

Matthew

Chapter 18

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MATTHEW CHAPTER 18

Jesus continues to teach His disciples on the precepts of the kingdom. After speaking about humility Jesus warns those individuals who cause believers to sin. He then lays down the process of confronting a sinful believer.

JESUS TEACHES ON HUMILITY (18:1-5)

The disciples are thinking about greatness in the kingdom and Jesus explains to them what true greatness is.

Matt. 18:1 At that time the disciples came Jesus, saying, “Who then is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”

Note on a variant reading: Instead of *at that time* some manuscripts read *in that day*.

At that time the disciples came Jesus, This relates the discussion with previous chapter.

saying, “Who then The question of the disciples begins in the Greek text with a particle meaning “so.” This relates back to Jesus words in 17:25,26.

is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” This is not dealing with the future, they wanted to know who *presently* is the greatest in the kingdom. Since Jesus has a special relationship with the “king” of heaven, they want to know how do the authority structures in the new kingdom of heaven compare to the kings of the earth? Human societies treat rank very seriously; how is this issue to be treated in God’s society? On what basis does God evaluate people? The answer Jesus will give shows that the disciples thought of greatness in terms of position, power and glory rather than in the terms of righteousness, as greatness in the kingdom had earlier been defined (5:19).

Matt. 18:2 And he called a child, and stood him among them.

And he called a child, and stood him among them By placing a child in their midst, Jesus gives substance to what He is about to teach. He gives a graphic and radical answer—the total reverse of human value scales. A child was a person of no importance in Jewish society, he was subject to the authority of the elders, and was not taken seriously. He was one who was to be looked after, not to be looked up to.

Matt. 18:3 And he said, “Truly I say to you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

And He said, “Truly I say to you, Another one of Jesus’ solemn statements.

unless you change This is a radical reorientation of priorities and values. The KJV translation “be converted” is not correct if it suggests a technical theological meaning for the verb which simply means “to turn.” However, it points appropriately to the radical nature of the change involved (cf. John 3:3 for a similar image). They must repent, they must change their ways.

and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. They must become

as children. It seems that the status of the child is the point rather than the supposed characteristics of children (humble, innocent, receptive and trustful). Contrary to the world's standards, they must have a childlike indifference to greatness.

Matt. 18:4 Therefore whoever will humble himself as this little child, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Therefore whoever will humble himself This refers to self-humbling, not being humbled.

as this little child, Humble oneself to the status of a child.

is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. The emphasis is now made explicit. The child's humility is in his lack of status. True greatness is found in being little, true importance in being unimpressive. That is how the kingdom of heaven looks at the world's scale of values.

Humbling oneself does not refer to an ascetic lifestyle or a phony false modesty; it does not describe a character trait; it is the acceptance of an inferior position as Jesus accepted, (see Philippians 2:8, where the same phrase is used).

Matt. 18:5 And whoever will receive one such child in my name, receives me.

And whoever will receive one such child in my name, The name of Jesus refers to the authority of Jesus.

receives me. The child represents the "little ones" (the insignificant believers) of verses 6,10,14. Not a reference to children as such, but to those who follow Jesus and have accepted the child's status. The greatness of such children lies in their relationship to Jesus (cf 25:31-46 for the principle of receiving Jesus in receiving His "little ones"). One application of this principle may be church leaders accepting the "average" Christian, especially the youth, as their equal.

JESUS WARNS ABOUT CAUSING OTHERS TO SIN (18:6-11)

Jesus has some stern words about those who cause others to sin. It can result in their damnation.

Matt. 18:6 Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a large millstone around his neck, and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.

Whoever causes one of these little ones The little ones here are not necessarily only the less important or the more vulnerable members of the congregation, though what it says here particularly applies to them.

who believe in me to stumble, These sayings are linked together by the words *scandalize* ("cause to sin," verses 6,8,9) and *skandilon* ("offenses" or "stumbling blocks," three times in verse 7). Disciples are vulnerable and stumbling blocks are a real danger.

The transition from the child, who formed the illustration in vs 2-4 to the little ones is now complete. Similar language is used of Jesus disciples in 10:42 and 11:25, and it will be taken up with *the least* of 25:40,45. This is how they appear in the world's eyes, weak and insignificant.

it would be better for him to have a large millstone around his neck, and to be drowned in the

depths of the sea. Anyone who causes a stumbling block for a believer it would be better that he have a quick drowning, than the judgment that God has in store.

