

# Why perspective in forgiveness and redemption is so important

[Life](#)



## **Perspectives on Redemption and Forgiveness**

Trying to draw fine lines about redemption can be tricky; however, I've always found that it goes hand in hand with forgiveness. In most situations, redemption begins with being forgiven by whoever it is that you wronged. There isn't a sure-fire way to gain forgiveness from a person after you've done something wrong to them; it all depends on circumstance and perspectives, such as the severity of the trespass or the level of comprehension of the offender. While forgiveness and redemption do go together, sometimes, even after enough has been done to be redeemed for the action, forgiveness isn't granted. There are many reasons why forgiveness could be withheld, but the main one is perspective.

Forgiveness isn't something that is just given, forgiveness needs to be earned. In the fable about Tannhauser traveling through the lands, Tannhauser thinks by just confessing his sins to the Pope that he should automatically be forgiven, but that is not true. He did not earn this forgiveness, and the pope has not regained any trust with him. The pope then curses him, saying that he will not be forgiven until he takes more time to make amends, "not until leaves begin to grow on this dry stick that I am holding in my hand" (Ashliman). Tannhauser didn't show any initiative to want to be redeemed, because he went straight back to the mountain once it looked like it would be difficult. Although God eventually forgave him based on his own all-loving perspective, it had nothing to do with Tannhauser redeeming himself from what the story tells. The fable after that, "The Woman Who Had No Shadow" also supports this point because the woman

made a decision about her and her husband's future without even consulting him first. In addition, she committed a sin against God, and expects it to be hidden or forgiven just because she confessed it. She also consulted a witch, trying to go above God's head, which is why he would not want to forgive her. She herself shows no remorse either. However, when she is found dead on the kitchen floor, her "duty to God" (Ashliman) had been paid so-to-speak, and the flowers on the roof symbolize that and that she has gone to Heaven. While she was not redeemed in the sense that she did not make up for her actions, God chose to take her physical life as a price for his forgiveness.

Heaven seems to be the goal of those trying to achieve the ultimate redemption, and Jesus tells us how to in Matthew. Chapters 5-7 of Matthew have been dubbed as "The Sermon on the Mount", where Jesus basically lays down the law and preaches to the masses about how to do right by him. He goes into a lot of detail about the exact ways in which humans should act and react to stay in God's good graces. In the beginning of Chapter 7, Jesus uses an analogy that basically says 'don't try to remove a speck from someone else's eye when you've got an entire log in yours' (Mark 3:1). It's a funny mental image to think about, but it symbolizes that you are not supposed to judge other people, as chances are you have definitely done more wrong than they have. This is a reminder that forgiveness is based on perspective, and the mental 'logs' we keep about the people we deal with. Just as Chapter 7 reads, "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you" (Mark 7:6). This explains why it is reasonable

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not to trust people who have wronged you in the past, as they are only bound to do it again. Don't give what is sacred to you to somebody who has the reputation of tearing such things down. Matthew is full of examples of how forgiveness and judgment can go hand in hand - however someone sees an issue, or however big of a deal it is to them can determine how much it takes to earn their forgiveness.

In Heathers, it is debatable that the two main characters, Veronica and JD, have been redeemed by the end of the movie for murdering their classmates. Veronica is not redeemed by the end of the movie because she never really earns the right to be redeemed. From the start of the movie she's looking for trouble, getting involved with a guy who thought it was okay to bring a gun to school. She had full knowledge that JD had the power and the will to murder their peers because he had the initial idea to make the first Heather drink bleach. Even though JD himself filled up the cup, Veronica is the one who gave it to her to drink. While JD didn't stop her, she did not bother to double check either. After Heather died, she did not take responsibility for her actions and instead wrote a fake suicide note. After all of the murders, she still acted as if she did nothing wrong and did not make up for the fact that she killed and helped kill classmates in cold blood for petty reasons. The closest thing she does to try to redeem herself is being nice to a girl she was previously mean to. While this can be a start, in the grand scheme of the murders that took place it really does not make up for anything. An audience usually sees her being nice to the girl at the end as a means to forgive her, but that does not mean she was redeemed. From the point of view of anybody in the story if they knew everything that she did

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and how she did it, they would not choose to forgive her. She never made up for the crimes she committed or even confessed to them, she only stopped doing it which is not enough to get her redeemed.

