

Matthew 18:1-14 The Precepts of Greatness

Okay, we have a new study guide for today. We have a new section we are starting, Matthew 18:1-14. We are still in this large section in Matthew's gospel - chapters 5 through 25 - where Matthew gives us five major sermons and then supporting teachings and miracles to go with those sermons throughout the section.

We saw the first sermon in chapters 5-7; the second one in Matthew chapter 10; the third sermon in Matthew chapter 13; and we start the fourth sermon today in Matthew chapter 18, entitled The Precepts of the Kingdom. Those rules, those regulations, for the kingdom of heaven. This sermon is all about relationships, how to interact with one another. None more important than the very message that we are going to study today in the first 14 verses.

The first precept we are going to study is Conversion. Look at verse 1. **In that hour, the disciples came to Jesus...** In that same hour that we left off with in chapter 17. Remember the last message was about making sure you pay your taxes, but the underlying message and theme was do whatever you need to do to not offend other people. By *offense*, the New Testament does not mean personal offense. It is the Greek word **σκάνδαλον** (skandalon), which means *to put something in a path* to prevent someone from coming to the truth of Christ. It is a stone, a trap spring, that people would trip over and not be able to get to Christ. So Jesus at the end of chapter 17 was saying, "Do what you need to do because the things of this world hold no value, so if you have to pay, pay. So that others will not be offended." Others will not be offended in coming to Christ because of your actions or your decisions or your lifestyle.

So this theme of offense is carried over. Now He is going to underline that theme. **Because in that hour the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greater in the kingdom of Heaven?"** This was the debate and argument among the disciples, *Which one of them was the greater?* Not greatest but greater, because the Greek text uses a comparative adjective there, *Which one of us is the greater in the kingdom of heaven?*

See in chapter 17 it tells us some - three - disciples experienced the transformation of Christ up on top of the mountain. They had a tremendous experience to see Jesus speaking with Moses and Elijah. But as they came down to the bottom of the mountain the other nine disciples that were left behind were wrestling with this man's son who was demonically possessed. They came to the disciples and asked them to cast the demon out and they could not do it, so there was a lot of frustration. Some were exhilarated because of the mountaintop experience. Others were frustrated because they could not cast the demon out. So then began the debate between the disciples. I am sure - and I am taking liberty here because I really do not know - I am just taking it from their attitude, that the ones up on the mountaintop were ribbing the ones down below, saying, "What is your problem? We had a mountaintop experience. Down here you can't even take care of a demon!"

And so then they began to wrestle verbally with themselves as to *Who is the greater in the kingdom of Heaven?* They come to Jesus. **And Jesus having called to him a little child,** emphasis on *little* child. The Greek word for *child* all the way through these verses is *a child of*

disciplinary age. That is, not a *newborn*, not an *infant*, but a *child that is of disciplinary age*. One that is under the discipline of his or her parents. So Jesus called over a little child, young child, **And Jesus stood the child in the middle of them. And He said, "Truly I say to you, if you should not be converted and should not become as the little children, you should never,** that is what the Greek text says, **you should never enter into the kingdom of Heaven.** We are talking about entering into the kingdom of heaven.

I should explain to you about the children, that also has been misunderstood over the years. By *children* and Jesus taking a little child and putting the child in the midst, He was not just focused on little children saying, "Do not offend one of these little ones or else these things apply to you and you are in trouble with judgment." He is using the child as an example of all believers. If you look at verse 6 the *children* are told to us as being *the ones who believe*. So when God the Father looks at us, every believer, whether it is a young child in age, or whether it is an elderly adult older than me, they are approached by the Lord as a little child. We are all children.

You can see how far we have fallen in our pride and in our ego, especially in our education system, is that we can get educated in the Bible and get our doctorate degrees and all of a sudden we are not little children anymore. Oh yes we are. Because the more you know, the more you know you do not know. And then there's debates and arguments among people about their theology and comparative education. No, we are just little children. If God allows us some knowledge and some understanding and some enlightenment, that is a blessing. To have the enlightenment beyond the age of an adult, that the little child has that kind of enlightenment, wow, what a blessing.

