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INTERPERSONAL FORGIVENESS AS AN EXAMPLE OF LOVING ONE'S ENEMIES

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We suggest that altruistically-motivated forgiveness is an ideal we rarely achieve. In fact, we often think such forgiveness is impossible. Our contribution is to identify ways that God promotes forgiveness—specifically the ideal forgiveness that demonstrates altruistic love for our enemies. We see God at work in the human psychological processes of forgiving with altruistic motives. We thus address four questions: (1) How do motives shape forgiveness? (2) How do virtues shape forgiveness? (3) How are motives transformed? (4) How do Scripture and God contribute to transforming motivations from justice-oriented motives to forgiveness-oriented motives? Compared with previous writings on forgiveness, we focus more on how transformations of motives and emotions occur.

Loving others often requires that we forgive them for transgressions against us. When Christians forgive–both decide to grant forgiveness and experience emotional forgiveness (Exline, Worthington, Hill, & McCullough, 2003)–they usually believe that they should forgive from the pure motive of love toward the neighbor. That neighbor has (temporarily, we hope) made himself or herself an enemy through transgressing against us. People do not always forgive from the pure motive of altruistic love. In fact, people often think such altruistic forgiveness is difficult, if not impossible. Scriptures clearly tell us to forgive, but offer little specific guidance about how to accomplish this. We contend that altruistic forgiveness is possible. In the following article, we describe the emotions and motivations that help bring about such altruistic forgiveness.

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TRANSGRESSIONS ARE INEVITABLE

Transgressions will be inflicted upon us. They are part of the Fall. As early as the book of Genesis, we see blame-shifting (Gen 3:12, 14). Cain killed Abel soon after God expelled Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden (Gen 4:8b). Fallen people will inevitably perpetrate offenses, hurt feelings, place blame, betray trust, and engage in unjust acts against each other.

Moreover, human victims are also fallen. We provoke others to perpetrate injustices. We have self-enhancing motives (Myers & Jeeves, 2003). We are reluctant to admit our role in troubled relationships–to others and even to ourselves. We perceive transgressions even when none might be intended or when others would not have interpreted the act as a transgression.

WE SHOULD FORGIVE FROM A PURE MOTIVE OF LOVE

Because transgressions are inevitable, Scripture has made it plain what we are to do about them. Jesus' teaching is clear. We are to forgive–unilaterally. In Scripture, Jesus admonishes us to "Love [our] enemies" (Matthew 5:44) and "pray for those who persecute [us]" (Matthew 5:44). The Hebrew Scriptures affirm the idea of not holding onto negative attitudes toward an offender. They argue that people

should "not seek revenge or bear a grudge" (Leviticus 19:18; see also Proverbs 20:22; 24:29; 25: 21, 22; Deuteronomy 32:35; Genesis 50:19-21). In addition, we are told not only to tolerate those who have vowed our destruction and who might have transgressed against us seeking to harm us, but also to love those persons (Matthew 5:44).

Jesus' life serves as a model. Although tempted in all the ways we are tempted, Jesus forgave. His prayer on the cross, "Father, forgive them. They know not what they do" (Luke 23:34a), is the supreme example of forgiveness as an altruistic example of loving his enemies, who were literally in the process of killing him as he forgave them (see also Stephen; Acts 7:60). Paul reaffirmed Jesus' teaching (Romans 12:17-19). In Romans, he admonished his readers, "Bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse" (Romans 12:20).

Jesus' direct teaching on forgiveness links Divine forgiveness with human forgiveness of others who have offended us (Matthew 6:12, 14, 15; 18:21, 27; Mark 11:25; Luke 6:37; 11:4, 25; 17:3-4; 2 Corinthians 2:7, 10; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:12-15). Interpersonal forgiveness is meant to be unilateral, not contingent on or waiting for the offender to accept responsibility, confess, apologize, make restitution, ask for forgiveness, and completely turn from the sinful and harmful acts (Luke 23:34; 1 Samuel 25:23-25; Genesis 50:15-21; 2 Corinthians 1:5-11; Ephesians 4:2, 32; Colossians 3:12-15; Mark 11:20-25; Matthew 18:21-35). Divine forgiveness is linked to human repentance (Luke 7:33-50; Exodus 32:32; 1 Kings 8:30, 39; 2 Chronicles 6:21; Joshua 24:19; Psalms 25:18; 79:9; 85:2; Mark 2:7), but interpersonal forgiveness is not.

