the money back (in fact they'd charge you much more to give their counsel). What distinguishes a Christian view of forgiveness from the non-religious is the belief that one chooses to forgive because they have already been forgiven themselves. In this sense, justice is served. "I may be out of one-hundred dollars", says the redeemed believer, "but, I have already been forgiven a much larger debt". The moral of the parable of the unforgiving servant resonates deeply here. (Matthew 18:21-35)

Forgiveness without some form of atonement is in danger of becoming a cheap form of grace. Forgiveness can only make sense in the presence of a robust sense of justice.<sup>25</sup> "Forgiveness can't be understood apart from the assumption that we inhabit a moral universe in which moral responsibility matters, moral choices have real consequences, and justice and guilt have a salient role".<sup>26</sup>

The only alternative to the injustice of forgiveness for those who are not of a Christian persuasion is victimization. In becoming a victim, the weight of the wrong that was done is placed upon the offended party who then becomes a scapegoat for the wrong committed.

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<sup>25</sup> Wilfred M McClay., "Pinning Your Own Tail on Someone Else's Donkey". *In Character*, Fall 2008, <http://incharacter.org/archives/forgiveness/pinning-your-own-tail-on-someone-elses-donkey-guilty-feelings-got-you-down-let-dr-feelgood-help-you/>, (accessed March 30, 2012).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, (accessed March 30, 2012).

McClay suggests that for this reason, the increase in victimization in our society can be directly correlated with the decrease in Christian orthodoxy.<sup>27</sup> Victimization does not provide a solution to the injustice of forgiveness, but instead puts the offended party in bondage to something or someone she cannot control.

### Is Forgiveness Optional?

Another distinction between Christian and secular forgiveness has to do with a person's choice to forgive. To an irreligious person who is bound by no moral code of ethics, forgiveness is just one option among many. Bitterness, resentment, fault finding, grudge holding and even retaliation are viable options that can be considered. In an article entitled, "Teach kids to forgive", Ken Schroeder explains the necessity in encouraging adolescents to forgive instead of opting for retaliation.<sup>28</sup> In the increasingly violent world we are living in, it would be hard not to argue for more teaching of civility, virtue and respect for others in our public schools. But the choice remains in the hands of the offended party of whether or not to forgive the offender.

To the committed Christian, the choice to not forgive and retaliate is also available, but never justified. Forgiving others is not just one choice of many for the believer, it is a commandment. Based on Jesus teachings in the Synoptic Gospels, forgiveness is not optional, but obligatory for Christians. "Judge not, and you shall not be judged: condemn not, and you shall not be condemned: *forgive, and you shall be forgiven*" (Luke 6:37, emphasis added)

### The Power to Forgive

The ability to forgive from a secular worldview is based on one being a "good person" and having virtue in oneself. The act of forgiveness is taken or encouraged to show a person's goodness or value, even to the shame of the offender. It can actually work as a subtle form of revenge towards the offender. The forgiver proves they are a bigger person and one of greater character by forgiving the offender. The emphasis in secular forgiveness is to take the high road, to be more mature and to choose what's ultimately better for oneself.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., (accessed March 30, 2012).

<sup>28</sup> Ken Schroeder., "Teach kids to forgive". *The Education Digest*, 64(3), 74.

Contrarily for Christians, in forgiving others, we are first admitting that we are fallen, sinful beings who have need for forgiveness ourselves. Christians don't look upon our own goodness to empower us to forgive, but to the model and power of a crucified and resurrected Savior. Jesus did not clench his nail-pierced hands and demand justice or threaten retaliation, but instead opened his hands and called on the Father to forgive his enemies.<sup>29</sup> Christians believe what they do about forgiveness for the same reason they believe anything distinctly Christian; it is because they are convinced that Jesus Christ rose from the dead.<sup>30</sup>

McClay states that forgiveness is bound to "fundamental theological and metaphysical beliefs about the person and work of Christ, which are in turn traceable to Jewish notions of sin and how one pays for it". He concludes therefore that an absence of those beliefs makes forgiveness very difficult to sustain in any meaningful form.<sup>31</sup>

Fortunately, God not only requires and even commands Christians to forgive; He also provides them with the power to do so.<sup>32</sup> The power of God through the Holy Spirit to forgive others is something no secular psychologist advocating forgiveness can provide.

#### Is Self-Forgiveness Biblical?

Lastly, it is necessary to discuss an area of forgiveness that has grown in popularity among secular sources and even at times spoken from the pulpits of Christian churches. It's the concept of self-forgiveness. Self-forgiveness is being promoted by "psychics, self-healers, psychotherapists, and even some psychologist and medical doctors".<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> George O. Wood., "Steps to Forgiveness" *Enrichment Journal*, (Spring 2009), [http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200902/200902\\_078\\_Forgiveness.cfm](http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200902/200902_078_Forgiveness.cfm) (accessed April 4, 2012).

<sup>30</sup> Stephen N. Williams., *What Christians Believe about Forgiveness. Studies in Christian Ethics, Training*, May 2011, Volume 24, Issue 2, 147-156.

