

A Sermon on Forgiveness and Making Amends

Sermon by Rev. Minister Angela Smith of COPE for April 18th, 2021 (and beyond)

To avoid hypocrisy and treat others as I'd wish to be treated per the Golden Rule, when I intentionally or accidentally cause a legally actionable harm or unreasonable social offense (i.e. sharing a minority perspective or unfavorable opinion), I examine the facts.

I consider whether or not I accept when others share an opinion unfavorable to my own perspective and how receptive I am to that when I offer my own minority views. I feel open to discussion and debate, even heated exchanges, as long as all sides are given equal time and/or consideration in full context with the goal being a greater understanding of each other and closer proximity to the truth.

If a harm is legally actionable, I believe the harmed party should pursue remedies at law rather than resort to vigilantism. But, what about forgiveness? Forgiveness in the eyes of the law is when you forfeit justice by not pursuing it within the statutes of limitation or pursue justice without sufficient evidence to identify and apprehend the perpetrators. True soulful forgiveness of harms done to you or which you've caused others may take more than what the law covers.

The people forgiven for Jesus Christ's crucifixion are the people responsible for it and/or the Jewish people. The reason is Jesus never died and in Exodus 21:21 (Wycliffe) it says "Sotheli if the seruaunt ouerlyueth o dai, ether tweyne, he schal not be suget to peyne, that is of deeth, for the seruaunt is his catel." [Modern English Translation: So, if the servant is unconscious or unable to rise for a few days, the person responsible for his injuries shall not be subject to penalty, including death penalty...(for the servant is the property of the state as a result of his conviction.)] So, that was Jewish law and if someone convicted of crime is able to rise after a few days after you caused an injury then there is no penalty ergo you are de facto forgiven according to Exodus 21:21. So, the forgiveness for all the atrocities suffered by Jesus for violating local laws is born from Exodus 21:21 and many say he fulfills the Old Testament promise. I'm not comfortable with that. I am comfortable with people taking responsibility for ourselves individually and our own individual actions as long as said responsibilities come with civil liberties and Constitutional Rights protecting the same. If anyone was forgiven on Easter Sunday it was those responsible for excessive force and cruel or unusual punishment of Jesus Christ leading to his loss of consciousness for a few days after which everyone was relieved they wouldn't be penalized because he was okay.

So, Jesus lives therefore he didn't die to absolve anyone of their own crimes, vices, or sins. However, if you see his life and punishment as a cautionary tale for those who lean towards self-righteous vigilantism and the likely outcome of that which works to steer you away from such a lifestyle, then he did save you from that fate. Jesus saves too in that way. Magic words such as "I repent" while you continue to rape or murder or do any other ungodly thing though tell everyone it is okay because you accepted Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior so all is forgiven, is total bullshit and something only hypocrites would postulate to avoid personal responsibility or accountability at law.

Here's a brief guide on what I would suggest as some of the ways to objectively make amends with society and humanity even if any specific victim of harm you caused will never forgive you no matter what:

Making Amends For Murder Objectively:

1. Save a life and choosing not to kill yourself only counts if you really thought about it and maybe attempted it. I wouldn't really count choosing not to kill yourself if you murdered someone else already. Personally I think you need to actually save someone else's life literally by stopping a murder, performing CPR, preventing someone from stepping into traffic, Heimlich Maneuver, or something of that nature. I think once you've saved one life for every life you've taken wrongfully, you have made amends and are cool with God and the Universe. However, you may still get the death penalty or life in prison without parole depending on jurisdiction.

There is no way to make amends for murder subjectively. If someone murdered someone you love, what would it take for you to forgive that murderer? Would it take a simple "I repent and Jesus forgave me so you should too and if you don't you aren't a good Christian"? And, if you answered yes, did you do so honestly or is that just what you would say to try to force someone else to say they forgive you by guiltting them into it by invoking Christ and playing on their vanity/self-righteousness like the devil you are?

Making Amends For Theft Objectively:

1. How much did you steal or what is the value of everything you stole? That's the amount you need to pay the person or people you stole from to make amends.

Subjectively, most everyone will be fine if made whole by having the value of the items stolen and/or the items stolen returned. So, if someone is still holding a grudge, perhaps you stole something of sentimental value they feel is irreplaceable even if they were compensated for it at fair market value. Do you have anything like that? What if you had a single photograph of your Great Great Grandparents in a fairly expensive frame and the thief took the picture and frame to pawn? What if you hadn't scanned the photo because you wanted to preserve it so that was the only copy? How do you replace that? What if the pawnbroker reported to police that the photo that came with the frame was thrown in the trash and is now in some garbage dump, but you got the frame back?

Now, the way to forgive something like that is to know the thief likely didn't even consider your feelings or the possibility anything stolen would have significant sentimental value to anyone. The thief was only looking for things with fair market value that the pawnbroker would be interested in buying. Would it make a difference to you why the thief needed the money in terms of your willingness to forgive?

Making Amends For Rape Objectively:

1. You need to confess to every crime you've ever committed to law enforcement, especially all rapes you've committed and accept any and all penalties for it. Never rape anyone again is the second part. You have to truly repent and never do it again.