Why the difference? First, God is infinite and can know each offender's true motives, but humans cannot. Thus, God relieves us of trying to discern people's true motives prior to forgiving. Second, if we had to wait for an offender to repent before we forgave, that would hold our forgiveness hostage to the offender's behavior. Because Divine forgiveness is linked to granting interpersonal forgiveness, an ill-spirited offender could deny a victim Divine forgiveness by failing to repent. Surely this is not God's desire. This may be another reason God requires human forgiveness to be unilateral.

Though the Bible warns of the dangers of unforgiveness (e.g., Matthew 6:15), forgiveness is not commended to Christians merely because of the benefits to the forgiver. Forgiveness is aimed at blessing an "enemy." Paul says, we are to bless those who persecute us, not curse them (Romans 12:14). 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 (Worthington et al., 2000).

God makes it simple. We are to forgive as soon as possible, with a pure heart, altruistically, as God forgives people, and without awaiting repentance.

Types of Forgiveness

Worthington (Exline et al., 2003; Worthington, 2003; Worthington & Scherer, 2004) has identified two types of experiences of individual forgiveness: decisional forgiveness and emotional forgiveness. Decisional forgiveness is a statement of one's behavioral intentions toward the offender—to eschew revenge or avoidance (if it is safe to continue interacting with the transgressor). Decisional forgiveness is rooted, most often, in will or in an ethical framework (see Matthew 6:12, 14-15) that mandates forgiveness.[1]

Emotional forgiveness is a process of replacing negative unforgiving emotions with positive other-oriented emotions (like empathy, sympathy, compassion, and love), which can be facilitated by other non-self-oriented emotions like gratitude, humility, contrition, and hope (Worthington, 2003). The process of emotional replacement (Worthington & Wade, 1999) may result in a net removal of all negative unforgiving emotions, usually considered complete unilateral emotional forgiveness (McCullough & Worthington 1994). Unilateral forgiveness is forgiving an absent party or one with whom one does not wish a continuing intimate relationship.

In contrast, *interpersonal forgiveness* (McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997) is forgiving a partner in an ongoing interpersonal relationship. Complete interpersonal forgiveness would entail removal of all negative unforgiving emotions and the additional experience of a net positive emotional valence is required. Emotional

[1]Allison (2005) argues that a command such as to forgive is not an ethical mandate, but an opportunity for gratitude because the Christian has been forgiven by God. Receipt of forgiveness inspires one (out of emotion) rather than obligates one (out of duty) to forgive. Choosing not to forgive is seen as developing a character that is unfit for close fellowship with God.

replacement, by definition (Worthington & Wade, 1999) is the sine qua non of emotional forgiveness. However, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral changes are likely to attend emotional forgiveness—before, during, or after the process of emotional replacement.

Alternatives to Altruistic Forgiveness

We don't always forgive with pure motives. In fact, we don't always forgive, although we know we should. Altruistic forgiveness should well up in us out of the gratitude for having been forgiven by God. Jesus showed that pure forgiveness was indeed possible and godly. Yet Paul tells us that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:10-18, 22). We demonstrate this (in one of many ways) by our failure to forgive at all or from altruistic motives.

Sometimes we don't forgive because we take care of the injustice other ways: such as forbearing (not allowing the injustice to arouse our unforgiving thoughts and feelings, Colossians 3:13); exonerating the person (finding that the person didn't actually wrong us and declaring a release from our incorrect accusation); seeing justice done (such as punishment or restitution); or turning judgment over to God (Romans 12:19; Deuteronomy 32:35).