On the other hand, JD tries to make up for what happened by blowing up himself and the school. He was raised by a psychopath and watched his mother blow herself up, so it's understandable that the only way he knew how to make up for what he did is by adding more violence, as he was trying to give everybody a "clean-slate". In the end, he only blows himself up, which is his own way of showing penance. From his father's negligence and his mother's sacrifice of herself, there is no way he could have learned the right way to make up for things, which is why he is redeemed at the end of this movie and Veronica is not. He does not necessarily get a free pass on his actions, but because he did not have the same understanding of the situation as a mentally sane person would have, his form of self-sacrifice can be accepted as redemption. With that being said, the usual audience tends not to see this and does not forgive him at the end of the movie because what he did was wrong and in cold blood. Their perspective is that he is a crazy person who could never be redeemed for actions as treacherous as murder. What they fail to remember, however, is that he was not raised under the same standards in which a child is taught right from wrong; from the film's understanding of his upbringing, there was nothing traditional about it. While this is a viable excuse as to how he is redeemed in the end because of his circumstances, he is never forgiven because of the audience's perspective on his actions and how his classmates would not forgive him if they knew what happened either.

Perspective plays a big part in forgiveness, meaning that the perspective of the person trying to be forgiven/redeemed matters just as much as the perspective of the victim. If a person does not believe they have anything to be redeemed for, it will be difficult for them to earn redemption. White Male Privilege - A Conversation is a narrative written from two conversational standpoints - a bystanding woman and a white male who believes he is not guilty of exercising his white male privilege. As the woman describes, he walked in every single day with his confident walk that tells you he knows he belongs there. He makes small, snarky comments that get on the nerves of people who were not born like him, and one day he stepped on the toes of somebody who was not going to let him get away with it. They almost fought, but they ended up settling it silently. The man in this situation "forgot" what happened soon thereafter, defending himself that nothing he did describes any sort of white privilege. As this article states;

" How could I in any way have swaggered [...] into a room I was so academically unprepared to enter? How could I possibly suck power from a group of people who clearly knew so much more than me about the subject matter at hand?" (Kaufman 78)

This could be found to be false considering the recollection of the actions as described by Jodi, the woman who witnessed these events, states that the way he entered the room showed that he thought he was so much higher than any of the people. What he does not realize, is while he was able to ignore the situation and leave it in the past, the people witnessing it and whom it had happened to were not going to forget how superior he acted.

Their perspective is that he was acting self-entitled based on the color of his skin and how he has been treated in the past. His perspective, however, is that he was just being himself and was not able to find anything in this situation that he would need to be redeemed from. This ignorance is the very reason he cannot be redeemed; once he understands the perspective of the other people in the situation with him he will finally be able to understand why he needs to earn their forgiveness and come back from his mistakes. Over all, those who act as if they are entitled are suffering from a great deal of ignorance; the majority of white males are not aware that they act this way, and have been benefitting from their skin color and gender their whole life so they have no idea when they are supposed to be apologetic for it. This still does not make an excuse; any white male who acts out in this privilege needs to make amends for their wrongdoings, regardless of whether or not they understand it, in order to be redeemed just like the rest of us would have to.