Subjectively, if you think you will do it again, kill yourself so all your existing victims have the peace of mind of knowing you will certainly never do it again. I've thought about this extensively and quoting from <https://www.cope.church/taofu.htm> "If you think "If I raped a child, I'd hate myself and commit suicide like Jeffrey Epstein or request the death penalty like Westley A. Dodd," then you are not being hypocritical if that's truly how you feel about someone who did that to you or anyone else." Rape is an act of torture. "Rape is classified as an act of torture within international human rights, humanitarian and criminal law and is used to discourage dissent and to demonstrate power. Rape was also officially recognised as a tactic of war by the United Nations Security Council in 2008. Attacks are used to systematically break down families and communities around the individuals directly targeted, creating fear, division and shame." Source: <https://irct.org/media-and-resources/latest-news/article/606> . Whether talking Harry Potter or anything else, torture AKA Cruciatius Curse, is unforgivable depending on perspective. Jesus forgave the ignorant, the murderer, and the thief. He never forgave a rapist nor a torturer to my knowledge and I've read the entire Holy Bible, multiple versions of it, cover to cover on many occasion. He damns hypocrites and rapists. Damnation is the death penalty for being soulless and therefore no afterlife, you just cease to exist rather than reincarnate as a continuing element of God's creation. Saint Thomas "Aquinas's thought sanctions neither an absolute acceptance nor an absolute rejection of the death penalty; for him, this is not a question that admits of absolutes. Like other punishments, the death penalty is a determination made by human reason. Its justification depends on specific historical and cultural circumstances and on the needs of the political community, as well as on the severity of the offense. Killing a guilty person is not intrinsically evil, in Aquinas's view, but it is nonetheless a last resort..." Source: <https://dlib.bc.edu/islandora/object/bc-ir:101201/datastream/PDF/view>

Personally, as a sexual assault survivor, I don't believe any of the motherfuckers ever sincerely repented so I do not forgive any of them. However, I give them credit for leaving me alone and not continuing to terrorize me though it honestly could be them at times harassing me. It is really hard to tell the difference between one virtual trespasser and another especially when some seem to clearly be affiliated with child rapists and child traffickers on the HEAL Mission watch-list. So, I'm willing to say I would and do forgive any of the rapists (including sexual abusers) who raped/abused me as long as they are not continuing to terrorize me in any way and no longer rape anyone (including me) ever. If those exact specifications and conditions are not met, you are not forgiven and I do hope you kill yourself and be a man about it like Jeffrey Epstein or Westley A. Dodd.

The definition of "rape" provided by the US Department of Justice is "The penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim." Source: <https://www.justice.gov/archives/opa/blog/updated-definition-rape> This is also my

definition of rape. You can't rape yourself, but, you can get convicted of rape and share a cell with other rapists who overpower you and in that way by raping others you created the circumstances under which you might also be raped. Some call that Karma that comes with penalties at law attached. If you were convicted of rape and were later raped yourself, how do you feel about the person who raped you and what do you wish to be their fate? That's likely going to be similar to how your victim(s) feel about you. Many rape victims commit suicide because they can't live with the trauma. "Rape victims were 13 times more likely than non-crime victims to have attempted suicide (13% Vs 1%)." Source: <https://mainweb-v.musc.edu/vawprevention/research/mentalimpact.shtml> "It is quite common for rape victims to suffer from depression. And untreated depression is the number one cause for suicide. About 33% of rape victims have suicidal thought. About 13% of rape victims will attempt suicide. Suicide attempts may occur years after the rape." Source: <http://www.suicide.org/rape-victims-prone-to-suicide.html> In 2019, there were 98,213 reported rape cases in the US. Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/191137/reported-forcible-rape-cases-in-the-usa-since-1990/> And, that means 12,768 victims attempted and/or successfully committed suicide. So, maybe if you've raped 8 people, one of them killed themselves and 2 more are thinking about killing themselves. If you killed yourself and they were made aware of it, you could potentially save 3 lives right there depending on how swiftly you take action. I'd respect that.

End Of Suggested Amends

Objectively, I'm content to have the law handle all legally actionable harms while willing to forgive anything that is not legally actionable. We all annoy each other from time to time. I don't like when people play with pens or pencils in a manner that adds to cacophony and doesn't even keep a recognizable rhythm. On extremely rare occasion, I've done a teeter-totter type thing with a pen or pencil between my middle finger and two surrounding fingers, which made a tapping sound on a desk or table of some sort. I've also clicked a pen that you have to click to extend the pen three times when it wasn't necessary and just because I felt like it. So, I've done something similar at times that other people may do more regularly that I find annoying when they do it. I've also wastefully on rare occasion overly sharpened pencils. So, those are just some of the annoying things I do and why I forgive it.

Subjectively, the First Amendment grants all of us the rights to freedom of association, freedom of religion, freedom of speech, and freedom of expression as well as freedom to peaceably assemble. So, that's why I accept Feedback and will post it to my site even if it is a position with which I disagree. You can support the mission and church by funding, donating in-kind, and spreading the word. You can disagree with the mission and church and express that in any manner that is legal for you to do so.

