



Chapter 18

Humility & Forgiveness

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McGee Introduction: The next few chapters do not seem to further advance the movement in Matthew, but they do fill out many of the dark corners which have arisen because of the sudden digression in the kingdom of heaven due to the rejection of the King. Matthew 13 in the Mystery Parables Discourse has given us the overall outline of the kingdom of heaven in this age, but there are still questions to be answered. These chapters are helpful in answering many of them.

Now we find that the new birth is made essential in entering the kingdom.¹

Matthew 18 contains the fourth of five discourses in Matthew's Gospel (compare 5:1–7:27; 10:1–42; 13:1–53; 24:1–25:46). The theme of this discourse is humility. Jesus outlines five reasons that humility is essential: (1) for entrance into the kingdom (vv. 2, 3); (2) for greatness in the kingdom (v. 4); (3) to prevent offenses (vv. 5–11); (4) to carry on proper discipline in the church (vv. 5–20); and (5) for forgiving one another (vv. 21–35).²

Matthew 18:1

At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

It doesn't take a lot of insight to figure that the disciples seem to be on some kind of ego trip. Notice the patience that Jesus has. From Mark's Gospel we learn that Jesus precipitated this conversation by asking the disciples what they had been discussing among themselves earlier (Mark 9:33-34).

Someone has accurately defined humility as "that grace that, when you know you have it, you've lost it!" It has well been said, "True humility is not thinking meanly of oneself; it is simply not thinking of oneself at all."³

ESV: Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? The disciples misunderstand greatness in terms of human endeavor, accomplishment, and status.

McGee: I wonder if you detect a note of fleshly ambition here? It may be that I just have a critical mind, but it seems to me that these men have been talking about this subject, and maybe two or three of them felt that they could reasonably be considered the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. So the Lord did a rather sensational thing.⁴

¹McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:98). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

²The Nelson Study Bible

³Wiersbe, W. W. (1996, c1989). *The Bible exposition commentary*. "An exposition of the New Testament comprising the entire 'BE' series"--Jkt. (Mt 18:1). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

⁴McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:98). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

[Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?] A question to this day among disciples who still classify men in the gospel as to position and rewards contrary to the constant rebuke of Christ (Matthew 18:3-4; Matthew 20:20-28; Matthew 23:8-11; Mark 9:34-37; Luke 9:46-48; Luke 22:24-27). In these scriptures He did not rebuke men for expecting a literal earthly kingdom or for wanting to be in it, but He made it clear that entrance into it and position in it are on a different basis from that of the world.⁵

Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? See also Mark 9:33-41, Luke 9:46-60. By the kingdom of heaven they meant the kingdom which they supposed he was about to set up- his kingdom as the Messiah. They asked the question because they supposed, in accordance with the common expectation of the Jews, that he was about to set up a temporal kingdom of great splendour; and they wished to know who should have the principal offices and posts of honour and profit. This was among them a frequent subject of inquiry and controversy. Mark 9:34 informs us that they had had a dispute on this subject in the way. Jesus, he says, inquired of them what they had been disputing about. Luke 9:47 says, that Jesus perceived the thought of their heart;-an act implying omniscience, for none can search the heart but God, Jeremiah 17:10. The disciples, conscious that the subject of their dispute was known, requested Jesus to decide it, Matthew 18:1. *They were at first silent* through shame, Mark 9:34 but perceiving that the subject of their dispute was known, they came, as Matthew states, and referred the matter to him for his opinion.⁶

The need for humility (v. 1). “Which one of us is the greatest?” was a repeated topic of discussion among the disciples, for we find it mentioned often in the Gospel records. Recent events would have aggravated the problem, particularly with reference to Peter. After all, Peter had walked on the water, had been on the mountaintop with the Lord, and had even had his taxes paid by means of a miracle.

The fact that Jesus had been sharing with the disciples the truth about His coming suffering and death did not affect them. They were thinking only of themselves and what position they would have in His kingdom. So absorbed were the disciples in this matter that they actually *argued* with each other! (Luke 9:46)

The selfishness and disunity of God’s people is a scandal to the Christian faith. What causes these problems? Pride—thinking ourselves more important than we really are. It was pride that led man into sin at the beginning (Gen. 3:5). When Christians are living for themselves and not for others, then there is bound to be conflict and division (Phil. 2:1ff).⁷

Yashanet.com: It is possible that the disciples (who are still in the process of leaning the mysteries of the Kingdom from Yeshua), were thinking in terms of "might" or "wisdom" when they asked this. Yeshua turns this question around to show who the "greatest" really are.

⁵ Dake Study Notes, Dake’s Study Bible

⁶ Barnes’ Notes

⁷ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996, c1989). *The Bible exposition commentary*. "An exposition of the New Testament comprising the entire 'BE' series"--Jkt. (Mt 18:1). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

Spurgeon: He spoke of his abasement, they thought of their own advancement; and that "at the same time." How different at the same moment the Teacher and the disciples! The idea of greatness, and of more or less of it for each one, was interwoven with their notion of a kingdom, even though it might be "the kingdom of heaven." They came unto Jesus; but how could they have the hardihood to ask their lowly Lord a question so manifestly alien to his thought and spirit? It showed their trustfulness, but also displayed their folly.

Matthew 18:2

And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them,

Jesus used a child to help his self-centered disciples get the point. We are not to be *childish* (like the disciples, arguing over petty issues), but rather *childlike*, with humble and sincere hearts.

McGee: What does this tell us? It tells us that the little child came to the Lord without hesitation. In Mark 10:14 the Lord said, "... Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not..." The problem was not in getting the little children to come to Him but in stopping the adults from hindering the little ones in coming to the Lord. This is a lovely picture we have here. Our Lord takes this little child and puts him in the midst of them.⁸

Spurgeon: He did not answer them with words alone, but made his teaching more impressive by an act. He "called a little child unto him." The child came at once, and Jesus "set him in the midst of them." That the child came at his call, and was willingly placed where Jesus wished, a evidence of a sweetness of manner on the part of our Lord. Surely there was a smile on his face when he bade the little one come unto him; and there must have been a charming gentleness in the manner in which he placed the child in the center of the twelve, as his little model. Let us see Jesus and the little child, and the twelve apostles grouped around the two central figures. Thus may the whole church gather to study Jesus, and the childlike character.

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.

Simplicity, innocence, unquestioning acceptance; yielding like a little child. Contrast this with verse 1. Childlikeness, not childishness, is essential to conversion and hence to entrance into the kingdom of God. Children are normally characterized by simplicity, profound trustfulness, and honesty. Such qualities in a man lead him to Christ and conversion.

⁸McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:98). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

[Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven] The condition of entrance into the kingdom to have a part in its administration. Only Christians who have part in the first resurrection will be kings and priests on earth when Christ comes to reign (Romans 8:17-18; 1 Cor. 4:8; 1 Cor. 6:2-3; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 1:6; Rev. 5:10; Rev. 20:4-6; Rev. 22:4-5). Unsaved men will be in the kingdom in the Millennium, but they will not inherit the kingdom and rule it (Isaiah 2:2-4; Isaiah 65:20; Isaiah 66:19-21; Zech. 8:23; Zech. 14:16-21; Rev. 20:7-10). See Seven "Except's".

[converted] Meaning, right about face, or a change of direction, a new walk with God (note, Psalm 19:7; Psalm 51:13; Luke 22:32; Acts 3:19; James 5:19).

[as little children] Without worldly ambitions to be the greatest and without lust for money, power, and fame—become as little children who act among themselves as equals (Matthew 23:5-12).

[enter into the kingdom of heaven] This refers to the eternal aspect of the kingdom, not the present realm of profession in this age, for both tares and wheat and good and bad are now in the kingdom (Matthew 13:11). To enter it and have a part in it eternally one must be converted (John 3:3).

[Except ye be converted] The word "converted," means *changed*, or turned. It means, to change or turn from one habit of life, or set of opinions, to another, James 5:19, Luke 22:32. See also Matthew 7:6, 16:23, Luke 7:9, etc., where the same word is used in the original. It is sometimes referred to that great change called the new birth, or regeneration, Psalms 51:13, Isaiah 9:5; Acts 3:19 but not always. It is a *general* word, meaning any change. The word *regeneration* denotes a particular change—the passing from death to life. The phrase, "except ye be converted," does not imply of necessity that they were not Christians *before*, or had not been born again. It means, that their opinions and feelings about the kingdom of the Messiah must be *changed*. They had supposed that he was to be a temporal Prince. They expected that he would reign as other kings did. They supposed he would have his great officers of state, as other monarchs had. And they were ambitiously inquiring who should hold the highest offices, Jesus told them they were wrong in their views and expectations. No such things would take place. From these notions they must be *turned, changed, or converted*, or they could have no part in his kingdom. These ideas did not fit at all the nature of his kingdom.

[And become as little children] Children are, to a great extent, destitute of ambition, pride, and haughtiness. They are characteristically humble and teachable. By requiring his disciples to be like them, he did not intend to express any opinion about the native moral character of children, but simply that *in these respects* they should become like them. They should lay aside their ambitious views, and pride, and be willing to occupy their proper station—a very lowly one. Mark 9:35 says that Jesus, *before* he placed the little child in the midst of them, told them that "if any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all." That is, he shall be the most distinguished Christian who is the most humble, and who is willing to be esteemed least, and last of all.

To esteem ourselves as God esteems us, is humility. And it cannot be degrading to think of ourselves *as we are*. But pride, or an attempt to be thought of more importance than we are, is foolish, wicked, and degrading.

McGee: This is a verse that has certainly been abused and misunderstood, but remember, the Lord Jesus is talking about *conversion* not *reversion*. Some people think this verse means that you must revert back to your childhood in some unusual fashion or that you are to become juvenile in your actions in order to enter the kingdom of heaven. The Lord is not talking about going back to a former childhood, but rather of going on to a new life. Here our Lord gives logic to the thinking of the disciples as He diverts their attention from the matter of holding an exalted place in the kingdom to that of primary importance; namely, of first being able to secure entrance into that kingdom. This is as radical as John 3:3, "Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." The important thing emphasized in this verse is the new birth. You must become a little child in the sense that you must be born again. When you are born again, you start out spiritually as a child.

Unfortunately, there are many folk who do not recognize their spiritual immaturity. When I was pastoring a large city church, you would be surprised at the number of requests that came to me from so-called new converts who wanted to come and give their testimonies. I feel that it was basically the same thing as the disciples' argument as to who would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Our Lord says that if you have been converted, think of your spiritual age. You are to become a little child. Should a little child get up and blabber out a testimony immediately? Should a little child be an officer in the church? In listing qualifications for the office of bishop in the church, Paul rules out the novice: "Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil" (1 Tim. 3:6). I think that our Lord is saying something like that here.⁹

Unless you change. Greek *strephō* ("turn") can mean inward turning, hence "repent" or "change." KJV renders the phrase, "except ye be converted." The "conversion" needed is not from Judaism but from the sin of self-seeking ambition to be "the greatest" (v. 1). The conversion is not to Christianity or to an "-ism," but to God and relating personally with him through Yeshua the Messiah.¹⁰

Yashanet.com: The full explanation of "being converted" is in verse 4, where Yeshua shows this has to do with humility. As mentioned earlier, Moses is said to be the most humble man to ever live as well as the greatest of the prophets until Yeshua's time.

Spurgeon: The apostles were converted in one sense, but even they needed a further conversion. They needed to be converted from self-seeking to humbleness and content. A little child has no ambitious dreams; he is satisfied with little things; he trusts; he aims not at greatness; he yields to command. There is no entering into the kingdom of heaven

⁹McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:98). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

¹⁰Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Mt 18:3). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

but by descending from fancied greatness to real lowliness of mind, and becoming as little children. To rise to the greatness of grace, we must go down to the littleness, the simplicity, and the trustfulness of childhood. Since this was the rule for apostles, we may depend upon it we cannot enter the kingdom in any less humbling manner. This truth is verified by our Lord's solemnly attesting word, "Verily I say unto you."

Matthew 18:4

Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

[Whosoever] Used 183 times; 73 in the Old Testament and 110 times in the New Testament; it expresses free moral agency and personal and individual sovereignty of action.

All Persons Are Free to Obey or Disobey:

1. God (Matthew 12:50; Mark 3:35)
2. Christ (Mark 8:34; 1 John 3:6,10; 1 John 4:15; 1 John 5:1; 2 John 1:9)
3. The Holy Spirit (Matthew 12:31-32)
4. The Word (Matthew 5:19; 1 John 2:5)
5. Satan (Romans 6:16-23)
6. Sin (John 8:34; 1 John 3:4-15)
7. Civil laws (Romans 13:2)
8. God's conditions of salvation (John 3:15-20; John 4:14; Acts 2:21; Acts 10:43; Romans 9:33; Romans 10:9-13; Rev. 22:17)

[humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven]

The way of greatness in the world is to go up by every means at the expense of all others; the way of the gospel is to go down, to become least and the servant of all, considering the other the better man (Luke 14:11; Luke 18:14; James 4:6,10; 1 Peter 5:3-7; Phil. 2:1-3).

