

# Matthew 18 Commentary

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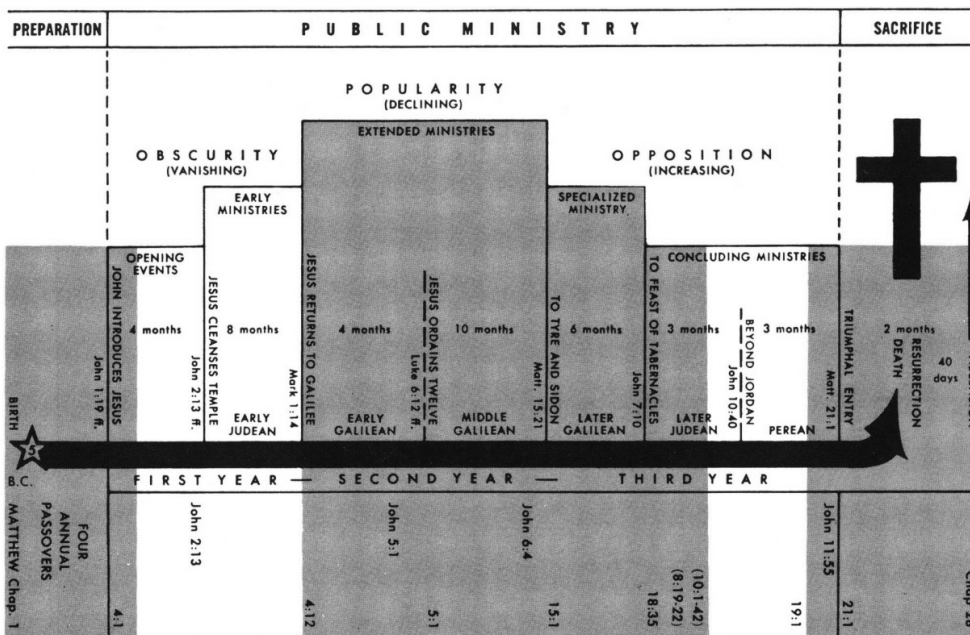
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MATTHEW CONTAINS 15 PARABLES 20 MIRACLES KEY VERSES: 1:1 "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." 2:2 "Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him."

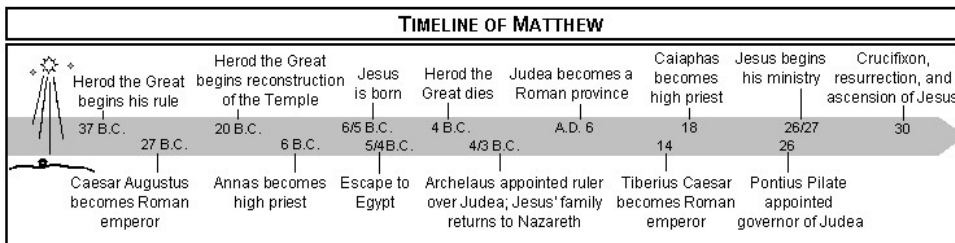


Click chart to enlarge  
Charts from Jensen's Survey of the NT - used by permission  
Another Chart from Swindoll

### THE LIFE OF JESUS AS COVERED BY MATTHEW (shaded area)



Click chart to enlarge



Source: Borrow Ryrie Study Bible

Matthew 18:1 At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

- **At that time:** Mk 9:33-37
- **Who:** Mt 20:20-28 23:11 Mk 9:34 10:35-45 Lu 9:46-48 22:24-27 Ro 12:10 Php 2:3
- **in the kingdom of heaven:** Mt 3:2 5:19,20 7:21 Mk 10:14,15

## Related Passages:

Mark 9:33-37+ And they came to Capernaum; and when He was in the house, He began to question them, "What were you discussing on the way?" 34 But they kept silent, for on the way they had discussed with one another which of them was the greatest. 35 And sitting down, He called the twelve and \*said to them, "If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all, and servant of all." 36 And taking a child, He set him before them, and taking him in His arms, He said to them, 37 "Whoever receives one child like this in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me does not receive Me, but Him who sent Me."

Luke 9:46-48+ And an argument arose among them as to which of them might be the greatest. 47 But Jesus, knowing what they were thinking in their heart, took a child and stood him by His side, 48 and said to them, "Whoever receives this child in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me; for he who is least among you, this is the one who is great."

## THE EVER PRESENT DANGER OF PRIDE

**At that time** - Always pause to ponder "What time?" Gotquestions gives a good response - "This incident occurred after the Transfiguration and after Jesus' second prediction of His death. Jesus had also just spoken about paying temple taxes, essentially claiming exemption as the Son of God yet miraculously providing for both Peter's tax and His own so as not to cause offense. Too, Jesus had healed a demon-possessed boy whom His disciples were unable to heal (Matthew 17:14–21). Jesus' power was evident, and the disciples recognized Him as Messiah and King. Evidently, they were interested in what their roles would be in Jesus' kingdom. Rather than provide qualifications for the greatest or talk about a hierarchical structure, Jesus said those who became like children—humble—were the greatest (Matthew 18:4)."

**The disciples** ([mathetes](#)) came to Jesus ([Iesous](#)) - This is undoubtedly the inner circle of the 12 disciples.

**And said, "Who then is greatest** ([meizon](#)) **in the kingdom** ([basileia](#)) **of heaven** ([ouranos](#)) - This question would likely have been prompted because now the twelve are coming to the recognition that Jesus is indeed the Messiah, the King, and that he would soon assume His throne in an earthly kingdom and they wanted to know who would be greater. Is this not the natural tendency of all of us? The 12 are arguing about who is "Numero Uno" (Number one) which is amazing considering that they are in the presence of the Greatest One in all eternity! Unbelievable! Add to that fact that 9 of them had just failed the "cast out the demon test" (Mt 17:19+) and the other 3 had experienced a mountain top experience (Mt 17:1-9+) and you have the ingredients for an argument. Fallen flesh is always interested in self (take "h" off of "flesh" and spell it backwards!), which was clearly the case here. At the very least, consider the 9 who have just failed the "cast out a demon test" and now are arguing about who is the **greatest** ([megas](#)), the most significance, the most important! Pride is an ugly animal that will rear its head and attempt to take a mile if we give it even an inch. While the demon test would not have been very pride exalting for the 9, the 3 who went to the mountain would be another story. One can imagine one of them saying "You'll never guess Who I saw last week." Of course that is hypothetical because they were told to keep silent, but that would not have prevented their minds from exalting "self" for having had a once in a lifetime preview of the coming Kingdom!

**Warren Wiersbe** makes a good point that "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+)....When Christians are living for themselves and not for others, then there is bound to be conflict and division." ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

*He spoke of His abasement, they thought of their own advancement; and that 'at the same time'.*

-- C H Spurgeon

**C H Spurgeon Commentary** - 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.

**John MacArthur**- Ironically, while Jesus spoke of His personal suffering, they argued about their personal glory. This was a disturbing and potentially disastrous development. These men were the first generation of gospel preachers, and would be the leaders of the soon to be founded church. With so much riding on them and so much opposition from the hostile world, they needed to be unified and supportive of each other. The danger revealed here is that pride ruins unity by destroying relationships. Relationships are based on loving sacrifice and service; on selfless deferring to and giving to others. Pride, being self-focused, is indifferent to others. Beyond that, it is ultimately judgmental and critical, and therefore divisive. Because of that, pride is the most common destroyer both of relationships and churches. It plagued the Corinthian church, causing Paul to ask, "For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?" (1 Cor. 3:3; cf. 2 Cor. 12:20). Knowing that pride is the wedge Satan uses to split churches and splinter relationships, the Lord stressed to the disciples the crucial necessity of humility. (See [MacArthur Commentary](#))

*The Lord had just spoken to them about **His humiliation**,  
but all they could think about was **their exaltation!***

-- John MacArthur

**THOUGHT** - Lord, keep us mindful that we are all equal at the foot of the old rugged Cross, all blessed beneficiaries of Thy amazing grace and love lavished upon us in Christ and let the thought of His eternal exaltation expel the temporal temptation to prideful exaltation. For Thy glory, in the Name of the Exalted One, Christ Jesus. Amen

As **Leon Morris** this says "How far the disciples were from the spirit of Jesus...Jesus had just spoken of his sacrificial death for sinners (Mt 17:22-23+). They were speaking of their pride of place. This may be part of the reason for their inability to understand. They were thinking of themselves, He of others." (See [The Gospel According to St. Luke](#))

**William Barclay** quips that "the very fact that they asked that question showed that they had no idea at all what the Kingdom of Heaven was!"

**Matthew Henry Concise** - Mt 18:1-6. Christ spoke many words of his sufferings, but only one of his glory; yet the disciples fasten upon that, and overlook the others. Many love to hear and speak of privileges and glory, who are willing to pass by the thoughts of work and trouble. Our Lord set a little child before them, solemnly assuring them, that unless they were converted and made like little children, they could not enter his kingdom. Children, when very young, do not desire authority, do not regard outward distinctions, are free from malice, are teachable, and willingly dependent on their parents. It is true that they soon begin to show other dispositions, and other ideas are taught them at an early age; but these are marks of childhood, and render them proper emblems of the lowly minds of true Christians. Surely we need to be daily renewed in the spirit of our minds, that we may become simple and humble, as little children, and willing to be the least of all. Let us daily study this subject, and examine our own spirits.

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**Disciples** (3101) **mathetes** from **manthano** = to learn which Vine says is "from a root *math*, indicating thought accompanied by endeavor". Gives us our English = "*mathematics*" - see [matheteuo](#)) describes a person who learns from another by instruction, whether formal or informal. Another sources says mathetes is from from **math**- which speaks of "mental effort that thinks something through" and thus describes is a learner; a follower who learns the doctrines and the lifestyle of the one they follow. Discipleship includes the idea of one who intentionally learns by inquiry and observation (cf [inductive Bible study](#)) and thus **mathetes** is more than a mere pupil. A **mathetes** describes an adherent of a teacher. As discussed below **mathetes** itself has no spiritual connotation, and it is used of superficial followers of Jesus as well as of genuine believers. The Lord calls everyone to grow as a disciple (a learner of Christ; cf. also Mt 11:29,30), one who lives in faith, who lives in and by His Word in the power of the Holy Spirit.

**Great, Greatest** (3187) **meizon** is the the comparative of **mégas** (3173) great, strong, large.

**Friberg** - **μέγας, μεγάλη, μέγα** with a basic meaning great, translated to fit the context; (1) of extent of space large, spacious, wide, long (Mk 4:32; 14:15);

(2) of number and quantity large, great, abundant (Heb 10:35);

(3) of intensity and degree, opposite λιγος (little);

(a) in relation to natural phenomena intense (heat) (Rev 16:9), violent (storm) (Mk 4:37), very bright (light) (Mt 4:16), etc.;

(b) in relation to human and divine experience loud (voice) (Mk 15:37), loud (lamentation) (Acts 8:2), intense (fever) (Lk 4:38), etc.;

(c) in relation to extraordinary and surprising events mighty (deeds) (Rev 15:3); severe (trouble) (MT 24:21); neuter as a substantive μεγάλα extraordinary things (Lk 1:49);

(d) in relation to emotions great (joy) (Mt 2:10), deep (sorrow) (Ro 9:2), fierce (anger) (Rev 12:12), overwhelming (astonishment) (Mk 5:42), etc.;

(4) of persons possessing power, rank, dignity mighty, great, eminent (Titus 2:13); substantively ο μεγάλοι important people (Rev 11:18);

(5) of things marked by importance great, extraordinary, outstanding (Jn 19:31); especially of the time of judgment (Acts 2:20; Jude 1:6);

(6) comparative μείζων, με ζων and μείζοτερος, τέρα, ov greater (3Jn 4); most important, very important (1Co 12:31); substantively μείζων the older one (Ro 9:12); (τ) μείζω more outstanding things (Jn 1:50);

(7) superlative μέγιστος, ἴστη, ov greatest, very great (2Pe 1:4) (**BORROW** [Analytical Lexicon page 254](#))

**Gilbrant - Meizōn**, “greater,” is the comparative degree of megas, “great,” in reference to a wide range of connotations (e.g., great size, rank, external form, degree or intensity of feeling, wind, loudness etc.). Meizōn is used in the neuter plural in John 1:50 referring to “greater things” and in John 14:12, “greater works” (literally, “greater things”). In 1 Corinthians 12:31 it translated “the best.” The idea of “greater degree” is reflected in Romans 9:12 in the words, “The elder shall serve the younger.” A form of meizōn functions as an adverb with the meaning “all the more” in Matthew 20:31. It is also used in the superlative degree to mean “greatest” (cf. Matthew 18:1,4; Mark 9:34; 1 Corinthians 13:13). ([Complete Biblical Library](#))

**MEIZON - 42V** - Matt. 11:11; Matt. 12:6; Matt. 13:32; Matt. 18:1; Matt. 18:4; Matt. 23:11; Matt. 23:17; Matt. 23:19; Mk. 4:32; Mk. 9:34; Mk. 12:31; Lk. 7:28; Lk. 9:46; Lk. 12:18; Lk. 22:24; Lk. 22:26; Lk. 22:27; Jn. 1:50; Jn. 4:12; Jn. 5:20; Jn. 5:36; Jn. 8:53; Jn. 10:29; Jn. 13:16; Jn. 14:12; Jn. 14:28; Jn. 15:13; Jn. 15:20; Jn. 19:11; Rom. 9:12; 1 Co. 13:13; 1 Co. 14:5; Heb. 6:13; Heb. 6:16; Heb. 9:11; Heb. 11:26; Jas. 3:1; Jas. 4:6; 2 Pet. 2:11; 1 Jn. 3:20; 1 Jn. 4:4; 1 Jn. 5:9; 3 Jn. 1:4; Jude 1:6; Rev. 1:10; Rev. 2:22; Rev. 5:2; Rev. 5:12; Rev. 6:4; Rev. 6:10; Rev. 6:12; Rev. 6:13; Rev. 6:17; Rev. 7:2; Rev. 7:10; Rev. 7:14; Rev. 8:8; Rev. 8:10; Rev. 8:13; Rev. 9:2; Rev. 9:14; Rev. 11:8; Rev. 11:12; Rev. 11:13; Rev. 11:15; Rev. 11:17; Rev. 11:18; Rev. 11:19; Rev. 12:1; Rev. 12:3; Rev. 12:9; Rev. 12:10; Rev. 12:12; Rev. 12:14; Rev. 13:2; Rev. 13:5; Rev. 13:13; Rev. 13:16; Rev. 14:2; Rev. 14:7; Rev. 14:8; Rev. 14:9; Rev. 14:15; Rev. 14:18; Rev. 14:19; Rev. 15:1; Rev. 15:3; Rev. 16:1; Rev. 16:9; Rev. 16:12; Rev. 16:14; Rev. 16:17; Rev. 16:18; Rev. 16:19; Rev. 16:21; Rev. 17:1; Rev. 17:5; Rev. 17:6; Rev. 17:18; Rev. 18:1; Rev. 18:2; Rev. 18:10; Rev. 18:16; Rev. 18:18; Rev. 18:19; Rev. 18:21; Rev. 19:1; Rev. 19:2; Rev. 19:5; Rev. 19:17; Rev. 19:18; Rev. 20:1; Rev. 20:11; Rev. 20:12; Rev. 21:3; Rev. 21:10; Rev. 21:12

MEGAS - 230V - Matt. 2:10; Matt. 4:16; Matt. 5:19; Matt. 5:35; Matt. 7:27; Matt. 8:24; Matt. 8:26; Matt. 11:11; Matt. 12:6; Matt. 13:32; Matt. 15:28; Matt. 18:1; Matt. 18:4; Matt. 20:25; Matt. 20:26; Matt. 20:31; Matt. 22:36; Matt. 22:38; Matt. 23:11; Matt. 23:17; Matt. 23:19; Matt. 24:21; Matt. 24:24; Matt. 24:31; Matt. 27:46; Matt. 27:50; Matt. 27:60; Matt. 28:2; Matt. 28:8; Mk. 1:26; Mk. 4:32; Mk. 4:37; Mk. 4:39; Mk. 4:41; Mk. 5:7; Mk. 5:11; Mk. 5:42; Mk. 9:34; Mk. 10:42; Mk. 10:43; Mk. 12:31; Mk. 13:2; Mk. 14:15; Mk. 15:34; Mk. 15:37; Mk. 16:4; Lk. 1:15; Lk. 1:32; Lk. 1:42; Lk. 1:49; Lk. 2:9; Lk. 2:10; Lk. 4:25; Lk. 4:33; Lk. 4:38; Lk. 5:29; Lk. 6:49; Lk. 7:16; Lk. 7:28; Lk. 8:28; Lk. 8:37; Lk. 9:46; Lk. 9:48; Lk. 12:18; Lk. 14:16; Lk. 16:26; Lk. 17:15; Lk. 19:37; Lk. 21:11; Lk. 21:23; Lk. 22:12; Lk. 22:24; Lk. 22:26; Lk. 22:27; Lk. 23:23; Lk. 23:46; Lk. 24:52; Jn. 1:50; Jn. 4:12; Jn. 5:20; Jn. 5:36; Jn. 6:18; Jn. 7:37; Jn. 8:53; Jn. 10:29; Jn. 11:43; Jn. 13:16; Jn. 14:12; Jn. 14:28; Jn. 15:13; Jn. 15:20; Jn. 19:11; Jn. 19:31; Jn. 21:11; Acts 2:20; Acts 4:33; Acts 5:5; Acts 5:11; Acts 6:8; Acts 7:11; Acts 7:57; Acts 7:60; Acts 8:2; Acts 8:7; Acts 8:9; Acts 8:10; Acts 8:13; Acts 10:11; Acts 11:5; Acts 11:28; Acts 14:10; Acts 15:3; Acts 16:26; Acts 16:28; Acts 19:27; Acts 19:28; Acts 19:34; Acts 19:35; Acts 23:9; Acts 26:22; Acts 26:24; Acts 26:29; Rom. 9:2; Rom. 9:12; 1 Co. 9:11; 1 Co. 12:31; 1 Co. 13:13; 1 Co. 14:5; 1 Co. 16:9; 2 Co. 11:15; Eph. 5:32; 1 Tim. 3:16; 1 Tim. 6:6; 2 Tim. 2:20; Tit. 2:13; Heb. 6:13; Heb. 6:16; Heb. 8:11; Heb. 9:11; Heb. 10:21; Heb. 10:35; Heb. 11:24; Heb. 11:26; Heb. 13:20; Jas. 3:1; Jas. 3:5; Jas. 4:6; 2 Pet. 2:11; 1 Jn. 3:20; 1 Jn. 4:4; 1 Jn. 5:9; 3 Jn. 1:4; Jude 1:6; Rev. 1:10; Rev. 2:22; Rev. 5:2; Rev. 5:12; Rev. 6:4; Rev. 6:10; Rev. 6:12; Rev. 6:13; Rev. 6:17; Rev. 7:2; Rev. 7:10; Rev. 7:14; Rev. 8:8; Rev. 8:10; Rev. 8:13; Rev. 9:2; Rev. 9:14; Rev. 11:8; Rev. 11:12; Rev. 11:13; Rev. 11:15; Rev. 11:17; Rev. 11:18; Rev. 11:19; Rev. 12:1; Rev. 12:3; Rev. 12:9; Rev. 12:10; Rev. 12:12; Rev. 12:14; Rev. 13:2; Rev. 13:5; Rev. 13:13; Rev. 13:16; Rev. 14:2; Rev. 14:7; Rev. 14:8; Rev. 14:9; Rev. 14:15; Rev. 14:18; Rev. 14:19; Rev. 15:1; Rev. 15:3; Rev. 16:1; Rev. 16:9; Rev. 16:12; Rev. 16:14; Rev. 16:17; Rev. 16:18; Rev. 16:19; Rev. 16:21; Rev. 17:1; Rev. 17:5; Rev. 17:6; Rev. 17:18; Rev. 18:1; Rev. 18:2; Rev. 18:10; Rev. 18:16; Rev. 18:18; Rev. 18:19; Rev. 18:21; Rev. 19:1; Rev. 19:2; Rev. 19:5; Rev. 19:17; Rev. 19:18; Rev. 20:1; Rev. 20:11; Rev. 20:12; Rev. 21:3; Rev. 21:10; Rev. 21:12