So when He brings the children, He is saying this is true for every single human being, young or adult. **If you should not be converted**, that is number one. Number two, **And should not become as the little children, you should never enter the kingdom of heaven.** You must experience these two things in order to enter into heaven. Not just church, or function with Christians, we are talking about salvation here. You should be converted. Jesus said, "If you are not converted you cannot enter into heaven." **You will never enter into heaven.**

The work *converted* in the Greek means *to turn around*. To turn around and go in the opposite direction. It is synonymous with the word *repentance*. *Repentance* means *to make a decision for change*. Not only does it mean make a decision for change, but repentance also means I do not have the means to change myself. I am coming to the Lord and I am letting Him know that I am making a decision for change, to change the direction of my life. But I must be converted. I must be changed. My direction must change in life. My whole way of life must go in a totally different direction.

The best definition of a *sinner* in the Bible is Isaiah 53:6 where it says, **All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned everyone to our own way.** All of the other examples throughout the whole Bible of sin and corruption, and who a sinner is, and what a sinner does, all come from the basic principle of sin - that everyone is going their own way. Period. Even in Christianity, even in church, people are going their own way for the Lord. Not going the Lord's way, but they are doing it for Him, so they are justified in their own eyes.

So the Lord must make a change. As a matter of fact, another technical point for us, the word converted and the word *become* in this verse; verse 3, *converted* and *become* are what are called passive voices in Greek, which means it happens to you from the outside, it is nothing that you do. So a person must be converted, the Lord must convert a person. They must experience a conversion, a change of life, a change of direction, based on their desire for the Lord to change them, knowing they cannot change themselves. So they must be converted.

And secondly, **And if you should not become as the little children**, notice the plural here: as all these little children. He did not say, "If you should not become childish." He did not say, "If you do not become immature, like a little child." He says, "You must become like children in your approach to the things of the Lord."

I think it is the toughest thing that I have found in being a Christian is to be an adult, yet function like a little child in the presence of the Lord. You know as an adult you are supposed to have it together, have all these experiences. But yet the dependency upon the Lord must be one like a little child. It comes with confessing. It comes with admitting. We do not know.

I think people get shocked when they come up and ask me questions, especially about the Greek text; I will sit there and think about it, and I say, "You know, I really do not know offhand." They are shocked. "You don't know?!" "No, I only know what I know. What the Lord tells me, what He shows me. I mean, I can look it up for you," but obviously they are disappointed I did not know on the spot.

So The Content of Becoming Like a Child, look in verses 4-6. Three things:

1) **Whoever therefore should humble himself as this little child**, this is for adults too, everybody. **Whoever therefore should humble himself as this little child, this one is the greater in the kingdom of Heaven.** He is saying literally, you must choose to take the low road. Our culture teaches and promotes self-reliance and self success and self promotion. Even friends coming up to us and saying, "What are you doing with your life? You are wasting your time. You need to get out. You have the potential to really earn a lot of money. Really go places. Got to get out of Sisquoc." But Jesus said, "You have to choose the low road." You know Jesus chose the low road. Stop and think about it. Because we have God's word in a book, it gets lost the kind of lifestyle that Jesus lived, starting with the way He was born. Born in a stable. Born under humble means. Humble people coming, lowly people coming to celebrate His birth. Religious leaders and public after Him to crucify Him to have Him killed. Having Him punished and persecuted, and eventually hung on a cross. I would say that is the low road when it comes to the world. Jesus chose the low road.

2) Verse 5, secondly, **And whoever should receive one such little child upon the basis of My name**, so we are talking about spiritual things here, **he is receiving Me.** A person must receive Christ like a little child. Jesus identifies with those who depend on Him like a child would depend upon their parent. And Jesus said, "If you receive one of these little children who are dependent upon Me you are receiving Me. I am in that child."

3) Verse 6, the third thing, **But whoever should offend one of these little ones believing into Me**, see we are talking about spiritual things here. *Whoever should offend* - we are talking about putting something in the pathway that would hinder someone from coming to Christ. Keep that in mind. We are not talking about personal offense. We all offend people all the time but not in the spiritual sense. But we are responsible for our life either showing the way to Christ - we do not have to talk to people, we do not have to be the preacher, but is our life showing people the way to Christ or is it hindering people from coming to Christ? And there are many of us church leaders who are - even doing church - that are hindering people from coming to Christ. You do not know how many times I personally have gone to church and after it was all over, I said, "That's it? I came to see Jesus. I have not seen Him yet. Is He coming out? What are we doing here?" There was a program.