The disciples had become so preoccupied with the organization of Jesus' earthly kingdom that they had lost sight of its divine purpose. Instead of seeking a place of service, they sought positions of advantage. It is easy to lose our eternal perspective and compete for promotions or status in the church. It is difficult to identify with "children"—weak and dependent people with no status or influence.

ESV: Whoever humbles himself like this child. The humility of a child consists of childlike trust, vulnerability, and the inability to advance his or her own cause apart from the help, direction, and resources of a parent.

Spurgeon: In the kingdom of heaven the least is the greatest. The most humble is the most exalted. He that will fulfill the lowest offices for the brethren shall be highest in their esteem. We have need to use endeavors to make ourselves truly lowly in mind; and if, through almighty grace, we succeed in it, we shall take high degrees in the school of love. What a kingdom is this, in which every man ascends by willingly going down!

It is wisdom for a man to humble himself, for thus he will escape the necessity of being humbled. Children do not try to be humble, but they are so; and the same is the case with really gracious persons. The imitation of humility is sickening; the reality is attractive. May grace work it in us!

Matthew 18:5

And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me.

[**whoso**] Used 54 times; 43 times in the Old Testament and 11 in the New Testament It means the same as "whosoever" of note above Matthew 18:4.

[**in my name receiveth me**] Whatever is done to the least believer is done to Christ.

[**And whoso shall receive one such little child**] That is, whoso shall receive and love one with a spirit like this child—one who is humble, meek, unambitious, or a real Christian.

[**In my name**] As a follower of me; or, because he is attached to me. Whoso receives one possessed of my spirit, and who, *because* he has that spirit, *loves* him, loves me also. The word "receive" means, to approve, love, or treat with kindness; to aid in the time of need. See Matthew 25:35-40.

True greatness (see Mk. 9:33–37; Lk. 9:46–48). Any human society is concerned to establish a proper 'pecking order' and the gospels record several disputes among the disciples on this subject. Over against all conventional ideas of status and importance Jesus offered the model of the *little child* (cf. 19:14). The point was not any supposedly childish qualities of innocence or unselfishness but the status of the child at the bottom of the pecking order, subject to grown-up authority, dependent and powerless. To accept this lowest rank (*humble himself*) is to be great, and to treat the least prominent as the most important is to echo the attitude of Jesus (5). Such an attitude is not natural; it involves a radical *change* (lit. 'turn round', conversion).¹¹

Spurgeon: It is no small thing to be able to appreciate humble and lowly characters. To receive one childlike believer in Christ's name is to receive Christ. To delight in a lowly, trustful character is to delight in Christ. If we count it a joy to do service to such persons, we may be sure that we are therein serving our Lord. Those who receive little ones in Christ's name will grow like them, and so in another way will receive Christ into their own souls.

cf. compare
lit. literally

¹¹Carson, D. A. (1994). *New Bible commentary : 21st century edition*. Rev. ed. of: The new Bible commentary. 3rd ed. / edited by D. Guthrie, J.A. Motyer. 1970. (4th ed.) (Mt 18:1). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press.

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.

[offend one of these] Cause to stumble so as to be lost. Cause to fall, or to sin; or who should place anything in their way to hinder their piety or happiness; Matthew 5:29.

[little ones which believe in me] Christ used a little child as an emblem of a true disciple, so now the term here means a disciple.

Children are trusting by nature. They trust adults, and through that trust their capacity to trust God grows. God holds parents and other adults who influence young children accountable for how they affect these little ones' ability to trust. Jesus warned that anyone who turns little children away from faith will receive severe punishment.

[millstone] About 18 inches in diameter and 3 inches thick. Here and in Luke 17:2. This was a mode of punishment by Syrians, Greeks, and Egyptians. Mills anciently were either turned by hand, Matthew 24:41 or by beasts, chiefly by *mules*. These were of the larger kind; and the *original* words denote that it was this kind that was intended. This was one mode of capital punishment practised by the Greeks, Syrians, Romans, and by some other surrounding nations. The meaning is, it would be better for him to die before he had committed the sin. To injure, or to cause to sin, the feeblest Christian, will be regarded as a most serious offence, and will be punished accordingly.

McGee: The word *offend* means "to cause to stumble"; that is, to lead into sin. Jesus warns against it in strong language! It seems to me that what He is doing in this section is making the evangelism of children a divine imperative. He gives top priority to winning the children to Christ. I commend anyone who is working with children today. There is nothing as important as that.

The story is told of Dwight L. Moody concerning his coming home one night after a meeting. His family asked him how many converts he had that night, and he said, "Two and a half." His family said, "Oh, you had two adults and one child who accepted the Lord as Savior." Moody replied, "No, no, two children and one adult accepted the Lord." He continued, "The adult was an old man and he had only half a life to give. He was just half of a convert." The little children are important.

A pastor of a Scottish church turned in his resignation years ago, and as he did so, the elders asked him why. "Well," he replied, "for this past year I've had but one convert, wee Bobby Moffat." Bobby Moffat was the man who opened up Africa to missionary work. It was the biggest year that preacher ever had! In these verses the Lord is putting a great emphasis upon children.¹²

While still in the city of Capernaum, the disciples asked Jesus a question they had undoubtedly been pondering among themselves: Who is the greatest in the kingdom of

¹²McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:99). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

heaven? The disciples were still anticipating an earthly kingdom and wondering what great positions they would have. In response Jesus took a little child (*paidion*), who had no rights according to the Law, and stood him in their midst. He told the disciples a change in their thinking was necessary. Greatness in the kingdom was not based on great works or words, but on childlike humility of spirit.

Jesus' reply indicated they were asking the wrong question. They should have been concerned about serving the Lord, not asking about positions in the kingdom. Their service needed to be directed toward people, for Jesus spoke about welcoming a little child . . . in His name. Little thought was directed in those days toward children, but Jesus did not overlook them. In fact, He gave a stern warning concerning any who might place a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in Him. (Interestingly little children can—and do—believe in Jesus!) Causes . . . to sin translates the verb *skandalisē*, “to offend, or cause to fall,” a verb Matthew used 13 times. It would be better for such an offender to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. A truly humble person does not concern himself with position or power, but is concerned about active service, especially toward those who are most in need.¹³

The example of humility (vv. 2–6, 10–14). The disciples waited breathlessly for Jesus to name the greatest man among them. But He bypassed them completely and called a little child into their midst. This child was the example of true greatness.

True humility means knowing yourself, accepting yourself, and being yourself—your *best* self—to the glory of God. It means avoiding two extremes: thinking *less* of yourself than you ought to (as did Moses when God called him, Ex. 3:11ff), or thinking *more* of yourself than you ought to (Rom. 12:3). The truly humble person does not deny the gifts God has given him, but uses them to the glory of God.

An unspoiled child has the characteristics that make for humility: trust (Matt. 18:6), dependence, the desire to make others happy, an absence of boasting or selfish desire to be greater than others. By nature, all of us are rebels who want to be celebrities instead of servants. It takes a great deal of teaching for us to learn the lessons of humility.

The disciples wanted to know who was greatest *in* the kingdom. But Jesus warned them that, apart from humility, they could not even *enter* the kingdom! They had to be converted—turned around in their thinking—or they would never make it.

It seems that Jesus is, in these verses, blending two concepts: the human child as an example of humility, and the child of God no matter what his age might be. As Christians, we must not only accept the little children for Jesus' sake; but we must also receive *all* of God's children and seek to minister to them (Rom. 14:1ff). It is a serious matter to cause a child to sin or to lead him astray. It is equally as serious to cause another believer to stumble because of our poor example (Rom. 14:13ff; 1 Cor. 8:9ff). True humility thinks of others, not of self.

Jesus explained that we can have four different attitudes toward the children and, consequently, toward true humility. We can seek to *become like the children* (Matt. 18:3–4) in true humility, as to the Lord. Or, we can only *receive them* (Matt. 18:5) because

¹³Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983–c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (2:61). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Jesus told us to. If we are not careful, we will *cause them to stumble* (Matt. 18:6), and even end up *despising them* (Matt. 18:10).

It is a dangerous thing to look down on the children, because God values them highly. When we welcome a child (or a Christian believer), we welcome Christ (Matt. 18:5). The Father cares for them and the angels watch over them (Matt. 18:10). Like the good shepherd, God seeks the lost and saves them; and we must not cause them to perish. If the shepherd goes after an adult sheep, how much more important is it that he protect the lambs!

In these days of child neglect and child abuse, we need to take Christ's warning seriously. It is better to drown with a heavy millstone around one's neck, than to abuse a child and face the judgment of God (Matt. 18:6).¹⁴

ESV: One such child (see vv. 2–4) and **these little ones who believe in me** both refer to Christ's disciples (cf. 10:40–42).

Spurgeon: To bless a little one is to entertain the Savior himself. To set one's self to pervert the simple, or to molest the humble, will be the sure way to a tremble doom.

Little ones which believe in Jesus are specially under his guardian care, and only the desperately malicious will attack them, or seek to make them stumble. Such an evil person will gain nothing, even should he win the easy victory he looks for: he will, on the contrary, be preparing for himself a terrible retribution. It were better for him that the biggest of milestone, such as would be used in a mill worked by an ass, were hanged about his neck, and that he, himself, were then hurled overboard, and drowned in the depth of the sea. He will surely, sink infamously, sink never to rise again. The haters of the humble are among the worst of men, for their enmity is unprovoked. They may hope to rise by oppressing or duping the simplehearted; but such conduct will prove their certain destruction sooner or later. It is the lowly Lord of the lowly who pronounces this condemnation; and he is soon to be the Judge of quick and dead.

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!

One being Judas Iscariot. Ps 41:9 predicts the betrayal, yet this does not take any responsibility off Judas? No! Cf. "Gospel of Judas"? See Appendix A

(Psalm 41:9) Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me.

[must needs be that offences come] Must, as a bitter fountain must send forth bitter water (James 3:11).

¹⁴Wiersbe, W. W. (1996, c1989). *The Bible exposition commentary*. "An exposition of the New Testament comprising the entire 'BE' series"--Jkt. (Mt 18:1). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

Woe unto the world because of offences That is, offences will be the cause of woe, or of suffering. *Offences*, here, mean things that will produce sin; that will cause us to sin, or temptations to induce others to sin. Matthew 5:29.

Stumbling-blocks (*cf.* Mk. 9:42–48; Lk. 17:1–2). These verses are bound together by the Greek word *skandalon* (‘stumbling-block’) and its related verb *skandalizo* (‘to trip up’). The NIV uses ‘cause to sin’ to translate these words, but they are less specific. Anything that gets in the way of effective discipleship is a *skandalon*, an unkind word or a cold shoulder no less than a ‘cause of sin’.

Such stumbling-blocks may come from others (6–7) or from ourselves (8–9). Both are equally serious. We are responsible for our own spiritual health (hence the vivid imagery of vs 8–9 for drastic remedial measures; *cf.* 5:29–30); but also for that of our fellow-disciples, and a quick drowning would be more merciful than the fate deserved by one who hinders *one of these little ones*. This last phrase refers not primarily to children but to disciples in general, who have just been likened to little children. To recognize one another as *little ones*, and therefore as vulnerable, is to accept our pastoral responsibility for each other, as vs 10–20 will explain.¹⁵

It must needs be, etc. That is, such is the depravity of man, that there will be always some attempting to make others sin; some men of wickedness endeavouring to lead Christians astray, and rejoicing when they have succeeded in causing them to fall. Such, also, is the strength of our native corruption, and the force of passion, that our *besetting sins* will lead us astray.

Woe to that man by whom the offence cometh. He who draws others into sin is awfully guilty. No man can be more guilty, life wickedness can be more deeply seated in the heart, than that which attempts to mar the peace, defile the purity, and destroy the souls of others. And yet, in all ages, there have been multitudes, who, by persecution, threats, arts, allurements, and persuasion, have endeavoured to seduce Christians from the faith, and to lead them into sin.

Jesus warned the disciples about two ways to cause “little ones” to sin: tempting them (Matthew 18:7-9) and neglecting or demeaning them (Matthew 18:10-14). As leaders, we are to help young people or new believers avoid anything or anyone that could cause them to stumble in their faith and lead them to sin. We must never take lightly the spiritual education and protection of the young in age and in the faith.¹⁶

cf. compare

NIV New International Version

¹⁵Carson, D. A. (1994). *New Bible commentary : 21st century edition*. Rev. ed. of: The new Bible commentary. 3rd ed. / edited by D. Guthrie, J.A. Motyer. 1970. (4th ed.) (Mt 18:6). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press.