MEGAS - >700X IN SEPTUAGINT - Gen. 1:16; Gen. 1:21; Gen. 4:13; Gen. 10:12; Gen. 10:21; Gen. 12:2; Gen. 12:17; Gen. 15:12; Gen. 15:18; Gen. 17:20; Gen. 18:18; Gen. 18:20; Gen. 19:11; Gen. 20:9; Gen. 21:8; Gen. 21:13; Gen. 21:18; Gen. 25:23; Gen. 26:13; Gen. 27:33; Gen. 27:34; Gen. 29:2; Gen. 29:16; Gen. 38:11; Gen. 38:14; Gen. 39:14; Gen. 45:7; Gen. 45:28; Gen. 46:3; Gen. 48:19; Gen. 50:9; Gen. 50:10; Gen. 50:11; Exod. 1:9; Exod. 2:11; Exod. 3:3; Exod. 6:6; Exod. 7:4; Exod. 9:3; Exod. 11:3; Exod. 12:30; Exod. 14:31; Exod. 18:11; Exod. 19:16; Exod. 23:31; Exod. 32:10; Exod. 32:11; Exod. 32:21; Exod. 32:31; Exod. 33:13; Lev. 21:10; Num. 11:33; Num. 13:28; Num. 14:12; Num. 14:19; Num. 22:18; Num. 34:6; Num. 34:7; Num. 35:25; Num. 35:28; Num. 35:32; Deut. 1:7; Deut. 1:17; Deut. 1:19; Deut. 1:28; Deut. 2:7; Deut. 4:6; Deut. 4:7; Deut. 4:8; Deut. 4:11; Deut. 4:32; Deut. 4:34; Deut. 4:36; Deut. 4:37; Deut. 4:38; Deut. 5:22; Deut. 5:25; Deut. 6:10; Deut. 6:22; Deut. 7:1; Deut. 7:19; Deut. 7:21; 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1 Sam. 19:5; 1 Sam. 19:8; 1 Sam. 20:2; 1 Sam. 20:41; 1 Sam. 22:15; 1 Sam. 23:5; 1 Sam. 25:2; 1 Sam. 25:36; 1 Sam. 28:12; 1 Sam. 30:2; 1 Sam. 30:16; 1 Sam. 30:19; 2 Sam. 3:38; 2 Sam. 7:9; 2 Sam. 13:15; 2 Sam. 13:16; 2 Sam. 13:36; 2 Sam. 15:23; 2 Sam. 18:7; 2 Sam. 18:9; 2 Sam. 18:17; 2 Sam. 18:29; 2 Sam. 19:5; 2 Sam. 19:33; 2 Sam. 20:8; 2 Sam. 23:10; 2 Sam. 23:12; 1 Ki. 1:40; 1 Ki. 2:22; 1 Ki. 2:35; 1 Ki. 3:4; 1 Ki. 3:6; 1 Ki. 3:15; 1 Ki. 4:13; 1 Ki. 6:1; 1 Ki. 7:46; 1 Ki. 7:47; 1 Ki. 7:49; 1 Ki. 8:55; 1 Ki. 8:65; 1 Ki. 10:18; 1 Ki. 11:19; 1 Ki. 12:24; 1 Ki. 18:27; 1 Ki. 18:28; 1 Ki. 18:45; 1 Ki. 19:11; 1 Ki. 21:13; 1 Ki. 21:21; 1 Ki. 21:28; 1 Ki. 22:31; 2 Ki. 3:27; 2 Ki. 4:8; 2 Ki. 4:38; 2 Ki. 5:1; 2 Ki. 5:13; 2 Ki. 6:23; 2 Ki. 6:25; 2 Ki. 7:6; 2 Ki. 8:4; 2 Ki. 10:9; 2 Ki. 10:21; 2 Ki. 12:11; 2 Ki. 16:15; 2 Ki. 17:21; 2 Ki. 17:36; 2 Ki. 18:19; 2 Ki. 18:28; 2 Ki. 20:3; 2 Ki. 22:4; 2 Ki. 22:8; 2 Ki. 22:13; 2 Ki. 23:2; 2 Ki. 23:4; 2 Ki. 23:26; 2 Ki. 25:26; 1 Chr. 9:31; 1 Chr. 11:14; 1 Chr. 12:15; 1 Chr. 12:23; 1 Chr. 16:25; 1 Chr. 17:8; 1 Chr. 17:21; 1 Chr. 22:8; 1 Chr. 25:8; 1 Chr. 26:13; 1 Chr. 29:1; 2 Chr. 1:8; 2 Chr. 1:10; 2 Chr. 2:4; 2 Chr. 2:8; 2 Chr. 3:5; 2 Chr. 4:9; 2 Chr. 6:32; 2 Chr. 7:8; 2 Chr. 9:17; 2 Chr. 13:17; 2 Chr. 15:14; 2 Chr. 16:14; 2 Chr. 17:12; 2 Chr. 18:30; 2 Chr. 20:19; 2 Chr. 20:27; 2 Chr. 21:14; 2 Chr. 21:11; 2 Chr. 24:25; 2 Chr. 26:15; 2 Chr. 28:5; 2 Chr. 30:21; 2 Chr. 30:26; 2 Chr. 31:15; 2 Chr. 32:18; 2 Chr. 34:9; 2 Chr. 34:21; 2 Chr. 34:30; 2 Chr. 35:19; 2 Chr. 36:18; Ezr. 3:11; Ezr. 3:12; Ezr. 3:13; Ezr. 4:10; Ezr. 5:8; Ezr. 5:11; Ezr. 9:7; Ezr. 9:13; Ezr. 10:12; Neh. 1:3; Neh. 1:5; Neh. 1:10; Neh. 3:1; Neh. 3:20; Neh. 3:27; Neh. 4:8; Neh. 5:1; Neh. 5:7; Neh. 6:3; Neh. 7:4; Neh. 8:6; Neh. 8:12; Neh. 8:17; Neh. 9:4; Neh. 9:18; Neh. 9:25; Neh. 9:26; Neh. 9:27; Neh. 9:32; Neh. 9:37; Neh. 12:31; Neh. 12:43; Neh. 13:5; Neh. 13:28; Est. 1:1; Est. 3:13; Est. 4:1; Est. 4:3; Est. 8:12; Est. 10:3; Ps. 18:14; Ps. 20:6; Ps. 21:26; Ps. 39:10; Ps. 46:3; Ps. 47:2; Ps. 47:3; Ps. 50:3; Ps. 75:2; Ps. 76:14; Ps. 85:10; Ps. 85:13; Ps. 88:8; Ps. 94:3; Ps. 95:4; Ps. 98:2; Ps. 98:3; Ps. 103:25; Ps. 105:21; Ps. 107:5; Ps. 110:2; Ps. 113:21; Ps. 130:1; Ps. 134:5; Ps. 135:4; Ps. 135:7; Ps. 135:17; Ps. 137:5; Ps. 144:3; Ps. 146:5; Ps. 151:5; Prov. 2:3; Prov. 15:16; Prov. 18:11; Prov. 20:6; Prov. 20:10; Prov. 24:5; Prov. 26:25; Prov. 27:14; Prov. 28:16; Prov. 29:6; Eccl. 2:21; Eccl. 9:13; Eccl. 9:14; Eccl. 10:1; Eccl. 10:4; Eccl. 10:6; Job 1:3; Job 1:19; Job 2:12; Job 2:13; Job 3:8; Job 3:19; Job 5:9; Job 9:4; Job 9:10; Job 9:22; Job 10:17; Job 24:12; Job 26:3; Job 30:4; Job 31:28; Job 36:24; Job 37:5; Job 37:22; Job 38:7; Job 40:22; Job 42:3; Hos. 2:2; Amos 6:11; Joel 2:11; Joel 2:25; Joel 3:4; Jon. 1:2; Jon. 1:4; Jon. 1:10; Jon. 1:12; Jon. 1:16; Jon. 2:1; Jon. 3:2; Jon. 3:3; Jon. 3:5; Jon. 4:1; Jon. 4:6; Jon. 4:11; Nah. 1:3; Zeph. 1:10; Zeph. 1:14; Hag. 1:1; Hag. 1:12; Hag. 1:14; Hag. 2:2; Hag. 2:12; Hag. 2:9; Zech. 1:2; Zech. 1:14; Zech. 1:15; Zech. 3:1; Zech. 3:8; Zech. 4:6; Zech. 4:7; Zech. 6:11; Zech. 7:12; Zech. 8:2; Zech. 14:4; Zech. 14:13; Mal. 1:11; Mal. 1:14; Mal. 3:22; Isa. 1:13; Isa. 5:9; Isa. 5:14; Isa. 7:20; Isa. 8:1; Isa. 9:1; Isa. 9:5; Isa. 9:6; Isa. 9:13; Isa. 10:12; Isa. 18:7; Isa. 19:22; Isa. 22:5; Isa. 22:18; Isa. 22:24; Isa. 26:4; Isa. 27:1; Isa. 27:13; Isa. 29:6; Isa. 33:4; Isa. 33:21; Isa. 33:22; Isa. 34:6; Isa. 36:4; Isa. 36:13; Isa. 38:3; Isa. 39:2; Isa. 49:6; Isa. 54:7; Isa. 60:22; Jer. 4:5; Jer. 4:6; Jer. 6:1; Jer. 6:13; Jer. 10:22; Jer. 11:16; Jer. 21:5; Jer. 21:6; Jer. 21:8; Jer. 27:22; Jer. 27:41; Jer. 28:54; Jer. 28:55; Jer. 31:3; Jer. 32:32; Jer. 32:38; Jer. 33:19; Jer. 34:5; Jer. 35:8; Jer. 37:7; Jer. 38:34; Jer. 39:17; Jer. 39:18; Jer. 39:19; Jer. 39:21; Jer. 39:37; Jer. 39:42; Jer. 40:3; Jer. 40:37; Jer. 48:9; Jer. 49:1; Jer. 49:8; Jer. 50:9; Jer. 51:7; Jer. 51:12; Jer. 51:15; Jer. 51:35; Jer. 52:13; Ezek. 1:4; Ezek. 3:12; Ezek. 8:6; Ezek. 8:13; Ezek. 8:15; Ezek. 9:1; Ezek. 11:13; Ezek. 17:3; Ezek. 17:7; Ezek. 17:8; Ezek. 17:9; Ezek. 17:17; Ezek. 17:23; Ezek. 21:19; Ezek. 25:17; Ezek. 29:3; Ezek. 29:18; Ezek. 31:10; Ezek. 36:23; Ezek. 38:15; Ezek. 38:19; Ezek. 39:17; Ezek. 43:14; Ezek. 47:10; Ezek. 47:15; Ezek. 47:19; Ezek. 47:20; Ezek. 48:28; Dan. 2:20; Dan. 2:31; Dan. 2:35; Dan. 2:45; Dan. 2:48; Dan. 4:10; Dan. 4:11; Dan. 4:20; Dan. 4:23; Dan. 4:30; Dan. 4:33; Dan. 4:34; Dan. 4:37; Dan. 5:1; Dan. 5:7; Dan. 5:9; Dan. 6:4; Dan. 6:21; Dan. 6:22; Dan. 7:2; Dan. 7:7; Dan. 7:8; Dan. 7:11; Dan. 7:17; Dan. 7:20; Dan. 8:3; Dan. 8:8; Dan. 8:21; Dan. 9:4; Dan. 9:12; Dan. 10:4; Dan. 10:7; Dan. 10:8; Dan. 11:2; Dan. 11:5; Dan. 11:13; Dan. 12:1;

**Rod Mattoon** - Where in the world did this come from? How did they get to this point? We are informed in Luke 9:1<sup>+</sup> that these men had power to heal and perform miracles. **This was a great and wonderful accomplishment, but unfortunately, it started fueling the flames of pride in some of the men.** When Peter, James, and John were asked to go up to the mountain with Jesus and they saw Moses and Elijah, they became inflated and infatuated with themselves, instead of elated. Evidently, they felt they deserved some special status of greatness because they were eyewitnesses to this event. This grasp for greatness got so bad, that James and John manipulated their mother to ask Jesus to let her sons have important, powerful positions in His kingdom. This really ticked off the disciples (see Mt 20:20-24) Whether you are rich or poor, young or old, the grasp for greatness has a way of pulling at the heart in some way or another, no matter who you are. People grasp for greatness because they mistakenly believe that greatness will make them more valuable or important to others. They believe greatness will make them happy and satisfy their soul. The grasp for greatness created dander, disputes, and division among the disciples. How did all this arguing lead to happiness? It didn't. The grasp for greatness has the same effect among people today, causing disunity, disharmony, and jealousy. Paul gave a warning about having the wrong attitude in grasping for greatness. (cf Galatians 5:26) The next time you get into a dispute with someone, ask yourself, "Am I angry because I am grasping for greatness?" Some may say at this point, "I don't care about greatness. I'm not concerned about this at all." By the time we get finished, I believe you will see that your sentiment is not quite accurate. Everyone, whether young or old has struggled with this desire in their lifetime and most people battle with it until the day they die. The desire of the first couple in the Garden of Eden was to be like a god. There is something in our nature that reflects the desire of Adam and Eve to be great. The grasp for greatness surfaces in so many ways in so many places. ([Treasures from the Scripture](#))

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#### **QUESTION - [Who is greatest in the kingdom?](#)**

**ANSWER** - The greatest person in [the kingdom](#) will of course be Jesus. After that, ranking the greatest is full of surprises. Matthew 18:1–5 records, "At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, 'Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' [Jesus] called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: 'Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me'" (see also Mark 9:35–37; Luke 9:46–48).

This incident occurred after the Transfiguration and after Jesus' second prediction of His death. Jesus had also just spoken about paying temple taxes, essentially claiming exemption as the Son of God yet miraculously providing for both Peter's tax and His own so as not to cause offense. Too, Jesus had healed a demon-possessed boy whom His disciples were unable to heal (Matthew 17:14–21). Jesus' power was evident, and the disciples recognized Him as Messiah and King. Evidently, they were interested in what their roles would be in Jesus' kingdom. Rather than provide qualifications for the greatest or talk about a hierarchical structure, Jesus said those who became like children—humble—were the greatest (Matthew 18:4).

Interestingly, after Jesus talks about the greatest being like a child, John tells Jesus that he had tried to stop others who were casting out demons in Jesus' name (Mark 9:38; Luke 9:49). Apparently, the lesson had not quite sunken in, or perhaps John was convicted by Jesus' words and chose to confess his mistake. Jesus explained that what mattered was not who was doing the works but the Name in which the works were being done. It is God who deserves the glory, not an elite group of His followers. We also see in Matthew 20 and Mark 10 a request from John and James to sit with Jesus in His kingdom. Jesus replied by asking them if they were able to suffer as He was going to suffer. He then said, "To sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father" (Matthew 20:23). Being great in God's kingdom is not about prestige or privilege. Rather, it involves responsibility and sacrifice. Jesus told His disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done" (Matthew 16:24–27). To be great is to serve self-sacrificially. Being great in God's kingdom is about giving oneself for the sake of God's glory and for the benefit of others.

Luke 22 tells about another dispute among the disciples about who was the greatest, this time during the [Last Supper](#). Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves" (Luke 22:25–27). This is the same night Jesus performed the service of the lowest of servants by [washing His disciples' feet](#). John 13 tells us Jesus did this because of His love for the disciples and also fully knowing His own relationship with the Father. Again, we see that the greatest is not the one with power or prestige, but the one who is secure in the Father's love and willing to serve.

Consistent in Jesus' teaching is that His kingdom is not like the kingdoms of this world. Humans tend to be concerned with social status, political clout, and pecking order. We tend to rank people according to how things look to us in this world, but Jesus warned

that using earthly criteria will never give us an accurate picture of rank in God's kingdom. Human judgment will give way to God's some day: "Many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first" (Matthew 19:30).