Whosoever should offend one of these little ones believing into me, it is profitable for him in order that a millstone... and by the way this word *millstone*, in the Greek text there are two words identifying this millstone. It is literally a *millstone being turned by a donkey*, so this was a big stone, not a small one. **...it is profitable for him in order that a millstone should be hung upon his neck, and he should be drowned in the depth of the sea.** It would be better for you if you were drowned in the middle of the sea than you should offend one of the little ones who are seeking the Lord. Even if they are an adult. Even if they are very intellectual, have a high IQ.

I always tease the nurses because if you have been to the doctor lately you know that when they take your temperature - some doctors offices still do the thermometer thing but a lot of them have this roller. They roll it across your forehead, and they can read it in their hand. So one day the nurse came in and she took my temperature, she rolled it across my forehead, and I said, "So is that for my IQ?" She said, "Yeah, your IQ is 97 but we have got to improve that."

But The Consequences in verse 7. **Woe to the world from the effect of offences!** This is offenses in keeping people, stopping people from coming to Christ. **For it is necessary for offences to come.** Necessary. It is impossible for them not to come. I can concentrate all day long to try not to offend people from coming to Christ, and I can tell you I would probably succeed in offending people from coming to Christ. But offenses in general. Offenses will come. **Nevertheless woe to that man through whom the offence is coming!** Offenses are necessary to come just because we are still in our sin nature. And that is what keeps us humble, keeps us like little children. But I am still responsible. I am still responsible for if I am hindering family members, friends, neighborhood - and we will see in a moment, even myself - from coming to Christ because of things that I do to myself. But I have to make a right. I am responsible for offending people from coming to Christ. And the Bible.

And later on, beginning next week, we will find out what to do about it. If somebody is offended, if I offend someone from coming to Christ, they are to come to me, and we are to settle the issue. We cannot let it linger on. Many people have complaints. Many people get offended. In fact, I know of one person when I said, "Well, let's get together and talk about it. It is easy to handle. If indeed I have done what you said, I will repent, I will apologize, and fellowship can be restored." They were very disappointed. They did not want restoration. They just wanted complaint.

Verse 8, and this is under Consequences, **And if your hand or your foot is offending you, in other words it is offending you, cut them off and throw them from you; it is good for you to enter into life lame or maimed, than having two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire.**

Now over the years in history some people have taken this literally. Some people, in fact, I read about the account here just a few months ago, where somebody gouged out their eyes because they were seeing terrible things that offended them. It is used metaphorically not literally. By metaphorical I mean he is using it as illustrations. And I can prove it to you because (1) if you cut off all these body parts it does not stop you from offending yourself and (2) if you cut off your body parts and notice what happens: *it is better day to go through life maimed than to have two hands or two feet and thrown into eternal fire* - you are not saved and kept from eternal fire by cutting off your feet and your hands. It is by receiving Christ. You can see the emphasis that he is making here. Becoming lame or maimed does not save you. He is emphasizing how important it is to keep your physical members from offending you as well as offending others.

Romans chapter 6 Paul brings this out. Romans 6:12-14 and verse 19. **Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in the lusts of it. Neither yield your members (that would be the physical members of the body) as instruments of unrighteousness for sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members (that is the members of the body) as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for you are not under the law, but under grace.** Then verse 19 he says, **I speak after the manner of men because of the weakness of your flesh: for as you have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness.** So even to the point, receiving Christ but living a life where I do not offend myself. I do not obey the lusts of the members of my body that keep me from coming to Christ and following Christ. I am my biggest hindrance. It is not people.

I forgot who it was, I think it was a preacher, but he says, "You know you are your biggest hindrance. The only thing you need to remember in life to follow Christ: *get out of the way.*" Get out of the way.

He goes on to say in verse 9, **If your eye is offending you, what you are looking at, what you are watching, what you are pursuing, pluck it out and throw it from you; it is good for you to enter into life one-eyed, than having two eyes to be thrown into the Gehenna of fire.** Better you lose those members, than keep them and keep sinning and be thrown into the fire, the fire of hell. And again this is metaphorical. It is illustration in order to emphasize the importance of not offending yourself and not offending other people from coming to Christ.

It all starts with me, with my approach as a little child. My ego will not take the blame for much of anything, but like a child I must own up, as we have said before. I have to own up for my own responsibility. Christ has come into my life, but I am stuck in this human body of flesh that has lustful desires and still has a sin nature. I must be responsible if I give in to my sin

nature. If I do not yield my members - hands, eyes, feet - in service to Christ and serve other things of this world, I have to take responsibility for that.