¹⁶ Life Application Notes

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, etc. Matthew 5:29,30. The meaning of all these instances is the same. Temptations to sin, attachments, 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 must be lost.

It is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed-with one eye, etc. It is not meant by this, that when the body shall be raised it will be maimed and disfigured in this manner. It will be perfect. See 1 Corinthians 15:42-44. But these things are said for the purpose of carrying out or making complete *the figure*, or the representation of cutting off the hands, etc. The meaning is, it is better to go to heaven, without enjoying the things that caused us to sin, than to enjoy them here, and then be lost.

Spurgeon: Here our Lord repeats a passage from the Sermon on the Mount. (Mt 5:29,30) Why should he not? Great lessons need to be often taught; especially lessons which involve painful self-denial. It is well when at the close of a man's ministry he can preach the same sermon as at the beginning. Some in these days change continually; Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and for ever.

Temptations and incitements to sin are so dangerous that, if we find them in ourselves, we must at any cost be rid of the causes of them. If escape from these temptations should cause us to be like men who are halt or maimed, or have only one eye, the loss will be of small consequence so long as we enter into life. Better to miss culture through a rigid Puritanism, than to gain all the polish and accomplishments of the age at the expense of our spiritual health. Though at our entrance into the divine life we should seem to have been largely losers by renouncing habits or possessions which we felt bound to quit, yet we shall be real gainers. Our main concern should be to enter into life; and if this should coat us skill of hand, nimbleness of foot, and refinement of vision, as it may, we must cheerfully deny ourselves that we may possess eternal life. To remain in sin and retain all our advantages and capacities will be an awful loss when we are cast into hell fire, which is the sure portion of all who persevere in sinning. A lame, maimed, half-blinded saint is, even on earth, better than a sinner with every faculty fully developed. It is not necessary that hand, or foot, or eye should make us stumble; but if they do, the surgical process is short, sharp, decisive — Cut them off; and cast them from thee, or, pluck it out, and cast it from thee. The half-educated, timid, simpleminded believer, who, to escape the snares of false science, worldly cunning, and courtly pride, has cut himself off from what men call "advantages", will, in the end, prove to have been far wiser than those who risk their souls for the sake of what worldlings imagine to be necessary to human perfecting. The man who believes God, and so is set down as losing his critical eye, is a wiser person than he who by double acumen doubts himself into hell. Two hands, two feet, and two eyes will be of small advantage if cast into everlasting fire. Let the reader note that the terrible terms here employed are not the creation of the dark dreams of mediaeval times, but are the words of the loving Jesus.

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.

[it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire] Would it not be better to do this literally than to spend eternity in hell? The whole idea is to get rid of offending members that constantly cause sin.

[hell fire] Greek: *gehenna* (GSN-1067), the eternal hell (Luke 12:5, note). How inconsistent to teach such statements refer to the grave, for all people go to graves at death, but only the wicked go to gehenna. The 12th time in Matthew Jesus mentions eternal hell fire and punishment for the wicked (Matthew 5:22,29,30; Matthew 7:19; Matthew 8:12; Matthew 10:28; Matthew 11:23; Matthew 13:30,40-42,49-50; Matthew 16:18; Matthew 18:8-9; Matthew 22:13; Matthew 23:15; Matthew 24:51; Matthew 25:30-46).

Into hell fire. It is implied in all this, that if their beloved sins are not abandoned, the soul must go into everlasting fire. This is conclusive proof that the sufferings of the wicked will be eternal. Mark 9:44, Mark 9:46, Mark 9:48.

We must remove stumbling blocks that cause us to sin. This does not mean to cut off a part of the body; it means that any person, program, or teaching in the church that threatens the spiritual growth of the body must be removed. For the individual, any relationship, practice, or activity that leads to sin should be stopped. Jesus says it would be better to go to heaven with one hand than to hell with both. Sin, of course, affects more than our hands; it affects our minds and hearts.¹⁷

The cost of humility (vv. 7–9). The truly humble person helps to build up others, not to tear them down. He is a stepping-stone, not a stumbling block. Therefore, anything that makes me stumble must be removed from my life, for if it is not, I cause others to stumble. Jesus had uttered similar words in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:29–30). Paul used the eye, hand, and foot to illustrate the mutual dependence of members of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:14–17).

Humility begins with self-examination, and it continues with self-denial. Jesus was not suggesting that we maim our bodies, for harming our physical bodies can never change the spiritual condition of our hearts. Rather, He was instructing us to perform “spiritual surgery” on ourselves, removing anything that causes us to stumble or that causes others to stumble. The humble person lives for Jesus first and others next—he puts himself last. He is happy to deprive himself even of good things, if it will make others happy. Perhaps the best commentary on this is Philippians 2:1–18.¹⁸

¹⁷ Life Application Notes

¹⁸ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996, c1989). *The Bible exposition commentary*. "An exposition of the New Testament comprising the entire 'BE' series"--Jkt. (Mt 18:1). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

ESV: drowned in the depth of the sea . . . foot causes you to sin, cut it off . . . eye causes you to sin, tear it out. Jesus uses hyperbole (intentional overstatement) to emphasize the necessity of rigorous self-discipline and radically removing sin from the disciple's life before it leads to judgment; see note on 5:29–30. The Greek for **hell** in 18:9 is *gehenna*, a name derived from the Valley of the Son of Hinnom near Jerusalem (cf. 2 Kings 23:10; Jer. 7:31; 19:2; etc.), where rubbish was constantly burned so that it came to be seen as a metaphor for the **fire** of hell (cf. Matt. 3:12; Rev. 20:15; etc.).¹⁹

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.

Biblical support for the concept of guardian angels (at least kids). Heb 1:14, only the saved have guardian angels? [vs. “His Angel” = His Spirit; Acts 12:15?] Don’t pray to them, nor thank them, thank the Lord!

(Hebrews 1:14) Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?

The Nature of Angels

- Always appear in human form:
 - Sodom and Gomorrah
 - Resurrection; Ascension
 - Spoke, took men by hand, ate meals
- Capable of direct physical combat
 - Passover in Egypt
 - Slaughter of 185,000 Syrians
- [*Demons always seek embodiment*]

[angels] Angels minister to each believer (Hebrews 1:14; Psalm 34:7). See The Spirit World.

[behold the face of my Father which is in heaven] See God's face now, as all believers will in eternity (Rev. 22:4-5). Seeing the face is an idiom of personal presence (Esther 1:14; 2 Kings 14:8)

ESV: The heavenly Father uses angels to care for his childlike disciples (cf. Heb. 1:14), but **their angels** does not imply that each disciple has one assigned “guardian angel.” **always see the face of my Father.** These angels do, however, have continuous and open communication with God.

¹⁹ ESV Study Bible

Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones, etc. That is, one who has become like little children-or, a Christian. Jesus then proceeds to state the reason why we should not despise his feeblest and obscurest follower. That reason is drawn from the *care* which God exercises over them. The first instance of that *care* is, that *in heaven their angels do always behold his face*. He does not mean, I suppose, to state that every good man has his guardian angel, as many of the Jews believed; but that the angels were, *in general*, the guards of his followers, and aided them, and watched over them, Hebrews 1:14.

Do always behold the face of my Father, etc. This is taken from the practice of earthly courts. To be admitted to the presence of a king; to be permitted to see his face continually; to have free access at all times, was deemed a mark of peculiar favour, 1 Kings 10:8, Esther 1:14 and was esteemed a security for his protection. So, says our Saviour, we should not despise the obscurest Christians, for they are ministered to by the highest and noblest of beings; beings who are always enjoying the favour and friendship of God.

Our concern for children must match God's treatment of them. Certain angels are assigned to watch over children, and they have direct access to God. These words ring out sharply in cultures where children are taken lightly, ignored, or aborted. If their angels have constant access to God, the least we can do is to allow children to approach us easily in spite of our far too busy schedules.

Their angels in heaven are constantly seeing the face of my Father. The imagery recalls Oriental court ceremony. The verse does not say that each believer has a guardian angel, but that recent believers as a group have angels in heaven. The apocryphal book of Tobit (c. 300 B.C.E.) speaks of guardian angels; Daniel and Zechariah mention angels of particular countries. The disciples praying for Kefa thought that the knock at the door was that of "his angel" (Ac 12:15), but their ideas were not necessarily correct. There may be guardian angels, but Scripture does not prove it. Angels have many functions in relation to believers: ministering to God on their behalf (MJ 1:14), protecting them (Psalm 91:11, Mt 4:6), overseeing their worship (1C 11:10), in judgment separating them from the wicked (Mt 13:41, 24:31). Their function here is not stated.²⁰

Yashanet.com: This could be a reference to "guardian angels," a belief that seemed to have been held by Yeshua's disciples as seen in Acts 12:15. As you learn in a Revelation study, there also seem to be angels assigned to Israel and to the nations of the world.

Spurgeon: The humble in heart, though judged to be fools among the ungodly, must not be so judged of by us. Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones. We must see to it that we never look down on them with the pit, which is akin to contempt. They are very dear to God: they are cared for by angels, ay, by the presence angels who dwell near the eternal throne. Their angels are not in the rear rank, but in heaven do always behold the face of the Father. The highest courtiers of glory count it their honor to

²⁰Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Mt 18:10). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

watch over the lowly in heart. Those who are servants to poor saints and little children are allowed free entrance to the King: what must he think of his little ones themselves?

Nay, this is not all. Jesus himself cares for the poorest and neediest. Yes, he came to save that which was lost. How dare we then be proud, and despise a child because of its youth, or a man because of his poverty, or his want of intelligence? The angels and the angels' Lord care for the most despised of our race; shall not we?

Matthew 18:11

For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.

The point is that the one lost was received with joy upon its return.

For the Son of man, etc. This is a second reason why we should not despise Christians, for the Son of man came to seek and save them. He came in search of them when lost; he found them; he saved them. It was the great object of his life; and though obscure and little in the eye of the world, yet that cannot be worthy of contempt which the Son of God sought by his toils and his death.

That which was lost. Property is *lost* when it is consumed, mislaid, etc.-when we have no longer the use of it. Friends are lost when they die-we enjoy their society no longer. A wicked and profligate man is said to be lost to virtue and happiness. He is useless to society. So all men are lost. They are wicked, miserable wanderers from God. They are lost to piety, to happiness, and heaven. These Jesus came to save by giving his own life a ransom, and shedding his own blood that they might be recovered and saved.

This parable is different from the parable of the lost sheep in Luke 15. The key to this parable is the word *save*. In Luke 15 the emphasis is upon *finding* the lost, and in Matthew 18 it is upon *saving* the lost.

Matthew 18:12

How think ye? if a man have an 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?

[**hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray**] Luke 15:4. Note the effects of finding the one (Matthew 18:13).

ESV: a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray. Here the wandering sheep represents a believer, but in a similar parable in Luke 15:3-7 it is an unbeliever. Jesus draws upon the OT images of God's people as both secure sheep (e.g., Psalm 23; Isa. 53:6; Jer. 13:17; Zech. 10:3; 13:7) and straying sheep (e.g., Ps. 119:176; Jer. 23:1-4; 50:6; Ezek. 34:1-30). Cf. also John 10:7-8; 1 Pet. 5:2-4; Rev. 7:17.

Spurgeon: We may not even think harshly of wandering ones. He who would not have

us despise the little will not have us neglect the lost. Nay, the lost are to have special consideration. Is not the owner of a flock for the moment more concerned about the one astray, than the ninety and nine which are safe? The lost one is not better than any one of the others, but it is brought into prominence by its condition. It is not to the shepherd the object of deserved blame, much less of contempt; but his main thought is sympathy with its danger, and the fear that it may be destroyed before he can find it. To save it, he makes a mountain journey, in person, neglecting the large flock in comparison with his care of the one. This is good argument for despising none — not only of the least, but of the most erring. How think ye? Ye who yourselves were once astray, and have been restored by the Shepherd and Bishop of souls, how think ye?

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.

To show still farther the reason why we should not despise them, he introduced a parable showing the joy felt when a thing lost is found. Man 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, 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, See this passage farther explained in Luke 15:4-10.

Spurgeon: In the shepherd's case we read, If so be that he find it; but our great Shepherd fails not, and is not discouraged. He brings back all the sheep that his Father gave him. That sheep which, after wandering, is found, gives the shepherd more immediate joy than all the rest, just because it had caused him more present concern. Its rescue brought it to the front in his mind: he was forced to do more for it than for the ninety and nine, and therefore, estimating its value by what it has cost him, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray. He is not vexed by his loss of time, nor angry because of his extra labor; but his joy is undiluted and overflowing. Evidently the Good Shepherd does not despise the little one because of its straying; for, having restored it, he allots it a chief place in his thoughts of joy; yea, he gets from it, though it be but one, more than from ninety and nine others of the best of his flock.

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.

Are Children Saved?