Rather than strive to be the greatest in this world, we should simply trust in Jesus and serve others, thereby serving Him. Positions of power are meant to be positions of service. Rather than lord power over others, we are to use any influence or resources we have to serve others. The greatest in the kingdom are those who have the humility of a child and the meekness of Jesus. "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5). What is valued in God's kingdom is loving the way He loved us—selflessly.

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#### **THE TRUE STANDARD OF GREATNESS - J H Jowett Matthew 18:1-7.**

HERE is our Lord's estimate of true greatness. How infinite is the contrast between His standard and the standards of the world! The world measures greatness by money, or eloquence, or intellectual skill, or even by prowess on the field of battle. But here is the Lord's standard—"Whosoever, therefore, shall humble himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

Those people are greatest who are most like God. We become partakers of the Divine nature through a child-like relationship to God. The grace and power of God pour into our souls when we wait upon Him like a little child.

Child-likeness opens the doors and windows to the incoming of the Almighty. The child-like is the trustful, and no barriers of cynical suspicion block the channels of spiritual communion. And the child-like is the docile, and no boulders of arrogance or self-conceit block the channel of the invigorating waters of life. And so the child-like become the God-like, and, of course, they are the greatest among the sons of men. The little child enshrines the secret of the God-man, and we should be infinitely wise if we had the little child always in our midst.

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#### **John Bennett - DESPISE NOT ONE OF THESE LITTLE ONES**

In today's verses, the Lord is answering a question posed by the disciples when they asked, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?', v. 1. It must have been a complete surprise to them when He put a child in their midst, and said, 'Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven', v. 3. What were the childlike features that Jesus identified as being worthy of emulation?

##### **Childlike faith, Mt 18:3**

We live in a world where men have become intellectually arrogant, refusing to accept the simple terms of God's great salvation. They think they have all the answers to their endless questions and queries about the universe and the reasons for all the disasters that afflict our earthly condition. If such are to be saved, they must realise that conversion is not an intellectual process. God cannot be held to ransom to provide all the answers before puny man yields his will. No! Salvation is not an intellectual process, but a spiritual event where childlike faith and implicit trust is exercised and thereby new life is received.

##### **Humility of heart and mind, Mt 18: 4**

Children are the unconscious models of reality and faith. They have no hidden agendas, nor do they profess to know everything, or have the need to understand all before believing. Similarly, in the Gospels, all who came to Christ for healing came with humility of mind, disclaiming personal merit, and casting themselves on the mercy of God. This is the attitude of mind and heart we must come with today if we ever would be saved. AUGUSTUS TOPLADY put it so succinctly: 'Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling'.

##### **Objects of the Father's Care, Mt 18:10, 14**

Concerning such, the Lord warns any who would dare offend them, v. 6, or who would despise them, v. 10, that serious consequences will ensue. Angels tend their way, Mt 18:10, and the Father guarantees their place in heaven, v. 14. We can also extend such thoughts to embrace those who are the children of God by faith. The Father is jealous over us with a fatherly love, and angels minister to us daily, we who are the heirs of salvation.

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#### **Matthew 18:2 And He called a child to Himself and set him before them,**

- Mt 19:13,14 1Ki 3:7 Jer 1:7 Mk 9:36,37



## JESUS TAKING A CHILD

**And He called ([proskaleo](#)) a child ([paidion](#)) to Himself and set him before** (literally in the midst of) **them** (the twelve) - Jesus loved metaphors and this one was a living metaphor. This action by Jesus is especially poignant and could not be missed by His disciples for in that day (in Jewish society) children were considered to be of no importance and were not to be taken seriously "except as a responsibility, one to be looked after, not one to be looked up to." ([France](#)) What a powerful contrast, a little child surrounded by a group of grown men!

**D A Carson** points out that "The child is held up as an ideal, not of innocence, purity, or faith, but of humility and unconcern for social status." (See [Matthew](#))

**David Guzik** notes that "Children are not threatening; we aren't afraid of meeting a five-year-old in a dark alley. When we have a tough, intimidating presence, we aren't like Jesus. Children are not good at deceiving; they are pretty miserable failures at fooling their parents. When we are good at hiding ourselves and deceiving others, we aren't like Jesus."

**C H Spurgeon Commentary** - 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.

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**Child** ([3813](#)) **paidion** diminutive of pais = child) is a little child of either sex, ranging from an infant (Mt 19:13, 14; Mk 10:13-15; Lk 18:16, 17, etc) to children who are older (Mt 11:16; Mt 14:21; 15:38; 18:2-5, etc) **Paidion** is used repeatedly of the infant Jesus in Matthew (Mt 2:8-9, 11, 13-14, 20-21) **Paidion** is used as a term of comparison, Jesus making the point that we are to become like a little child (Mk 10:15 Lk 18:17), the implication of course being that this is not an infant but a child old enough to express saving faith in the Messiah!. **Paidion** stresses the need for moral training and guidance. As a term of address, **paidion** occurs in the NT only in 1John 2:14, 18 and John 21:5.

**Barclay** - teknion indicates a child young in age and paidion a child young in experience, and, therefore, in need of training and discipline.

Another has said that teknion emphasizes more the relationship, the dependence or weakness of the infant, the community of nature and kinsmanship between parent and child, while paidion stresses the immaturity of the child, the need to be under instruction or direction.

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## QUESTION - [Does the Bible instruct us to have childlike faith? SEE VIDEO](#)

**ANSWER** - Unquestionably, [faith](#) is the essence of the Christian life. Faith is exhorted throughout the Bible and is presented as an absolute necessity. In fact, "without faith, it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11:6). The entire chapter of Hebrews 11 is about faith and those who possessed it. Faith is a gift from God, as we see in Ephesians 2:8-9 and not something we come up with on our own. All Christians have received the gift of faith from God, and faith is part of the armor of God—the shield with which we protect ourselves from the "flaming arrows of the evil one" (Ephesians 6:16).

The Bible never exhorts us to have "childlike" faith, at least not in so many words. In Matthew 18:2 Jesus says that we must "become as little children" in order to enter the kingdom of God. The context of Jesus' statement is the disciples' question, "Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" (verse 1). In response, Jesus "called a little child to him, and placed the child among



them. And he said: ‘Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me’” (verses 2–5).

So, as the disciples focus on what constitutes “greatness” in heaven, Jesus provides a new perspective: the way “up” is “down.” Meekness is required (cf. Matthew 5:5). Jesus exhorts the disciples (and us) to seek to possess a childlike modesty in addition to their faith. Those who willingly take the lowest position are the [greatest](#) in heaven’s eyes. A young child is destitute of ambition, pride, and haughtiness and is therefore a good example for us. Children are characteristically humble and teachable. They aren’t prone to pride or hypocrisy. Humility is a virtue rewarded by God; as James says, “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up” (James 4:10).

Although faith is not mentioned in Matthew 18:1–5, we know that it isn’t just humility that ushers a person into heaven; it is faith in the Son of God. A humble, unpretentious faith could rightly be called a “childlike faith.” When Jesus wanted to bless the children, He said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it” (Mark 10:14–15). How does a child receive a gift? With openness, honesty, and unbridled joy. That type of happy authenticity should be a hallmark of our faith as we receive God’s gift in Christ.

Of course, children are easily fooled and led astray. In their artlessness they tend to miss the truth and be drawn to myths and fantasies. But that is not what is meant by having a childlike faith. Jesus promoted a humble, honest faith in God, and He used the innocence of a child as an example. Emulating the faith of children, we should simply take God at His Word. As children trust their earthly fathers, we should trust that our “Father in heaven [will] give good gifts to those who ask him” (Matthew 7:11).

#### Related Resources:

- [Is the inner child a biblical concept?](#)
- [Why do so many people struggle with a lack of faith?](#)
- [Can faith really move mountains?](#)
- [What does the Bible say about faith?](#)

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Vance Havner - Lesson from Children

Children (Matt. 18:2).

Childish (Matt. 11:16-19).

Childlike (Matt. 18:3).

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**H A Ironside - The Continual Burnt Offering** - Then Jesus called a little child to Him, [and] set him in the midst of them. Matthew 18:2

The child in the midst. When God became incarnate He chose to appear on earth as a baby. The sweetest, purest creature that we know in this world is an artless, little child. And this is the chosen symbol of the representative of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus declared, “Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3). Who then can ever enter? Who can go back to the comparative innocence and purity of a little child? But note what really happened. The Lord Jesus called a little child. In trustful confidence he came to the Savior, who took him in His arms and set him in the midst. Now note the analogy. He calls. We heed His voice, and so become converted and find a place in His kingdom. The law of that kingdom is love. Its subjects are to show the meekness and gentleness of Christ, hence not to seek great things for themselves (Jeremiah 45:5), nor to sit in judgment on their fellow servants (Matthew 7:1–2). Each one is to act as before the Lord, endeavoring in his measure to do the will of God and to glorify Him, while seeking to cooperate in the fullest way with all true service in which others may be engaged (Philippians 1:27).

Oh, let the reaping of the after-years  
Be of the sowing of your patient love  
And many prayers.  
Look up for strength;  
The God who placed that child within your care  
Will give you all you need to teach of heaven  
And guide it there.

"He called to Him a little child, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the Kingdom of Heaven."-- Mat 18:2, 3 (R.V.).

OUR LORD bids us seek the child-heart! Not to be childish, but childlike! It is recorded of the illustrious soldier, Naaman, that after he had washed in the Jordan waters, his flesh came to him as that of a little child. It is a noble combination--the stature and strength of the full-grown man united with the winsome purity and sweetness of a little child. It is not possible for any one of us to attain these two qualities unless we are prepared to pay the price. The orders of rank in the Kingdom of Heaven are diametrically opposed to those of our earthly kingdoms. Here men are ever striving to rise above their fellows; but in Christ's Kingdom they stoop to serve, and in stooping become crowned!

The King of Glory girded Himself with a towel, and kneeling down washed the feet of His disciples, and the nobles in His Kingdom are those who have become willing to be the servants of all!

Simplicity, humility, and freedom from self-consciousness are the natural traits of early childhood; alas! that they so quickly learn from us to seek for notice, patronage, and the first place! How happy that little one was as he nestled to the Saviour's heart! Three times over in this chapter the Master speaks about "these little ones." How dearly He loved the children, and each time must have pressed the child closer to Himself! It was thus that like came to like!

It is the childlike hearts that agree on earth in the symphony of prayer. One may go East and the other West, but beneath the touch of the Spirit of Love, they will be of one accord, i.e. in attuned fellowship with each other and with Christ (Mat 18:19, 20). The child-spirit, also, will be willing to forgive and forget (Mat 18:15, Mat 18:21, Mat 18:22).

#### PRAYER

Grant, O Lord, that I may become as a little child in Thy kingdom. May my heart be filled with Thy love, my lips with gentle, helpful words, and my hands with kind, unselfish deeds. AMEN

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#### MATTHEW 18:2

READ: Matthew 18:1-5

CHILDREN represent great potential, and the time and attention we give them is one of life's most fruitful investments.

Many years ago a doctor was comfortably seated in front of his fireplace, enjoying shelter from the pouring rain, when someone began knocking at his door. Outside stood a distressed mother.

"My boy, my Davy," she cried, "he's very sick!"

Oh no, the doctor thought, not on a night like this! He knew the visit would be financially unprofitable because the woman appeared to be too poor to pay him.

But the doctor loved children, and he had a strong sense of duty, so he walked five miles in drenching rain to help the child. That night the doctor saved the life of David Lloyd George, a future prime minister of England.

The doctor had no way of knowing that his young patient would one day be an important world leader. Nor do we know the effect we have on eternity when we minister to children. Jesus is calling children to Himself and He wants to use our voices to do the calling and our arms to do the hugging.—HGB (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

Lord, I live in a nation that abuses, forsakes, and devalues children even as it gives lip service to "family values." May I have the wisdom, strength, and courage to be a rescuer and a protector of such defenseless ones, as You have rescued and defended me.

**Matthew 18:3 and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.**

- **Truly:** Mt 5:18 6:2,5,16 Jn 1:51 3:3
- **Unless:** Mt 13:15 Ps 51:10-13 131:2 Isa 6:10 Mk 4:12 Lu 22:32 Ac 3:19 Ac 28:27 Jas 5:19,20
- **and become:** Mk 10:14,15 Lu 18:16,17 1Co 14:20 1Pe 2:2

## CHILDLIKE FAITH GAINS ENTRANCE TO KINGDOM

Truly ([amen](#)) I say to you, unless you are converted ([strepho](#) - voluntary turn from sin) and become like children ([paidion](#)), you will not enter ([eiserchomai](#)) the kingdom ([basileia](#)) of heaven ([ouranos](#)) - Truly ([amen](#)) is a solemn opening and should always garner our full attention and unhesitating obedience. **Converted** ([strepho](#)) simply means to turn but in this context it signifies a complete change of direction in one's life (see [conversion](#)). It is notable that **Converted** ([strepho](#)) is in the passive voice, signifying that this turning is something that one cannot carry out by exertion of their own will or their own strength but is something God's Spirit must bring about (thus this is a so-called divine passive). In this passage Jesus' gives the only way one can **enter the kingdom of heaven**, entering in this context being synonymous with being (divine passive) born again (Jn 3:3+). To **become like children** means to lay aside all of your learned anti-God thoughts (doing so enabled by God's Spirit) and instead exhibiting a trusting spirit like a child (again enabled by God's Spirit and gift of faith), as well as a willingness to be dependent and receive sustenance (so to speak) from one's parents, in this case from God the Father.

Children rely entirely on others for their needs, trusting their parents or guardians for provision, care, and guidance. Children are open to learning and quick to believe and trust. Children often have an unpretentious and straightforward trust in those they depend on. Imagine a child sitting at the dinner table. The child does not worry about where the food comes from, how it was prepared, or if there will be enough. The child simply trusts that the parent will provide. This is the kind of trust and reliance Jesus asks of us—a faith free from anxiety and full of confidence in God's care.

**Leon Morris** ably summarizes Jesus' objective in using the picture of a little child pointing out that "Adults like to assert themselves and to rely on their own strength and wisdom. This attitude is impossible for those who wish to enter the kingdom. We should notice further that Jesus does not answer the set terms of the question. He does not concern himself with relative positions and who will have the top job when the kingdom comes: he speaks of the more basic problem of getting into the kingdom. His emphatic double negative rules out the possibility of even entering the kingdom for those seeking great things for themselves. He does not talk about eminence in the kingdom at all; without genuine humility it is impossible even to get into it, and for humility the question of personal preeminence does not arise." (See [The Gospel According To Matthew](#))

**C H Spurgeon Commentary** - 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 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."

*One does not receive salvation  
by bargaining or arguing*

**Henry Morris** - as little children. One does not receive salvation by bargaining or arguing, although the prior clearing of obstacles to faith is helpful and often necessary. In the last analysis, however, we are saved through faith--unconditional faith--like the unquestioning trust of a little child.

*Childlikeness, not childishness,  
is essential to conversion*

**The Believer's Study Bible** - 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.

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**Converted** (return)([4762](#)) [strepho](#) means to turn, to turn about. The first use is here in Mt 5:39 where a literal turning of the cheek signifies an act of non-retaliation. Jesus made several literal turns (in fact most of the literal uses in the NT describe Jesus turning), some so dramatic we can picture them in our mind (See Mt 9:22, 16:23, Lk 7:9, 44, 9:55, 10:23, 14:25, 22:61, 23:28, Jn 1:38). One

writer said strepho was used in classic Greek writings for "the moral walk and inner turnings." Jesus used strepho figuratively to refer to conversion (Mt 18:3 = turning of one's heart to Jesus, the antithesis is seen in Acts 7:39!). Strepho describes Judas' return after remorse but his return was too late for conversion (Mt 27:3, cp Jn 12:40). In Acts 7:39 we read of the Jews in the OT after coming out of Egypt "in their hearts **turned back** to Egypt!" Strepho then describes God turning away from His rebellious people (Acts 7:42, cf Isaiah 63:10) Of Mary seeing Jesus after His resurrection (Jn 20:14, 16). Paul and Barnabas when repudiated by the Jews said "we are **turning** to the Gentiles" or taking the Gospel to them. In Rev 11:6 the two witnesses "have power over the waters to turn them into blood." (cf "the staff that was turned into a serpent" in Ex 7:15)

**Strepho** - 21v - Matt. 5:39; 7:6; 9:22; 16:23; 18:3; 27:3; Lk. 7:9,44; 9:55; 10:23; 14:25; 22:61; 23:28; Jn. 1:38; 12:40; 20:14,16; Acts 7:39,42; 13:46; Rev. 11:6

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## **H A Ironside - The Continual Burnt Offering - Matthew 18:3–4**

None can be too young for the kingdom of Heaven. The children should be taught to come to Jesus as soon as they are able consciously to respond to His love and grace. As for those who are taken away from this scene before they reach years of accountability, we can rely upon the precious words of chapter 18:10, 14. The Good Shepherd has died for these lambs and will not permit one of them to be lost. Christian parents should bring their babes to Him from the very beginning of their lives and should count on Him to bless them by drawing their hearts to Himself, assured that the faith of a child is as real as that of a more mature person. In fact, the one is the model for the other.

A tremendous responsibility moreover rests upon those who are older to guide the feet of the young, both by precept and example.

How oft a little one has found the road,  
The narrow pathway to that blest abode:  
Through faith in Christ has read its title clear,  
While learned men remain in doubt and fear!  
A little child! The Lord oft uses such  
The stoutest heart to break, or bend, or touch;  
Then by His spirit bids the conflict cease,  
And once for ever enter into peace.

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## **QUESTION - [Why did Jesus say, "Let the little children come to me"?](#)**

**ANSWER** - At one point during Jesus' earthly ministry, some [children](#) were brought to Him so that He could lay hands on them and pray for them (Matthew 19:13). The disciples tried to turn the children away, but Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (verse 14). Mark 10:14 (KJV) adds that Jesus was "much displeased" with His disciples for their actions. He then blessed the children (Matthew 19:15).

There are two potentially puzzling elements to this story. First, why did the disciples try to keep the children away from Jesus? Also, what did Jesus mean when he said, "Let the little children come to me . . . for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these"?