The ongoing example of white male privilege does not just stop in classrooms; in Jack Halberstam's *Imagined Violence* he relates white male privilege to cop violence against black males. As he states, "white violence is not only permitted but legally condoned while the mere representation of black-on-white violence leads to censorship and a paranoid retreat to a literal relation between representation and reality". Halberstam knows that whites' have the advantage in violent situations, because society and even themselves believe that killing a black male in cold blood is not wrong. It is hard for a white man to redeem himself from this type of a situation because he happens to be so ignorant as to what he had done. Rather than trying to

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understand and humble themselves to the other party, they go to other alternatives such as blaming the victim or acting as if it never happened. In the minds of these types of offenders, they can push the blame away and never feel any guilt about it. Offending white males don't see the perspective of the victim, who has been violated and is searching some sort of reasonable explanation as to why somebody would do this to them. An apology does not make it better but doing anything that is possible to earn their forgiveness, such as taking responsibility and serving time for their wrongdoings, is much better than pretending it never happened. If only it was possible to reset gender and race stereotypes when it comes to harming others and just view everything through the eye of justice; it would be a whole lot easier than analyzing perspectives in trying to come to the most fair and conclusive answer.

When it comes to dealing with touchy subjects, such as white male privilege or domestic violence, forgiveness and redemption are not usually talked about. This is a great point brought up in "Battering, Forgiveness and Redemption", in which the author writes "Forgiveness is often associated with forgetting and a lack of accountability for the wrongdoer. Yet forgiveness can include both accountability and remembrance. Being forgiven creates opportunities for accountability because the focus is on the conduct of the offender, and not on the offender as a person" (Smith 3). This statement becomes the ideology for a purely consequential-based judicial system which would, in the eyes of the law, make every action redeemable. Smith believes there is room for forgiveness in every crime. It relates to the ideas of the pentecostal church, which was founded on the idea that there

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was always room to come back from any mistake. While this is true when trying to be redeemed, the idea of forgiveness being based purely on the extent of the crime rather than the person itself is sadly an illogical suggestion, because as humans we are flawed in the way that we cannot view a crime in a tunnel. It's the reason why religion lies so far from the law; while it would be ideal to just forgive for a crime there is a good reason as to why we use character witness testimonies in courts. A man who is guilty of rape for the third time, and even his brother does not believe he is changing for the better should be judged more harshly than the man with one strike against him and an abundance of loving family members who pledge he has improved his ways. Forgiveness can only be achieved with the intent to change your ways, rather than just redeeming yourself for the singular action.

The idea of redemption and forgiveness is usually related to religion, and the idea of being good in the eyes of a higher being. Schleiermacher's perspective on redemption can be summed up as "the fulfillment of the coincidentia oppositorum (the coincidence of opposites) between the finite (individual) and the Infinite (the whole) within the dynamic dialectical interrelationship between them" (Park 270). In other words, redemption is in the eyes of Christ, and doing right by him means you are redeemed to the world. This is a topic that is very commonly debated, and hard to agree with if you don't live by this religion. One point being there are many things that are described as "wrong" by Christ that in a moral sense can be found to be right due to perspective. For example, lying in any form is wrong and you must do penance if you lie according to Christ and Schleiermacher's

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theorem. However, the bible does not mention any incidences where lying is to protect the good of a person, if say the lie was something hurtful that wouldn't affect the person if they did not know. In addition to that, there is the moral issue of stealing. Once again, according to Christ, stealing anything at all is wrong, but they never touch on the issue of stealing being the only method someone has to feed their family or to get life-preserving medication. In the perspective of the person stealing, they are only doing something small that is bad in order to achieve something good; food on their families plates, a longer life for someone who might have otherwise died. However, from what is told of God's point of view, this is on his top-ten list of the worst possible things you could do.