Are small children saved if they die before the age of accountability? One can build a strong Biblical case supporting this idea (2 Sam 12:23; Rom 7:9);

(Romans 7:9) *For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.*

(2 Samuel 12:19-23) ¹⁹*But when David saw that his servants whispered, David perceived that the child was dead: therefore David said unto his servants, Is the child dead? And they said, He is dead.* ²⁰*Then David arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed himself, and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the LORD, and worshipped: then he came to his own house; and when he required, they set bread before him, and he did eat.* ²¹*Then said his servants unto him, What thing is this that thou hast done? thou didst fast and weep for the child, while it was alive; but when the child was dead, thou didst rise and eat bread.* ²²*And he said, While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live? ²³But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.*

(Job 1:2-3) ²*And there were born unto him seven sons and three daughters.* ³*His substance also was seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she asses, and a very great household; so that this man was the greatest of all the men of the east.*

(Job 42:12-13) ¹²*So the LORD blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning: for he had fourteen thousand sheep, and six thousand camels, and a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand she asses.* ¹³*He had also seven sons and three daughters.*

Job	Beginning	End
Sheep	7,000	14,000
Camels	3,000	6,000
Oxen	500	1,000
She Asses	500	1,000
Children	7	7

Our Lord says that we are not to despise one of the little ones. When one of them dies, his spirit goes immediately to be with God. All little ones go to heaven, my friend. If you have lost a little one, knowing this will be a great comfort to you. They go to heaven, not because they are innocent or because they are yours, but they go to heaven because Jesus *died* for them. That is what our Lord is talking about here. “Don’t offend them; don’t despise them. Let them come to Me. Even if they die, their spirits are going to be right

there in the presence of My Father.” So many parents wonder about the eternal state of their little ones.

King David knew about his. When his son by Bathsheba fell ill, he was greatly exercised about the life of the child. We have the record of this in 2 Samuel 12:15–23. He fasted and wept and lay all night upon the earth. But when the child was dead, he arose, bathed, changed his clothes, and went into the house of God and worshiped. His servants were baffled by his actions, and David’s explanation was this “ ... While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether GOD will be gracious to me, that the child may live? But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.” He had the confidence that one day he would be with him. This is a very precious truth. Many people have lost little ones, and I have lost a little one, also—my firstborn. She is buried here in Altadena in Southern California. Every now and then I go by there and put a few flowers on her grave. She’s not there; she’s with Him, but I go there because that is all I have left of her now. But someday, some golden tomorrow, I’m going to be there in heaven, and I am going to see my little one. She is saved. I have two children—one in heaven and one here on earth. I confess that I have worried more about the one here than the one in heaven. I know where my firstborn is, and someday I’ll go to be with her.

The feeling of our Lord about children is very important to note, especially in our day when there are so many crimes committed against these little ones. Recently, I have been reading about a mother and a stepfather who left a precious little girl along the freeway. How shocking it was to read about this. They just wanted to get rid of her. Some folk believe there is no hell, but I want to say this: If there were no hell, there *ought* to be one for folk like that! And there *is* one. Our Lord uses the strongest language possible in warning us about offenses against children.²¹

ESV: little ones should perish. A dangerous yet real possibility is that apparent followers of Jesus may not be true disciples at all but only professing believers (e.g., Judas Iscariot).

[it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish] God's will is that all men be saved (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9; John 3:16). All who meet His terms will be saved (John 3:16-20; Romans 1:16; Romans 10:9-10; Ephes. 2:8-9; 1 John 1:9).

Just as a shepherd is concerned enough about one lost sheep to go search the hills for it, so God is concerned about every human being he has created (he is “not wanting anyone to perish,” 2 Peter 3:9). You come in contact with children who need Christ at home, at school, in church, and in the neighborhood. Steer them toward Christ by your example, your words, and your acts of kindness.

McGee: He will take care of them until they get to the age of accountability, but you, parent, are responsible for leading them to Christ. I am afraid that our school systems are

²¹McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:99). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

using our children as guinea pigs for humanistic philosophies. Young people are paying an awful price in the contemporary schoolroom. My friend, we have a tremendous responsibility before God in this area.²²

Spurgeon: We may ourselves complete the parallel as to the Shepherd of souls; it is too obvious to need the Savior to rehearse it. In the words before us, our Lord further avers that our Father who is in heaven wills not that any one of these little ones should perish. Hence, we may not despise any of them; nor, indeed, despise any because of their being lowly, and of mean estate. Humble in their own estimate of themselves, and lightly esteemed among men, as the Lord's people often are, and surrounded by cruel foes, as is frequently the case, the heavenly Father wills not their destruction, nor can they be destroyed. We must not treat the poor, the obscure, the little-gifted, as though we thought they would be better out of our way, or as if they were of no consequence whatever, and could be most properly ignored. This is in a certain sense to make them perish; for those whom we regard as nothing become to us as if they were nothing. He who sits in the highest heavens seeks out those who are lowly in heart, and of a contrite spirit because of their wanderings, and he sets great store by them. Our Father in heaven will not have us despise those who are precious in his eyes.

Matthew 18:15

Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

[brother] Anyone of the same religious society.

Moreover if thy brother. The word *brother*, here, evidently means a fellow-professor of religion. Christians are called brethren because they belong to the same redeemed family—having a common Father, God, and because they are united in the same feelings, objects, and destiny.

[tell him his fault between thee and him alone] Three steps in church discipline:

1. Settle all personal differences by yourself (Matthew 18:15; Matthew 5:23-26; Luke 17:3-4; Leviticus 19:17)
2. Confirm your personal efforts by two or three witnesses (Matthew 18:16; 2 Cor. 13:1; Deut. 17:6; Deut. 19:15)
3. Take a stubborn and unforgiving brother before the church and if he refuses all means of reconciliation, then let him be excommunicated (Matthew 18:17). If men will not forgive, neither will God forgive (Matthew 6:14-15; Matthew 18:21-35; Mark 11:25-26; Romans 16:17)

²²McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:100). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Go and tell him his fault. This was required under the *law*, Leviticus 19:17. In the original it is, "go and *reprove* him." Seek an explanation of his conduct; and if he has done wrong, administer a friendly and brotherly reproof. This is required to be done *alone*:

(1.) That he may have an opportunity of explaining it. In nine cases out of ten, where one supposes he has been injured, a little friendly conversation would set the matter right, and prevent difficulty.

(2.) That he may have opportunity of acknowledging his offence, or making reparation, if he has done wrong. Many would be glad of such an opportunity, and it is our duty to furnish it by calling on them.

(3.) That we may admonish them of their error, if they have done an injury to the cause of religion. This should not be blazoned abroad. It can do no good. It does injury. It is what the enemies of religion wish. Christ is often wounded in the house of his friends; and religion, as well as an injured brother, often suffers by spreading such faults before the world.²³

Thou hast gained thy brother. To *gain* means, sometimes, to *preserve*, or to *save*, 1 Corinthians 9:19. Here it means, thou hast preserved him, or restored him, to be a consistent Christian. Perhaps it may include the idea also, thou hast *reconciled* him-thou hast gained him as a Christian brother.

ESV: go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If a matter can be settled without getting others involved, that will keep rumors and misunderstandings from multiplying and will keep the conflict from spreading (cf. Prov. 25:9). **gained.** The ultimate objective is restoration of the offending brother or sister to the path of discipleship.

Matthew 18:16

But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

If he will not hear thee, etc. That is, if he spurns or abuses you, or will not be entreated by you, and will not reform.

Take one or two more. The design of taking them seems to be,

(1.) that he might be induced to listen to them, Matthew 18:17. They should be persons of influence or authority; his personal friends, or those in whom he could put confidence.

(2.) That they might be witnesses of his conduct before the church, Matthew 18:17. The law of Moses required two or three witnesses, Deuteronomy 19:15, 2 Corinthians 13:1, John 8:17.

²³ Barnes' Notes

Two or three witnesses establish a fact in a Jewish court (Deuteronomy 19:15).²⁴

ESV: Evidence of two or three witnesses follows the guideline in Deut. 19:15 and refers to witnesses of the subsequent confrontation described in this verse, not necessarily eyewitnesses to the original offense (Matt. 18:15).

Matthew 18:17

And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell *it* unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

Put him out of the fellowship.

[let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican] Seven New Testament reasons for excommunication:

1. A trespass (Greek: *hamartia* (GSN-266), sin, note, [□]John 1:29) plus an unforgiving spirit (Matthew 18:15-17)
2. False doctrines and offenses contrary to Scripture (Romans 16:17)
3. Hating Christ (1 Cor. 16:22)
4. Disorderly conduct and disobedience (2 Thes. 3:6,14-15)
5. Apostasy (1 Tim. 1:19-20; 1 Tim. 4:1-8; 2 Tim. 3:5; 2 Tim. 4:1-4)
6. Heresy (Titus 3:10; 1 Tim. 6:3-5)
7. Fornication and other gross sins that damn the soul (1 Cor. 5:1-13; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Galatians 5:19-21; Mark 7:21-23; Romans 1:18-32; Col. 5:5-10; 1 Tim. 6:3-5)

[heathen] Greek: *ethnikos* (GSN-1482), pagan, a Gentile. Used only here and in Matthew 6:7. Be a Christian toward him, as you would a stranger whom you would seek to win to Christ, but have no religious communion with him until he repents. Then forgive him, letting his sin be a thing of the past (Matthew 6:14-15; Matthew 18:21-35; 2 Cor. 2:6-11; Galatians 6:1).

[publicans] Tax-gatherers. Used 17 times. They were despised by the Jews, so any reference to being less than this class was the lowest thing that could be said of anyone religious. They were classed with sinners (Matthew 9:10-11; Matthew 11:19; Matthew 21:31-32). Many repented and were baptized (Luke 3:12; Luke 7:29). One of them—Matthew—became an apostle (Luke 5:27-29; Luke 19:1-10).

Barnes: Publicans were men of abandoned character, and the Jews would have no intercourse with them. The meaning of this is, cease to have *religious* intercourse with him, to acknowledge him as a brother. Regard him as obstinate, self-willed, and guilty. It does not mean that we should cease to show kindness to him, and aid him in affliction or trial; for *this* is required towards all men; but it means that we should *disown* him as a Christian brother, and treat him as we do other men not connected with the church. This

²⁴Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Mt 18:16). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

should not be done till all these steps are taken. This is the only way of kindness. This is the only way to preserve peace and purity in the church.

Barnes: Tell it unto the Church. Matthew 16:18. The church may here mean the whole assembly of believers; or it may mean those who are authorized to try such cases—the representatives of the church, or those who act for them. In the Jewish synagogue there was a bench of elders, before whom trials of this kind were brought. It was to be brought to the church, in order that he might be admonished, entreated, and, if possible, reformed. This was, and is always to be, the first business in disciplining an offending brother.

These are Jesus' guidelines for dealing with those who sin against us. They were meant for (1) Christians, not unbelievers, (2) sins committed against *you* and not others, and (3) conflict resolution in the context of the church, not the community at large. Jesus' words are not a license for a frontal attack on every person who hurts or slights us. They are not a license to start a destructive gossip campaign or to call for a church trial. They are designed to reconcile those who disagree so that all Christians can live in harmony.

When someone wrongs us, we often do the opposite of what Jesus recommends. We turn away in hatred or resentment, seek revenge, or engage in gossip. By contrast, we should go to that person *first*, as difficult as that may be. Then we should forgive that person as often as he or she needs it (Matthew 18:21-22). This will create a much better chance of restoring the relationship.

McGee: There are some people who like to smother trouble and cover it up. This is not the way the Lord tells us to handle it. If there is a problem between two believers, it should be worked out in an amiable, peaceful, and quiet manner. If the individuals cannot work things out, take it to a group. If the group cannot work things out, the last resort is to take the problem to the church as the final authority. The Lord says in conclusion, concerning this subject:²⁵

Here and in 16:18 are the only references to “the church” in all of the four Gospels. Government is charged with jurisprudence in civil matters. In the ecclesiastical arena, each local congregation must assume the exercise of its own discipline. Jesus provided a program whereby the local assembly could protect its own sanctity and admonish an erring brother. The system involved three possible encounters with a brother overtaken in a fault. After the individual approach by one brother, one or two additional brethren are to be taken to confront the wayward brother. Only if this failed was the matter to be brought before the entire congregation. Furthermore, this last action involved two steps, the first being an appeal and admonition from the church, and the second, the exercise of the ban. The entire procedure is designed to prevent this exclusion from the church. Few cases would ever proceed beyond the first and second provisions. Even when a case demanded the ultimate drastic action of exercising the ban, the intent was redemptive. The disbarment from fellowship would hopefully awaken the rebellious person. On the other hand, the reputation of God's people would be protected if no disposition for

²⁵McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:100). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

repentance was forthcoming in the erring brother (cf. 1 Cor 5:1-13; 2 Cor 2:5-11; Gal 6:1, 2).²⁶

ESV: If the offending party of vv. 15–16 will not repent after the matter has been brought before the entire **church**, then he or she is to be excluded from the fellowship and thought of as an unbeliever. **Gentile** and **tax collector** describes those who are deliberately rebellious against God.