It is important to remember that children in Jesus' time were not necessarily regarded as special or particularly endearing, except to their own parents. Many cultures today look on children as especially sweet, innocent, and even wise. Jewish culture in that day probably did not see children in such optimistic terms. The disciples most likely rebuked those bringing the children to Jesus because they felt bringing children to Jesus was socially improper or because they thought the children would bother Jesus. It is likely that their move to hinder the parents from bringing their children to Jesus was motivated not by unkindness but by a desire to respect Jesus' position as a teacher. But Jesus wanted the children to come to Him. He said, "Let the children come," because He wanted to bless them.

It is wonderful to think of Jesus interacting with a child. Children are needy and dependent, and they know almost nothing about life. They function mostly on emotion rather than reason. Yet Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (Matthew 19:14). Scripture often compares believers to children (e.g., Luke 10:21; Galatians 4:19; 1 John 4:4). In fact, Jesus told those following Him, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3–4; cf. Mark 10:15).

Jesus' command to "let the little children come to me" reveals several truths: 1) Children need to be blessed by the Lord. 2) The Lord wants to bless children. 3) Parents should be encouraged to bring their children to Jesus at an early age and teach them His ways. 4) Jesus has regard for the weakest and most vulnerable among us. 5) No matter how compassionate Jesus' followers are, Jesus Himself is more compassionate still. 6) Those who come to Christ must do so in childlike [humility](#), [faith](#), and simplicity.

Like children who implicitly trust their parents, believers trust God. Faith is not about knowing everything or doing everything right. It is about knowing that, no matter what happens, our Father will take care of us. That trust in Him, even when life is terrifying and sad and makes no sense, is what makes a believer like a child. "All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away" (John 6:37). God loves His children.

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#### Related Resources:

- [How did Jesus interact with children?](#)
  - [What does it mean that Jesus loves the little children?](#)
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#### Oswald Chambers - Borrow [Biblical Ethics page 38](#)

##### Moral Conversion

"Except ye ... become as little children." (Matthew 18:3†)

Our Lord teaches that moral progress must start from a point of moral innocence, and is consequently only possible to a man when he has been born again. A child's life is implicit, not explicit. To become "as little children" means to receive a new heredity, a totally new nature, the essence of which is simplicity and confidence towards God. In order to develop the moral life innocence must be transformed into virtue by a series of deliberate choices in which the present pleasure is sacrificed for the ultimate joy of being good. This aspect of truth is familiar in all Paul's Epistles, viz., that the natural has to be transformed into the spiritual by willing obedience to the word and will of God. Such passages as Romans 12:2 ("... be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind:") and Ephesians 4:23 ("be renewed in the spirit of your mind") apply directly to the moral life of those who have been supernaturally saved by the grace of God, those in whom the Holy Spirit dwells and is at work. To renew means to transform to new life. These passages make it clear that we can be renewed in our mind when we choose. We have no choice about being born into this world, but to be born again, if we will but come to Jesus and receive His Spirit, is within our own power. This is true all along in the Christian life, you can be renewed in the spirit of your mind when you choose, you can revive your mind on any line you like by sheer force of will. Always remember that Jesus Christ's statements force an issue of will and conscience first, and only as we obey is there the understanding with the mind (see John 7:17). The challenge to the will comes in the matter of study, as long as you remain in the "stodge" state there is no mental progress—"I am overwhelmed by the tremendous amount there is to know and it's no use my going on." If you will forge through that stage you will suddenly turn a corner where everything that was difficult and perplexing becomes as clear as a lightning flash, but it all depends on whether you will forge ahead. When people say, "Preach us the simple Gospel," what they mean is, "Preach us the thing we have always heard, the thing that keeps us sound asleep, we don't want to see things differently"; then the sooner the Spirit of God sends a thrust through their stagnant minds the better. Continual renewal of mind is the only healthy state for a Christian. Beware of the ban of finality\* about your present views.

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#### TODAY IN THE WORD

Few people in his day had a greater passion for the salvation and training of children than Dwight Moody. As his involvement in ministry grew during his early years in Chicago, Moody found himself increasingly drawn to the poorest children of Chicago, who were not being reached by more conventional methods and Sunday schools. Moody ventured boldly into the worst district of Chicago, called "the Sands," where children lived in degrading conditions. He befriended these neglected children, rented a vacant saloon, and soon had a Sunday class going--often amid fighting, screaming, and boisterous laughter.

D. L. Moody took seriously Jesus' command concerning the importance of bringing children to Himself. Children may be overlooked when the conversation turns to the "heavy" issues of theology and spiritual matters. But in Matthew 18 Jesus punctuated a question from an adult, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?", by placing a child in the middle of the circle of disciples. The Savior then insisted that child-like humility and faith are prerequisites for salvation.

Although this scene can easily be sentimentalized, this was not just a touch of emotion on Jesus' part. He identified Himself with the children in terms of how they were treated. Clearly, His kingdom is wide open to believing children. Jesus also issued a dire warning to anyone who causes a child to fall away spiritually.

Evidently some unnamed disciples didn't completely understand the message, since a short time later they tried to "shoo" away some parents who wanted Jesus to pray for their children. These followers may have been trying to save Jesus some time. Or they may have considered the children an annoyance.

Whatever the reason for the disciples' rebuke, Jesus again set the record straight. Today's verse contains both an invitation and a warning. Jesus invited us to bring children to Himself, and urged us to remove anything that might keep them from coming to Him--

including neglect and indifference on the part of adults.

#### TODAY ALONG THE WAY

If you want encouragement in your ministry to children, we recommend a reading of Lyle Dorsett's book, *A Passion for Souls*, the life of D. L. Moody, from which we are drawing this month.

If you are already helping to evangelize and disciple children, keep up the good work. If you are not currently involved in a ministry to children and young people, we encourage you to talk with the leaders at your church. You don't have to be a parent, or even married, to touch young lives for the Lord. Ask God to lead you as you consider the possibility

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**D L Moody** - IT is a master-piece of the devil to make us believe that children cannot understand religion. Would Christ have made a child the standard of faith if He had known that it was not capable of understanding His words? It is far easier for children to love and trust than for grown-up persons, and so we should set Christ before them as the supreme object of their choice.

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#### **James Smith - CONVERSION**

“Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven” (Matt. 18:3).

I. The Privilege Offered. “The kingdom of Heaven.” This kingdom of the heavenlies is not of this world. This fig cannot grow on a thistle. It is what the world cannot give—

1. **RIGHTEOUSNESS.** “The kingdom of God is righteousness” (Rom. 14:17). Put right in a righteous way and ruled in a righteous manner.
2. **PEACE.** The kingdom of God is “peace” (Rom. 14:17). In perfect harmony with God.
3. **JOY IN THE HOLY GHOST** (Rom. 14:17). The righteousness of God, the peace of Jesus Christ, and the “joy of the Holy Ghost.”

II. The Change Needed. “Converted.” The Greek word means to turn. The water of nature must be turned into the wine of grace. The only way a mineral can enter into the vegetable kingdom, or a vegetable into the animal kingdom, or the human animal into the spiritual kingdom, is by being radically changed. “Born again,” made a new creation in Christ Jesus.

III. The Evidence of being Converted. “A little child.” Not a little boy who thinks himself a man. It is a great step down (or up) into the honest simplicity of a trustful child. Look at some of the characteristics of a little child—

1. **UNCONSCIOUS HUMILITY.** Humble, but not aware of it. No duplicity. Instinctively choosing the low place.
2. **ENTIRE DEPENDENCE.** Simple, not careful about the future. Like the fowls, taking no thought for their life. Clinging close to the parent, esteeming father the biggest and best man in the world.
3. **UNQUESTIONING RECEPTIVENESS.** Teachable and obedient. A mother said not long ago: “When my children were young they believed me, but now——?” The evidence of conversion is seen in character, not in profession. It is not putting an old head on young shoulders, nor a young head on old shoulders, but becoming little children. “How can this be?” (John 3:3).

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#### James Smith - CONVERSION MATTHEW 18:3

Here are three reasons why it is needed.

- 1 Because by nature we are not now as “little children”
- 2 Because we are presently unfit for “the Kingdom of Heaven”
3. Because Christ says. “Except ye be converted ye cannot.” He knows

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#### **HELPING UNCLE JOE**

References: Matthew 18:3, 21–35; Mark 11:25; Luke 10:21; Romans 12:19–21; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13

When I went to pick up Shanna for Sunday school one week, she was crying and had blood on her dress. “It’s my uncle Joe!” she said. I knew that her family was “going through changes” because of Uncle Joe and his drug addiction.

Shanna had particular reason to feel bitter toward her uncle. For years she had dreamed of owning a bicycle, and that Christmas a donation from a church made her dream come true. Shanna rode her shiny, new blue bike everywhere, bragged on it, polished it, and treasured it. Within a month, her uncle had sold the bike to buy drugs—an ample reason to embitter a nine-year-old.

Now, on this morning, there was one more reason. Uncle Joe had come home wearing a T-shirt that read, “Say No to Drugs.” Shanna commented, “Why don’t you read your own shirt?” He hit her, causing a nosebleed. The white collar and yellow lace of her

Sunday dress were a mess. Nothing else was clean, and everyone else was still asleep. We went to church to wash out the bloodstain.

When it came time in the service for individual prayer petitions, Shanna's voice sounded bright and clear as a trumpet: "I pray for my uncle Joe. He needs your help, Lord. Please, Jesus, help my uncle."

What a privilege to drink from the same chalice as Shanna.

—Heidi Neumark, *Breathing Space* (Beacon, 2003)

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Gentle Jesus

Read: Matthew 18:1-10

Unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. —  
Matthew 18:3

Charles Wesley (1707–1788) was a Methodist evangelist who wrote more than 9,000 hymns and sacred poems. Some, like "O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing," are great, soaring hymns of praise. But his poem "Gentle Jesus, Meek and Mild," first published in 1742, is a child's quiet prayer that captures the essence of how all of us should seek the Lord in sincere, simple faith.

Loving Jesus, gentle Lamb,  
In Thy gracious hands I am;  
Make me, Savior, what Thou art,  
Live Thyself within my heart.

When some followers of Jesus were jockeying for position in His kingdom, the Lord "called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven' " (Matt. 18:2-3).

Not many children seek position or power. Instead, they want acceptance and security. They cling to the adults who love and care for them. Jesus never turned children away.

The last stanza of Wesley's poem shows a childlike desire to be just like Jesus: "I shall then show forth Thy praise / Serve Thee all my happy days; / Then the world shall always see / Christ, the holy Child, in me." — David McCasland (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

Father, give me the faith of a little child. I want to know Your love and care, and to rest in Your embrace. Grant my desire to be like You in all my ways that I might live for Your honor.

Faith shines brightest in a childlike heart.

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### **Puritan Daily Readings - Matthew 18:3**

In short, the converted man has a new end in his thoughts, and a new way in his endeavors, and therefore his heart and life are new. Before, his carnal self was his end; and his pleasure and worldly profits, and credit were his way; and now God and everlasting glory are his end; and Christ, and the Spirit, and Word, and ordinances, holiness to God, and righteousness, and mercy to men, these are his way. Before, self was the chief ruler; to which the matters of God and conscience must stoop and give place. And now God in Christ, by the Spirit, Word and ministry, is that chief ruler, to whom both self and all the matters of self must give place. So that this is not a change in one, or two, or twenty points, but in the whole soul, and in the very end and bent of the conversation. A man may step out of one path into another, and yet have his face the same way, and be still going towards the same place. But it is another matter to turn quite back again, and take his journey the contrary way, to a contrary place. So it is here: a man may turn from drunkenness to thriftiness, and forsake his good fellowship, and other gross disgraceful sins, and set upon some duties of religion, and yet be still going to the same end as before, intending his carnal self above all, and giving it still the government of his soul. But, when he is converted, this self is denied and taken down, and God is set up, and his face is turned the contrary way; and he, that before was addicted to himself, and lived to himself, is now by sanctification devoted to God, and lives unto God.

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### **Vance Havner - Have You Lost the Wonder?**

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 (Matthew 18:3)

Gypsy Smith, the great evangelist, died on a journey in true Gypsy tradition in his eighty-seventh year. Called to preach at seventeen, he was simple and original and colorful. He said, "I was born in a field; don't put me in a flowerpot." He was not a theologian; he would have agreed with Sam Jones, who said he liked flowers but not botany, religion but not theology. He was in a class with Billy Sunday, who used to say that he didn't know any more about theology than did a jack rabbit about ping-pong. When

he was advised to learn how to sing from his diaphragm, Gypsy replied that he didn't want to sing from his diaphragm but from his heart.

When asked about the secret of his freshness and vigor, even into old age, he said, "I have never lost the wonder." A preacher should have the mind of a scholar, the heart of a child, and the hide of a rhinoceros. His biggest problem is how to toughen his hide without hardening his heart. Gypsy Smith had the heart of a child. He never lost the wonder.

Is not this one thing our Lord meant when He said, "Except ye be converted; and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3)? Children have not lost the wonder. They have not been here long enough to get used to it. They still have a sense of surprise—anything may happen, everything is new. At five they have all the questions, and at eighteen they know all the answers. With a child, every turn of the road may hold a glad discovery. The commonest, most humdrum day is glorified by the glamour of imagination, for life is one-fourth fact and three-fourths fancy.

All too soon, and sooner now than ever, children lose the wonder. A popular magazine inquired recently, "What happened to the Magic of Childhood?" Youngsters become cynical, fed-up, sophisticated before they reach their teens. In a television age they have already seen everything. What could possibly surprise them? Recently, in a Mennonite settlement, I read this motto: "We are too soon old and too late smart." "Too smart too soon" would describe the plight of modern youth.

Youth is not entirely to blame. Oldsters have no time to wonder, to reflect, to meditate about anything. We must always be "doing something." There is no time to walk in the woods, to sit before an open fire, "just thinking." Everything is organized, supervised, planned, programmed, and correlated. We don't walk—we take organized hikes. We don't wander along, watching birds—we join a club and keep records. We lose the wonder of it in the work of it.

This gets into Christian experience. What should be a life of faith working by love becomes high-pressure "religious activity." What should be a Thessalonian work of faith and a labor of love and a patience of hope becomes just Ephesian work and labor and patience.

We lose the wonder because too many Christians become childish instead of childlike. They are spiritual babies who won't grow up; milk-feeders who should be on meat; carnal believers, not newborn babes desiring the sincere milk of the Word; overgrown babies who keep pastors busy with a milk bottle. We are not to be "children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, [we] may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ" (Ephesians 4:14-15). We ought to grow up and out of childishness into childlikeness. This secret is kept from the wise and prudent and revealed unto babes. There is not so much to learn as to unlearn. A revival comes when childish church members become childlike in simple faith and obedience.

A childlike Christian does not lose the wonder. There ought to be in every child of God a sense of surprise, a glad expectancy.

This is his Father's world and anything can happen. We live on a miracle level and faith is not believing that God can, but that He will do wonderful things. But we do not look for miracles, and we do not see many. We pray for rain, and do not carry our umbrellas. We ought never to start for a meeting without saying, "This may be the great night!" We get used to being Christians; we take it for granted and we lose the wonder. We work at it harder than ever, but we are shorn Samsons in treadmills. "Christian activity" becomes a battle of wits and a bustle of works. Nothing else under the sun can be as dry, flat, tedious, and exhausting as religious work without the wonder. We dread going to church. We are bored by the sermon. The Sunday-school lesson puts us to sleep. Church visiting is drudgery and singing in choir a chore. We are weary in well-doing. Once we stood amazed in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene; now we want to sit amused. Once we were edified; now we must be entertained. It is all work and no wonder.

A passenger on a long train trip was so enthralled by the journey that every few moments he was heard to say, "Wonderful!" The passing scenery, the faces of the fellow passengers, even the smallest details elicited from him glad expressions of keen enjoyment. Finally one traveler, overcome by curiosity, asked him, "How is it that while the rest of us are worn out with this monotonous trip, you are having the time of your life and you keep saying, 'Wonderful!'" He answered, "Until a few days ago, I was a blind man. A great doctor has just given me my sight and what is ordinary to the rest of you is 'out of this world' to me."

If the Great Physician has opened our eyes; if we have been to Siloam's Pool and have come back seeing, if we have had the touch by which we no longer see men as trees walking—if all that has happened to us, why shouldn't we make our way through this poor world singing?

Wonderful, wonderful, Jesus is to me,  
Prince of Peace, Counsellor, Mighty God is He;  
Saving me and keeping me from all sin and shame,  
He is my Redeemer, praise His Name!

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MATTHEW 18:3

Many years ago a doctor was comfortably seated in front of his fireplace, enjoying his shelter from the pouring rain. Suddenly he heard a knock at the door. Outside stood a distressed widow "My boy, my Davy" she cried, he's very sick!" Oh no, he thought, not on a night like this! He knew this visit would be financially unprofitable. The woman obviously couldn't pay him. But the doctor loved children, and he had a strong sense of duty. So he went, and Davy's life was saved. That sick little boy recovered. His name was David Lloyd George. The doctor frequently looked back to that night when he took that five-mile walk in the drenching rain. He would say, "I never dreamed that in saving the life of that child, I was saving the life of the future Prime Minister of England!"

Nor do we know the eternal impact we can make when we seek opportunities to lead children to Christ.

Jesus is calling children to Himself. Ask God to give you opportunities to demonstrate His love for them. As we live for Christ, let's be careful not to offend children by our words and actions. Let's always look out for the little ones. —H. G. B. (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

EVERY CHILD IS A BUNDLE OF POTENTIALITY.

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### James Smith - CONVERSION

"VERILY, I SAY UNTO YOU, EXCEPT YE TURN AND BECOME AS LITTLE CHILDREN, YE SHALL IN NO WISE ENTER INTO THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN" (Matt. 18:3, R.V.).

This was Christ's answer to some of His own disciples, who had been asking that somewhat half-curious, self-confident question, "Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?" They are not all properly converted who are the professed followers of Jesus Christ. Three things here should be noted—

#### I. The Need of Conversion. "Except ye turn and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter the Kingdom of Heaven."

