

Matthew 18
Part 1 (1-14)
Lessons on relationships

- I. Humility attributed to greatness (1-6).
- A. Jesus answers the disciples' question on greatness (1-3).
1. Envy and pride are the sources of this question (cf Mk 9:33, 34; Lk 9:46).
 - a. This may have happened immediately after paying of the tax or tribute (cf 17:27).
 - b. They were still looking for an earthly, temporal kingdom (cf 3:2; Lk 17:21).
 2. Self-importance has always been a problem for mankind (cf 20: 20, 21; 23:11; Rom 12:3, 10).
 - a. Possibly they understood the fact that He must die and they were interested in who among them was to be next in line to lead in the coming kingdom.
 - b. Paul has this problem completely solved for all that want to follow acceptably (cf Phil 2:3).

Note: If Jesus wanted to put Peter up as the leader, or the most important of the apostles, this would have been the ideal time to do so. He did not do so!
 3. Jesus sets forth a great lesson using a child as an example for His ambitious apostles.
 - a. Interestingly, He talks of the apostles being converted.
 - b. It means to turn or change (cf Acts 3:19; James 5:19, 20).
 - c. Grown men to become like children. In what way?
 - (1) Humble: Free from the pride and haughtiness we see in adults (cf 1 Cor 14:20).
 - (2) Trust: Complete trust and dependence (cf 1 Pet 2:2).
- B. Jesus directs His disciples to become humble as this little child (4-6).
1. Their child-like humility would show their trust in God (cf Ps 131:1, 2; James 4:10).
 - a. The "greatest" servant of God will have (or develop) this attitude (cf 1 Pet 5:5).
 - b. Verse four answers the question in verse one, e.g., one who is free from personal ambitions.
 2. The "receive" here does not refer to this child, but to all who are child like in spirit.
 - a. A hard lesson for many to grasp is that true greatness doesn't exist in position.
 - b. Being a preacher is a great position, but the word means "servant" (cf 20:27; 23:11).
 3. "Shall offend" means to cause to stumble or fall (cf Lk 17:1; Rom 14:13; 1 Cor 8:9).
 - a. "Believe in me" shows He was referring to His disciples and not the little children.
 - b. Drowning, as punishment, was fairly common among the Greeks and Romans.
- II. Our grave responsibility is to avoid causing another to sin (7-9).

- A. Jesus now moves from a specific offense to more general offenses (7).
 - 1. “Offences” means a stumbling block, or an inducement to cause others to sin (cf Rom 11:9; 14:13; 1 Cor 1:23; 1 Jn 2:10; Rev 2:14).
 - Notice the two “woes” which are contained in this verse.
 - a. The “woe” of this world is the sin all around us (cf Gen 3:6; 2 Sam 12:14; Rom 5:19).
 - b. “Woe” to any who brings a cause of stumbling to others (cf 2 Pet 2:3; Jude 11-13).
 - 2. We are people of free will, to choose between right and wrong.
 - a. We have the obligation to be the best we can be, so we don’t cause another to stumble by our actions (cf 13:41, 42).
 - b. Too many are causing others to do this very thing among us today, i.e., Rubel Shelly, Max Lucado, Jeff Walling, etc.
 - B. Jesus gives a figurative expression of the seriousness of this sin (8, 9).
 - 1. The point is this; it is better to spurn all unlawful pleasures in this life so that the reward might be obtained in the next life.
 - a. Even to the pain of removing a member (figuratively) (cf 5:29, 30).
 - b. We may have to turn against family and friends to try and remain true to God (cf Deut 13:6-8; Matt 14:3, 4).
 - c. If it comes to this we must be willing to endure this type of pain to please God.
 - 2. An everlasting punishment awaits those not willing to make this sacrifice (cf 16:25, 26).
 - a. “Everlasting fire” and “hell fire” await those who prefer to please self in this life.
 - b. Mark adds the thought of an undying worm and an unquenched fire (cf Mk 9:48).
 - c. This illustrates a state of continual decay and an unconsumed burning (cf 25:41, 46; 2 Thess 1:8, 9; Rev 20:15).
- III. God doesn’t want any of these “little ones” to perish (10-14).
- A. Jesus goes back to the same warning of pride against a disciple (10, 11).
 - 1. The “little ones” here are those who have become child like as Christians.
 - a. Popular idea of “guardian angels” for children. Not from this verse.
 - b. Children are “safe”, but those in this passage could be lost (cf 18:14).
 - c. This is simply improper reasoning (cf Gal 4:19; 1 Jn 2:1, 12, 18, 28; 3:7, 18 etc).
 - d. Whatever these angels do, they are doing their work “in heaven” not on earth!
 - 2. Every Christian is important, therefore none should be despised (cf Lk 10:16).
 - a. “Was lost” (past tense) is the condition of all who have become “little ones” (cf Jn 3:17; 10:10; 1 Tim 1:15).
 - b. Jesus came to save, which is another reason the “little ones” shouldn’t be despised.
 - (1) God’s plan.
 - (2) Jesus’ sacrifice.
 - B. Jesus shows the importance of each and every “sheep” (12-14).

1. One out of a hundred is lost (cf Lk 15:4).
 - a. Value is being expressed in this parable.
 - b. Interestingly, each of the 99 had the same inherent value of the one which was lost.
 - c. This teaches us to have compassion rather than to despise (cf Lk 15:5, 23, 24).
2. Those who are able to live a high moral life should not despise those who don't, but rather work diligently to bring them safely into the fold.
 - a. A sheep can wander off from the safety of the fold and possibly wander back again.
 - b. A human who has "gone astray" must be sought and brought back (cf Lk 19:10).
 - c. A child of God can "perish" if they have "gone astray".

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