Matthew 18:18

Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

The authority given to Peter (Mt 16:19) is now given to all of them. Ex: 1 Cor 5 deals with man and incest. In the second letter where this person had repented he admonishes the Church to forgive him (1 Cor 5:9-13 vs. 2 Cor 2:5-11). The person was bound to the ways of the world and forgiven or freed from that in 2 Cor 2.

[bind on earth shall be bound in heaven] Binding:

1. Men with chains (Matthew 12:29; Matthew 14:3; Matthew 22:13; Mark 5:3; Acts 9:2,14,21)
2. Tares in bundles (Matthew 13:30)
3. Men by Satan's power (Luke 13:16)
4. Men with obligations (Acts 20:22)
5. Men in marriage bonds (Romans 7:2; 1 Cor. 7:27,39)
6. Satan and angels in chains (Rev. 9:14; Rev. 20:2)
7. Animals in chains (Matthew 21:2)
8. Men by God's power (Matthew 16:19; Matthew 18:18)

[loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven] Loosing:

1. Infirmities (Luke 13:12-16; Mark 7:35)
2. Satan and angels from chains (Rev. 9:14; Rev. 20:3,7)
3. Men from chains and prison (Acts 16:26; Acts 22:30; Acts 24:26)
4. Men from sin (Rev. 1:5)
5. Men from bonds of death (Acts 2:24)
6. Marriage bonds (1 Cor. 7:27)
7. Satanic powers (1 John 3:8)
8. Animals (Mark 11:2-4)
9. Earth from bondage and the curse (2 Peter 3:10-13; Romans 8:21)
10. Men by God's power (Matthew 16:19; Matthew 18:18).

One can see from these examples of binding and loosing that it means more than declaring something lawful or unlawful by preaching. It also means to confirm the truth by power as Christ and the apostles did. See Matthew 18:18, refs.

²⁶ Believer's Study Bible

This *binding* and *loosing* refers to the decisions of the church in conflicts. Among believers, there is no court of appeals beyond the church. Ideally, the church's decisions should be God-guided and based on discernment of his Word. Believers have the responsibility, therefore, to bring their problems to the church, and the church has the responsibility to use God's guidance in seeking to resolve conflicts. Handling problems God's way will have an impact now and for eternity.²⁷

ESV: whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven. Peter's foundational authority is extended to the entire community of disciples, giving them the authority to declare the terms under which God forgives or refuses to forgive the sin of wayward disciples.

Matthew 18:19

Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.

The word "again" means "once more" and evidently points to a repeat of the truth of Matthew 18:18, that every believer can have power to bind and loose. It is expressed here in another form: anything asked for by any two in agreement shall be done.

Also arises the concept of where two or three shall agree. The word "agree" is "symphonize."

Again I say unto you, That if two of you, etc. This is connected with the previous verses. The connexion is this: The obstinate man is to be excluded from the church, Matthew 18:17. The care of the church-the power of admitting or excluding members-of organizing and establishing it-is committed to you, the apostles, Matthew 18:18. Yet there is not need of the whole to give validity to the transaction. When two of you agree, or have the same mind, feelings, and opinion, about the arrangement of affairs in the church, or about things desired for its welfare, and shall ask of God, it shall be done for them. See Acts 1:14-26, 15:1-29. The promise *here* has respect to the apostles in organizing the church. It cannot, with any propriety, be applied to the ordinary prayers of believers. Other promises are made to them, and it is true that the prayer of faith will be answered; *but that is not the truth taught here.*²⁸

Yashanet.com: Many critics will point to the countless unanswered prayers of people, as evidence that Yeshua's statement isn't true. Many answers are given in response to this challenge, however the words of scripture can't be ignored:

James 4:3-6 - *Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. Do ye think that the*

²⁷ Life Application Notes

²⁸ Barnes' Notes

scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy? But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.

The adultery James speaks of, as the source of prayer not being answered, is spiritual adultery, as seen by his description of it being "*friendship of the world.*" As said throughout this study, the way of God is the light of Torah. Outside of Torah is darkness - "the way of the world."

We like to think that we're "out of the dark ages" with regard to receiving spiritual light from God. However, with the overwhelming number of people in the world today rejecting either the written Torah (in the case of most of Christianity) or Yeshua, the walking Torah, (in the case of most of Judaism), is it any wonder that God's blessings are not as prevalent as they should be?

"James" (Jacob) says, "*We ask amiss.*" Amiss of what? Amiss of the will of God, which is revealed through His Torah. He reiterates that God's grace (answer to prayer) is given to the humble. Humility comes from denying ourselves and accepting His Torah. Spiritual pride/arrogance comes from rejecting Torah in favor of some other religious belief that allows for "picking and choosing" from the commandments of God.

Some would here interject, "What about the Holy Spirit? Doesn't the Spirit reveal to us the will of God? The answer is Yes - but the will of God that the Spirit will reveal IS His Torah. The Spirit will make clear to us the deeper meaning of the Torah and how to apply it in our lives. The Spirit will never lead anyone against God's Torah. If someone "prays to the Spirit" and is told that God's Torah is not for today, they are hearing from a spirit that is not of God.

Paul gives the same message as "James," - If you consider yourself not subject to God's Torah, you are of the world, and not of the Spirit:

Romans 8:7 - *Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.*

Spurgeon: Thus the Savior sets his seal upon assemblies of the faithful, even of the smallest kind, not only in their acts of discipline, but in their intercessions. Note how tenderly Jesus speaks of his followers: "If two of you." Poor as you are, if two of you agree in prayer on earth, "my Father which is in heaven" will hearken to your pleading. Prayer should be matter for previous consideration, and persons about to join in prayer should "agree as touching anything that they shall ask." Then they come together with an intelligent design, seeking a known blessing, and agreeing to combine their desires and their faith in reference to the one chosen object. Two believers united in holy desire and solemn prayer will have great power with God. Instead of despising the verdict of so small a gathering, we ought to respect it, since the Father does so.

Note the power of combined prayer. There is no excuse for giving up prayer-meetings while there are two praying people in the place; for two can prevail with God. Of course, more is needed than a cold agreement that certain things are desirable; there must be importunity and faith.

Matthew 18:20

For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

Not “in” my Name, but “unto” my Name. A little more emphatic reference. [Ancient rabbinical teaching noted that where two or three are sitting in judgment, the *Shekinah* is in the midst of them.]

[two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them]

Not only can two condemn a man in a church court of trial (Matthew 18:16-17), and two can move God to get whatever they ask and agree upon in prayer, but two can constitute a local church with God's presence assured in Christ.

[there am I in the midst of them] A clear reference to the omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence of Christ among believers; consequently, proof of His Deity.

Nothing could more clearly prove that Jesus must be everywhere present, and, of course, be God. Every day, perhaps every hour, two or three, or many more, may be assembled in every city or village in the United States, in England, in Greenland, in Africa, in Ceylon, in the Sandwich Islands, in Russia, and in Judea—in almost every part of the world—and in the midst of them all is Jesus the Saviour. Millions thus at the same time, in every quarter of the globe, worship in his name, and experience the truth of the promise that he is present with them. It is impossible that he should be in all these places, and not be God.

Jesus looked ahead to a new day when he would be present with his followers not in body, but through his Holy Spirit. In the body of believers (the church), the sincere agreement of two people is more powerful than the superficial agreement of thousands, because Christ's Holy Spirit is with them. Two or more believers, *filled with the Holy Spirit*, will pray according to God's will, not their own; thus their requests will be granted.

McGee: “If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing.” Does He mean that if we agree on *anything*, He will hear us? Yes, but notice the condition: “where two or three are gathered together in *my name*.” He will hear any request which is given in Christ's name—that is, a request that Christ Himself would make. Or, we could say that asking in His *name* is asking in His *will*.

“Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” is the simplest form of church government. As verse 19 is a new basis for prayer, verse 20 is the new basis for the visible church. The early church began there: “And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42).²⁹

‘If your brother sins’. These verses explain how the principle of vs 10–14 should work out in practice. They are addressed to *you* (singular), the individual disciple who is aware of his fellow-disciple's sin and accepts (as vs 10–14 demand) that it is his

²⁹McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:100). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

responsibility to do something about it. The words *against you* (15) were probably not part of the original text and unhelpfully restrict the scope. Response to personal injury will come into focus in vs 21–35 here it is the *brother's* danger, not any effect of his sin on me personally, which is at issue.

The aim must be to *win your brother over*, restoration, not punishment. To that end, the minimum of publicity must be used. The erring brother must be approached alone or at most with *one or two others*. Only if that fails is it necessary to involve *the church* (the local congregation); it is to be expected that the offender will *listen* to the united conviction of his fellow-disciples. If he does not, the only course open remains a severing of fellowship, though presumably still with the hope that this will jolt him into repentance and restoration.

The congregation's right, and responsibility, to make such a serious decision rests on the same principle of delegation which was applied to Peter in 16:19, but now the whole congregation shares this authority (*you* in 18:18 is plural). See the comments on 16:19. The idea that the church *on earth* may bring the authority of *heaven* to bear on their situation is continued in vs 19–20, where the continued presence of Jesus among his people ensures that their united prayer will be effective. In the context this refers primarily to prayer for the 'brother who sins', but the principle may also be applied more widely. It is not, of course, an automatic guarantee that any petition will be granted, but only such as are compatible with gathering *in my name*.³⁰

JNTC: Contrary to most Christian interpreters, I take the *p.shat* ("plain sense") of this passage to be dealing with making legal judgments and *halakhah*, not prayer.

The words rendered "**prohibit**" and "**permit**" (v. 18) are, literally, "bind" and "loose." These terms were used in first century Judaism to mean "prohibit" and "permit," as is clear from the article, "Binding and Loosing," in the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, 3:215:

"BINDING AND LOOSING (Hebrew *asar ve-hittir*) ... Rabbinical term for 'forbidding and permitting.' ...

"The power of binding and loosing was always claimed by the Pharisees. Under Queen Alexandra the Pharisees, says Josephus (*Wars of the Jews* 1:5:2), 'became the administrators of all public affairs so as to be empowered to banish and readmit whom they pleased, as well as to loose and to bind.' ... The various schools had the power 'to bind and to loose'; that is, to forbid and to permit (Talmud: Chagigah 3b); and they could bind any day by declaring it a fast-day (... Talmud: Ta'anit 12a ...). This power and authority, vested in the rabbinical body of each age or in the Sanhedrin, received its ratification and final sanction from the celestial court of justice (Sifra, Emor, ix; Talmud: Makkot 23b).

"In this sense Jesus, when appointing his disciples to be his successors, used the familiar formula (Matt 16:19, 18:18). By these words he virtually invested them with the same authority as that which he found belonging to the scribes and Pharisees who 'bind heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but will not move them with one of their fingers'; that is, 'loose

³⁰Carson, D. A. (1994). *New Bible commentary : 21st century edition*. Rev. ed. of: The new Bible commentary. 3rd ed. / edited by D. Guthrie, J.A. Motyer. 1970. (4th ed.) (Mt 18:15). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press.

them,’ as they have the power to do (Matt 23:2–4). In the same sense in the second epistle of Clement to James II (‘Clementine Homilies,’ Introduction), Peter is represented as having appointed Clement as his successor, saying: ‘I communicate to him the power of binding and loosing so that, with respect to everything which he shall ordain in the earth, it shall be decreed in the heavens; for he shall bind what ought to be bound and loose what ought to be loosed as knowing the rule of the church.’ ”

The article notes that a very different, non-Jewish interpretation, equating binding and loosing with remitting and retaining sins (Yn 20:23), was adopted by Tertullian and all the church fathers, thus investing the head of the Christian Church with the power to forgive sins, referred to on the basis of Mt 16:18 as the “key power of the Church.” Needless to say, I reject this later understanding which bears no relationship to the Jewish context.