We may be disciples, in a sense, and yet be unfit for the Kingdom of God. Those who don't need to be converted are those who, at some time or other, have been converted, for "All we like sheep have gone astray." There may be an outward conformity where there is an inward deformity. The tree needs to be made good before the fruit can be good; the fountain of the heart must be cleansed if the streams of thought and feeling are to be pure. The Kingdom of Heaven cannot be entered by those who selfishly seek their own good, and not the glory of God. Not to submit to the will and purpose of God is to rebel against this Kingdom, which is the "rule of the Heavens."

#### II. The Nature of Conversion. "Except ye turn."

It is a turning about—a turning from self-confidence and self-rule unto the rule of God. Saul was thoroughly converted when he said, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" He had turned from His own self-made plans and purposes to the will of his Lord and Saviour. In one sense we need to be converted very often, for every time we turn aside, like Bunyan's pilgrims, into any By-Path Meadow that leads us out of fellowship with the Lord, we need another conversion, another turning back, if we would enter again into the peaceful Kingdom of Heaven. Christ "suffered for us, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God." If we have not been turned unto God we are yet unconverted; and if we have been thus converted, and are not now walking in the light and joy of His presence, it is quite clear that we need another turning about. "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?"

#### III. The Evidence of Conversion. "Become as little children."

The little child which "Jesus set in the midst of them," was for them an object lesson of self-abasement and trustfulness. Those who are wholly turned to God are as open minded and submissive as little children. They are very conscious of their own weakness, and free from all unholy ambition and secret intrigue. They are harmless, affectionate, and sincere, without duplicity and hypocrisy. To become as a little child is to have the past blotted out and forgiven, and to begin life anew after another and more heavenly fashion. It is only when a man gets converted, and becomes again a little child, that he can have all the prospects and opportunities of a lifetime before him. He has not yet begun to live in a real, true sense, if he has not been turned to God. "God is angry with the wicked every day; if he turn not, He will whet His sword" (Psa. 7:11, 12).

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J R Miller - Matthew 18:3

Our great Teacher spoke strong words, when he said that only those who become like little children, can enter into the kingdom of heaven. It is of vital importance that we learn just what the words mean. What is it—to become like a little child?

There is a legend of a man whom the angels loved, and wished to have honored in some way. They asked that some remarkable power might be bestowed upon him. They were told to learn what the man would choose. But he would make no choice. Pressed to name some new power which should be given him, he said he would like to do a great deal of good in the world—without even knowing it. So it came about, that whenever his shadow fell behind him—it had healing power—but when it fell in front of him—it had not this power.

This is Christlikeness, goodness, power to do good, usefulness, helpfulness, without being conscious of the possession of these qualities. Ambition to have distinction, craving for praise, consciousness of being good, bright, useful, or great—all are marks of a worldly spirit. In another place Jesus said that greatness in his kingdom, is the spirit of unselfish serving, desiring "not to be served unto—but to serve." He who serves others the most unselfishly—is the greatest Christian.

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### The Possibility of Conversion

The possibility of sudden change or sudden conversion is one of the most relevant topics in almost every area of human endeavor. The psychologist and the psychiatrist and the psychotherapist now are debating whether Freud was right. He seemed to say that you cannot transcend your childhood; the best you can do is to make peace with what your parents did to you. You can't really change. Freud's most recent disciples, like Erik Erikson, say, "Oh yes, Freud was great. He opened up the whole unconscious to us. But he was wrong there. Yes, you can transcend your childhood. You don't have to be what your parents made you." Good news, if it's true.

—Bruce Larson, "What about Sudden Conversion?" Preaching Today, Tape No. 72.

See: Matthew 18:3; Luke 19:1–10; Acts 3:19.

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**John MacArthur** - When speaking of genuine salvation, Jesus made an apt comparison to the characteristics of young children. To be saved, you must come to Christ with the dependent attitude and outlook of a little child: simple, helpless, trusting, unaffected, unpretentious, and unambitious.

It's not that children are without sin, but that they are naïve and unassuming, dependent on others and free from selfish claims to grandeur. They submit to the care of their parents and other loved ones, relying on them to meet all their needs. That's the kind of humble and dependent attitude anyone must have who seeks to enter the kingdom of Jesus Christ. [Truth for Today: A Daily Touch of God's Grace - Page 240](#)

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**Martyn Lloyd-Jones** - The ultimate sin of man is pride of intellect. That is why it is always true to say that 'Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are 'called'. The wise man after the flesh wants to understand. He pits his brain against God's wisdom, and he says, 'I don't see'. Of course, he doesn't. And Christ says to him, 'Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven'. (Matthew 18:3)

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### Vance Havner - A Day In Disney World

Sara and I visited Disney World and were swallowed up in sixty thousand tourists from everywhere. I soon found myself calling it Dizzy World! Why does this avalanche of people descend on this land of fantasy? For one reason—because it is an escape from reality. Everybody is trying to get away from it all. Some go to the movies or opera, some to the ball game. Some play bridge all afternoon. When we were children we read Alice in Wonderland, Cinderella, Robinson Crusoe, The Wizard of Oz. Some take the wrong road and turn to drugs, alcohol, immorality, religious orgies, demonic cults, magic. Walt Disney was a genius who created a wonderland of innocent make-believe enjoyed by adults and children alike. Don't forget that Dad spends more time than Junior playing with the electric train he bought for his son!

But one does not have to go to Disney World or to any Shangri-La to get away from it all. We do not have to escape from reality. There are two worlds of Reality—the natural and the spiritual.... "the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18). We can live in another world while we live in this one—in a world of spiritual reality in the midst of this present natural world. Jesus came to tell us about the Kingdom of Heaven. All who trust and follow Him belong to that kingdom. Christians are not citizens of earth trying to get to heaven but citizens of heaven making their way through this world.

*The keys to this kingdom are conversion and childlikeness*

The keys to this kingdom are conversion and childlikeness (see Matthew 18:3). When we are born again, we enter a second childhood as children of God. Some are worldly, some are unworldly, some are otherworldly. A little boy in a parade of youngsters was marching out of step. It turned out that he had a transistor radio under his coat and was keeping step with music from a

thousand miles away! So does the Christian march through this world keeping step with the drumbeats of heaven. He does not stand on Jordan's stormy banks casting a wishful eye toward Canaan—he dwells now in Beulah Land. He tastes the powers of the age to come. The blessed assurance that Jesus is his is a foretaste of glory divine.

This other world is not a make-believe realm of fantasy. We know that we are dead and risen with Christ. We accept it, affirm it, and act upon it. The childlike Christian has a sense of wonder far more marvelous than the delight of a youngster in Disney World. He is a new creature to whom all things have become new. He drinks of a new wine that leaves no hangover. There will be trouble and hardship as we pilgrims and strangers, exiles and aliens travel toward that city with foundations whose builder and maker is God. We groan in this tabernacle but we know that all things work together for good to us, and that our light affliction (which is but for a moment) works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

The early church shook that age because it had learned to live in two worlds at once with a simple faith, a pilgrim character, and a blessed hope. Then Constantine came along and made Christianity popular and the church at home in this world. We need a new band of pilgrims who make their way through these lowlands in childlike wonder while creation stands on tiptoe waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God—those who "ply their daily task with busier feet because their secret souls a holier strain repeat."

They do not escape from Reality—they triumph over it and find a life more wonderful than all the Disney Worlds that man could ever devise.

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### **A W Tozer - WHY BE ARTIFICIAL?** [Mornings with Tozer: Daily Devotional Readings - Page 28](#)

Except ye...become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 18:3

Christian men and women who have sincerely knelt at the feet of Jesus and have surrendered themselves to His meekness have found a comforting and satisfying place of rest.

They have discovered that we do not have to worry about what people think of us—as long as God is pleased!

We are no longer plagued with the heavy burden of artificiality. Think of the millions who live in secret fear that someday they will be careless and by chance an enemy or a friend will be allowed to peep into their poor, empty souls. Bright people are tense and alert in fear that they may be trapped into saying something common or stupid.

It is plain to see that the heart of the artificial worldling is breaking under the burden, under the weight of pretense and pride.

To men and women everywhere, Jesus says, "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest!" He offers His grace and His mercy—blessed relief that comes when we accept ourselves for what we are and cease to pretend!

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If a person is what the world calls an honest moral man, if he does justly, and loves a little mercy, is now and then good-natured, reaches out his hand to the poor, receives the sacrament once or twice a year, and is outwardly sober and honest; the world looks upon such an one as a Christian indeed, and doubtless we are to judge charitably of every such person. There are many likewise, who go on in a round of duties, a model of performances, that think they shall go to heaven; but if you examine them, though they have a Christ in their heads, they have no Christ in their hearts.

GEORGE WHITEFIELD\*

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### The First One You Must Bring

Many years ago I used to lead a thing at St. Peter's called The Children's Church. There was a little girl who was a member many years ago. Jillie was 10 at the time. We'd been studying Matthew's gospel, and in those days at the end of the year we set these poor kids an examination—a written examination. Having asked them 30-odd academic questions, I permitted myself a final personal one. This is what I said, because we'd been studying the Gospel of John, John 1: "Andrew brought Simon to Jesus. Philip brought Nathaniel to Jesus. Whom have you brought to Jesus?"

Do you know what Jillie answered? "I have brought myself to Jesus." She was quite right. Have you? You can't bring anybody else till you've brought yourself. —John R. W. Stott, "Keeping the Right Company," Preaching Today, Tape No. 46.

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### **Oswald Chambers** - Continuous conversion

Except ye be converted, and become as little children.... Matthew 18:3.

These words of Our Lord are true of our initial conversion, but we have to be continuously converted all the days of our lives, continually to turn to God as children. If we trust to our wits instead of to God, we produce consequences for which God will hold us responsible. Immediately our bodies are brought into new conditions by the providence of God, we have to see our natural life obeys

the dictates of the Spirit of God. Because we have done it once is no proof that we shall do it again. The relation of the natural to the spiritual is one of continuous conversion, and it is the one thing we object to. In every setting in which we are put, the Spirit of God remains unchanged and His salvation unaltered but we have to "put on the new man." God holds us responsible every time we refuse to convert ourselves, our reason for refusing is wilful obstinacy. Our natural life must not rule, God must rule in us.

The hindrance in our spiritual life is that we will not be continually converted, there are 'wedges' of obstinacy where our pride spits at the throne of God and says—"I won't." We deify independence and wilfulness and call them by the wrong name. What God looks on as obstinate weakness, we call strength. There are whole tracts of our lives which have not yet been brought into subjection, and it can only be done by this continuous conversion. Slowly but surely we can claim the whole territory for the Spirit of God

He interprets Jesus' words in Matthew 18:3—"Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven"—as a call for ongoing spiritual transformation. Chambers writes that this transformation isn't a one-time event but a daily turning to God with childlike trust and humility (cf Ro 12:1, "daily" in Lk 9:23). He warns against relying solely on our own understanding, urging believers to continually align their natural inclinations with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This process requires persistent submission and the willingness to let God govern every aspect of our lives, aka "surrender" to His good, and acceptable and perfect will.

Chambers further explains that in every new situation, the Spirit of God remains unchanged, and His salvation unaltered, but we must "put on the new man" (Ephesians 4:24). He cautions that refusing this ongoing conversion can hinder spiritual growth, as areas of self-will and pride resist submission to God's authority. By embracing continuous conversion, believers can gradually surrender all aspects of their lives to the Spirit of God, fostering deeper spiritual maturity.

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**Spurgeon Study Bible** - Mt 18:3 " 'Truly I tell you,' he said, 'unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.' " Someone said to me, "This is a growing day." "Ah," I said, "I hope we shall all grow spiritually." "Which way?" he asked, "smaller or larger?" Let it be smaller; that will certainly be the surest way of growth. If we can become much less today, we shall be growing. We have grown up, as we call it; today let us grow down and become as little children, or else we shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

**Matthew 18:4 "Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."**

- **humbles:** Mt 23:11,12 Ps 131:1,2 Isa 57:15 Lu 14:11 1Pe 5:5 Jas 4:10
- **greatest:** Mt 18:1 20:26,27 Mk 10:43 Lu 9:48

#### Related Passages:

1 Peter 5:5+ You younger men, likewise, **be subject** ([aorist imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) to your elders; and all of you, **clothe yourselves** ([aorist imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) with humility toward one another, for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.

James 4:10+ **Humble** ([aorist imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

### THE WAY UP IS DOWN!

Other titles could be "The Greatness of Humility" "Childlike Humility in God's Kingdom" "Becoming Great by Becoming Small" "The Path to True Greatness" "Humble Hearts, Heavenly Rewards" "The Childlike Spirit of the Kingdom" "Greatness Redefined by Humility" "The Kingdom Belongs to the Humble" "Small in Spirit, Great in God's Eyes" "The Secret to Kingdom Greatness" "Lessons in Humility from a Child" "True Greatness Through Submission" "The Power of a Humble Heart" "Becoming Like a Child to Enter the Kingdom" "The Childlike Key to Heaven's Kingdom" "The Greatness of Childlike Dependence" "Walking Humbly in the Kingdom" "A Little Child Leads the Way" "From Humility to Heavenly Honor" "The Greatest in Heaven: The Humble"

See [Spiritual Paradox in the Christian Life](#) and related article [Paradoxes in the Christian Life](#)

**Whoever then** - This pronoun means what follows has universal application and relevance. Jesus narrows down His focus on the

attribute of humility.

**Humbles** ([tapeinoo](#) aorist active) **himself as this child** ([paidion](#)), **he is the greatest** ([megas/meizon](#)) **in the kingdom** ([basileia](#)) **of heaven** ([ouranos](#)) - Here Jesus gives the definitive answer to the prideful question of the disciples in Mt 18:1<sup>L</sup>. One can imagine the facial expressions on the twelve as they heard Jesus' description of greatness! Humbling oneself like a child means acknowledging your limitations and asking for and depending on God's help without hesitation or shame. A childlike humble attitude reflects a heart that depends entirely on God. True greatness in God's kingdom is found not in self-exaltation but in self-lowering, serving others (cf Mk 10:45+), and fully relying on God's grace.

*Humility is to the Christian what ballast is to the ship;  
it keeps him in his proper position and regulates all his thoughts and feelings.*

-- Archibald Alexander

What does humbling oneself like a child look like, keeping in mind that one can only do this because of God's grace? It is one who manifests a teachable spirit, a willingness and openness to correction and guidance from God's Word, God's Spirit, and God's children (other believers). It is one who like a child serves others without expecting recognition. It is one who like a child recognizes that everything they have and need comes from their heavenly Father (cf Jas 1:17+). In sum, humility, as taught by Jesus, involves adopting the qualities of a child which include trust, dependence, teachability, and a willingness to take a lowly position. It is a countercultural posture that leads to true greatness in God's kingdom and transforms both our relationship with God and with others.

**Theodore H Robinson** says "It is not merely the simplicity of the child that Jesus has in view, it is even more the fact that he is starting life afresh, with no preconceived notions; the saying means much the same as the Johannine 'Ye must be born again'" (Borrow [Gospel of Matthew page 152](#))

**R T France** points out that "Humbles himself does not refer to arbitrary asceticism or a phoney false modesty...but the acceptance of an inferior position (as Jesus did, Philippians 2:8, where the same phrase is used)." (See [Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary - Page 274](#))

As **Warren Wiersbe** says "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 (Ro 12:3). The truly humble person does not deny the gifts God has given him, but uses them to the glory of God. ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

*The imitation of humility is sickening;  
the reality is attractive.*

As **Spurgeon** says "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."

*What a kingdom is this, in which  
every man ascends by willingly going down!*

**C H Spurgeon Commentary** - 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!

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

-- Matthew Henry

In summary, when Jesus calls a child to Himself and sets them before the disciples, He illustrates the heart posture required to enter and thrive in the kingdom of heaven: humility, trust, and dependence. This simple yet profound act challenges us to let go of pride, ambition, and self-sufficiency and to approach God with childlike faith and openness.

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Children in Jesus' time were considered lowly and dependent, with no significant social status. By pointing to a child, Jesus highlights humility as essential for entering the kingdom. Just as children rely completely on their parents, believers must recognize their dependence on God for everything, including salvation. Children often approach life with sincerity and openness, characteristics Jesus encourages in our relationship with God. Children are eager to learn and grow, making them a fitting model for

discipleship. Believers must remain teachable and open to correction.

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**Humbles** (5013) **tapeinoo** from **tapeinos** = low, not high, figuratively of one's attitude/social position) literally means to level, to cause something to be lower or to make low (eg, to level off a mountain in Lk 3:5 from Lxx of Is 40:4). **Tapeinoo** means to bow down, to make low, to humble. Most NT uses of **tapeinoo** are figurative and include the following meanings: To cause someone to lose prestige, to reduce to a meaner condition or lower rank, to abase. To be ranked below others. In secular Greek, the person who was **tapeinos** described the one who was base, ignoble or of low birth, servile, held in low esteem. Obviously in the Bible, the supreme example of humility and humbling one's self is the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Wuest** - The word is found in an early secular document where it speaks of the Nile River in its low stage in the words, "It runs low." The word means "not rising far from the ground." It describes the Christian who follows in the humble and lowly steps of his Lord." **Wuest** adds that **tapeinoo** means "to make low, bring low, to bring into a humble condition, to abase, to assign a lower rank or place to, to humble or abase one's self, to be ranked below others who are honored or rewarded, to have a modest opinion of one's self, to behave in an unassuming manner." ([Eerdmans Publishing](#) - used by permission)

See lengthy discussion of **tapeinoo** in the [NIDNTT \(online\)](#).

[Older Articles on Humility](#) - Puritans, et al

[Quotations on Humility](#)

**TAPEINOO** - 15X/11V - **brought low(1), get along(1), humble(2), humble means(1), humbled(4), humbles(4), humbling(1), humiliate(1)**. Matt. 18:4; Matt. 23:12; Lk. 3:5; Lk. 14:11; Lk. 18:14; 2 Co. 11:7; 2 Co. 12:21; Phil. 2:8; Phil. 4:12; Jas. 4:10; 1 Pet. 5:6

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**Oswald Chambers** - There are no experts in spiritual matters as there are in scientific matters. The spiritual expert is never so consciously because the very nature of spiritual instruction is that it is unconscious of itself; it is the life of a child, manifesting obedience, not ostentation. Our Lord describes the spiritual expert in Matthew 18:4—"Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven." (Borrow [Baffled to fight better : Job and the problem of suffering page 62](#))

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#### **ILLUSTRATIONS OF HUMBLING ONESELF AS A LITTLE CHILD:**

**An Open Hand** - A child holds their hand out for food, trusting their parent will fill it. Humility is like an open hand, trusting God to provide rather than clinging tightly to our own resources.