Matt. 18:7 Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For it is necessary for the stumbling blocks to come; but woe to the one whom the stumbling block comes!

Woe to the world The world now is the subject of Jesus' condemnation.

because of its stumbling blocks! These are things that causes offense.

For it is necessary for the stumbling blocks to come; but woe to the one whom the stumbling block comes! The offenses will continue as long as we remain in the world..

Matt. 18:8 But if your right hand or foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away; for it is better to enter into life lame or maimed than to have two hands or two feet and to be thrown into the eternal fire.

But if your right hand or foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away; for it is better to enter into life lame or maimed than to have two hands or two feet and to be thrown into the eternal fire. We have virtually the same saying in 5:29,30. It is a warning about things that stumble disciples in their following of Christ.

Matt. 18:9 And if your eye causes you to stumble, take it out and throw it away. For it is better to enter into life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the gehenna of fire.

And if your eye causes you to stumble, An example of things that cause the believer to be offended.

take it out and throw it away. For it is better to enter into life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the gehenna of fire. Notice again the emphasis on things that offend or scandalize believers.

Matt. 18:10 See that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I say to you, that their angels in heaven continually see the face of my Father who is in heaven.

See that you do not despise one of these little ones; To despise the "little ones" shows that a person has missed the concept of true greatness. It is also to part company with God the Father to whom every one is important.

for I say to you, that their angels in heaven continually see the face of my Father who is in heaven. In Daniel 10 and 12:1 angels are spoken of as heavenly representatives of nations and in Revelation 1:20 as representatives of churches. Here we have individuals who have their heavenly representative. Even the least of the little ones has constant access to God.

Matt. 18:11 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost.

Note on a variant reading: This verse is not found in some manuscripts and is omitted or bracketed in many translations (see Luke 19:10). Bruce Metzger notes

There can be little doubt that the words . . . are spurious here, being omitted by the earliest

witnesses representing several different textual types . . . and manifestly borrowed from copyists from Lk 19:10. The reason for the interpolation was apparently to provide a connection between ver. 10 and verses 12-14 (Metzger, p. 36).

THE LOST SHEEP (18:12-14)

Jesus shows God's feeling for those who are lost—comparing them to sheep.

Matt. 18:12 What do you think? If any man has one hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, he will leave the ninety-nine on the mountain, will he not, and go and look for the one that is straying?

What do you think? If any man has one hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, he will leave the ninety-nine on the mountain, will he not, and go and look for the one that is straying? As usual, Jesus draws an example from real life.

Matt. 18:13 And if he finds it, truly I say to you, that he will rejoice over it more than the ninety-nine which did not wander astray.

And if he finds it, truly I say to you, that he will rejoice over it more than the ninety-nine which did not wander astray. The rejoicing is for the lost one found, not the ones still at home.

Matt. 18:14 In the same way, it is not the will of your heavenly Father that any of these little ones should perish.

Note on a variant reading: Some manuscripts read *My heavenly Father* instead of *your heavenly Father*.

In the same way, it is not the will of your heavenly Father that any of these little ones should perish. As God cares for each of these little sheep, so should we. The following verses shows what this means in practice.

THE PROCESS OF CONFRONTING A SINFUL BELIEVER (18:15-17)

Jesus gives a 3 step program on confronting believers who sin.

Matt. 18:15 And if your brother sins [against you,] go and show him his fault, between you and him alone. And if he listens to you, you have gained your brother.

Note on a variant reading: Some manuscripts do not have the words *against you*.

And if your brother sins [against you,] go and show him his fault, between you and him alone. And if he listens to you, you have gained your brother. The reference to “your brother” refers to conduct within the community of believers. The word *you* is singular, referring to one brother who sins against another brother. The disciple is not to ignore the fault of another disciple but rather confront him in love with the hope that he will repent. Notice it is between you and him alone, it is the concern of no one else! This is private confrontation if someone is involved in open, public, serious sin (1 Corinthians 5:11). We convince him of his sin. Love disciplines

Three points need to be emphasized: (1) Do not do it if you enjoy it! (2) The object is to restore your

brother. (3) Prepare to be misunderstood.