Sometimes we forgive, but with questionable motives. These motives may include a desire to manipulate the person, to make the person indebted to us, or to punish the person by inflicting guilt feelings (Baumeister, Exline, & Sommer, 1998). Victims might experience forgiveness internally but not communicate it to the offender: *silent forgiveness* (Baumeister et al., 1998). Victims sometimes express forgiveness to an offender even when they have not experienced it internally: *hollow forgiveness* (Baumeister et al., 1998).

Sometimes we postpone our forgiveness until we see evidence of the offender's repentance. We may believe we have good intentions. We might say that we do not want to let the offender off the hook, or we might want to call the offender to own up to his or her transgression so the offender can seek forgiveness from God (and from us). Yet, holding onto unforgiveness is a sin (Matthew 6:12, 14-5). It can also affect our physical (Harris & Thoresen, 2005), mental (Toussaint & Webb, 2005), relational (Fincham et al., 2005), and spiritual (Mahoney et al., 2005) health.

How Do Motives Shape Forgiveness?

An Injustice Gap Is Created

Why don't we forgive from a motive of pure love? One reason is that transgressions offend our sense of justice. When we observe an injustice—especially to one who is defenseless—we respond with an immediate, visceral response wanting justice. Lerner (1977) called this the heroic justice motive and has established its presence empirically. Rusbult, Hannon, Stocker, and Finkel (2005) noted the quick justice- or retaliation-oriented response in times when self-interest was attacked, not merely when a defenseless other was attacked.

Research indicates that a heroic justice motive (Lerner, 1977) or gut justice response (Rusbult et al., 2005) occurs soon after a wrong occurs. This response is pre-cognitive. People quickly employ motivational and emotional regulation strategies to modulate the response (Gross, 1998). A cognitive-evaluative process measuring the degree of injustice begins.

The product of the cognitive evaluations, the *injustice gap* (Exline et al. 2003; Worthington, 2003; Worthington & Scherer, 2004), is the difference between one's evaluation of the way things ought to be and one's evaluation of the current situation. The size of the injustice gap is hypothesized to be directly proportional to the amount of unforgiveness one feels and inversely proportional to the ease of forgiving (Worthington & Scherer, 2004). The size of the injustice gap is continuously revised. If the offender apologizes, the current situation is thereby closer to the way things ought to be. This narrows the injustice gap and makes forgiveness easier. However, if the offender denies responsibility for offending or blames the victim, the gap is widened, and forgiveness is more difficult.

Our Justice Motive Is Aroused

People are created in the image of God. Part of this image may include a sense of right and wrong. Injustices, hurts, offenses, and perceived misunderstandings—which we call *transgressions*—trigger the justice motive (Lerner, 1977, 1980). Motives energize emotions, thoughts, and behavior. Emotions, in turn, energize the same and other motives. This emotion-motivation connection involves recursive feedback loops.

Observing the behaviors of others triggers moral emotions (Haidt, 2003). When people act

unjustly or immorally, the victim's (and often observers') anger, resentment, and righteous indignation are triggered. These emotions in turn might fuel a reconstrual of the offender as a flawed human, a monster, or a devil (Hargrave, 2001). In contrast, viewing particularly virtuous behavior (i.e., sincere or contrite apology) triggers emotions of awe or wonder (Haidt, 2003). Such emotions fuel a reconstrual of the person into a good person, "saint," or "angel."

Consider a study described by Rusbult et al. (2005). People in ongoing romantic relationships were given 7 or 14 seconds to read and decide how they would respond to a hypothetical partner-inflicted transgression. The 7-second condition accessed peoples "gut feelings" and "gut motives." People often reported that they would seek retribution, revenge, or retaliation. If given merely seven additional seconds, negative responses were cut in half. This intuitive, virtually universal, and non-rational desire to avenge wrongs is sometimes called the *justice motive* (Lerner, 1977). Justice is a virtue. Yet letting gut feelings and motives rule to provoke retaliation or revenge (Romans 12:17) twists a God-given thirst for justice into a motive warped by vengeance and self-interest. For many participants in Rusbult's study, the desire for revenge was attenuated quickly, but was not eliminated.