**A Low Door** - Some ancient doors were deliberately low, requiring people to bow to enter. The kingdom of heaven is entered only by those willing to bow low in humility, acknowledging their need for God.

**A Shepherd and a Lamb** - A lamb, small and helpless, stays close to the shepherd for protection and provision. Humility means recognizing that we are like lambs who need to follow the Good Shepherd to find safety and peace (cf Ps 23:1-5+).

**A Child's Hand in a Parent's Hand** - Imagine a small child holding their parent's hand, walking confidently even in uncertain terrain. The child doesn't worry about the path ahead because they trust the parent implicitly. This depicts the kind of trust and dependence we are called to have on Jesus—willing to follow wherever He leads, knowing He cares for us.

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#### Matthew 18:4 TODAY IN THE WORD

In his essay, "A Bible Fit for Children," English professor Alan Jacobs asked his students what it means to "become like children." They responded that children are innocent and have a simple faith and a sense of wonder. "But," commented Jacobs, "Jesus Himself employed none of these concepts."

Instead, he explained, Jesus was referring to the low social status of children.

"After all, in most societies children do not have the full rights and privileges of adults; they are not free agents, they are under the authority of their elders. One can readily see how accepting for oneself such a status would be congruent with Jesus' insistence that the first shall be last and the last first."

If we're going to understand true greatness in God's kingdom, we're going to have to dispense with romantic notions and pay close attention to God's Word. Today's reading provides several important clues about how to be great in the kingdom of heaven.

The first way is to live by faith. Genuine faith, even if it is as small as a mustard seed, can cast out demons and move mountains. That is to say, if faith is placed in the right Person—God—nothing inside God's will is impossible (17:20). After giving this promise,

Jesus kept His disciples from misconceptions about power by again predicting His death and resurrection. Against all human expectations, they were to put their faith in a suffering Messiah.

Another road to greatness in God's kingdom is to live in freedom. Jesus did not owe the temple tax. There was no duty to be done, no obedience required, in this situation. But freedom in Christ means the freedom not to put self first, so Jesus told Peter to pay it. He did not bow to the legalists, but simply avoided giving offense by working a rather humorous miracle.

#### TODAY ALONG THE WAY

In what ways can you choose a servant's position? Perhaps your church has some behind-the-scenes ministries where you could serve. Or maybe you could assist some elderly people with necessary but unglamorous tasks like house cleaning or yard work.

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#### Matthew 18:4

HUMILITY IS NOT AN IDEAL; it is the unconscious result of living in right relationship to God, centered in Him. The conscious eye of a humble person is not on his service, but on his Savior.

There is nothing more awful than conscious humility; it is the most satanic type of pride. A person who consciously serves you is worse than the Pharisee eaten up with conceit.

We will be humble if the center of our affection is God's honor. Our humility will never be understood by someone who is not Christ-centered; but Christ will know the source of our attitude.

Jesus Christ did not lift up humility as an ideal. He lived it. When we serve others only for the sake of Christ's glory, and not for the purpose of being appreciated by them, we will be humble as He is.

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O FOR A CHILD'S PERSPECTIVE - A Little League baseball player was in right field when his dad arrived late to the game and called to him from the sideline to see how it was going. "It's seventeen to nothing right now," the little guy yelled to his dad. "But as soon as we get to bat, things'll get better."

Ah, the optimism of youth. Maybe that's why Jesus said adults need to be more like children—hopeful and unencumbered by pessimism and negativism. Could you use a little hope right now? The Bible is full of hope for those who will take time to discover it.

Let God fill you with childlike hope and joy today. No matter what you're facing, good days are ahead.

Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Mt 18:4

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#### Chris Tiegreen - Unassuming Children [The One Year At His Feet Devotional](#)

"Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 18:4

"For those who would learn God's ways, humility is the first thing, humility is the second, humility is the third."

—St. Augustine

IN WORD Most cultures love their children. Few give them any respect or honor. We look down on them. It's a loving condescension, of course, but it's a condescension nonetheless. Adults don't aspire to have the status of little children or strive for their accomplishments. We spend most of our childhood hoping to grow up so we can do more and be more. We aspire to adulthood.

This may be normal human growth, but it runs contrary to the kingdom of God, at least in terms of spiritual development. Our bodies grow, our intellects accumulate knowledge, our talents are developed, and everything about us matures upward. But to mature spiritually, we must go in the opposite direction. We must intentionally avoid seeking status. We must not try to earn spiritual respect. True spiritual maturity and respect in the kingdom of God are issues of humility. And in order to have them, we must become like society's least impressive contributors—children.

IN DEED Human beings can be quite ambitious. We admire that drive when it comes to athletics, art, business, and every other area of human achievement. We like the prestige and the honor that accomplishments bring us. But when we transfer such ambition to our spiritual life, it misses God's purpose for us. He did not make us to be spiritually independent. We are entirely dependent creatures, who must learn that the way to grow up is to go down.

Have you learned that status in the kingdom of God is an inverted version of status in the world? The first will be last and the last first (Matthew 20:16). Those who wish to rule must serve (Matthew 20:26). And the greatest in the kingdom of heaven has aspired to the humility of . . . well, just a child. It's a hard lesson to learn, but it's a solid principle. Aspire to greatness—the greatness of being discounted like a child. It's the way up in the kingdom.

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Gems of Gold - "Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven." (Matt.

18:4.)

O Lord, I'm but a little child who loves to walk with Thee,  
I like to sense Thy presence near, wherever I may be,  
I know that Thou art wondrous strong, and careth e'en for me.

When I am tired, I like to know that Thou dost hold my hand,  
It helps me on o'er cragged rocks, and makes me feel so grand,  
And when I slip and fall, I know that Thou dost understand.

Then, when I reach Thy home at last, upon the golden shore,  
I know I'll find a welcome true through heaven's open door,  
Then I will ever be with Thee, the One whom I adore.

THE child spirit should always be prized. John delighted in addressing the saints as "little children." And we are, no matter the number of our years, but children as we come into the presence of the Eternal.

As a "little child," we should confidently trust. As a "little child," we should seek our Father's face.

Child-life is beautiful in the simplicity of its faith. A child delights in seeking the benefactions and blessings of his elders. He rejoices in pleasing those who are over him.

O God, may I come to Thee with this same child-like confidence. May I find no greater joy than to nestle close to Thy side, than to bask beneath Thy smile. Keep me a child in the innocence of my yielding trust.

He loves to feel me close to Him, to see I trust Him so,  
He's happy when I run to Him, and tell Him all my woe;  
He says I'm all the world to Him; He loves me, this I know.

He often holds me by the hand, and tells me not to fear,  
I feel secure from all alarms because I know He's near;  
I know I'm precious unto Him, of all things else most dear.

And so, I walk along with Him, and cuddle to His side,  
I place my feeble hand in His and trust whate'er betide,  
And soon I'll go away with Him forever to abide.

John placed his head upon the bosom of His Lord. There is the place for us, also. We grow tired and faint and we need to nestle up to Him.

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### **John Bennett** - Matthew 18:4 GREATEST IN THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

At the commencement of the chapter, Matthew is at pains to make us aware that this is a continuing narrative. Therefore, the relevance of the previous incident is very important. The Lord has just paid the temple tax and raised the issue of gathering tribute Himself. Clearly, as Lord of the temple, He had no obligation to pay the tax. 'Then are the children free', He says. But He then demonstrates how He acts in such circumstances and submits to the requirements 'lest we should offend (margin says 'stumble') them'. This is the mark of true humility.

'At the same time', so the account continues, the disciples wish to speak about being 'great' in the kingdom of heaven. What is required of us, they ask, to have positions of greatness in the kingdom? Sadly, this was not the first time they had raised this matter, nor would it be the last. Place and position are ever the ambitions of our hearts. When we have them then we will do anything to keep the status that they bring. It all has to do with pride and our perceptions of things according to how it is here in our world.

Now, enter the sphere of the kingdom, and all is changed. Unless you are converted, that is, recognize what you are before God and repent of it, and 'become as little children', that is, humble yourself and helplessly cast yourself on God's mercy, then you won't even get in! See verse 3.

The Lord then goes on to deal with 'greatness' in the kingdom. You only get on if you are prepared to go down, He says. The promise of 'greatness' only comes to those who continue to live lives on the same basis as they entered the kingdom, that is, to 'become as little children'. This, alone, is the road to true greatness before God. This spirit of lowliness is one where there is no thought of self, just total dependence and trust in the Father. It can only be worked out in daily, unsophisticated submission to the will of God.

The true child of the kingdom starts each day casting his needs upon the Father and yielding all to Him in a total sense of



dependence. It is that joy of 'simply trusting everyday'. Pray for such a spirit today.

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True greatness is found in simple surrender to God's plan for our lives. - Jim Cymbala

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**A W Tozer - MATTHEW 18:4** [My Daily Pursuit: Devotions for Every Day - Page 37](#)

Jesus desires that we be as sincere as little children, especially when it comes to our worship.

This sincerity must be cultivated in our life, and we must cultivate it prayerfully if our worship is to be accepted by Almighty God. Our preparation and coming into His presence has to do with cultivating the simplicity of our lives. That is, getting rid of everything in our lives that hinders our sincere devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ.

If we would just stop and begin to believe that anything that hinders this is sin, and then deal with it as sincerely as is called for at the time, we would be on our way into the presence of God.

What a terrible thing to spend a lifetime making offerings to the Almighty and find out all of them have been rejected! How many people will come to the end of life and realize nothing they have ever done is acceptable to God?

Each day, we must strip ourselves of anything hindering our coming acceptably into the presence of God.

I hear the Savior say,  
"Thy strength indeed is small;  
Child of weakness, watch and pray,  
Find in Me thine all in all."  
ELVINA M. HALL (1822–1889)

Oh, God, I come before Thee as simply as a child, knowing that, before Thee, I am as nothing. Be Thou my all in all today, I pray.  
In Jesus' name, amen.

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**J I Packer** - If we are not constantly growing downward into humility, we shall be steadily swelling up and running to seed under the influence of pride.

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### **CHILDLIKENESS by George MacDonald**

The disciples had been disputing who should be the greatest, and the Lord wanted to show them that such a dispute had nothing whatever to do with the way things went in His kingdom. Therefore, as a specimen of His subjects, He took a child and set him before them. It was not to show the scope but the nature of the kingdom.

The child was employed as a manifestation, utterance, and sign of the truth that lay in his childhood, in order that the eyes as well as the ears should be channels to the heart. It was essential—not that the child should be beautiful but—that the child should be childlike.

He told them they could not enter the kingdom save by becoming little children—by humbling themselves. For the idea of ruling was excluded where childlikeness was the one essential quality. It was to be no more who should rule, but who should serve; no more who should look down upon his fellows from the conquered heights of authority—even of sacred authority, but who should look up honoring humanity, and ministering to it, so that humanity itself might at length be persuaded of its own honor as a temple of the living God. It was to impress this lesson upon them that He showed them the child; therefore, I repeat, the lesson lay in the childhood of the child.

**Matthew 18:5 "And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me;**

- **receives:** Mt 10:40-42 25:40,45 Mk 9:41 Lu 9:48 17:1,2
- **receives Me:** Mk 9:37 Jn 13:20 Ga 4:14

### **Related Passages:**

James 1:21+ Therefore putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility **receive** ([dechomai](#) - [aorist imperative](#) middle) the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.

Matthew 25:34-40+ (EPITOMIZES WHAT JESUS IS SAYING IN OUR PRESENT PASSAGE) Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 35'For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; 36naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.' 37"Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You drink? 38 'And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? 39 'And when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' 40 "And the King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.'

## WELCOMING THE LEAST, WELCOMING CHRIST

**Other titles could be** "Welcoming a Child, Welcoming the King" "Receiving One, Receiving Him" "When You Welcome a Child, You Welcome Christ"

**And whoever** - Notice as in the previous passage this pronoun means that what Jesus is getting ready to say has universal application and relevance.

**Receives** ([dechomai](#) - aorist middle) **one** (smallest number = even one) **such child** ([paidion](#)) **in My name** ([onoma](#)) **receives** ([dechomai](#) - present tense) **Me - Receives** is a term of hospitality meaning that one in essence puts the "welcome mat" out for someone, in this case a **child**. While He illustrates the principle with a little child, He is referring to not to literal children but to those who exhibit the childlike qualities of humility, trust, and lowliness that He had just highlighted in Matthew 18:2-4.

*By nature, all of us are rebels  
who want to be celebrities instead of servants.*  
--Warren Wiersbe

**In My Name** carries profound significance meaning all that the Name Jesus implies, so in My Name is as His authority, as His representative. To receive someone "**in My name**" means to act under His authority, representing Him and His mission, our actions mirroring His character.

*The way a person, believer or unbeliever, treats Christians  
is the way he treats Jesus Christ.*  
-- John MacArthur

**John MacArthur** - When anyone welcomes with an open heart a Christian as an honored guest and friend, he welcomes Christ as his guest and friend. When he treats any Christian with tenderness and kindness, he treats Christ in the same way. ([Matthew Commentary - Page 103](#))

*'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these  
brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.'*  
-- Jesus Christ (Mt 25:40)

**D A Carson** - "They are not welcomed because they are great, wise, or mighty, but because they come in Jesus' name – i.e., they belong to him." (See [Matthew](#))

**David Guzik** makes an interesting observation - It is easy to actually despise the humble. They are the losers; the kind who will never make it in our competitive and aggressive and get-ahead world. Yet when we despise humble people, we also despise Jesus.

**C H Spurgeon Commentary** - 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.

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**Receives** ([1209](#)) [dechomai](#) = [middle voice](#) of a primary verb) means to to receive something offered or transmitted by another (Luke 2:28). To take something into one's hand and so to grasp (Luke 2:28, 22:17). To be receptive to someone (Mt 10:14, 40). To take a favorable attitude toward something (Mt 11:14). **Dechomai** means to accept with a deliberate and ready reception of what is offered, to receive kindly and so to take to oneself what is presented or brought by another. It means to welcome as a teacher, a friend, or a guest into one's house. The word describes accepting persons with open arms, minds, and hearts, even going beyond normally

expected gracious hospitality. The term was often used of welcoming honored guests and meeting their needs with special attention and kindness.

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#### TODAY IN THE WORD

The church was attracting more visitors, the new worship team sounded almost professional, and giving was starting to increase. The pastor had one concern, though: a woman with Down Syndrome had started to attend church, and she sat near the front and worshiped in a way that could only be described as exuberant. He and his staff decided to tell her that she needed to sit in the back so she wouldn't disturb others. Hurt and confused, the woman left the church, never to return.

Our passage instructs the people of Christ never to dismiss “the least of these” in an effort to improve our image or self-importance. The themes of this chapter are humility and forgiveness—and the way that these qualities impact relationships.

The disciples finally understood that Jesus was introducing the kingdom of heaven, but they were confused about what that meant. They asked who would be the greatest (Mt 18:1). Jesus explained how wrong their perspective was: only those who recognize their vulnerable neediness will have the humility that characterizes those in His kingdom (Mt 18:4).

In the context of humility and sacrificial love, Jesus outlined how to handle the inevitable sin that will come among people. We might be tempted to think that humility and love would mean that we should just overlook the sins of others—but failure to confront sin means that we condone it. Allowing our brothers and sisters to continue in sin is the opposite of love.

Confrontation requires humility and forgiveness. We should not imagine that this is easy, either to confront or to be confronted. But Jesus next tells us what we must remember: how much we have been forgiven. The Unmerciful Servant had been forgiven a debt of millions of dollars, and then held the one who owed him a few dollars in prison. When we are tempted to demand our rights, we must remember our true place in the kingdom: lost sheep that have been rescued and forgiven by our merciful, great God.

#### TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Our Lord compared His followers to little children, and He also demonstrated His love and concern for children (Mt 18:5-6). This love and concern should characterize us as well. The world has no shortage of children who need the sacrificial love of God's people. Pray about how you can tangibly show this love: does your church need more Sunday school teachers? Could you support a child through Compassion International? Perhaps you could serve as prayer warrior for children in your family or neighborhood.

**Matthew 18:6 but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.**

- **Causes...to stumble:** Ps 105:15 Zec 2:8 Mk 9:42 Lu 17:1,2 Ac 9:5 Ro 14:13-15,21 Ro 15:1-3 1Co 8:9-13 10:32,33 2Th 1:6-9
- **little:** Mt 18:10,14 Zec 13:7 Lu 17:2

#### Related Passages:

Mark 9:42+ “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble, it would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he had been cast into the sea.

Zechariah 2:8 For thus says the LORD of hosts, “After glory He has sent me against the nations which plunder you, for he who touches you, touches the apple of His eye.

Romans 14:13-15; 21+ Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this—not to put an obstacle or a **stumbling block** in a brother's way. 14 I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. 15 For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died....14:21 It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother **stumbles**.

1 Corinthians 8:13+ Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, that I might not cause my brother to stumble.



A HEAVY MILLSTONE

## DON'T STUMBLE OVER THIS WARNING AGAINST STUMBLING BELIEVERS

**But** (term of contrast) **whoever causes** ([skandalizo](#)) **one of these little ones who believe** ([pisteuo](#) - present tense) **in Me to stumble** ([skandalizo](#)) (NET = "causes to sin") Jesus had just spoken of the great privilege of one who was like a little child, and now switches to warn those who would act against a little child clearly referring now to believers ([pisteuo](#) - present tense). Again Jesus uses the pronoun "**whoever**" to emphasize the universal aspect of His warning, applicable to believers and non-believers! To cause them to **stumble** clearly means to cause them to commit sin. The idea is that the **whoever** is leading the little ones to do something they do not understand as sin.