<sup>31</sup> Wilfred M. McClay., "Pinning Your Own Tail on Someone Else's Donkey". *In Character*, Fall 2008, <http://incharacter.org/archives/forgiveness/pinning-your-own-tail-on-someone-elses-donkey-guilty-feelings-got-you-down-let-dr-feelgood-help-you/>, (accessed March 30, 2012).

<sup>32</sup> George O. Wood., "Steps to Forgiveness" *Enrichment Journal*, (Spring 2009), [http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200902/200902\\_078\\_Forgiveness.cfm](http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200902/200902_078_Forgiveness.cfm) (accessed April 4, 2012).

<sup>33</sup> Donald Holdridge., "Is Self-Forgiveness Biblical Forgiveness?". *The Journal of Ministry & Theology*, Spring 2001, Volume 5, No. 1, 89.

Self-forgiveness has been defined in psychology literature as “a willingness to abandon self-resentment in the face of one’s own acknowledged objective wrong, while fostering compassion, generosity, and love toward oneself”.<sup>34</sup> According to modern psychology, self-forgiveness begins with a person’s willingness to admit their own wrongdoing and accept responsibility. Without this acknowledgment at the start of the process, one is likely to practice “pseudo self-forgiveness”.<sup>35</sup> “True self-forgiveness is often a long and arduous process that requires much self-examination and may be very uncomfortable”.<sup>36</sup>

If acknowledging one’s wrong and accepting responsibility sounds familiar to a student of the Bible it is because it is the secular way of describing repentance. “Pop psychology promotes self-forgiveness so that people will feel better about themselves emotionally, spiritually, and physically. Yet it does not matter how good one feels towards oneself, if God does not share the same feelings!”<sup>37</sup>

The root of the problem with self-forgiveness is that it passes over the need for a person to find forgiveness from God and instead places the individual in the role of God himself. Self-forgiveness is the pinnacle of humanism and the idolatry of self. The happiness and overall sense of well-being that self-forgiveness is supposed to bring about justifies its practice by the world.<sup>38</sup>

The information provided from the world’s perspective regarding self-forgiveness contradicts Scripture.<sup>39</sup> If a person is truly forgiven by God, then their need is not for self-forgiveness, but the acceptance of the forgiveness God has already made available through Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross.

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<sup>34</sup>R.D. Enright., “Counseling within the forgiveness triad: On forgiving, receiving forgiveness and self forgiveness”, *Counseling & Values*, Vol. 40, Issue 2, 115.

<sup>35</sup> Julie H. Hall & Frank D. Fincham. “Self-Forgiveness: The Stepchild of Forgiveness Research”. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, Retrieved April 5, 2012, from Research Library, 623.

<sup>36</sup> Julie H. Hall & Frank D. Fincham. “Self-Forgiveness: The Stepchild of Forgiveness Research”. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, Retrieved April 5, 2012, from Research Library, 624.

<sup>37</sup> Donald, Holdridge., “Is Self-Forgiveness Biblical Forgiveness?”. *The Journal of Ministry & Theology*, Spring 2001, Volume 5, No. 1, 91.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 91.

Christian advocates of self-forgiveness have correctly assessed that the concept of forgiveness does not always filter down from the head into the heart, but this does not justify the additional step of self-forgiveness to the process of right standing with God or self.<sup>40</sup> Ultimately, self-forgiveness is a means by which people who remove God from their worldview find relief from a guilty conscience.

Holdridge believes the reason for such an interest in self-forgiveness even within Christian circles is that it is a “sugar-coated form of humanistic, man-centered philosophy that resonates with most people”.<sup>41</sup> He traces the roots of self-forgiveness to the self-love movement. MacArthur agrees; he states that self-forgiveness is found nowhere in Scripture, but instead based on sinful pride exacerbated by modern self-esteem philosophy.<sup>42</sup>

Just because self-forgiveness doesn't align with Scripture, doesn't mean Christians are stuck to feel bad about themselves and never able to overcome the guilt and shame of their past. In fact, quite the opposite is true. When a Christian learns to accept and receive by faith the complete forgiveness provided by God through Christ, he is relieved of all guilt and condemnation (Romans 8:1). The Biblical solution is not to love oneself, but to deny and humble oneself before God recognizing the need for His forgiveness and grace.

### Conclusion

In summary, as we look through the differences between the notion of forgiveness among the secular and Christian communities, we see a great contrast. The primary motivation for forgiveness in the secular world is to promote positive well-being emotionally and physically to the forgiver. In Christianity, multiple motivations exist for forgiveness including reconciliation of relationships, the love of God and one's own forgiveness by God. We also see that the injustice of forgiveness is reconciled in Christianity through the cross, but in the secular worldview, victimization is the only viable means of balancing the scales of injustice. We noted

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>42</sup> John F. MacArthur., *Forgiveness: The Freedom and Power of Forgiveness*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1998).

that forgiveness is obligatory to the Christian and only optional to those outside the faith. Finally we examined how self-forgiveness is unbiblical and unnecessary to those who accept God's forgiveness in Christ.

In the end, one can only suggest that the common teaching among secular and Christian sources about forgiveness is that it is the right thing to do and is beneficial in many ways. Otherwise the concept of forgiveness is categorically different in secular and Christian views.

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