Motives become more cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally complex when elaborated over longer time delays. Motives might inspire intentions restraining or prompting future behavior. For example, when hurt by a partner, a spouse may ruminate about the transgression for days or weeks (McCullough, Bellah, Kilpatrick, & Johnson, 2001). Angry, hateful emotions, thoughts, and motivations might develop into unforgiveness (Worthington & Wade, 1999), which may influence an individual toward less forgiving behavior in the future.

Altruistic Motivation

The justice motive (Lerner, 1977) has been discussed extensively, including the fallen quality of human efforts at achieving justice. Even though justice motives almost always occur after injustices, negative efforts to bring about justice (e.g., revenge or avoidance) do not always occur. Motives like altruism, mercy, grace, and conciliation and emotions like compassion and gratitude transform justice motives or subdue them.

How Do Virtues Shape Forgiveness?

Warmth-Based Virtues and Conscientious-Based Virtues

Worthington and Berry (2005) scoured the literatures of classic virtues and Biblical and ecclesiastical virtues (e.g., for summaries see Schimmel, 1997). They identified 18 classic virtues (Worthington & Berry, 2005). When responses to the 18 virtues were factor analyzed, a first-order factor of virtue-orientation was found (Berry, Worthington, Wade, Witvliet, & Kiefer, 2005; Worthington & Berry, 2005; Worthington, Berry, & Parrott, 2001). Some people endorsed many virtues, reported that they personally valued many of the virtues, and claimed to practice many of the virtues. Others did not aspire to, value, or claim to practice many of the virtues.

A second-order factor analysis revealed that there were two types of virtues: *warmth-based virtues* (e.g., empathy, compassion, sympathy, gratitude, humility, forgiveness, and the cardinal warmth-based virtue of love) and *conscientiousness-based virtues* (e.g., justice, truth, honesty, responsibility, accountability, and the cardinal conscientiousness-based virtue of self-control). Imagine these types of virtues as the warp and woof woven together to form a cloth. The conscientiousness-based virtues are connected strongly and run parallel to each other. On each end is the cardinal virtue of self-control binding together the conscientiousness-based virtues. Running at right angles to those virtues are strands of warmth-based virtues bounded on each end by love. The two sets of virtues are interwoven. Within-type connections are stronger than across-type connections.

Virtues and Justice

Besides activating the justice motive, injustices may focus a person's attention on the set of conscientiousness-based virtues. Injustices make people desire to assign blame. They want to place clear responsibility on the perpetrator and hold the perpetrator accountable for his or her transgressions. Injustice is seen as a failure in the perpetrator's self-control, so people demand more self-control from the perpetrator. Support for this hypothesis comes from philosophy. Roberts (2005) suggested that the virtues were interconnected and woven like a net. When one virtue is strained, others nearby (i.e., conceptually related) take up the weight. Other support

is empirical (i.e., Berry & Worthington's 2005 second-order factor analysis).

People may ruminate about the injustice (Berry, Worthington, O'Connor, Parrott, & Wade, 2005; Kachadourian et al., 2005; McCullough, Bellah et al., 2001). To the extent that they ruminate, they continue to focus on the conscientiousness-based virtues. That may block out a focus on the warmth-based virtues. As a result, the person focuses on an incomplete version of justice, a version that has been warped by the Fall. Examples of responses based on this warped version of justice include human retaliation, vengeance, and grudge holding. In some instances, criminal and civil justice also fall short of righting the wrongs created by the injustice.

Several factors make it difficult, if not impossible, to forgive. Unless the perpetrator or others act to reduce the injustice gap, a large gap keeps injustice on the front-burner psychologically. A fallen version of the justice motive is continually activated. Other conscientiousness-based virtues are activated in Fall-distorted ways, edging out considerations of the warmth-based virtues. This, too, directs us toward unforgiving ways of dealing with our sense of injustice. This is especially true when we ruminate about injustices and continue to focus on only the conscientiousness-based virtues. We hypothesize that, for Christians who value virtue; the set of related virtues called conscientiousness-based virtues is stimulated by experiencing an injustice. In our fallen state, we tend to view these virtues from a skewed, self-protective perspective. However, to forgive, the warmth-based virtues must be also stimulated.