The usual Christian view of vv. 19–20 is that it defines a “Messianic *minyan*” not as the quorum of ten established by *halakhah* (Talmud, Sanhedrin 2b) for public synagogue prayers, but as **two or three** assembled in Yeshua’s name, plus Yeshua himself, who is **there with them** (v. 20). The problem with this is that the passage is not about prayer—although it is not wrong to make a *midrash* on it which does apply to prayer (see below and 2:15N). Rather, Yeshua, speaking to those who have authority to regulate Messianic communal life (vv. 15–17), commissions them to establish New Covenant *halakhah*, that is, to make authoritative decisions where there is a question about how Messianic life ought to be lived. In v. 19 Yeshua is teaching that when an issue is brought formally to a panel of two or three Messianic Community leaders, and they render a halakhic decision here on earth, they can be assured that the authority of God in heaven stands behind them. Compare the Mishna:

“Rabbi Chananyah ben-T’radyon said, ‘If two sit together and words of *Torah* pass between them, the *Sh·khinah* abides between them, as it is said, “Those who feared *Adonai* spoke together, and *Adonai* paid heed and listened, and a record was written before him for those who feared *Adonai* and thought on his name” (Malachi 3:16).’ ” (Avot 3:2)

Curiously, the following extract from the Talmud provides a Jewish setting for both my understanding and the traditional Christian one. “How do you know that if ten people pray together the *Sh·khinah* [“manifested divine presence”] is there with them? Because it is said, ‘God stands in the congregation of God’ (Psalm 82:1a) [and a “congregation” must have a *minyan* of at least ten]. And how do you know that if three are sitting as a court of judges the *Sh·khinah* is there with them? Because it is said, ‘In the midst of judges he renders judgment’ (Psalm 82:1b [taking *elohim* to mean “judges”; compare Yn 10:34–36&N]).” (B’rakhot 6a)

Thus, according to vv. 18–20 Yeshua’s other *talmidim* join Kefa (16:19) in replacing “the Levitical *cohanim* and the judge who shall be in those days” (Deuteronomy 17:8–12) as the final earthly repository of halakhic authority. However, the new system was not established instantaneously; for later Yeshua could still advise the Jewish public to obey the *Torah*-teachers and *P·rushim* because they “sit in the seat of Moshe” (23:2–3&N). In

fact, even today, two thousand years later, the new system has hardly been established at all—Messianic communal practice is far more *ad hoc* and makes far less use of received wisdom and established precedents than one might expect.

The unity of subject matter in vv. 15–20 is also seen in the fact that “two or three” is found in both v. 16 and vv. 19–20. Moreover, it is then evident that v. 21 continues the topic begun in v. 15 (how communal Messianic life is to be lived), without what otherwise is an irrelevant digression to another subject (reassurance about prayer).

The following expansion of v. 19 further clarifies its meaning: “To repeat (Greek *kai*, “and, moreover”) [and fortify in other language what I have just said in v. 18], I tell you that if two of you [Messianic community leaders] agree on the answer to any halakhic question or matter of public order that people ask you about, then it [the halakhic decision you make] will be for them [the people who asked the question] as if it had come directly from my Father in heaven.” In v. 20 Yeshua strengthens this statement by promising his own presence and authority in such situations.

Nevertheless, one may regard the traditional Christian understanding of vv. 19–20 as a *drash* in which a prayer context is supplied (by allowable eisegesis, see 2:15N) in a homily reassuring believers that their prayers are “powerful and effective” (Ya 5:16&N).

For a fuller discussion of the role of believers in establishing Messianic Jewish *halakhah* and having authority to interpret the *Torah* for God’s people, based on this key passage of Mattityahu, see my *Messianic Jewish Manifesto*, pp. 146–151.³¹

Honesty (Matt. 18:15–20)

We don’t always practice humility. There are times when, deliberately or unconsciously, we offend others and hurt them. Even the Old Testament Law recognized “sins of ignorance” (Num. 15:22), and David prayed to be delivered from “secret faults” (Ps. 19:12), meaning “faults that are even hidden from my own eyes.” What should we do when another Christian has sinned against us or caused us to stumble? Our Lord gave several instructions.

Keep the matter private. Approach the person who sinned and speak with him alone. It is possible that he does not even realize what he has done. Or, even if he did it deliberately, your own attitude of submission and love will help him to repent and apologize. Above all else, go to him with the idea of winning your brother, not winning an argument. It is possible to win the argument and lose your brother.

We must have a spirit of meekness and gentleness when we seek to restore a brother or sister (Gal. 6:1). We must not go about condemning the offender, or spreading gossip. We must lovingly seek to help him in the same way we would want him to help us if the situation were reversed. The word *restore* in Galatians 6:1 is a Greek medical word that means “to set a broken bone.” Think of the patience and tenderness that requires!

Ask for help from others. If the offender refuses to make things right, then we may feel free to share the burden with one or two dependable believers. We should share the facts as we see them and ask the brethren for their prayerful counsel. After all, it may be that *we* are wrong. If the brethren feel the cause is right, then together we can go to the offender and try once again to win him. Not only can these men assist in prayer and

³¹Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Mt 18:18). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

persuasion, but they can be witnesses to the church of the truth of the conversation (Deut. 19:15; 2 Cor. 13:1).

When sin is not dealt with honestly, it always spreads. What was once a matter between two people has now grown to involve four or five people. No wonder Jesus and Paul both compared sin to leaven (yeast), because leaven spreads.

Ask the church for help. Remember, our goal is not the winning of a case but the winning of a brother. The word *gained* in Matthew 18:15 is used in 1 Corinthians 9:19–22 to refer to winning the lost; but it is also important to win the saved. This is our Lord’s second mention of the church (see Matt. 16:18), and here it has the meaning of a local assembly of believers. Our Lord’s disciples were raised in the Jewish synagogue, so they were familiar with congregational discipline.

What started as a private problem between two people is now out in the open for the whole church to see. Church discipline is a neglected ministry these days, yet it is taught here and in the epistles (see 1 Cor. 5; 2 Thes. 3:6–16; 2 Tim. 2:23–26; Titus 3:10). Just as children in the home need discipline, so God’s children in the church need discipline. If by the time the matter comes to the whole church, the offender has not yet changed his mind and repented, then he must be disciplined. He cannot be treated as a spiritual brother, for he has forfeited that position. He can only be treated as one outside the church, not hated, but not held in close fellowship.

Keep the local church spiritual (vv. 18–20). It is important that the local assembly be at its best spiritually before it seeks to discipline a member. When a church disciplines a member, it is actually examining itself and disciplining itself. This is why our Lord added these words about authority, prayer, and fellowship. We cannot discipline others if we ourselves are not disciplined. Whatever we loose (permit) in the assembly must first have been permitted by God (see the comments on Matt. 16:19).

The church must be under the authority of God’s Word. Church discipline does not refer to a group of Christian policemen throwing their weight around. Rather, it means God exercising His authority in and through a local body, to restore one of His erring children.

Not only must there be the authority of the Word, but there must also be prayer (Matt. 18:19). The word *agree* in the Greek gives us our English word “symphony.” The church must agree in prayer as it seeks to discipline the erring member. It is through prayer and the Word that we ascertain the will of the Father in the matter.

Finally, there must be fellowship (Matt. 18:20). The local church must be a worshiping community, recognizing the presence of the Lord in their midst. The Holy Spirit of God can convict both the offender and the church, and He can even judge sin in the midst (Acts 5).

There is a desperate need for honesty in the church today. “Speaking the truth in love” is God’s standard (Eph. 4:15). If we practice love without truth, it is hypocrisy. But if we try to have truth without love, it may be brutality. Jesus always taught the truth in love. If the truth hurts, it is because “Faithful are the wounds of a friend” (Prov. 27:6).

But keep in mind that *humility* must come before *honesty*. A proud Christian cannot speak the truth in love. He will use a brother’s faults as a weapon to fight with and not as a tool to build with. The result will be only greater disharmony and disagreement.

The first internal problem of the New Testament church was dishonesty (Acts 5). Ananias and Sapphira tried to make the church members believe that they were more

spiritual than they really were. They lied to themselves in thinking they could get away with the masquerade; they lied to their fellow Christians and the church leaders; and they tried to lie to the Holy Spirit. The result was judgment and death. God may not kill every hypocrite in the church today, but hypocrisy certainly helps to kill the church.

The second internal problem (Acts 6) had to do with people being neglected. The members and leaders faced this problem with truth and love, and the result was blessing. It takes both truth and love, and both must be used with humility.³²

ESV: there am I among them. Jesus affirms that he will be divinely present among his disciples as they seek unity in rendering decisions, which is rightly understood also as an affirmation of omnipresence and therefore of deity.

Yashanet.com: Exactly how is Yeshua "in our midst" if He is presently seated at the right hand of the Father? Does this mean He is simply "looking down at us?" Or is there a literal presence in the "spiritual realm" that "surrounds" us here on earth - and if so, how does this all work?

Although Yeshua's statement can, in a simple sense, be accepted "on faith," the concept of God's presence within creation is actually a very complex area of Bible study.

Matthew 18:21

Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?

Till seven times? The Jews taught that a man was to forgive another three times, but not the fourth. Peter more than doubled this, and asked whether forgiveness was to be exercised to so *great* an extent.

Matthew 18:22

Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.

Forgiveness. One of the prerequisites for forgiveness is repentance on the part of the person who is to be forgiven. Forgiveness is always based on the repentance of the offender. The underlying idea is that we should forgive as God has forgiven us (Eph 4:32; Col 3:13).

Also we should note that Israel's history is divided up into 490 year segments where God would forgive Israel for 490 years and then bring judgment. See appendix B for additional information and chart.³³

³²Wiersbe, W. W. (1996, c1989). *The Bible exposition commentary*. "An exposition of the New Testament comprising the entire 'BE' series"--Jkt. (Mt 18:15). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

³³Chuck Missler, Notes on Matthew, khouse.org

The rabbis taught that people should forgive those who offend them—but only three times. Peter, trying to be especially generous, asked Jesus if seven (the “perfect” number) was enough times to forgive someone. But Jesus answered, “Seventy-seven times,” meaning that we shouldn’t even keep track of how many times we forgive someone. We should always forgive those who are truly repentant, no matter how many times they ask.

McGee: That is four hundred and ninety times! By that time, things might be pretty well worked out. If not, both of them would have reached old age to the extent that it wouldn’t amount to much anyway! Four hundred and ninety times is going the limit—and that is the point our Lord is making.³⁴

Matthew 18:23

Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants.

[take account] Greek: *sunairo* (GSN-4868), to compare accounts. Translated reckon in Matthew 18:24; Matthew 25:19.

Barnes: **Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened**, etc. This phrase has reference to the church, or to the way in which God will deal with his people. It shall be in my church as it was with a certain king; or, *God* will deal with the members of his church as a certain king did with his servants. Matthew 3:2. This *parable* Matthew 13:3 is related to show the duty of forgiving others. It is not necessary to suppose that it was a *true* narrative, but only that it illustrated the truth which he was teaching. At the same time, it may be true that such an occurrence really took place.

Barnes: **Would take account of his servants.** To take account means to reckon, to settle up the affairs. *Servants* here means, probably, *petty princes*, or, more likely, *collectors of the revenue* or *taxes*. Among the ancients, kings often *farmed out*, or sold for a certain sum, the taxes of a particular province. Thus, when Judea was subject to Egypt, or Rome, the kings frequently *sold* to the high priest the taxes to be raised from Judea, on condition of a much smaller sum being paid to them. This *secured* to them a *certain sum*, but it gave occasion to much oppression in the collection of the taxes. It is probable that some such persons are intended by the word servants.

Matthew 18:24

And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents.

“...**talent**”: A very valuable ancient coin. Talent of silver contained 3,000 shekels (Ex 38:25,26) and was equal to 94 3/7 lbs. *avoirdupois*. The Greek talent, however, as in the

³⁴McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:101). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

LXX., was only 82 1/4 lbs. It was in the form of a circular mass, as the Hebrew name denotes. A talent of gold was double the weight of a talent of silver (2 Sam 12:30). Cf. Parable of the talents in Mt 25:15.³⁵

[talents] Greek: talanton (GSN-5007), about \$600,000 in gold; 10,000 talents would be \$6 billion. A talent of silver was \$7,500; 10,000 talents would be \$75 million.³⁶

Matthew 18:25

But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.

His lord commanded him to be sold, etc. By the laws of the Hebrews, they were permitted to sell debtors, with their wives and children, into servitude for a time sufficient to pay the debt. See 2 Kings 4:1, Leviticus 25:39-46, Amos 8:6.

Matthew 18:26

The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.

The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him. This does not mean that he paid him *religious* homage, but that in a humble, and reverent, and earnest manner, he entreated him to have patience with him. He prostrated himself before his lord, as is customary in all eastern nations, when subjects are in the presence of their king. Matthew 2:2.

Matthew 18:27

Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.

The lord of that servant was moved with compassion, etc. He had pity on him. He saw his distressed condition. He pitied his family. He forgave him the whole debt. This represents the mercy of God to men. They had sinned. They owed to God more than could be paid. They were about to be cast off. But God has mercy on them, and in connexion with their prayers, forgives them. We are not to interpret the circumstances of a parable too strictly. The verse about selling the wife and children is not to be taken literally, as if *God* was about to punish them for the sins of their father; but it is a circumstance thrown in *to keep up the story*; to make it consistent; to explain why the servant was so anxious to obtain a *delay* of the time of payment.