*To cause them to **stumble***

*clearly means to cause them to commit sin*

**John MacArthur** - The verb [skandalizo](#) (to stumble) literally means "to cause to fall," and the Lord is therefore speaking of enticing, trapping, or influencing a believer in any way that leads him into sin or in any way makes it easier for him to sin. A person who is responsible for causing a Christian to sin commits an offense against Christ Himself as well as against the Christian. (See [Matthew Commentary - Page 104](#))

**It would be better** ([sumphero](#)) **for him** (the one causing a believer to sin) **to have a heavy millstone** (see [note](#)) **hung** ([kremannumi](#)) **around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea** ([thalassa](#)) - A heavy millstone is more literally rendered "millstone of a donkey," referring to huge hour glass-shaped (see picture above; see [article in Zondervan Dictionary](#)) millstones turned by donkeys and used for grinding grain. Such millstones, weighing hundreds of pounds, were discovered in Capernaum and can still be seen there today. Jesus is referring to a millstone like that in the picture above, a millstone that was pulled around by a donkey. He is saying that to lead a believer into sin would result in a punishment worse than the greatly feared picture of drowning. "The very picture of drowning had its terror for the Jew. Drowning was sometimes a Roman punishment, but never Jewish." (Barclay) "The punishment of drowning with a heavy weight attached is extremely gruesome and reflects Jesus' views concerning those who cause others who believe in Him to sin." (NET NOTE)

It is interesting to recall the context where the disciples were arguing over who was the greatest and undoubtedly were causing one another to become angry (to sin)! Jesus warning would have caused them to recoil with some degree of trepidation at the repentment to those who cause others to sin!

**THOUGHT** - Are my words, actions and choices helping others grow in their faith, or are they creating confusion or setting up stumbling blocks? Am I sensitive to the spiritual struggles or convictions of my brethren (Gal 6:1-2+)? Do my words and actions align with the example of Christ (1Jn 2:6+), so that my life provides a positive example for my brethren to imitate (cf 1Co 11:1+)?

**MacArthur on a heavy millstone...to be drowned** adds that "The Romans sometimes practiced this form of execution by tying a heavy stone around a criminal's neck and dropping him overboard in deep water. Such a pagan form of execution was unimaginably horrible to Jews, perhaps in some respects more fearful even than crucifixion. Yet Jesus said that suffering such a terrifying death would be better than causing even one of His people to sin." (See [Matthew Commentary](#))

**C H Spurgeon Commentary** - 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 millstone, 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 famously, 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.

**Henry Morris** - Any person who tries to undermine the faith of young believers, or seeks to lead a child into sin or unbelief is in grave trouble (ED: PERHAPS MORRIS MEANT THAT TO BE A PUN!). "Woe to that man!" (Matthew 18:7).

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#### **EXAMPLES OF WAYS BELIEVERS MIGHT CAUSE OTHER BELIEVERS TO STUMBLE:**

1. **Tempting Someone to Sin:** Encouraging or pressuring a fellow Christian to engage in behaviors that go against their conscience or biblical principles, such as drinking alcohol with someone who struggles with past addiction or watching inappropriate content with someone who is trying to guard their purity or even suggesting dishonest actions, such as cheating on taxes or lying.

2. **Exercising Christian Freedom Without Consideration** - Participating in activities that may be permissible for you but harmful for another believer's conscience or faith, such as eating food offered to idols (in Paul's context, 1 Corinthians 8:9-13). Insisting on personal preferences (e.g., certain styles of music, entertainment) in ways that cause others discomfort or confusion. Failing to consider the spiritual maturity of those around you when exercising your freedoms.

3. **Hypocrisy or Poor Example** - Living in a way that contradicts your profession of faith, which can confuse or disillusion other Christians, especially newer or younger believers. Being dishonest in business dealings (of course these might only be nominal Christians) while claiming to follow Christ. Gossiping or slandering others openly.

4. **Harsh Judgment or Legalism** - Imposing strict, extra-biblical rules on someone and making them feel condemned or inadequate in their faith. Criticizing someone for not following your traditions or cultural norms (e.g., dress codes, worship styles). Judging someone for areas of freedom where the Bible allows individual conscience (Romans 14:1-3).

5. **Discouraging Someone's Faith** - Using words or actions that diminish someone's enthusiasm for Christ or discourage their spiritual growth. Mocking or dismissing someone's spiritual goals or efforts ("You are being a bit too radical giving out Christian tracts to everyone you meet!") Failing to support or encourage a struggling believer when they confide in you (and even feeling superior because of their weakness). Overloading a new believer with expectations, making faith feel like a burden rather than a joy ("You need to spend 1 hour in Quiet Time every morning").

6. **False Teaching or Misleading Doctrine** - Teaching or promoting ideas that are inconsistent with Scripture, leading others astray. Preaching a prosperity gospel that distorts biblical truth such as the "health and wealth gospel" (Woe to those preachers who are rich now! They will rue the day they preached a false gospel). Promoting self-help philosophies that diminish reliance on the sufficiency of Christ and His Word. Even willfully misinterpreting Scripture to justify your sin ("Well that was only applicable to those in the Old Testament").

7. **Fostering Division** - Creating or perpetuating division within the church or Christian community, one of the most effective (and sinful) ways being by spreading gossip or stirring up disputes over non-essential matters ("We need a beige carpet not a red carpet in the sanctuary!" This one has caused churches to split!) Aligning with factions or cliques that exclude others (You've never seen this in churches have you?!). Disrespecting church leadership in a way that undermines unity, constantly manifesting a critical spirit attitude.

8. **Failing to Forgive** - Refusing to extend forgiveness to someone, which can lead to bitterness and a stumbling block for others and last for years, even decades! Holding grudges openly, discouraging others from seeking reconciliation. Setting an example of resentment instead of restoration!

9. **Materialism or Worldliness** - Encouraging others to prioritize worldly success or possessions over spiritual growth. Boasting about wealth or material achievements in a way that stirs envy or misplaced priorities. Modeling a life that emphasizes materialism over spiritual contentment.

10. **Insensitivity to the Weaker Believer:** Acting without regard for the spiritual struggles or sensitivities of others. Speaking flippantly about sensitive topics like suffering or sin. Making jokes or comments that trivialize someone's convictions or struggles.

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#### **QUESTION - [Who are the "little ones" in Matthew 18:6?](#)**

**ANSWER** - In Matthew 18:6, Jesus issues a stern warning to those who cause others to sin: "If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea" (see also Mark 9:42 and Luke 17:1-2). The "little ones" are true disciples of Jesus, whether young or old, who are identified by their [childlike trust](#) in God. This interpretation is substantiated by the immediate and wider context of the

Gospel of Matthew.

Matthew 18 begins with the disciples asking, “Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” (Matthew 18:1). After placing a child among them (verse 2), Jesus answers, “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me” (verses 3–4). Jesus used the child as a visual aid to illustrate His point about humility and faith. So, the text is not necessarily about children, although it could be. Instead, it is about becoming *like* children and entering the kingdom of heaven. It is about being a true disciple of Jesus.

The wider context also substantiates this interpretation. In Matthew 10:42, Jesus says, “If anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward.” True disciples show kindness and hospitality to one another (cf. Galatians 6:10), even in small ways such as offering a cup of cold water. This act of kindness may seem insignificant, but Jesus promises that it will not go unnoticed or unrewarded.

Just as there are positive rewards for whoever shows kindness and hospitality to other disciples, there are also grave consequences for whoever causes one of these little ones—those who believe in Christ—to stumble. The punishment is severe and graphic. Jesus says that it would be better for that person to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.

A [millstone](#) is a large, heavy, circular stone that was used in ancient times to grind grain into flour. The milling process used two stones: a bed stone and a runner stone. The bed (or base) stone remained stationary, while the runner (or top) stone was turned by an animal, such as an ox or donkey, walking in a circle around the lower stone.

The image of someone sinking to the bottom of the sea with a millstone around his neck is a call to take this warning seriously. If we lead others astray and cause them to sin, we do great harm to them and to ourselves. Jesus promises that such an offense will not go unnoticed or unpunished. In fact, the punishment would be so terrible that it would be better to drown in the sea than to face it.

As Christians, we should be mindful of how our actions impact others, especially those who are in the household of God. It is our responsibility to be a positive influence in their lives, helping them to [grow spiritually](#) and avoid anything that could cause them to sin. If we do cause others to sin, we should confess our wrongdoing and seek forgiveness, both from God and the ones we wronged. In doing so, we demonstrate that we are true disciples of Jesus (John 13:35).

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### **The Weight of a Millstone**

*(Inspired by Matthew 18:6)*

Woe to the one who casts the snare,  
To stumble the child with faith laid bare.  
A soul so tender, a heart so pure,  
Such faith as theirs will long endure.

But cursed be hands that weave deceit,  
That cause these little ones' defeat.  
For better to sink in the ocean's deep,  
Than the trust of a child to lose or sweep.

A millstone heavy, bound to the neck,  
Dragged to the depths where light won't reflect.  
Such is the fate of hearts so cruel,  
Who scorn the innocent, break the rule.

Oh, guard the child, their faith so small,  
Protect the ones who to Jesus call.  
For in their eyes, His kingdom shines,  
Through humble hearts, His love aligns.

So heed this warning, sharp and stern,  
Let kindness guide at every turn.  
For in the hearts of the meek and mild,  
Resides the face of God's own child.

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## UNINTENTIONAL PARENTING MATTHEW 18:6; EPHESIANS 6:4

It happened during one of those Rockwellian moments: a grandmother making cookies with her seven-year-old granddaughter. The kind of moment a grandmother wraps around her like a handmade shawl, to keep her warm months later, when the smell of Snickerdoodles no longer fills the kitchen, and the child has returned to another time zone. The little girl, the grandmother noticed, was engrossed in the flour. She had a knife and, with the intensity of a sculptor—a sculptor whose little tongue suggested she was deep in concentration—carefully shaped the fine powder into a pattern of neat, narrow lines. How cute, the woman remembers thinking. Then the little girl looked up at her. “Look, Grandma,” she said, “this is how Mom and Gary cut their cocaine!” Citation: Bob Welch, *Where Roots Grow Deep* (Harvest House, 1999), p. 118

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MATTHEW 18:6 [God's Word for Today: A Daily Devotional for the Whole Year - Page 78](#)

I doubt that Jesus at any other time ever spoke such sharp words as those we read just now.

It is our responsibility toward children that Jesus would impress upon us. He says that it would be better for a person to be put to death than to cause a child to stumble.

These words apply to all of us. Not only to fathers and mothers, but to sisters and brothers, companions and servants. Oh, that they might pierce us all to the very marrow and make us all feel our responsibility to the little folk!

Be careful lest you entice little ones into sin! Be careful lest your life entice little ones into sin!

But our passage today applies especially to fathers and mothers.

No one can help a child as can its father and mother. But neither can any one lead it astray as can they.

We think of the many parents who never tell their children about Jesus, never teach them to fold their little hands in prayer; who never send them to Sunday school, but instead perhaps withhold permission even when the children themselves desire to go.

From the time some children are small they hear father and mother curse and take the name of the Lord in vain. Yes, they even hear them lie and use foul language.

And if the children are awakened by the grace of God from the life in sin into which they have been led by their parents, they often encounter opposition and persecution in their own home.

You father and mother, you who are living without God, hear the earnest words which Jesus speaks to you this day!

You are ruining not only your own soul, but also the souls of the children whom you love, are you not? Remember the words of Jesus about the millstone. And be saved today!

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**Adrian Rogers** ([Exodus Sermons page 330](#)) - I used to hear Dr. Lee talk about his wrath against those theological professors who would break into the house of faith of some young student and with reason's scissors clip faith's wings. I say amen to that. Jesus said, “If you cause someone to stumble—one of these little ones that believe in me—it would be better for you if a millstone were hanged about your neck and you were cast into the deep of the sea” (Matthew 18:6). This is God's warning against false prophets; this is God's warning against liberals; this is God's warning against modernists; and this is God's warning against those who do not believe that the Bible is the inerrant, inspired, infallible Word of God, like a fire and like a hammer (Jeremiah 23:19). It's thievery to steal away faith out of someone's heart. God said, “I'm against those prophets” (Jeremiah 23:30). And there's going to be a lot of moaning and groaning at the judgment, when some of these liberals who have destroyed the faith of young people in college come. And they have transgressed the commandment that says, “Thou shalt not steal” (Exodus 20:15). “They steal away my words”—steal God's Word—“every one from his neighbour” (Jeremiah 23:30). There's the theft of faith.

Hume was a great rationalist—the humanist. His mother was a Bible-believing Christian, but he was so witty, he was so clever, he was so intelligent, and he was so logical, that he could argue against her faith. And day after day after day after day, he argued with his mother. He belittled her, he cut her down, and he whittled away at her faith until finally he had stolen the Word of God out of her heart. At last, when his mother came to die, he tried to comfort his mother. Can you imagine a humanist—an infidel, an agnostic—trying to comfort someone in the hour of death? He said to his mother, “Mother, hold on.” She looked at him with agony and said, “Son, there's nothing to hold on to. You've taken away my faith.” Those who “steal my words” (Jeremiah 23:30). There is the theft—the theft, the robbery—of one man against another.

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Daily Light on the Daily Path - So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil.

Abstain from every form of evil.—We aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of man.—For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.

But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.

For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.—But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.—“But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to

be drowned in the depth of the sea.”—“As you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.”  
Rom. 14:16; 1 Thess. 5:22; 2 Cor. 8:21; 1 Pet. 2:15; 1 Pet. 4:15–16; Gal. 5:13; 1 Cor. 8:9; Matt. 18:6; Matt. 25:40

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### The Child Witnesses Before the Throne - [Windows for Sermons: A Study of the Art of Sermonic ... - Page 286](#)

The editor of the New York Journal has set forth with tremendous realism Christ's teaching concerning God's love for the children, and the power of that teaching over human life for more than eighteen hundred years. He calls attention to the fact that Jesus made no threats so terrifying as those aimed at men who should harm little children—"it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea." (Matthew 18:6.) It is impossible now to conceive the horrid indifference to childhood's rights which preceded the birth of Christianity. Infanticide was not the exception, but a settled custom; so much so that in Rome the "exposure" of children in desert places was almost a virtue, since it gave the child some slight chance of surviving. Not a few, but thousands and tens of thousands of children were thus "exposed." They fell a prey to wild beasts or to men still more ferocious, who took the children to make slaves or criminals of them. Jesus came, and a miracle was wrought—a miracle that no man will deny. This was the miracle: Jesus said, "For I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven." Jesus spoke, and thousands of millions of men through nineteen centuries have believed and obeyed the command. Every man was warned that the child dying goes straightway into the presence of God, and there, looking upon his face, bears witness of the treatment meted out to him here. Well might it be said of the man who mistreated such a child: "It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea."

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### Playing Around With Sin - Newell Hillis

What happens to our Christian friends when we play around with sin? Why should we care about how our actions impact others?

Two reasons:

- Often our sin deeply hurts our Christian brothers and sisters:

"If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it ..." (1 Corinthians 12:26a)

- We incur the judgment of God if we cause the least among us to stumble:

**"Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it is better for him that a heavy millstone be hung around his neck, and that he be drowned in the depths of the sea."** (Matthew 18:6)

Following, are excerpts from a letter I received today from a close friend who is lamenting over the sin of a fallen brother:

"Where my real grief lies is with Sam and his family. Mary and I have been experiencing severe buffeting due to the consequences associated with (Sam's sin) ...

"Dwight, never before have I ever in my life convulsed due to the sin committed by a friend ... it made me wretch ... How much more so for a pure and holy God ...

"Be careful how you walk, Dwight, for the days are full of evil and Satan continues to roam about looking for guys like you and me ...

"After seeing Sam's world come apart in the midst of the absence of accountability to anyone ... it serves as a terrifying reminder of just how close we all are (to sinning) at any given time."

Like it or not, our actions do profoundly affect the lives of those around us.

Not to mention the account to which God will call us, should we by our actions cause others to stumble.

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### Charles Stanley - A TOOL OF THE TEMPTER Matthew 18:6–14 KEY VERSE:Matthew 18:6 [Enter His Gates: A Daily Journey into the Master's Presence - Page 150](#)

Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea.

No one likes to feel used by another person. Yet when we cause other believers to stumble in their Christian walk, we have unwittingly become tools of the tempter. When we spread gossip in the office, dress immodestly, speak coarsely, or allow questionable television programs in our homes, we can be the tempter's agents. Suppose you were asked: "Do you want to be used by Satan?" Surely your answer would be an adamant "No!"



Our wily adversary, however, has no qualms about using our sins and wayward habits to delude and deceive other Christians. While each of us is responsible for the response to temptation, we can avoid any compliance with the deceiver's tactics as we understand a crucial truth: each Christian is part of Christ's body. Our actions are never in isolation. For good or evil, our behavior affects the health and vitality of other believers.

Therefore, it is for your well-being as well as the rest of the body of Christ that you live obediently. God desires that you be a blessing to others, not a curse. Let your love for believers keep you and them from temptation.

Heavenly Father, as part of the body of Christ, I realize my actions are not in isolation. Let me be a blessing and not a curse to others. Don't let me lead others into temptation.

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Oswald Chambers - John 10:27-28

HAVE YOU EVER SEEN GOD give someone a tremendous blow for molesting one of His children? Woe to the person who touches or troubles the children of God—the apple of His eye.

Over and over again, the first disciples of Jesus made that blunder. Remember Peter? He once said, "Jesus, what shall this man do?" Jesus told Peter, in effect, "Mind your own business" (John 21:22). Martha said, "I am serving You, Jesus. Make Mary come and help me in the work." Jesus replied, "Martha, Mary has chosen the better way. She has taken orders from Me" (Luke 10:41-42).

We are not to touch God's obedient child. If anyone were to abuse a child of God, Jesus said, "It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matthew 18:6).

God blights the hypocrites who pretend to be virtuous and pious, for the purpose of winning favor for themselves, as they correct and chastise other Christians.

Remember, God will condemn everyone who dares to say anything against His children.

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Confession Without Guilt MATTHEW 18:6 - Valerie Hess

I know of non-Christian adults who shamed their children into stopping their activities at the local church's youth group. I fear for them when I read this verse. But before I can become too smug in thinking I am not condemned here, I have to ask myself: Where have I increased the guilt load for my children? Where have I shamed them instead of correcting them? Where have I held up past sins in front of them long after the issue was supposedly forgiven and resolved? Have I weakened their relationship with Jesus because of these actions and attitudes? The above verse needs to make us adults stop and think carefully about how we interact with children in general.