Thus far we have argued that injustices push people toward impure motives because (a) we experience an injustice gap, (b) our justice motive is aroused by the very injustice of all transgressions, and (c) our conscientiousness-based virtues are activated, taking the focus off of our warmth-based virtues. All of those psychological processes are tainted by our self-interested, fallen nature. Not surprisingly, many people respond with retaliatory gut feelings (see Rusbult et al., 2005) and ruminate about injustice and other conscientiousness-based virtues. Thus, they have difficulty forgiving.

How Are Motives Transformed?

Motives often compete within a person (Galatians 5:17b). Justice motives, corrupted by more sinister motives for retaliation, vengeance, or grudge-indulgence, are strong. More pro-social, conciliatory, or reconciliatory motives may, in time, prevail. But what transforms motives?

Biological, God-initiated, and Psychological Influences

The transformation of motives and of attention to conscientiousness-based virtues might be rooted, first, partially in biology. Evolutionary theorists point to opposing forces (toward and away from conciliation) that affect social groups after within-group transgressions (de Waal & Pokorny, 2005). For example, competition for mates or scarce food by primates in the wild (and to a lesser degree in captivity) breeds conflict, but reconciliation is necessary if the primate troupe is to combat external challenges from predators.

Second, the transformation might be rooted in God-given human nature. Conciliatory acts deriving from motives of altruism, and emotions of love, compassion, and gratitude have recently been studied. Mercy and grace motives have not yet been explored in depth. *Mercy* involves a motive toward deciding not to pursue legitimate punishment for an offense committed. Justice is understood as appropriate, but is relaxed. *Grace* involves a motive to do something benevolent for someone without *sufficient* external reward to explain why one might want to do so. Mercy and grace are part of God's nature and also part of the *imago dei*. Thus, we might expect nature to eventually re-assert itself, bringing about forgiveness.

Third, the transformation might be rooted in psychological experiences. Several psychological factors influence both mercy and grace motives. Person-centered factors may include: religious beliefs, personality, and internalized role models. Situational factors may include: mood, reciprocity, context, type of relationship, and whether the mercy or grace motive has been employed with the same individual before.

Psychological theories behind mercy and grace motives have not been established. Perhaps the mercy motive is on a continuum, with revenge on one end and mercy on the opposite end. Perhaps the grace motive is one of many points on a continuum of altruism. Perhaps mercy and grace motives, although related to altruism, are separate phenomena. Theory and research are needed to specify the empirical and conceptual interrelationships. Nothing prevents biological, God-initiated, or psychological influences from acting simultaneously.

Emotional Replacement

Emotional replacement of negative emotions with positive emotions may contribute to transforming motives. Positive and negative emotional systems compete with each other. Emotions are embodied experiences (Damasio, 1999), which have attendant hormones, brain pathways, neurotransmitter configurations, muscular responses, and subjective experiences. Positive emotions often blend together to form complex positive expressions (e.g., emotional forgiveness; Damasio, 1999). Negative emotions blend to form complex negative expressions (e.g., unforgiveness; Damasio, 1999). Emotional forgiveness is the replacement of negative unforgiving emotions with positive other-oriented emotions (empathy, sympathy, compassion, or love; Worthington & Wade, 1999). We now suggest that these transformed emotions can trigger and empower motives.

Batson (1990), in his empathy-altruism hypothesis, has argued similarly for three decades, with empirical support. Forgiveness-relevant motives energize a person to behave toward a transgressor in altruistic, merciful, gracious, and conciliatory ways. Justice-relevant motives energize a person to behave toward a transgressor in retaliatory, pay-back, vengeful, or grudge-holding ways. Thus, empathy has been shown to lead to altruistic motives (Batson, 1990). Sympathy and compassion have been shown to lead to mercy and grace (Eisenberg et al., 1989). Love promotes conciliation (Post, Underwood, Schloss, & Hurlbut, 2002).