Matt. 18:16 But if he does not listen to you, take one or two people with you, so that out of the mouth of two or three witnesses every matter may be established.

But if he does not listen to you, take one or two people with you, so that out of the mouth of two or three witnesses every matter may be established. If he does not listen, the next step is to take someone else with you (see Deuteronomy 19:15). or two people helps check out the validity of the accusation.

Matt. 18:17 But if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen to the church, let him be to you a Gentile and a tax-collector.

And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; The final step is before the congregation. The local assembly has authority over its members. The assembly has power, not the preacher or the pope. The local assembly has power of *its* members, *not* the unsaved.

and if he refuses to listen to the church, If he refuses to listen to the congregation, then he should be avoided by them until he repents. There is unlimited forgiveness for those who repent (Ephesians 4:32). We are to put up with one another and strive for unity.

let him be to you a Gentile and a tax-collector. The gentile and the tax collector were proverbial people whom the good Jews kept their distance. While Jesus accepted both gentiles and tax collectors into His kingdom, He is using this phrase to refer to someone who is ostracized from the congregation—someone who the congregation is to avoid.

THE AUTHORITY OF THE CHURCH (18:18-20)

Jesus lists the authority of the church in this matter of confrontation.

Matt. 18:18 Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on the earth will have already been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will have already been loosed in heaven.

Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on the earth will have already been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will have already been loosed in heaven. In some translations of this verse it sounds like Jesus promised His disciples whatever they bound on earth would be bound in heaven and whatever they loosed on earth would be loosed in heaven. In other words, they had the authority to bind and loose and God would simply back up what they decreed. However, the issue is not quite that simple.

In the Greek text, the words are “future perfect passives” which could be translated “whatsoever you bind on the earth will have already been bound in heaven,” and “whatever you loose on earth will have already been loosed in heaven.” In other words, the heavenly decree comes *before* the earthly decree. This is the language of the law court. Jewish legal issues in Jesus’ day were normally decided in the synagogue community and later by Rabbi’s. Many Jewish people believed the authority of heaven stood behind the earthly judges when they decided a case based upon a correct understanding of God’s law (this process came to be known as “binding and loosing”). Jesus’ contemporaries often envisioned God’s justice in terms of a heavenly court; by obeying God’s law the earthly court ratified the decrees of the heavenly court.

In Matthew 18:15-20 Christians who follow the careful procedures of verses 15-17 may be assured that they have the authority of the court of God when they decide cases. The application is clear: when a person refuses to turn from his sin after loving confrontation, the church by disciplining that individual already recognizes the spiritual reality that was true in God's sight.

Matt. 18:19 Again, truly I say to you, that if two among you on the earth agree about any thing which you ask, it will be done for them by my Father who is in heaven.

Note on a variant reading: Some manuscripts do not have *truly*.

Again, truly I say to you, that if two among you on the earth agree about any thing which you ask, it will be done for them by my Father who is in heaven. This echoes what He has just said. The decisions on earth will be ratified in heaven.

Matt. 18:20 For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in their midst."

For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in their midst." The promise can be applied when only two or three gather in *His* name. When they gather in His name, He is part of the gathering.

UNLIMITED FORGIVENESS (18:21-22)

Jesus shows that forgiveness should be unlimited when it is based upon repentance.

Matt. 18:21 Then Peter came to Jesus and said to him, "Lord how many times shall I forgive my brother who sins against me? Up until seven times?"

Then Peter came to Jesus and said to him, "Lord how many times shall I forgive my brother who sins against me? Up until seven times?" The Rabbi's discussed this issue and concluded three times was sufficient. Peter is being generous in saying seven times.

Matt. 18:22 Jesus answered and said to him, "I tell you, not until seven times, but until seventy seven times."

Jesus answered and said to him, "I tell you, not until seven times, but until seventy seven times." Jesus' reply does away with all limits and calculations. NRSV has seventy seven times following Genesis 4:24.

THE PARABLE OF THE TWO DEBTORS (18:23-35)

Jesus now gives a negative illustration with respect to forgiveness.

Matt. 18:23 For this reason, the kingdom of heaven may be compared to king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves.