This theorem also shows that it is very confusing as to how to get redemption in the eyes of Christ. The bible would like to tell you that nothing more than apologizing and being truly sorry will get you full forgiveness, but I disagree. If somebody took \$50 from me just to take, and all they did was apologize for it, I would not believe that they are truly sorry unless they give it back. Apparently, if you take \$50 from Jesus all you have to do is say you're sorry and all is forgiven. It's said that God can see what is in your heart when you apologize, but does it really matter if it's just going to happen again? It is not possible to fully forgive someone if they have the intention to repeat their actions, and it makes it much harder to redeem from when it happens twice. In Matthew Chapter 5, Jesus outlines the beatitudes from the infamous Sermon on the Mountain, in which Jesus lays down the law about who is right and who is wrong. To summarize, those who rely solely on God will own heaven, all those who do good and follow the 7

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virtues will get to heaven and everybody else is going to rot in hell. This is very hard to agree with, considering there's almost no wiggle room. From these passages, it seems like Jesus isn't into the idea of redemption at all, and the world should revolve around him. I disagree because I believe there is a way for everybody to be redeemed for what they've done wrong, and that depends on that single person and the power they have to make whatever they did right.

A novel that really spoke wonders about a different point of view with redemption is "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time" by Mark Haddon. It is written in the point of view of Christopher, a 15 year old boy with autism. This means it's difficult for his mind to understand the thoughts and feelings of others as well as himself, and he tends to think and speak based on the pure logical answer. For Christopher, things are black and white. At the turning point of this story, Christopher finds out that his father killed Wellington, the neighbor's dog because his father was upset that the dog's owner cared more about the dog than she did for Christopher and his father. This scares Christopher into running away and trying to live with his mom, because he doesn't understand that his father only killed the dog because he was upset with the owner and in Christopher's mind he thinks that because his father killed the dog his father will try to kill him.

Christopher's father tries to redeem himself after this, but it's very hard because there is no logical way to determine forgiveness. His father apologizes multiple times, but Christopher isn't able to understand his apology until his father buys him a dog and promises to make up for hurting the other dog by treating this one great. This is when Christopher begins to

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trust his father again, and his father begins to redeem himself. While it seems like such a small way to make up for his actions, it's hard for us to understand how a boy with autism perceives all these actions; however, it was the act of remedying his wrongdoings in an "eye for an eye" kind of way that made Christopher forgive his father and overall redeem him. It was difficult for Christopher's father to find a way to redeem himself, based on the circumstance of Christopher's autism. It was hard for him to compute anything in his brain other than the facts, but eventually his father got through to him with the action of setting a timer to talk with Christopher (since he likes things better when they're in a schedule) and giving him a puppy, which was an action that proved to Christopher that his father had no intention of hurting him. For most people, Father's apology would have been enough and they definitely wouldn't believe that their father would kill them because he killed a dog. However, Christopher wasn't thinking with any of his emotions, he was thinking logically in fear of his own life;

"I had to work out what to do. And I did this by thinking of all the things I could do and deciding whether they were the right decision or not. I decided that I couldn't go home again.[...] I imagined crossing out all the possibilities which were impossible, which is like in a maths exam when you look at all the questions and you decide which ones you are going to do and which ones you are not going to do and you cross out all the ones which you are not going to do because then your decision is final and you can't change your mind.[...] I had to go to London to live with Mother." (Haddon 93-94)

Since Christopher wasn't able to think with his emotions or understand that his father wouldn't hurt him just because he hurt a dog, the only explanation he could logically work out was to go live with his mother. That is why the circumstances were so difficult for his father to find a way to redeem himself; Christopher had a different understand of what an apology was, changing the circumstances and the actions required to forgive his father.

It would be easier to think that things are black and white; there's a wrong in a situation, there's a right. But that isn't always the case when it comes to forgiveness and redemption. There isn't a concrete, logical way to earn redemption like the excerpt from Matthew and Schleiermacher's theorem would like to claim; there are many different circumstances and intentions that go into redeeming oneself, and ultimately being forgiven. That is evident in "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime", the fables and "Heathers". Forgiveness is usually a sign that redemption has been completely, but redemption can still be earned without being forgiven. Earning redemption isn't black and white; it's a grey, fuzzy area that can only be calculated when taking into account circumstances, intentions and actions.