We hypothesize that positive other-oriented emotions, when they are stimulated after a transgression, trigger motivations to attend to and (perhaps) act out warmth-based virtues. Those motivations decrease the intensity of the already active motives to act out unbalanced conscientiousness-based virtues. Thus, motives of vengeance and payback are transformed by competition with the motives of mercy, grace, altruism, conciliation, and love. Positive, other-oriented emotions thus transform justice motives and refocus attention to warmth-based virtues.

Beliefs Transform Motives

If people value virtues in general, then anything that stimulates thinking about virtue can activate the mercy, grace, and other conciliatory motives (i.e., altruistic love), or God-pleasing motives. These triggers include (a) thoughts, (b) situational norms activated by salient situational cues, or (c) behavior by either the offender or another member of a community that pulls for mercy, grace, conciliation, or altruism (i.e., situational cues).

Doctrine (e.g., belief that God will only forgive those who forgive others; see Matthew 6: 12, 13, 14) provides a scaffolding for private beliefs. Individuals selectively attend to, recall, apply, or interpret theological doctrines. Each person's idiosyncratic body of doctrine, mixed with culture-shaped philosophy and experience, results in a person's belief system, which contributes to worldview and affects emotions and motives.

Religious beliefs are dependent on religious commitment. The extent to which a person integrates religion into daily living directly affects the value the person places on his or her religious beliefs (Worthington, 1988; Worthington et al., 2003). A person with low or even moderate religious commitment is less likely to think about or refer to his or her religious worldview. A person with high religious commitment will esteem and access his or her religious beliefs in many situations.

For the person with high religious commitment, Worthington (1988) has posited a three-dimensional religious value space where the person's values can be located at a point within the space. The first dimension is the authority placed on sacred writings, from low to high. The second dimension is the authority given to religious leaders. The third dimension is the authority given to one's personal religious identity. In practice, people's sense of valuing of these dimensions is less precise than a point within the religious value space. Substantial empirical research has supported this hypothesis (Worthington et al., 2003).

Further, Worthington (1988) hypothesized that people who are highly committed to a religious worldview evaluate their interpersonal relationships with another person according to whether the other person is perceived to hold similar religious values. Overall, a three-dimensional (e.g., along the dimensions of authority of sacred writing, of leaders, and of identity) zone of toleration can be represented in the value space surrounding the person's religious values. Relationships in which the other person's values are perceived to fall within a person's zone of toleration are more valued. The person will work harder to maintain those relationships. This hypothesis has received some, but substantially less, empirical support (Worthington et al., 2003).

Thus, for highly religious people, religious beliefs affect not only religious values but also the

relational context of a transgression. Religious beliefs are more likely to be activated in highly religious people: therefore more likely to transform motives in accordance with one's religious values and sense of preferred virtues.

Emotions Transform Motives

If we are to forgive with an altruistic motive, then our emotions must be changed. Our focus on the set of related conscientiousness-based virtues must be expanded to include warmth-based virtues. In a committed Christian, the motive of altruistic love—of laying down one's life (John 10:15; 15:13; Ephesians 5:25) or submitting to the other in love (Ephesians 5:24-28)—might become a stronger motive than imperfect human justice, vengeance, or avoidance. Eventually, weaker motives of vengeance and avoidance might fade or transform, and the person may decide never to act out vengeance motives. Emotional experience from anger (righteous or non-righteous) and bitter unforgiving emotions must also be replaced.

The Godly emotions of fear of the Lord (i.e., awe and elevation; see Haidt, 2003); gratitude (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons, & Larson, 2001; McCullough, Tsang, & Emmons, 2004); and contrition (Roberts, 2005) can also stimulate emotional replacement (of negative unforgiving emotions with positive other-oriented emotions) and pro-social motives to compete against our skewed version of justice, retaliation, pay-back, vengeance, and grudge-holding. They facilitate forgiveness but are not replacement emotions.