³⁵ Chuck Missler, Notes on Matthew, khouse.org

³⁶ Dake Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

Matthew 18:28

But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took *him* by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest.

100 denari = \$17. The servant had just been forgiven \$12 million dollars!³⁷

[pence] Greek: *denarion* (GSN-1220), a day's wage. It was .1375 oz. of silver, worth perhaps 65 cents today. Therefore, 100 pence would be worth only \$65.³⁸

Took him by the throat. Took him in a violent and rough manner; half choked, or *throttled* him. This was the more criminal and base, as he had himself been so kindly treated, and dealt so mildly with, by his Lord.

Matthew 18:29

And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.

Matthew 18:30

And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.

In Bible times, serious consequences awaited those who could not pay their debts. A person lending money could seize the borrower who couldn't pay and force him or his family to work until the debt was paid. The debtor could also be thrown into prison, or his family could be sold into slavery to help pay off the debt. It was hoped that the debtor, while in prison, would sell off his landholdings or that relatives would pay the debt. If not, the debtor could remain in prison for life.

Matthew 18:31

So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done.

Barnes: So when his fellowservants, etc. This is a mere circumstance thrown into the story for the sake of *keeping*, or making a consistent narrative. It cannot be intended to teach that other Christians should go and tell God What a brother had done; for God well knows all the actions of his children, and does not need us, surely, to *inform* him of what is done. It is abusing the Bible, and departing from the design of parables, to press every circumstance, and to endeavour to extract, from it some spiritual meaning. Our Saviour, in this parable, designed most clearly to exhibit only *one great truth*-the duty of forgiving our brethren, and the great evil of *not* forgiving a brother when he offends us. The

³⁷ Chuck Missler, Notes on Matthew, khouse.org

³⁸ Dake Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

circumstances of the parable are intended only to make the story consistent with itself, and thus to impress the general truth more fully on the mind.

Matthew 18:32

Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me:

Matthew 18:33

Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?

Matthew 18:34

And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.

[**tormentors**] The jailers who had charge of prisoners and who also tortured them when ordered to do so.

Barnes: Delivered him to the tormentors. The word *tormentors*, here, probably means *keepers of the prison*. Torments were inflicted on *criminals*, not on debtors. They were inflicted by stretching the limbs, or pinching the flesh, or taking out the eyes, or taking off the skin while alive, etc. It is not probable that anything of this kind is intended, but only that the servant was punished by imprisonment till the debt should be paid.

ESV: delivered him to the jailers. A metaphorical allusion to eternal punishment that the wicked servant justly deserves (cf. 8:12; 10:28; 13:42, 49–50; 22:13; 24:51).

Matthew 18:35

So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

The basic issue is if you have been forgiven much, He is expecting you to forgive those with trespasses against you.

Forgiveness

- Forgiveness:
 - Never remembers our sin Heb 10:17
 - Restorative forgiveness 1 Jn 1:9
 - Discipline retained 2 Sam 13,14
 - Forgive others Col 3:13
- Degrees of Punishment: Lk 12:47, 48; Jn 13:7; Rom 2:12; 1 Jn 5:17

[from your hearts] All issues of sin and righteousness come "from the heart" (Matthew 15:18-19; Mark 7:21-23; Acts 8:37; Romans 10:6-10; 2 Tim. 2:22; Hebrews 4:12).

ESV: not forgive your brother from your heart. A transformed heart must result in a changed life that offers the same mercy and forgiveness as has been received from God (cf. Isa. 40:2). Someone who does not grant forgiveness to others shows that his own heart has not experienced God's forgiveness. Throughout Scripture, the heart refers to the center of one's being, including one's reason, emotions, and will.

Yashanet.com: We are called by God to; a) forgive others, b) ask forgiveness of others (Matthew 5:23-24), and, c) be certain not to have unrighteous anger in our hearts (Matthew 5:22). Willful failure in any of these areas places someone in jeopardy with God. The "free gift" of salvation includes obedience to God, not just "believing" in certain facts. The subject of the believer's obedience to God is central to a Romans study.

This parable illustrates the necessity of forgiveness and godly treatment of fellow Christians in the kingdom of heaven or realm of profession in this age. The parable may be divided into four natural parts:

1. King and his servant (Matthew 18:23-27):
 - (1) The reckoning (Matthew 18:23-24)
 - (2) Great debt: perhaps \$6 billion (Matthew 18:24)
 - (3) Impossibility of payment (Matthew 18:25)
 - (4) Judgment pronounced (Matthew 18:25)
 - (5) Mercy asked, promise given (Matthew 18:26)
 - (6) King's compassion (Matthew 18:27)
 - (7) Cancellation of the debt (Matthew 18:27)
2. Servant, fellowservant (Matthew 18:28-30):
 - (1) New freedom (Matthew 18:28)
 - (2) The reckoning (Matthew 18:28)
 - (3) Small debt: only \$65 (Matthew 18:28)
 - (4) Possibility of payment (Matthew 18:28)
 - (5) Judgment pronounced (Matthew 18:30)
 - (6) Mercy asked (Matthew 18:29)
 - (7) No mercy shown (Matthew 18:28-30)
3. King and his servants (Matthew 18:31-34):
 - (1) Knowledge of fellowservants
 - (2) Compassion of fellowservants
 - (3) Report of fellowservants (Matthew 18:31)
 - (4) The reckoning (Matthew 18:32)
 - (5) Reproof for cruelty (Matthew 18:32-33)
 - (6) The king's wrath (Matthew 18:34)
 - (7) Judgment pronounced (Matthew 18:34): equal to eternal punishment, as he could never pay
4. The application
 - (1) God cancels all the debt for penitent sinners as this king did for his servant (Matthew 18:23-27,35; Matthew 12:31-32; 1 John 1:9)

- (2) God demands fair treatment between Christians (Matthew 18:26-30,35; Matthew 5:38-48; Matthew 7:12; Romans 12:9-21; 1 Cor. 13)
- (3) God will not forgive unless man forgives his brother (Matthew 18:35; Matthew 6:14-15; Mark 11:25-26; Ephes. 4:32)³⁹

So likewise, etc. This verse contains the sum or *moral* of the parable. When Christ has explained one of his own parables, we are to receive it just as he has explained it, and not attempt to draw spiritual instruction from any parts or circumstances which he has not explained. The following seems to be the particulars of the general truth which he meant to teach:

- (1.) That our sins are great.
- (2.) That God freely forgives them.
- (3.) That the offences committed against us by our brethren are comparatively small.
- (4.) That we should, therefore, most freely forgive them.
- (5.) That if we do not, God will be justly angry with us, and punish

From your hearts. That is, not merely in words, but really and truly to feel and act towards him as if he had not offended us.

Because God has forgiven all our sins, we should not withhold forgiveness from others. Realizing how completely Christ has forgiven us should produce a free and generous attitude of forgiveness toward others. When we don't forgive others, we are setting ourselves outside and above Christ's law of love.

McGee: This parable of the servant, who was forgiven but refused to forgive another, illustrates the *principle* of forgiveness. This is a new principle presented in this passage, but it is not quite the basis of forgiveness for believers which is set forth in Ephesians 4:32, "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." *Because* God has forgiven us, we are to forgive each other. If God forgave our sins in the same way we forgive others, none of us would be forgiven. But after we have become children of God, because we have been forgiven, we are to forgive. This is the principle of Christian conduct, of course.⁴⁰

Forgiveness (Matt. 18:21–35)

When we start living in an atmosphere of humility and honesty, we must take some risks and expect some dangers. Unless humility and honesty result in forgiveness, relationships cannot be mended and strengthened. Peter recognized the risks involved and asked Jesus how he should handle them in the future.

But Peter made some serious mistakes. To begin with, he lacked humility himself. He was sure his brother would sin against him, but not he against his brother! Peter's second mistake was in asking for limits and measures. Where there is love, there can be no limits or dimensions (Eph. 3:17–19). Peter thought he was showing great faith and love when he offered to forgive at least seven times. After all, the rabbis taught that three times was sufficient.

³⁹ Dake Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

⁴⁰ McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:101). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Our Lord's reply, "Until seventy times seven" (490 times) must have startled Peter. Who could keep count for that many offenses? But that was exactly the point Jesus was making: Love "keeps no record of wrongs" (1 Cor. 13:5, NIV). By the time we have forgiven a brother that many times, we are in the habit of forgiving.

But Jesus was not advising careless or shallow forgiveness. Christian love is not blind (Phil. 1:9–10). The forgiveness Christ requires is on the basis of the instructions He gave in Matthew 18:15–20. If a brother is guilty of a repeated sin, no doubt he would find strength and power to conquer that sin through the encouragement of his loving and forgiving brethren. If we condemn a brother, we bring out the worst in him. But if we create an atmosphere of love and forgiveness, we can help God bring out the best in him.

The parable illustrates the power of forgiveness. It is important to note that *this parable is not about salvation*, for salvation is wholly of grace and is unconditionally given. To make God's forgiveness a temporary thing is to violate the very truth of Scripture (Rom. 5:8; Eph. 2:8–9; Titus 3:3–7). The parable deals with forgiveness between *brothers*, not between lost sinners and God. The emphasis in this chapter is on brother forgiving brother (Matt. 18:15, 21).

The main character in this parable went through three stages in his experience of forgiveness.

He was a debtor (vv. 23–27). This man had been stealing funds from the king and, when the books were audited, his crime was discovered. The total tax levy in Palestine was about 800 talents a year, so you can see how dishonest this man was. In terms of today's buying power, this was probably equivalent to over \$10 million.

But this man actually thought he could get out of the debt. He told the king that, given enough time, he could pay it back. We detect two sins here: pride and a lack of sincere repentance. The man was not ashamed because he stole the money; he was ashamed because he got caught. And he actually thought he was big enough to earn the money to repay the king's account. In the economy of that day, a man would have had to work twenty years to earn one talent.

His case was hopeless, except for one thing: The king was a man of compassion. He assumed the loss and forgave the servant. This meant that the man was free and that he and his family would not be thrown into a debtor's prison. The servant did not deserve this forgiveness; it was purely an act of love and mercy on the part of the master.

He was a creditor (vv. 28–30). The servant left the presence of the king and went and found a fellow servant who owed him 100 pence. The average worker earned one penny a day, so this debt was insignificant compared to what the servant had owed the king. Instead of sharing with his friend the joy of his own release, the servant mistreated his friend and demanded that he pay the debt. The debtor used the same approach as the servant: "Have patience with me and I will pay you all of it!" But the unjust servant was unwilling to grant to others what he wanted others to grant to him.

Perhaps he had the *legal* right to throw the man in prison, but he did not have the *moral* right. He had been forgiven himself—should he not forgive his fellow servant? He and his family had been spared the shame and suffering of prison. Should he not spare his friend?

He became a prisoner (vv. 31–34). The king originally delivered him from prison, but the servant put himself back in. The servant exercised justice and cast his friend into prison. "So you want to live by justice?" asked the king. "Then you shall have justice!"

Throw the wicked servant in prison and torment him! I will do to him as he has done to others.” (There is no suggestion that the entire family was sentenced. After all, it was the father who abused the other servant and ignored the king’s kindness.)

The world’s worst prison is the prison of an unforgiving heart. If we refuse to forgive others, then we are only imprisoning ourselves and causing our own torment. Some of the most miserable people I have met in my ministry have been people who would not forgive others. They lived only to imagine ways to punish these people who had wronged them. But they were really only punishing themselves.

What was wrong with this man? The same thing that is wrong with many professing Christians: They have *received* forgiveness, but they have not really *experienced* forgiveness deep in their hearts. Therefore, they are unable to *share* forgiveness with those who have wronged them. If we live only according to justice, always seeking to get what is ours, we will put ourselves into prison. But if we live according to forgiveness, sharing with others what God has shared with us, then we will enjoy freedom and joy. Peter asked for a just measuring rod; Jesus told him to practice forgiveness and forget the measuring rod.

Our Lord’s warning is serious. He did not say that God *saves* only those who forgive others. The theme of this parable is forgiveness between brothers, not salvation for lost sinners. Jesus warned us that God cannot forgive us *if we do not have humble and repentant hearts*. We reveal the true condition of our hearts by the way we treat others. When our hearts are humble and repentant, we will gladly forgive our brothers. But where there is pride and a desire for revenge, there can be no true repentance; and this means God cannot forgive.

In other words, it is not enough to *receive* God’s forgiveness, or even the forgiveness of others. We must *experience* that forgiveness in our hearts so that it humbles us and makes us gentle and forgiving toward others. The servant in the parable did not have a deep experience of forgiveness and humility. *He was simply glad to be “off the hook.”* He had never really repented.

