

Matthew Chapter 18

Verses 1-35:

This is the fourth of 5 discourses around which Matthew frames his narrative.

This section's theme is the childlikeness of the believer.

Verses 1-4:

The dispute over "who is the greatest" was settled by Jesus' emphasis that it was the one who was willing to forgive the most!

"Be converted" means a "turning" (Greek strepho), of one's whole life and person toward God.

This is the true biblical picture of conversion.

It is far more than mental acknowledgment of the truth or intellectual assent to certain ideas.

To "become as little children" means to be born again (converted) as a newborn spiritual child, characterized by faith and humility.

Matthew 18:1 "At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

Now what they wanted to be satisfied in was, who should be advanced to the post highest in that kingdom next to the Messiah; and they doubted not but it would fall on one of them.

To have the most honorable post, and the place of the greatest trust, they were desirous of knowing who it should be.

It did not say which disciple was asking this question, or whether it was all of the disciples.

It seems as though the question was asked because one of them was not humble enough.

No one wants to play second fiddle.

Every one of them was trying to be first.

Matthew 18:2 "And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them,"

"And Jesus called a little child unto him":

One very likely, that was in the house and might belong to the master of it, and which was big enough to come to him at his call.

Christ designed by doing this, to give them his sense of the question, and convey some proper instruction to the minds of his disciples.

"And set him in the midst of them":

That everyone might see him; and upon the very sight of him, had he said no more to them, they might easily have perceived what his opinion was.

That he that was but a child, the humblest, and least in his own eyes, would be the greatest.

Matthew 18:3 "And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."

"Become as little children":

This is how Jesus characterized conversion.

Like the Beatitudes, it pictures faith as the simple, helpless trusting dependence of those who have no resources of their own.

Like children, they have no achievements and no accomplishments to offer or commend themselves with.

Little children have a special humbleness and are easily taught.

Most adults are not this way.

When a person is converted, it means he turned from his old ways and starts out brand new.

A little child is enthusiastic and eager to learn, and has a love that is forgiving.

He has simple trust.

Children, when very young, do not desire authority, do not regard outward distinctions, are free from malice, are teachable, and are willingly dependent on their parents.

It is true that they soon begin to show other dispositions, and other ideas are taught them at an early age; but these are marks of childhood, and render them proper emblems of the lowly minds of true Christians.

Most adults are different, constantly comparing their lives with others.

Few have confidence or faith in anyone or anything.

Surely we need to be daily renewed in the spirit of our minds that we may become simple and humble, as little children, and willing to be the least of all.

Matthew 18:4 "Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

"The same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven":

In the Gospel church state; which was verified in the Apostle Paul, though not one of the twelve: nor are these words limited to them; at least, this passage may be illustrated in his case.

He thought himself to be the chief of sinners, and less than the least of all saints, and unworthy to be called an apostle.

And yet he had the largest measures of grace, the greatest gifts and abilities; and was honored with the greatest usefulness and success in the preaching of the Gospel to the conversion of sinners, and planting of churches; laboring more abundantly than they all.

Humbleness is the most important thing.

We must not think too highly of ourselves, but instead, decide of our own free will, to be totally controlled by the will of God.

Verses 5-7:

The "little child" represents a new convert or young believer.

To "receive" such a fellow believer is to welcome Christ Himself.

Therefore, the basis of true Christian fellowship is established in Christ Himself.

"Offenses" are viewed as a reality that must be accepted in the present world, but "woe" (the prophetic condemnation to death), to the one who is the source of the offense.

"A millstone" is literally an "ass-stone" or a large grindstone turned by an ass.

Matthew 18:5 "And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me."

"Whoso shall receive ... one such little child":

This speaks not of literal children, but children in the sense described (in verses 3-4; those who have humbled themselves like children), i.e., true believers (verse 6).

When you receive a little child, you can't expect to get a reward in return, because he has nothing to give but himself.

Helping a child of God, expecting nothing in return, brings a satisfying feeling.

It also stores up treasures in heaven for you.

Matthew 25:40. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

God is the rewarder of those who love and care for His children.

Matthew 18:6 "But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and [that] he were drowned in the depth of the sea."

"Millstone":

A large stone used for grinding grain.

Literally "the millstone of an ass", a stone so large it took a donkey to turn it.

"These little ones":

That is, Christians manifesting the spirit of little children.

The meaning is it would be better for him to have died before he had committed the sin.

To injure, or to cause to sin, the feeblest Christian, that will be regarded by Christ as a most serious offence, and will be punished accordingly.

To be punished by society is bad, but nothing to compare with the punishment from God.

The authorities can destroy your body, but God can destroy your body and commit your soul to a burning hell forever.

Matthew 18:7 "Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!"

"Woe unto the world":

It is expected that those in the world will cause Christians to be offended, stumble and sin, and they will be judged for it.

But it should not be that fellow believers lead others into sin, directly or indirectly.

One would be better off dead (Rom. 13:14, 19, 21; 15:2; 1 Cor. 8:13).

There are going to be problems in the world, until Jesus comes back and sets up His kingdom here, and then reigns for 1,000 years.

The sad thing today is that offensive things to God are not only being promoted by the worldly people, but so-called Christians are promoting unholy living.

Judgment begins at the house of God.

The punishment will be greater for those who know to do right, and still choose to do wrong.

Verses 8-14:

The “hand, eye,” and “foot” are not the real source of temptation; nor are they the real cause of offending others.

Just as temptations arises from within, so does offending others and being offended.

The reference to “their angels” (verse 10), supports the idea of individual guardian angels for believers (see Heb. 1:14).