When people love God, they respond to the Divine beneficence and to God's sovereignty out of a mixture of emotions, including fear/awe (Exodus 18:21; Acts 10:12), love (Deuteronomy 6:5; Matthew 22:37) and gratitude (2 Corinthians 2:14-16; Rom 1:21). Emotions trigger attention to the most valued virtues. For some, the most valued virtue might be the conscientiousness-based virtue to please God. Others may focus on warmth-based virtues of love or gratitude for divine beneficence. We propose that the tension between types of virtues is a function of our fallen and finite nature. The virtues themselves are good and pure, but conscientiousness-based virtues cannot be fully apprehended apart from warmth-based virtues, particularly the cardinal virtue of love (1 Corinthians 13:13; 1 John 4:8).

Situations Transform Motives

Situations activate social norms. Social norms are highly imbued with emotional valence. Acting contrary to social norms is an emotionally charged experience that threatens people's understanding of themselves, their values, and responses of others in their social network (Milgram, 1974). Religious communities are a source of strong social norms for religiously committed people. People within local religious communities thus tend to agree about what constitutes virtue. Norms prescribe virtuous behavior. Sanctions attend norm violations. People join religious communities that support their religious worldviews. Communities reciprocally shape members' worldviews.

When an individual behaves in a manner consistent with group norms, behavior is experienced as natural, normal, or reasonable. When an individual behaves inconsistently with group norms, negative emotions are aroused (Milgram, 1974). Thus, if a religious community requires both decisional and emotional forgiveness as a strict religious duty, one's reaction to any transgression that is perceived to be relevant to that community will be norm-prescribed. If a person does not grant forgiveness rapidly, those failures can trigger strong negative emotions in the person such as guilt, shame, anxiety, anger, and depression.

On the other hand, a religious community can aid forgiveness. Forgiveness may be prescribed as a virtue. The replacement emotions of love, empathy, sympathy, and compassion, and forgiveness-facilitative emotions like humility, contrition, gratitude, and hope relative to God and toward fellow humans, may be emphasized. The community may demonstrate mercy, grace, and love. Thus, situations such as religious community context may hinder or assist forgiveness depending on individual personality and perceptual factors.

How Do Scripture and God Contribute to Transforming Motivations from Justice-oriented Motives to Forgiveness-oriented Motives?

Scripture does not specify precisely how to forgive. Forgiveness is, in fact, difficult—perhaps the hardest Christian distinctive. Some religions promote the law of limited retaliation or value forgiveness only if the offender is repentant: Some teach

that offenses should be ignored or endured (Rye et al., 2000). Christianity insists that we love our enemies and actually forgive offenders whether they repent or not.

Sometimes we might wish that Scripture provided step-by-step instructions in how to forgive. Being fallen, however, we probably would turn a Scripturally specified method of forgiveness into law and use it to excuse our sinister motives (i.e., demanding forgiveness by others for our sins) and accuse others who fail to forgive us quickly (see Leary, Springer, Negel, Ansell, & Evans, 1998, for such responses). Yet, because we do not have explicit Scriptural guidance about how to forgive; we sometimes feel that we are left to our own devices to forgive.

The world wants people to forgive, too. Our individualistic culture within the United States usually appeals to the motive of self-interest. Smedes (1984) argued this persuasively: He suggested that people who hold onto grudges or lust after vengeance are not hurting the offender. However, they make themselves unhappy and perhaps ill. Often the offender might not even be aware of the injury inflicted, and usually is not aware of the extent to which the victim feels the injury. Therefore, Smedes argued, forgiveness is an act of self-therapy. The person can improve his or her mental health, relationships, and perhaps even spiritual health through forgiving. Researchers have subsequently shown that forgiveness can achieve such benefits (Exline & Martin, 2005; Fincham et al., 2005; Harris & Thoresen, 2005; Mahoney et al., 2005; Toussaint & Webb, 2005).

Jones (1995) posed a theological critique of Smedes' appeal to self-interested motives. As C. S. Lewis noted (2001) there is nothing wrong with receiving a blessing from right behavior. Paul urges us to press on the prize of eternal fellowship with God, appealing to a proper reward for righteousness (Philippians 3:12-15; Romans 8:18). However, the problem occurs when seeking an external reward becomes one's full or primary motive.