“And be you kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Eph. 4:32). “Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do you” (Col. 3:13).⁴¹

Barnes’ Remarks on Chapter 18:

(1.) We see that it is possible to make a profession of religion an occasion of ambition, Matthew 18:1. The apostles at first sought honour, and expected office in consequence of following Christ. So thousands have done since. Religion, notwithstanding all the opposition it has met with, *really* commands the confidence of mankind. To make a profession of it may be a way of access to that confidence; and thousands, it is to be feared, even yet enter the church merely to obtain some worldly benefit. Especially does this danger beset ministers of the gospel. There are few paths to the confidence of mankind so easily trod, as to enter the ministry. Every minister, of

⁴¹Wiersbe, W. W. (1996, c1989). *The Bible exposition commentary*. "An exposition of the New Testament comprising the entire 'BE' series"--Jkt. (Mt 18:21). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

course, if at all worthy of his office, has access to the confidence of multitudes, and is never despised but by the worst and lowest of mankind. No way is so easy to step at once to public confidence. Other men toil long to establish influence by personal character. The minister has it by virtue of his office. Those who now enter the ministry are tempted far more in this respect than were the apostles; and how should they search their own hearts, to see that no such abominable motive has induced them to seek that office!

(2.) It is consummate wickedness thus to prostrate the most sacred of all offices to the worst of purposes. The apostles, at this time, were ignorant. They expected a kingdom where it would be right to seek distinction. But we labour under no such ignorance. We *know* that his kingdom is not of this world, and woe to the man that acts *as though* it were. Deep and awful must be the lot of him who thus seeks the honours of the world, while he is professedly following the meek and lowly Jesus.

(3.) Humility is indispensable to religion, Matthew 18:3. No man, who is not humble, can possibly be a Christian. He must be willing to esteem himself *as he is*, and to have others esteem him so also. This is humility. And humility is lovely. It is not meanness; it is not cowardice; it is not want of just self-esteem. It is a view of ourselves just as we are, and a willingness that God and all creatures should so esteem us. What can be more lovely than such an estimation of ourselves? And how foolish and wicked is it to be proud; that is, to think more of ourselves, and wish others to think so, than we really deserve! To put on appearances, and to magnify our own importance, and think that the affairs of the universe could not go on without us, and to be indignant when all the world does not bow down to do us homage- this is hypocrisy, as well as wickedness; and there *may be*, therefore, hypocrites out of the *church*, as well as in it.

(4.) Humility is the best evidence of piety, Matthew 18:4. The most humble man is the most eminent Christian. He is *greatest* in the kingdom of heaven. The effect of sin is to produce pride. Religion overcomes it by producing a just sense of ourselves, of other men, of angels, and of God. We may, therefore, measure the advance of piety in our own souls by the increase of humility.

(5.) We see the danger of despising and doing injury to real Christians, and more especially the guilt of attempting to draw them into sin, Matthew 18:6. God watches over them. He loves them. In the eye of the world they may be of little importance, but not so with God. The most obscure follower of Christ is dear, infinitely dear, to him; and he will take care of him. He that attempts to injure a Christian attempts to injure God; for God has redeemed him, and loves him.

(6.) Men will do much to draw others into sin, Matthew 18:7. In all communities there are some who seem to live for this. They have often much wealth, or learning, or accomplishment, or address, or professional influence; and they employ it for the sake of seducing the unwary, and leading them into ruin. Hence offences come, and many of the young and thoughtless are led astray. But He who has all power has pronounced woe upon them, and judgment will not always linger. No class of men have a more fearful account to render to God than they who thus lead others into vice and infidelity.

(7.) We must forsake our dearest sins, Matthew 18:8,9. We must do this, or go to hell-fire. There is no way of avoiding it. We cannot love and cherish those sins, and be saved.

(8.) The wicked-they who will not forsake their sins-must certainly go to eternal punishment, Matthew 18:8,9. So said the compassionate Saviour. The fair and obvious meaning of his words is, that the sufferings of hell are eternal. And Christ did not use

words without meaning. He did not mean to frighten us by bugbears, or to hold up imaginary fears. If *Christ* speaks of hell, then there is a hell; if he says it is eternal, then it is so. Of this we may be sure, that EVERY WORD which the God of mercy has spoken about the punishment of the wicked is Full OF MEANING.

(9.) Christians are protected, Matthew 18:10. Angels are appointed as their friends and guardians. Those friends are very near to God. They enjoy his favour, and his children shall be safe.

(10.) Christians are safe, Matthew 18:11-14. Jesus came to save them. He left the heavens for this end. God rejoices in their salvation. He secures it at great sacrifices, and none can pluck them out of his hand. After the coming of Jesus to save them-after all that he has done for that, and that only-after the joy of God and angels at their recovery-it is *impossible* that they should be wrested from him and destroyed. See John 10:27,28.

(11.) It is our duty to admonish our brethren when they injure us, Matthew 18:15. We have no right to speak of the offence to any one else, not even to our best friends, until we have given an opportunity to explain.

(12.) The way to treat offending brethren is clearly pointed out, Matthew 18:15-17. Nor have we a fight to take any other course. Infinite Wisdom-the *Prince of Peace*-has declared that this is the way to treat our brethren. No other can be right; and no other, therefore, can be so well adapted to promote the peace of the church. And yet how different from this is the course commonly pursued! How few go honestly to an offending brother, and tell him his fault! Instead of this, every breeze bears the report-it is magnified- mole-hills swell to mountains, and a quarrel of years often succeeds what *might* have been settled at once. No robber is so cruel as he who steals away the *character* of another. Nothing can compensate for the loss of this. Wealth, health, mansions, and equipage, all are trifles compared with this. Especially is this true of a *Christian*. His reputation gone, he has lost his power of doing good; he has brought dishonour on the cause he most loved; he has lost his peace, and worlds cannot repay him.

**'Who steals my purse, steals trash: 'tis something, nothing:
'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands.
But he that filches from me my good name,
Robs me of that which not enriches him,
And makes me poor indeed.'**

(13.) We have every encouragement to pray, Matthew 18:20. We are poor, and sinful, and dying, and none can comfort us but God. At his throne we may find all that we want. We know not which is most wonderful, that God deigns to hear our prayers, or that men are so unwilling to use so simple and easy a way of obtaining what they so much need.

(14.) We should never be weary of forgiving our brethren, Matthew 18:22. We should do it cheerfully. We should do it always. We are never better employed than when we are doing good to those who have injured us. Thus doing, we are most like God.

(15.) There will be a day in which we must give up our account, Matthew 18:23. It may wait long; but God will *reckon* with us, and everything shall be brought into judgment.

(16.) We are greatly indebted to God-far, far beyond what we are able to pay, Matthew 18:24. We have sinned, and *in no way* can we make atonement for past sins. But Jesus the Saviour *has* made atonement, and paid our debt, and we may be free.

(17.) It is right to pray to God when we feel that we have sinned, and are unable to pay the debt, Matthew 18:26. We have no other way. Poor, and needy, and wretched, we must cast ourselves upon his mercy, or *die*-die for ever.

(18.) God will have compassion on those who do it, Matthew 18:27. At *his feet*, in the attitude of prayer, the burdened sinner finds peace. We have nowhere else to go but to the very Being that we have offended. No being but He can save us from death.

(19.) From the kindness of God to us we should learn *not* to oppress others, Matthew 18:28.

(20.) It is our true *interest*, as well as duty, to forgive those that offend us, Matthew 18:34. God will take vengeance; and in due time we *must* suffer if we do not forgive others.

(21.) Christians are often great sufferers for harbouring malice. As a punishment, God withdraws the light of his countenance; they walk in darkness; they cannot enjoy religion; their conscience smites them; and they are wretched. No man ever did, or ever can, enjoy religion, who did not from his heart forgive his brother his trespasses.

(22.) One reason why Christians ever walk in darkness is, that there is some such duty neglected. They think they have been injured, and very possibly they may have been. They think they are in the right, and possibly they are so. But mingled with a consciousness of this is an unforgiving spirit; and they cannot enjoy religion till that is subdued.

(23.) Forgiveness must not be in word merely, but from the heart, Matthew 18:35. No other can be genuine; no other is like God.

Appendix A (Information from Chuck Missler)

Gospel of Judas?

This text was discovered in Egypt about 1978. It is written in Coptic, the language of ancient Egypt, especially Christian Egypt, up to the 9th century. It is a codex (book with pages) rather than a scroll. The pages are badly damaged, so that there are some lacunae (blank spaces) that are difficult to fill. But it is not hard to see what it is about.

The “Gospel of Judas” is not a new discovery (even though it was lost for about 1,700 years). In 180 A.D. Irenaeus knew of this book and condemned it as heretical.

The Gnostic Gospels

They are not “gospels” at all, but rather speculative opinions, totally devoid of any verifiable facts. All were written under false pseudonyms in an attempt to gain legitimacy. The early church rejected any documents under pseudonyms as being inconsistent with the concept of God-breathed inspiration. They were all written several centuries after the Gospel period—in contrast to the contemporaneous eyewitness accounts in the New Testament.

A large number of spurious documents emerged during the centuries following the ministries of the Apostles and were universally rejected by the early church. Copies of a group of these were found at Nag Hammadi in Egypt in 1945, dating from the 3rd and 4th centuries. These include *The Gospel of Thomas*, *The Gospel of Philip*, *The Gospel of Mary*, *The Gospel of Truth*, and about four dozen others.

Scholars widely agree that none of these texts contain historically reliable information about the life of Jesus; all were likely written in the second century or later. However, they do help us learn more about false teachings that early church leaders like the Apostle Paul preached against in the book of Colossians and elsewhere.

Gnosticism

Gnosticism was a heresy that was rampant in the Roman Empire from about the 2nd century. Its name came from the Greek word for knowledge, *gnosis*. The Gnostics believed that knowledge was the way to salvation. For this reason, Gnosticism was condemned as false and heretical by several writers of the New Testament. The Gnostics consisted of diverse groups, from high-minded ascetics to licentious charlatans.

It claims that we are all divine (we have a spark of the divine in us), we are trapped in the physical world, which is evil, and Jesus came to give us *knowledge* of how to escape this world and get back to the Kingdom of Light where we belong. In Gnosticism, salvation is by *knowledge* of mysteries, rather than by faith in the atoning work of Jesus Christ.

Gnostic literature speaks of the deities or powers of the universe, such as Yaldabaoth, Seth, Barbelo (an emanation of the Supreme Being), Sophia, and others. Gnostic books have complex myths of creation, involving emanations from the Supreme Being, multiple heavens with their rulers, angels, etc. Most of them see matter as evil, and believe that Jesus only appeared to have flesh—that His physical body was a mere phantom. Christ is just a *principle* in Gnosticism, rather than a *person*. It is somewhat like Buddha in Buddhism. Just as anyone can become a *Buddha*, so we can all become what Christ was, or is—for we have the same divine principle in us—so they say.

Sources

There is much refutation of Gnosticism by church fathers. Some of the more important ones are: Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*; Hippolytus, *Refutations of All Heresies*; Epiphanius, *Panarion*; and, Tertullian, *Against Marcion*.

A primary source on Gnosticism is the New Testament itself. Gnostic teachings were condemned by the writers of the New Testament: Paul emphasized a wisdom and

knowledge that comes from God and not through idle speculations, fables, and moral laxity (Col 2:8-23; 1 Tim 1:4; 2 Tim 2:16- 19; Titus 1:10-16). John, both in his gospel and in the epistles, countered heretical teaching which, in a broad sense, can be considered Gnostic.

(2 Timothy 4:3) *For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.*

(Colossians 2:8) *Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.*

Appendix B: (Chuck Missler)

“70 Times 7”

- The Sabbath for the land was six years to cultivate, the seventh to rest (Lev 25:1-7).
- For 490 years Israel failed to keep the Sabbath year of the land.
- Since they failed to keep the Sabbath of the land for 490 years, the Lord said you owe me 70 and sent them into captivity in Babylon.

He forgave them for 70 X 7 times and then called what was due (2 Chr 36:21).

Abraham to the Exodus

Promise	Gen 12:4	75 years
	Gal. 3:17	<u>+430</u>
		505
Ishmael	Gen 16:16; 21:5	<u>-15</u>
		490 years

Exodus to the Temple

Begun:	1 Kings 6 - 8	594
Completed:	1 Kings 6:38	<u>+7</u>
		601

Servitudes: Judges

Mesopotamia 3:8	8	
Moabites 3:12-14	18	
Canaanites 4:2,3	20	
Midianites 6:1	7	
Ammonites 10:7,8	18	
Philistines 13:1 40		<u>-111</u>
		490 years

The Temple to the Edict of Artaxerxes

1 Kings 8:1-66	1005 B.C.	
Nehemiah 2:1	<u>445 B.C.</u>	
	560	
Babylonian Captivity	<u>-70</u>	
		490 years

Artaxerxes to the 2nd Coming

Artaxerxes to the 1st Advent

“The Sixty Nine Weeks” 69 x 7 = 483

[Church interval] ?

The “Seventieth Week”	<u>+7</u>	
		490 years