Salvation is not just a privilege to be enjoyed by a select few but it is also to be shared with the lost, so that they too may be saved.

Thus, it is not the Father’s “will” that any of these “little ones” “should perish.”

The immediate context in Matthew relates “little ones” to believers, but the cross-reference (in Luke 15:3-7) clearly refers to lost sheep.

Thus “we may conclude that it is not the ultimate wish (or desire) of God that anyone perish.

While God permits man to perish in his unbelief, He does not sentence him to such condemnation against his will.

Matthew 18:8 "Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast [them] from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire."

"If thy hand":

The sense in all these instances is the same.

Worldly attachments, friendships, and employments of any kind that cannot be pursued without leading us into sin, be they ever so dear to us, must be abandoned, or the soul will be lost.

“It is better for thee to enter into life maimed”:

Not that there will be any such thing, as upon the resurrection, going into heaven without a limb; for the words are to be understood, not literally, but figuratively.

And the sense is, it is better to part with everything here, that is detrimental to a man's doing, or enjoying, what is spiritually good, and enter into eternal life.

Matthew 18:9 "And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast [it] from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire."

“And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out”:

Than which, nothing is dearer to man, it being very tender, and exceeding useful.

This metaphor the Lord sometimes makes use of, to show how dear his people are unto him, and what a tender concern he has for them.

“It is better for thee to enter into life (meaning kingdom), with one eye”:

That kingdom, which God has prepared for his people, from the foundation of the world, and of his rich grace, gives unto them, and in which they will enjoy him to all eternity; than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire.

In the two instances before it is added, "that never shall be quenched".

Men and women should have their minds and spirits stayed upon God.

Lust of eyes can certainly form the thought pattern for sin.

Matthew 18:10 "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven."

“Ye despise not”:

I.e., spurn or belittle another believer by treating him or her unkindly or indifferently.

“Their angels”:

This does not suggest that each believer has a personal guardian angel.

Rather, the pronoun is collective so then is referring to the fact that believers are served by angels in general.

These angels are pictured “continually” watching the face of God so as to hear His command to them to help a believer when needed.

It is extremely serious to treat any fellow believer with contempt since God and the holy angels are so concerned for their well-being.

Jesus said "Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 19:14).

We are all God's children, if we are Christians.

Age, sex, and color make no difference to God.

God gives special attention to those who are unable to help themselves.

These angels could be easily dispatched to minister to one of these children in need.

Matthew 18:11 "For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost."

This is another and stronger reason, why these little ones should not be despised; because Christ, who is here meant by the Son of man, came into this world to save these persons; who were lost in Adam, and had destroyed themselves by their transgressions, and carries great force in it.

For if God had so great a regard to these little ones, as to send his Son to obtain eternal salvation for them, when they were in a miserable and perishing condition.

And Christ had so much love for them, as to come into this world, and endure the sorrows, sufferings, and death itself for them.

Those who were not only little, but lost; and that to obtain righteousness and life for them, and save them with an everlasting salvation; then they must, and ought to be, far above the contempt of all mortals.

And the utmost care should be taken not to despise, grieve, offend, and injure them in any form or shape whatever.

Without the Savior, all mankind would be lost.

There is not even one who is worthy to be saved aside from the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

Matthew 18:12 "How think ye? if a man have a hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray?"

To show still further the reason why we should not despise Christians, he introduced a parable showing the joy felt when a thing lost is found.

A shepherd rejoices over the recovery of one of his flock that had wandered more than over all that remained.

So God rejoices that man is restored: so he seeks his salvation, and wills that not one thus found should perish.

If God thus loves and preserves the redeemed, then surely man should not despise them.

Matthew 18:13 "And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that [sheep], than of the ninety and nine which went not astray."

“He rejoiceth more”:

It is justly observed by one, on this verse, that it is natural for a person to express unusual joy at the fortunate accomplishment of an unexpected event.

The ninety and nine were secure and in no danger.

The one who was lost and separated was in great danger.

The delight of the enemy is to get one separated from the others, that he might destroy the one.

The Shepherd is not willing to lose even one.

We read in 2 Peter 3:9 “that the Lord...is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”

The Lord died for us as individuals.

He loves each one of us, one at a time.

When one sinner comes to repentance, the angels in heaven rejoice.

The ninety and nine were already safe.

The one was lost.

Jesus came to save the lost.

Matthew 18:14 "Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish."

“Perish”:

The word here can (and does in this context), refer to spiritual devastation rather than utter eternal destruction.

This does not suggest that God’s children ever could perish in the ultimate sense (John 10:28).

Matthew Chapter 18 Questions

1. What question did the disciples ask Jesus?
2. What was wrong with this question?
3. What did Jesus do before He answered them?
4. What answer did He give?
5. What are two things children have that most adults are short of?
6. What must we become to be great in heaven?
7. If you receive a little one, who are you really receiving?
8. What would be better for one that offends a child?
9. Why would it be better to be punished by society than by God?
10. The world is rotten, but who will receive greater punishment for his actions?
11. Where does judgment begin?
12. If your hand or foot offend you, what should you do?
13. Does this just mean the physical? Explain.
14. If your eye offend you, what should you do?
15. What do your eyes sometimes cause you to do?
16. Jesus said "_____ do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven."
17. What does the word "despise" probably cover?
18. What three things make no difference to God when we come to Him?
19. What did the Son of man come to do?
20. What will a shepherd do, if he loses one sheep?
21. What causes the angels in heaven to rejoice?
22. What is the will of the Father?