And, I do not blame Orson Welles and "War of the Worlds" for any suicides resulting from the fantastical yet believable (because Welles was so talented) telling of the story. And, I think Tim Burton with "Mars Attacks" helped heal our nation in more ways than one.

There is no get out of jail free card resulting from Jesus' crucifixion. If he lives, the Jews are forgiven and if he died as a result of crucifixion then they are not forgiven. I say he lives and Easter proves it. But, it only applies to the torture and beating of Jesus by King Herod's crew and not for all legally actionable or potentially legally actionable harm that has, may, or will ever occur. So, if you believe Jesus lives and survives crucifixion like I do, then the Jews are forgiven (Exodus 21:21). If you believe he died and because he died you have a permanent get out of jail free card if you say the right words like "I repent and accept Jesus as my Lord and Savior", I heartily disagree with that interpretation of the story and readily accuse you of idolatry.

Now, if you feel a personal affinity for Jesus as I do, you may think the injustice he suffered even though he survived warranted retribution of some sort and maybe you'll feel better if you study history too. But, maybe not. Who started it matters and whether or not excessive force was involved. The Spanish Inquisition alone suggests that excessive force and what constitutes "starting it" means is subjectively determined at times as well as evidences that Jesus' message that people avoid hypocrisy while treating everyone as equal or your sibling, your neighbor, and like you treat Jesus, was exploited or perverted to expand oligarchy rather than spread the word on equality and brotherly love. I consider myself a sheep in wolf's clothing but recognize those who do just the opposite. I love wolves too. But, don't do the crime if you can't do the time. Those are all one-syllable words in that last sentence and as simple as we can make it for you. Consider temptation to any crime similar to temptation to use your own secured credit card on something unnecessary for which there is no bankruptcy option to eliminate the debt. Did you make the purchase anyway (i.e. commit the crime)? Then you have given your implied consent to any penalties attached. Were you okay with it because you wanted instant gratification and didn't care about the consequences or assumed you wouldn't be caught? If you didn't even consider beyond instant gratification, it suggests you are incompetent at law and may be institutionalized permanently if found to be developmentally disabled. Would you rather accept you assumed the risk of penalty when you broke the law or deny responsibility hoping to be found incompetent and institutionalized for life forfeiting individual liberty and personal responsibility until you die? I prefer to take responsibility for my own actions while understanding right from wrong without playing dumb to avoid accountability. That's the same standard the law of the US holds and so I feel it is reasonable to hold my equals in the eyes of the law to the same standard.

People without a conscience sometimes find others with one still know how to respond in kind. I'm not doing that well, but do a lot of good. And you? Are you doing very well at the moment but up to no good? No, because you just read this sermon and I give you credit for being good enough to read the whole thing. It shows patience and a good work ethic. That's two virtues right there. Namaste.

ADDENDUM:

Even if you find forgiveness unreachable while priding yourself on being particularly virtuous and recognize forgiveness as a virtue, let me correct or help. Forgiveness is an act in recognition of the equality and humanity of another human being in light of your own fallibility. Have I annoyed you by blowing bubbles with and popping my gum? Have you ever blown bubbles with and popped gum? Even once? If not, can you find it in your heart to forgive my doing so? If so, check yourself before you reveal your own hypocrisy to me and the world. Jesus does not like hypocrites. Matthew 23:13-14 specifically.” “13 But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in. 14 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.” (King James Version)

For those who do not yet have a copy of the Wycliffe Bible, here's the Wycliffe version of Matthew 23:13-14: "But wo to you, scribis and Farisees, ipocritis, that chosen the kingdom of heuenes bifore men; and ye entren not, nether suffren men entrynge to entre. 14 Wo to you, scribis and Farisees ipocritis, that eten the housis of widowis, and preien bi longe preier; for this thing ye shulen take more doom." The King James Version translates this passage effectively from the Wycliffe original.

Even if you are not ready to forgive, how merciful have you been in meting out justice or retribution? Oxford Languages via Google defines “Mercy” as "compassion or forgiveness shown toward someone whom it is within one's power to punish or harm.” I would say victims of crime and torts who do not pursue justice through the justice system have forgiven the harms as a matter of law and by so doing showed great mercy to those perhaps too ignorant or evil to be compassionate towards the forgiving and merciful. In that way, you arguably lead by example in the virtue of mercy, which is a lesson those who harmed you desperately need and your leadership may be part of their enlightenment process. Namaste.

For those interested in starting #TaoFu Self-Defense Exercises, please see <https://www.cope.church/taofu.htm> and begin at any time.

There are opportunities to send messages, receive mystery bonus blessings, and more with or without donating available now on our "Pass the Basket" page at <https://www.cope.church/basket.htm> . Thank You.

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 8:32 KJV Willful blindness is an abomination.

COPE accepts Feedback, critical and complimentary. Learn more at <https://www.cope.church/feedback.htm> . For the sake of keeping myself and others humble, a sense of humor is welcome on all sides.

For More About COPE and the HEAL Mission, see:

<https://www.cope.church> and <https://www.heal-online.org>