

October 2, 2006 Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania 1

How can we forgive those who have hurt us?

Matthew 18:21-35
Injustice and forgiveness

Matthew 18

“²¹ Then Peter came and said to Him, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” ²² Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.”

“²³ For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a certain king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves.” ²

“²⁴ And when he had begun to settle them, there was brought to him one who owed him ten thousand talents. ²⁵ But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made. ²⁶ The slave therefore falling down, prostrated himself before him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will repay you everything.’ ²⁷ And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt.” ³

CONTEXT

This parable addresses not the need of the offender but the heart of the offended.

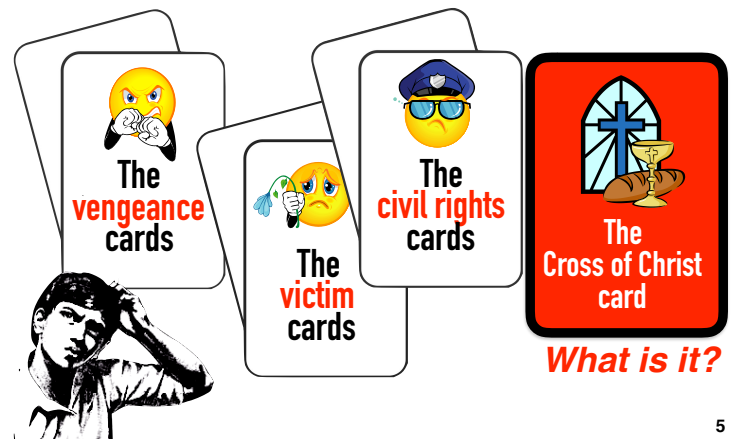
“²¹ Then Peter came and said to Him, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?”



We are prepared to respond to offenders only **AFTER** we have received a pass from a “spiritual cardiologist”.

4

Christians respond to injustice from different perspectives.



5

error difference apologize kindness charity forgiveness genuine feeling sorry intentional failure relationship crime mistake excuse regret spiritual sin passion sin confession family

Five pieces to gracious forgiving

G R A C E

contrary compassion choice cost conscience

6

1. Forgiveness is unjust.

G contrary

- The unpaid debt was unjust.
- Forgiving the servant was unjust.
- The parable is about the contrary nature of the kingdom's ethics.

Insight #1
We will have a hard time forgiving so long as we demand & expect justice.

7

1. Forgiveness is unjust.

G contrary

- Moral justice is the **heart** of the Gospel and the Biblical narrative.
- Passion for justice is a **sign** that humans are created in God's image.

"My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of just and unjust?"

C.S. Lewis

8

1. Forgiveness is unjust.

G contrary

- Moral justice is the **heart** of the Gospel and the Biblical narrative.
- Passion for justice is a **sign** that humans are created in God's image.
- Freedom to forgive is a **sign** that humans are walking in the Spirit of Christ.

Insight #2
Our light shines brightest and we glorify God most not in our demand for justice but in our gracious response to personal injustice.

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"Peace is not merely a distant goal that we seek but a means by which we arrive at that goal."

"Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend."

Martin Luther King Jr.

10

This "broken" world provides the **framework** for the display of certain kingdom virtues like - grace, hope, courage, patience, and **forgiveness**.

It is not our circumstances but our response to them that is our witness to the gospel's hope.

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Social justice plays an **important role** in the Scripture **BUT:**

Social injustice is like the pain that comes from a broken promise, body, or heart.

- The pain can and should be **alleviated** through pain killers (changing environment, etc.)
- But the pain also can be a **gift** pointing to a more serious underlying cause that will not be removed with pain killers.



Social injustice presents an **opportunity** to bear **witness through compassion** to the true hope of the Gospel.

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Social justice plays an **important role** in the Scripture - **BUT:**

- ✓ **Jesus** was not a political zealot, nor were his disciples (1 Peter).
- ✓ The emphasis is on the social dynamics **within the faith** (Christian) community.
- ✓ Superficial social reform is like **medicating the pain** rather than the underlying cause.



Kingdom justice may start with pain killers but there is **no expectation** that they will address the root problems.

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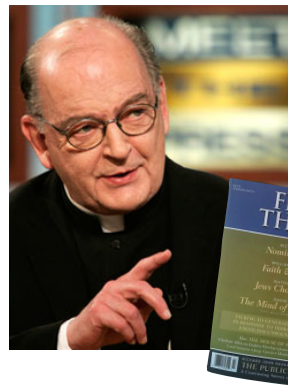
Jesus was clear in that his kingdom was not political, military, or economic.