The Conclusion, verses 10-14, **See that you should not despise one of these little ones.** The word *despise* means to *think down on*. This is the biggest problem. When people take up the gospel message to become like a little child, other people take advantage of them, with their egos and with their education, with their status, their position. Especially when we have this great movement of "What gift do you have? What gift did God give to you?" And you are like, "Well, He gave me His Spirit." And then they start bragging about what gift they have and how successful they are in exercising their gift. And they just run over humble people like a steamroller. The fact is we have nothing without Him. Zero.

For I say to you that there are angels in Heaven continually are looking on the face of My Father Who is in Heaven. One of a couple of places in Scripture that tells us that angels are assigned to believer's lives. And I know this personally without the Scripture because I have worn out a few in my lifetime. The Lord says, "Even your hairs on your head are numbered," and I have gone through a couple angels just for the count of the hair. But the angels are looking down on God's people, not just little children.

You see why I am emphasizing to you that little children in context is making reference to all believers, even adults. Because children's ministry groups today quote these verses to say, "We need to help these little children come to know Christ." But doing it in a very egotistical, very self-centered way. We are all children. Whether they are young believers, children as young believers, or believers as adults, still children. And it gets tougher to be a Christian the older you get, because you have to function like an adult, but approach Christ like a little child; dependent totally upon Him, and in need of Him.

In Hebrews 1:13-14 the writer of Hebrews tells us in comparison to the angels the Lord is superior. **To what angel did He tell them, "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool?"** No, He told Jesus that. And he says about angels verse 14, **Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs (inheritors) of salvation?** They are sent out to minister. Angels ministered to Jesus. They are in charge of the winds and the food and water. And we see that in the book of Revelation, where the angels are called upon to bring judgment through nature upon the earth. When Jesus was hungry the angels came and ministered to Him, brought food, brought food to Him. Angels have a big part. So angels are looking at every believer and noticing how that believer is treated by other believers.

And they look, interesting notice what it says, **their angels in heaven continually are looking on the face of My Father.** They are looking over at the Father, His Face, to tell by His facial expressions whether He is pleased or not. And if He is not pleased, I do not know this for sure, but I am sure that in the angel vocabulary, the phrase is *uh oh*. If God the Father is not pleased, remember, **It would be better for you if a millstone were hung around your neck and you be cast into the sea and you drowned than you offend one of God's people from coming to Christ,** from following the truth in Christ. So even the angels are noticing.

Verse 11. And you will notice in your study guide verse 11 is bracketed, which means it is another verse that is not original, but brought over from Luke 19:10. It says, **For the Son of Man** (that would be Jesus) **came to save the one which has been lost.** He came for the lost one, not the one that thinks he has got it together. And we will see in a moment He will leave the ninety-nine and go after the one that is lost, because He is looking for lost people. We have a tendency to despise lost people, to despise people, look down on people who are weak and just do not have it together. We criticize them. And yet the Lord is blowing the trumpet, telling the angels, "Get out there. I am coming to seek the ones that are lost."

Verse 12, **What does it seem to you?** So now He is ending with a parable. **What does it seem to you? If any man should happen to have a hundred sheep, and one of them should go astray, will he not after having left the ninety-nine upon the mountains, and having gone will he not seek out the one going astray? And if he should happen to find it, truly I say to you that he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine who have not gone astray. In this way, is it not the will before your Father Who is in Heaven in order that one of these little ones should be destroyed.** It is not God's will that one of these little ones should be destroyed. Caring for people's spiritual welfare ought to be our number one concern, even if it means sacrificing myself. Even if it means doing what I have to do to give up what I want so that they can see Christ, and come to Christ, or be helped in Christ.

The Lord is with the little children, not just age wise, but those who depend upon Him like a child would depend upon their parent. Confessing their need. Confessing - and I have said this before, after all these years I found out that the most spiritual status and position you can be in is to admit that without Him you cannot do one thing. Just cannot do it. Others brag they can do it, but in reality I cannot live life, I cannot understand the things of the Lord, I cannot even follow Him without His Spirit being there to give me the ability to do it. And confessing that to Him is the highest standard of spirituality. Not the attitude of, "I got this. I got this Lord. Do not trouble Yourself. Work with somebody else that needs You." No, we all need Him. We all need Him.

Next week, we will take verses 15 through 20, The Precepts of Sin, next week. Some important verses that people have quoted over the years. We will get into it next week. Very important.

Let's close with prayer.