We Are Not Expected to Forgive on Our Own

We know from Scripture that we have not been left solely to our own devices to forgive. We have resources by virtue of common grace and special grace. First, we have been created in the image of God, and we retain that image—albeit an image that is bent due to the Fall (Berkoff, 1996). Thus, we share the capacity for forgiveness, mercy, grace, and love as part of common grace (Berkoff, 1996; Evans, 2004; Reymond, 1998).

Second, if we are Christians, we have additional resources. We have been forgiven by God (Berkoff, 1996), and our proper response to that justification is gratitude that would motivate us to forgive others (Allison, 2005). We have divine and human resources that can help us forgive. We have the Comforter, the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 1:3). We have Christ in us, the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27b). We have the mind of Christ (Romans 12:2). We also have a supportive community (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). We have enhanced mercy and grace motives because we are redeemed (Berkoff, 1996), and we can read God's book of nature—the general revelation—to supplement the Special Revelation (i.e., Scriptures and Christ in us).[2]

Thus, we are told through Scriptures that we are not alone but that God is working in and through us to produce forgiveness. God-produced forgiveness is motivated by the highest Christian ideals: altruistic love as a motive.

Conclusion

Christians are commanded to forgive transgressors from a pure motive of love. However, we find this commandment hard to obey because it goes against our fallen sense of justice. People hold competing

[2]Our view of integration includes the following assumptions: (a) We acknowledge Scripture as our final rule for faith and practice. (b) We do not equate theology with the Word of God—whether it is a formally articulated or informally held. Theology is the way people try to understand God, God's Word, and how God interacts with creation. People can make mistakes in theology (and in science). (c) We imply people can discern from God's general revelation findings, which should be examined to see whether they are compatible with the written Word of God. However, we recognize that checking against the Word of God is not the same as checking against any particular theology. So, we check empirical findings from God's general revelation against Scripture (adhering generally to Reformed theology), and retain a humble attitude regarding any discrepancies between the two—seeking to discern through additional theological and scientific investigation how the discrepancies can be resolved. (d) We acknowledge that scientific and other methods of discerning truth from God's general revelation (e.g., historical, philosophical, and anthropological theologies, etc.) can provide additional information that is not directly revealed through Scripture. (e) We also acknowledge in humility that our generally Reformed theology might have errors that could be revealed through scientific findings. We therefore strive to maintain an appropriately high view of Scripture and humble view of both theological orthodoxy and scientific findings, models, or theories. Thus, we will both draw liberally from Scripture and look to science for an understanding of forgiveness.

motives, focus on competing virtue orientations, experience competing emotions, and find themselves in a variety of situations that make different (often competing) behaviors normative.

In this present article, we focused on how transformations of motivations and emotions occur. The essence of our hypotheses is that injustices, offenses, and transgressions stimulate a set of emotions, motivations, virtue orientation, and social norms that are skewed toward self-interest, self-protection, and revenge. Competing emotions, motivations, virtue orientation, and social norms more reflective of God's love must be activated at sufficient strength to overpower the transgression-driven elements and shift experience.

For the Christian, the salience of religious commitment is crucial to whether and how their motives are transformed when they experience a transgression. Environmental context, including the religious community, also plays a role. For a variety of internal and communal reasons, people have different virtue orientations. Some have little interest in any virtues. Others may lean toward conscientiousness-based virtues such as justice or toward warmth-based virtues such as love. Tension between these virtues may be a function of our fallible perceptions rather than an inherent conflict between the virtues themselves. A person's virtue orientation may shape that person's response to transgressions.

Throughout this article, we have argued that forgiveness can be an example of unselfish, agape (altruistic) love. Forgiveness can clearly be experienced for self-beneficial reasons, too.

We have suggested that Scripture tells us that God desires that Christians forgive and do so altruistically. God does not leave people alone to try to forgive unassisted. God is both transcendent and immanent, working in and through people. We thus hypothesized as to psychological processes that underlie forgiveness through the competition of positive and negative emotions, motivations, thoughts, situations, and different virtue orientations. Understanding those processes and drawing on them to change ourselves and others, we may better be able to forgive others, and thus love our neighbors as ourselves.

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