John 18:36

“Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, then my servants would be fighting, that I might not be delivered up to the Jews; but as it is, my kingdom is not of this realm.”

Is the church justified in fighting for kingdom dominion today?

14



Richard John Neuhaus

“Idolatry is trying to bring in God’s Kingdom before its time and without its King.”

It is popular with both the political right and left.

15

Note what is mentioned and NOT mentioned.

Love is a response to:

patient
kind
not jealous
does not brag
is not arrogant
does not act unbecomingly
does not seek its own
is not provoked
does not take into account a wrong
does not rejoice in unrighteousness
rejoices with the truth
bears all things
believes all things
hopes all things
endures all things



1 Cor. 13:4-7

trials
insults
success of others
success of self
power and authority
freedom
competition
challenging confrontation
injustice
failure of others
gossip and slander
loss
doubts
discouragement
delayed expectations

16

Romans 12

Paul’s Great Commission

vs 14-21

vs 1a

1. Grace of God deeply sensed

vs 1b-2

2. Cross of Christ willingly carried

vs 3-5

3. Body of Christ rightly discerned

vs 9-13

5. Love for the brethren openly shown

vs 6-8

4. Gifts of the Spirit properly used

6. Response to the world graciously given



17

Social activists too often misunderstand the **complexity of poverty**, the **power of love**, and the **nature of God's kingdom**.

Poverty

- Material deprivation
- Political exclusion
- Spiritual depression
- **Social isolation**



18

“Loneliness and the feeling of being unwanted is the most terrible poverty.”

Mother Teresa



19

“We live in a culture that discourages empathy. A culture that too often tells us our principal goal in life is to be rich, thin, young, famous, safe, and entertained.”

We are encouraged to either envy or hate others but seldom to share their pain.

Barack Obama



20

Matthew 7

“¹ Do not judge lest you be judged. ² For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. ³ And why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, **but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?** ⁴ Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ and behold, the log is in your own eye?”

Insight #3

Forgiveness requires that we share the pain of brokenness in others.

21

Ephesians 4:15

“but **speaking the truth in love**, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ,”

L istening to concerns
O verlooking weaknesses
V aluing strengths
E mpathizing with pains

22

2. Forgiveness is **compassionate**.



EWBATHY
EMPATHY

Empathy is simply **listening**, withholding judgment, emotionally connecting, and communicating that incredibly healing message of “**you're not alone**”.



23

2. Forgiveness is **compassionate**.



God's heart

Psalm 56:8

"You have taken account of my wanderings; put my tears in Your bottle. Are they not in Your book?"



24

2. Forgiveness is **compassionate**.



Matthew 1:23

"And they shall call His name Immanuel, which translated means, "God with us"."

The incarnation reveals God's empathy.



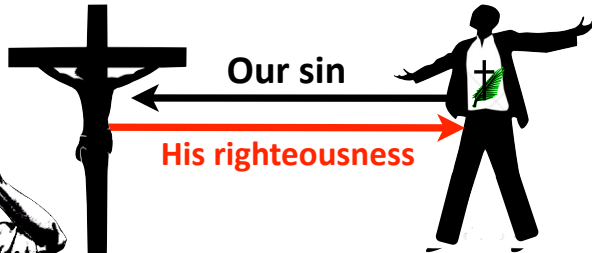
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2. Forgiveness is **compassionate**.



2 Corinthians 5:21

"He made Him who knew no sin to be **sin on our behalf**, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."



Hebrews 2:9-14



26

2. Forgiveness is **compassionate**.



Romans 8:26-27

"And in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words."

The Spirit's ministry is empathetic.



27

2. Forgiveness is **compassionate**.



"²⁷ And the lord of that slave felt compassion (Lk.15:20) and released him and forgave him the debt."

- Sympathy is **understanding another's plight**.
- Empathy is **feeling what another feels** so as to bring a passionate response.

- Compassion is **a willingness to relieve the suffering of another**.

It has a broader **perspective** and takes into account **timing** and **circumstances** of events.



28

2. Forgiveness is **compassionate**.



"²⁷ And the lord of that slave felt compassion (Lk.15:20) and released him and forgave him the debt."

Insight #4

Compassion is the path to gracious forgiveness.

If you come by any other way you will not be at home there.



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The next time you face a broken
relationship, bone, or heart
remember:



contrary compassion

You are facing an
opportunity to shine.



Forgiveness is **unfair**.
Forgiveness is **compassionate**.