

3) I will not bring it up to others.

Paul writes in Ephesians 4:31 that “all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.”

If you are bringing the issue up to others you are gossiping and committing slander against a person you have forgiven. Gossip and slander are meant to hurt and disguising it as “talk therapy” does not lessen the fact it is sin. Again, if one gets in the habit of not bringing it up to one’s self, they will have little trouble in keeping the second and third promise.

This is forgiveness from the heart.

**Reconciliation...**

Too often people say they have forgiven only to result in a break in fellowship anyway. This ought not be for Jesus Christ has called us to a ministry of reconciliation.

Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

2 Corinthians 5:18-19 (NASB)

Unless a person first forgives from the heart there is no chance that the relationship be restored and reconciled. But if a person makes the kingdom living choice and lets grace reign in their hearts it is possible that the relationship will be healed because just as our trespasses have been forgiven so ought we forgive other’s trespasses against us. The fruit of forgiveness from the heart ought to be reconciliation if at all possible.

Ganschow, Julie. Seeing Depression through the Eyes of Grace (Pure Water Press, Kansas City, Missouri, 2006).

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# The Heart of Forgiveness

Matthew 8:21-35

## Looking for loopholes...verses 22-23

In the wake of “Monica Gate” Hillary Rodham Clinton was asked about forgiving her husband Bill. Mrs. Clinton said; “In the Bible it says they asked Jesus how many times you should forgive, and he said 70 times 7. Well, I want you all to know that I’m keeping a chart.”

Mrs. Clinton was of course referring to Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 18:21-22. Perhaps she was speaking tongue in cheek for the reporters, I don’t know. What she said however does represent at least one misunderstanding of what it means to forgive from the heart.

When Jesus told Peter he had to forgive 70 times 7 he was not suggesting that Peter keep a chart of how many times he forgave and when the chart hit 490 times his responsibility to forgive was over.

Our Lord was in fact closing a loophole with Peter who thought he was being gracious by suggesting that forgiveness is calculated at 7 times. Jesus uses hyperbole to make the point that the grace of forgiveness is without limitation.

Jesus goes one to tell a powerful story of what it means to forgive from the heart.

## The Kingdom of God is like...verses 23-27

In Matthew 18:23 Jesus implies that life in God’s kingdom is quite different than life in a worldly kingdom. He begins to tell a story of a king who wished to settle his accounts and collect what was owed him from his servants.

A servant who owes a great deal is called in. In fact the amount was so large as to remove any possibility it could really be repaid. The king, at first, demands justice as the man did not have the means to repay the king. To recoup something, the king orders that the servant and his family be sold into slavery so at least some of the debt is satisfied.

The servant, realizing his fate, begs for mercy and makes an outlandish promise to repay what cannot be repaid. The king, moved by compassion, overlooks the servant’s rash promise and instead cancels the entire debt and removes the proposed punishment of slavery.

## In the Kingdom of God, Grace Reigns...verse 27

In verse 27, Jesus makes what is the most important point in the parable. In God’s kingdom, grace reigns. In other words, God is gracious and compassionate to those who trust in Him. His is a kingdom whereby unworthy sinners, who owe Him everything and cannot pay back anything, are forgiven their debts of sin and have their punishments averted. That is grace or unmerited favor shown to someone who cannot repay even a small portion of their debt.

I believe that Jesus’ point is that as His disciples we should see ourselves like this first servant. Each of us, who has been saved by grace through faith owe God a debt we can never repay. But because Jesus died on the cross and atoned for our debt, we are forgiven that debt and the punishment, which is the wrath of God, averted.

## So should you...verses 28-33

The first servant goes out, no doubt greatly relieved, and bumps into a fellow servant who happens to owe him a relatively small amount. Instead of viewing his fellow servant with compassion and granting him the grace he just received he demands repayment. He chokes the servant and has him thrown into debtor’s prison.

(In those days a man’s family and friends would raise the money to free their loved one from the prison.)

The illustration is powerful as the first servant fails to realize that the basis of forgiveness is based on what one has been forgiven. In the eyes of the king the debt owed him is always large and can never be repaid. The point is made so that we see our own sin as the king sees them; thus moving us to forgive one another something way smaller by comparison.

## Don’t be like the first servant...verses 31-33

Fellow servants see what the first servant did to his fellow servant and report it to the king. The king calls the first servant “wicked” thus indicating that the man was unredeemed as the term means degenerate or evil. In other words, the first servant’s actions were inconsistent with life in God’s kingdom and inconsistent from a person who had a redeemed heart. In God’s kingdom grace reigns and an unforgiving Christian is a contradiction in terms.

## Grace or Punishment...? verses 34-35

Because the first servant did not extend the grace he himself had received he was handed over for punishment. Jesus makes it quite clear in verse 35 there are serious consequences for the person who withholds forgiveness:

My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart.  
(Matthew 18:35, NASB)

It is an alarming conclusion to the parable. It clearly indicates that God expects that those He has forgiven to be, in turn, forgiving to one another. Other new New Testament passages teach the same principle:

Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.  
Ephesians 4:32 (NASB)

So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and be- loved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.  
Colossians 3:12-13 (NASB)

## Forgiving the debt from the heart...

In Jesus’s parable about living in the kingdom forgiveness involves the sense of debt one believes is owed them. Someone hurt us, someone abused us, someone owes us for some injustice, either real or perceived. We don’t forgive because we want to see them experience justice for our hurt or the injustice we’ve experienced.

We seek punishment for the offender because in our self-righteousness, we think we are justified in not forgiving the debt. In our anger and bitterness we forget that life in the kingdom of God is different and that in God’s kingdom, grace reigns.

To forgive from the heart means cancelling the sense of debt one thinks is owed and releasing the offender from an expectation of punishment. Forgiveness from the heart is a thought and heart attitude as well as an act of the will where one says; “I will no longer hold this debt against you, for I have chosen to forgive you on the basis of the enormous grace of forgiveness that I myself have received.”

## The forgiver makes 3 commitments...

Three promises or commitments are then made by the person choosing to forgive:

### 1) I will not bring this up to myself.

This is a battle for the mind whereby the forgiven must remind himself or herself that they have nailed the offense to the cross and put it under the blood of Christ. Stewing or brooding on the incident is a temptation that must be resisted. If it is not, bitterness and anger will again settle in as the person wishes to “choke” those who in some way, owe them something.

### 2) I will not bring it up to the person (as a weapon).

If you bring up the offense as a way of getting back at the offender you are still cherishing the hurt and seeking to punish the person. You have forgotten that while you may have been a victim you are now choosing to be a victimizer. You’ve forgotten what the basis of forgiveness is. If you get into the habit of not bringing it up to yourself and stewing about it, it’s not likely you’ll bring the offense up as a weapon.