For this reason, the kingdom of heaven may be compared to king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. The reason why forgiveness is unlimited is explained in this parable. A certain king

wanted to settle the outstanding accounts of his subjects.

Matt. 18:24 And when he began to settle them, one who owed ten thousand talents was brought to him.

And when he began to settle them, As he is in the process of settling these account a certain man will be brought to him.

one who owed ten thousand talents was brought to him. The talent was the highest form of Greek currency. This would be compared to us saying the man owed a billion dollars.

Matt. 18:25 But since he was not able to pay him back, his lord ordered that he, and his wife, and his children, and everything that he had, be sold to pay back the debt.

But since he was not able to pay him back, his lord ordered that he, and his wife, and his children, and everything that he had, be sold to pay back the debt. Whatever it takes.

Matt. 18:26 And the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, “Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.”

Note on a variant reading: After *saying* some manuscripts have *lord*.

And the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, “Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.” He asks for time to pay back the debt.

Matt. 18:27 And the lord of that slave was moved with compassion and canceled his debt, and released him.

And the lord of that slave was moved with compassion and canceled his debt, and released him. A very generous act.

Matt. 18:28 But that same slave, as he went out, found one of his fellow slaves who owed him one hundred denari; and after seizing that slave he began choking him, saying, ‘Pay back to me that which you owe.’

But that same slave, as he went out, found one of his fellow slaves who owed him one hundred denari; and after seizing that slave he began choking him, saying, ‘Pay back to me that which you owe.’ This slave owed him next to nothing. The second debt has been calculated to be one six hundred thousandth of the first debt.

Matt. 18:29 Then his fellow slave fell down to his knees and pleaded with him, saying, “Have patience with me, and I will pay you back.”

Note on a variant reading: After *fell down* some manuscripts read *at his feet*.

Then his fellow slave fell down to his knees and pleaded with him, saying, “Have patience with me, and I will pay you back.” Sound familiar? Almost word for word of what he said to his master.

Matt. 18:30 But he was not willing; instead, he went away and threw him into the prison, until he paid back that which he owed.

But he was not willing; instead, he went away and threw him into the prison, until he paid back that which he owed. No mercy.

Matt. 18:31 So when his fellow slaves saw what had occurred, they were exceedingly sad, and they went out and told to their lord everything that had happened.

So when his fellow slaves saw what had occurred, they were exceedingly sad, and they went out and told to their lord everything that had happened. The ruler will now hear about it.

Matt. 18:32 Then his lord summoned him and said to him, “Evil slave! I forgave all that you owed, because you pleaded with me.

Then his lord summoned him and said to him, “Evil slave!

I forgave all that you owed, He reminds him of his generosity.

because you pleaded with me. The reason for his mercy is due to the pleading of that slave.

Matt. 18:33 You should you have had mercy on your fellow slave, should you not, just as I also had mercy on you?

You should you have had mercy on your fellow slave, should you not, just as I also had mercy on you? The only natural thing to do. The Greek demands a yes answer to the question.

Matt. 18:34 And his lord was moved with anger, and delivered him over to the tormentors, until he paid back everything that he owed.

And his lord was moved with anger, and delivered him over to the tormentors, until he paid back everything that he owed. The man will learn a tough lesson.

Matt. 18:35 So also my heavenly Father will do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart..

Note on a variant reading After *your heart* some manuscripts have *their trespasses*.

So also my heavenly Father will do to you, Jesus now picks up with last scene of the parable but His interpretation is based on the entire parable.

if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart. Forgiveness must come from the heart. Those who do not forgive should not expect themselves to be forgiven (see Ephesians 4:32). Jesus made the same point in the Lord’s prayer (6:12,14-15). Christians should be characterized by their willingness to forgive one another.

SUMMARY TO CHAPTER 18

As Jesus ministry continues, so does His instruction to His followers. True greatness lies in humbling oneself. Those who wish to be great must be the servant of all.

Jesus has some strong warning about those who would stumble believers. The judgment upon them is great.

The Lord then gives the pattern of confronting an erring believer. We are to approach our fellow believer in a spirit of humility when we confront them. The goal is not punishment but rather restoration.

He then speaks about unlimited forgiveness illustrating it with the parable of the two debtors.