When we heap guilt upon others, young and old alike, we reinforce a wrong concept of God, one that might take people years to get over—assuming they even want to remain in relationship with a God they think is condemning. We all have a tremendous responsibility to avoid being a stumbling block to someone else's growing relationship with God. Using guilt to get back at someone who has hurt you is a major stumbling block.

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Matthew 18:6 Jesus sharply rebuked His disciples when they tried to stop parents from bringing their children to Him: "He was greatly displeased and said to them, 'Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God.'... And He took them up in His arms, laid His hands on them, and blessed them" (Mark 10:14, 16). Their value to the Lord is great!

According to the psalmist, children are a heritage from the Lord (Ps. 127:3). Scripture repeatedly reminds parents to love, teach, discipline, and protect their children (Eph. 6:4; Deut. 6:6, 7; Prov. 13:24; Heb. 12:11). This warning to those who would cause a child to sin is severe, but it is a reminder of our responsibility before the Lord for our children.

We as parents must guard our words and actions so that we never cause our children to stumble or sin. Rather, out of our love for them, everything that we do and say must reflect God's love, God's Word, and God's ways (Deut. 6:6, 7).

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**William MacDonald** - Mt. 18:6

It would be difficult to imagine a more effective and foolproof method of drowning than this. The millstone here was not the small one that was operated by hand, but the great one that was turned by an ass. To have a millstone like that secured around one's neck would mean speedy and inescapable drowning.

At first we might be startled by the vehemence of the Savior's words. He seems to thunder out with unusual condemnation against the sin of offending a little one. What is it that provokes such anger?

Let us take an illustration! Here is a minister of the Gospel who has a constant line of people coming to him for counseling. Among them is a young person who is enslaved by some sexual sin. This young person needs help—desperately. He (or she) looks to the

minister as one in whom he can have confidence, as one who will help him find the way of deliverance. But instead of that, the minister finds himself inflamed with passion, he makes improper advances, and soon he has led his counselee back into immorality. The young person is shattered by this betrayal of trust and is thoroughly disillusioned by the religious world. It may be that he is crippled spiritually for the rest of his life.

Or the offender may be a college professor who labors tirelessly to rob his students of whatever faith they may have. By sowing doubts and denials, he undermines the authority of the Scriptures and attacks the Person of our Lord.

Again it may be a Christian whose behavior stumbles a young believer. Overstepping the fine line between liberty and license, he is seen engaging in some questionable activity. The young Christian interprets his behavior as acceptable Christian conduct and leaves the path of godly separation to plunge into a life of worldliness and compromise.

We should be solemnly warned by the words of the Savior that it is a tremendously serious thing to contribute to the ethical, moral or spiritual delinquency of a minor who belongs to Him. Better to drown in literal water than to drown in a sea of guilt, disgrace and remorse for causing one of His little ones to fall into sin.

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#### QUESTION - [What is a millstone in the Bible?](#)

**ANSWER** - A millstone is a stone used to grind grain. When grain is milled, two stones are actually used: the bed stone, or base, which remains stationary; and the runner stone, which turns on top of the base, grinding the grain.

In Bible times the millstone was a common item, and it is mentioned in several contexts in the Bible. The millstone was in fact so integral a part of society that the Mosaic Law forbade taking someone's millstone in pledge (Deuteronomy 24:6). The millstone was needed to grind grain to make bread and sustain life, so taking someone's millstone would be like taking his or her life in pledge.

A millstone was both extremely hard and exceedingly heavy, and it provided a vivid illustration for anyone who had experience with millstones. In the book of Job, God mentions the millstone in His description of a beast called Leviathan. This animal was so strong that God compared its impenetrable skin to a millstone: "Its chest is hard as rock, hard as a lower millstone" (Job 41:24). The "lower" millstone is the base stone upon which the upper millstone turns. A millstone was also chronicled as an instrument of death. A woman killed Gideon's son Abimelech by dropping an upper millstone (the runner stone) from a tower. The stone landed on his head and crushed his skull (Judges 9:53; 2 Samuel 11:21).

Perhaps the most famous mention of a millstone in the Bible is in Jesus' warning against leading His children astray. He said, "If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea" (Mark 9:42). Causing a child of God to sin will bring severe judgment. If you would find it hard to swim with a millstone hanging around your neck, you should think twice before tempting God's child.

[.GotQuestions.org](#)

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#### A Baited Trap

**Stumble** (4624) [skandalizo](#) from [skandalon](#) = a trap = put a snare or stumbling block in way; English = scandalize = to offend the moral sense of) means to put a snare (in the way), hence to cause to stumble, to give offense. To entrap, trip up, or entice to sin, offend. So here in Mt 5:29-30 **skandalizo** is used in the active sense which conveys the idea to cause to do wrong, to entice to commit sin. In the passive sense it means to be led into sin, to be caused to do wrong. In the passive some uses mean to be offended (Mt 11:6), the idea being that one is taking offense at Jesus and/or refusing to believe in Him. Finally, [skandalizo](#) can mean to furnish an occasion for some to be shocked, angered, or offended (Mt 17:27). **Skandalizo** is derived from [skandalon](#) which refers to stick in a trap on which the bait is placed and which springs up and shuts the trap at the touch of the careless, unwary animal. It follows that the idea is to put a stumbling block or impediment in one's way, upon which another may trip and fall.

**NIDNTT** - In Classic Literature - The noun [skandalon](#), from a root meaning jump up, snap shut, was originally the piece of wood that kept open a trap for animals. Outside the Bible it is not used metaphorically, though its derivative [skandalethron](#) (e.g. a trap set through questions) is so used. No non-biblical example of [skandalizo](#) has been found. The Eng. word scandal is derived from the noun via the Lat. [scandalum](#).

**SKANDALIZO** - 27V - Matt. 5:29; Matt. 5:30; Matt. 11:6; Matt. 13:21; Matt. 13:57; Matt. 15:12; Matt. 17:27; Matt. 18:6; Matt. 18:8; Matt. 18:9; Matt. 24:10; Matt. 26:31; Matt. 26:33; Mk. 4:17; Mk. 6:3; Mk. 9:42; Mk. 9:43; Mk. 9:45; Mk. 9:47; Mk. 14:27; Mk. 14:29; Lk. 7:23; Lk. 17:2; Jn. 6:61; Jn. 16:1; 1 Co. 8:13; 2 Co. 11:29

**Swindoll** - The original and most literal meaning is "to spring back and forth" or "to slam closed," as with a spring-loaded animal trap. Therefore, the verb generally means "to close something in." The figurative use of

this word is rare outside of Jewish and Christian writings, but not altogether absent. One Greek playwright describes an unjust accuser dragging innocent men into court and “laying traps” with his questions. (Aristophanes, *Acharnenses* 687) Paul frequently used the corresponding noun (*skandalon*) to describe Jesus as an intellectual and moral trap for any who oppose God and think themselves righteous (Rom. 9:33; 11:9; 1 Cor. 1:23; Gal. 5:11). (Borrow [Insights on John](#))

**William Barclay** adds this comment on the root noun [skandalon \(see word study\)](#)...“The word he uses for a stumbling-block is ... *skandalon*... a form of the word *skandalethron*... the bait-stick in a trap. It was the stick or arm on which the bait was fixed and which operated the trap to catch the animal lured to its own destruction. So the word came to mean anything which causes a man’s destruction. Behind it there are two pictures. First, there is the picture of a hidden stone in a path against which a man may stumble, or of a cord stretched across a path, deliberately put there to make a man trip. Second, there is the picture of a pit dug in the ground and deceptively covered over with a thin layer of branches or of turf, and so arranged that, when the unwary traveler sets his foot on it, he is immediately thrown into the pit. The *skandalon*, the stumbling-block is something which trips a man up, something which sends him crashing to destruction, something which lures him to his own ruin... ANYTHING which helps to seduce us to sin is to be ruthlessly rooted out of life. If there is a habit which can be seduction to evil, if there is an association which can be the cause of wrongdoing, if there is a pleasure which could turn out to be our ruin, then that thing must be surgically excised from our life.” ([Col 3:5](#), [Heb 12:1](#) “the sin”) Coming as it does immediately after the passage which deals with forbidden thoughts and desires, this passage compels us to ask: How shall we free ourselves from these unclean desires and defiling thoughts? It is the fact of experience that thoughts and pictures come unbidden into our minds, and it is the hardest thing on earth to shut the door to them. There is one way in which these forbidden thoughts and desires cannot be dealt with—and that is to sit down and to say, I will not think of these things (cp [Col 2:23](#)). The more we say, I will not think of such and such a thing, the more our thoughts are in fact concentrated on it.

The outstanding example in history of the wrong way to deal with such thoughts and desires was the hermits and the monks in the desert in the time of the early Church. They were men who wished to free themselves from all earthly things, and especially of the desires of the body. To do so they went away into the Egyptian desert with the idea of living alone and thinking of nothing but God. The most famous of them all was Saint Anthony. He lived the hermit’s life; he fasted; he did without sleep; he tortured his body. For 35 years he lived in the desert, and these 35 years were a non-stop battle, without respite, with his temptations. The story is told in his biography.

*“First of all the devil tried to lead him away from discipline, whispering to him the remembrance of his wealth, cares for his sister, claims of kindred, love of money, love of glory, the various pleasures of the table, and the other relaxations of life, and, at last, the difficulty of virtue and the labor of it. The one would suggest foul thoughts, and the other counter them with prayers; the one fire him with lust, the other, as one who seemed to blush, fortify his body with prayers, faith and fasting. The devil one night even took upon him the shape of a woman, and imitated all her acts simply to beguile Anthony.”* **So for thirty-five years the struggle went on.** ([Daily Study Bible](#)) (Bolding added)

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## EXPOSING KIDS TO PORNOGRAPHY

Matthew 18:6; Mark 9:42; Luke 17:2

Nine of ten kids between ages eight and sixteen have been exposed to pornography online according to the U.S. Justice Department.

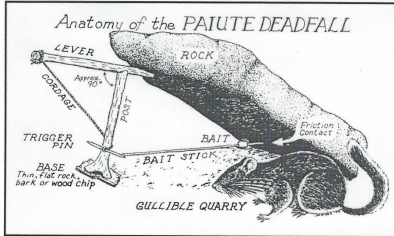
Furthermore, 47 percent of school-age children receive pornographic spam on a daily basis, reports software company Symantec. And representatives from the pornography industry told Congress’s COPA (Child Online Protection Act) Commission that as many as 20 to 30 percent of the visitors to some pornographic websites are children. —Daniel Weiss, “Pornography: Harmless Fun or Public Health Hazard?” [citizenlink.org](#) (May 19, 2005) (NOTE: THESE STATS ARE FROM 20 YEARS AGO! IMAGINE THE DEPTH OF DEPRAVITY THAT PERVADES THE INTERNET IN 2025!)

**Matthew 18:7 “Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes!**

- **Woe to:** Ge 13:7 1Sa 2:17,22-25 2Sa 12:14 Lu 17:1 Ro 2:23,24 1Ti 5:14,15 6:1 Tit 2:5,8 2Pe 2:2
- **because of its stumbling blocks:** Mk 13:7 Ac 1:16 1Co 11:19 2Th 2:3-12 1Ti 4:1-3 2Ti 3:1-5 2Ti 4:3,4 Jude 1:4
- **but:** Mt 13:41,42 23:13-28 26:24 Jn 17:12 Ac 1:18-20 2Pe 2:3,15-17 Jude 1:11-13 Rev 2:14,15,20-23 19:20,2

## Related Passages:

Luke 17:1+ And He said to His disciples, "It is inevitable that stumbling blocks should come, but woe to him through whom they come!



DEPICTION OF STUMBLING BLOCK!

**Woe (ouai) to the world (kosmos) because of its stumbling blocks (skandalon)!** - This passage is not found in the other synoptic gospels. Jesus first issues a strong warning to the godless, God hating world which is filled with deceptive snares from the unsaved sinners of the world. **Woe** introduces a solemn warning for all who would trip up believers for they will be judged for causing Christians to sin. Notice that the **woe** is not defined and is not the millstone, because that is actually the way to escape the **woe**! In fact it is the easier way out!. Jesus leaves the **woe** undescribed!

**Leon Morris** - *Woe* is to be understood as an expression of regret and compassion; Jesus is not exulting in the punishment that must come, but he is making it clear that punishment will come (*woe* is a verdict as well as an expression of sorrow). The person who leads others to sin is storing up grievous trouble for himself. ([The Gospel According To Matthew](#))

**David Guzik** points out that "**Woe** to the world because of offenses! The first **woe** is a cry of pity for a world in danger of offenses. The second **woe** is a warning to the one who brings or introduces evil to others."

**For** (explains the first "woe") **it is inevitable (anagke) that stumbling blocks (skandalon) come (erchomai)** - What Jesus is saying in essence is "It is impossible for the **stumbling blocks** not to come." In other words, **stumbling blocks** are guaranteed to come in the life of the disciples. They could count on it! And we can too, because **stumbling blocks** will continually come to trip up the follower of Christ, for we have three persistent, powerful enemies - the [world](#), the [flesh](#) and the [devil](#). Why is it **inevitable**? Because the world is broken, godless and filled with sin and constantly seeks to ensnare its hapless victims!

Beware of doing anything that would cause others to fall into sin. You might be saying "But I have this liberty!" The response is that they might not!

**But woe (ouai) to that man through whom the stumbling block (skandalon) comes (erchomai)** - present tense - continually comes! - Now Jesus shifts from the godless world to the specific godless man with the same warning of **woe** to the one who perpetrates evil in the lives of believers. They will experience payday, some day!

**David Guzik** applies this truth writing that "This teaches us that we can let go of the anger and the bitterness for what people have done against us. God promised to deal with those by whom the offense comes."

As one writer says "The harsh word, the thoughtless deed, the frivolous remark-these injurious facets of human relations are inevitable. But that does not lessen the seriousness of the deed nor the responsibility of the offender."

**C H Spurgeon Commentary** - It is a sad world because of stumbling-block. This is the great misery of every age. Occasions for falling into sin are terribly many; and from the formation of society it seems as if it must be so. "It must needs be that offenses come." While man is man, his surroundings will be trying, and his fellow-men will too often become occasions of evil to him. This brings woe unto the world; but the center of that woe will be with the guilty cause of the stumbling, be that stumbling what it may. Those who try to be the greatest are great causers of offenses: the humble are the least likely to make others stumble. Woe, therefore, is the sure heritage of the proud; for he is that man by whom the offense cometh.

**Matthew Henry Concise** - Mt 18:7-14. Considering the cunning and malice of Satan, and the weakness and depravity of men's hearts, it is not possible but that there should be offences. God permits them for wise and holy ends, that those who are sincere, and those who are not, may be made known. Being told before, that there will be seducers, tempters, persecutors, and bad examples, let us stand on our guard. We must, as far as lawfully we may, part with what we cannot keep without being entangled by it in sin.

The outward occasions of sin must be avoided. If we live after the flesh, we must die. If we, through the Spirit, mortify the deeds of the body, we shall live. Christ came into the world to save souls, and he will reckon severely with those who hinder the progress of others who are setting their faces heavenward. And shall any of us refuse attention to those whom the Son of God came to seek and to save? A father takes care of all his children, but is particularly tender of the little ones.

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**Stumbling** (4625) **skandalon** (from a root meaning jump up, snap shut) was originally the piece of wood that kept open a trap for animals. Outside the Bible it is not used metaphorically, though its derivative skandalethron (e.g. a trap set through questions) is so used. The English word **scandal** is derived from the noun via the Lat. **scandalum**. Thus **skandalon** was literally, that movable part of a trap on which the bait was laid, and when touched caused the trap to close on its prey. **Skandalon** thus came to mean any entanglement of the foot. Figuratively, as used most often in Scripture, **skandalon** refers to any person or thing by which one is drawn into error or sin. (but see more detailed notes below)

**Skandalon** is used 15 times: **KJV** (15) - occasion of stumbling, 1; occasion to fall, 1; offence, 9; stumbling block, 3; thing that offends, 1; **NAS** (15) - cause for stumbling, 1; hindrances, 1; offense, 2; stumbling block, 7; stumbling blocks, 4 Matt. 13:41; 16:23; 18:7; Lk. 17:1; Rom. 9:33; 11:9; 14:13; 16:17; 1 Co. 1:23; Gal. 5:11; 1 Pet. 2:8; 1 Jn. 2:10; Rev. 2:14

**Woe** (How dreadful!) (3759 - click and select "**Phonetics**" to hear "ouai" pronounced) is pronounced "oo-ah'ee," an eerie, ominous foreboding sound some say is like the cry of an eagle) is an onomatopoeic word (an imitation of the sound) which serves as an interjection or lamentation (e.g., at funerals 1Ki 13:30) expressing an outburst of emotion, a cry of intense distress, displeasure, pain, sorrow or horror. An exclamation denoting pain or displeasure. It is a strong expression of regret, usually for the punishment that sinners are inevitably drawing down on themselves. Sometime woe was used to attract attention (Isa. 55:1). Less frequently, it occurs as a noun denoting a disaster or calamity. The OT prophets would often open their prophetic utterances of coming divine judgment with the word "Woe!" (Isa. 5:8-10; Mic 2:1-5) An interjection expressing great distress or sorrow; or a noun signifying a condition of deep suffering due to a calamity that has befallen or will befall a person or community. It may convey a warning of impending disaster to the hearers. BDAG - ① interjection denoting pain or displeasure, woe, alas ② a state of intense hardship or distress, woe

**OUI** - 47X/36V - Matt. 11:21; Matt. 18:7; Matt. 23:13; Matt. 23:14; Matt. 23:15; Matt. 23:16; Matt. 23:23; Matt. 23:25; Matt. 23:27; Matt. 23:29; Matt. 24:19; Matt. 26:24; Mk. 13:17; Mk. 14:21; Lk. 6:24; Lk. 6:25; Lk. 6:26; Lk. 10:13; Lk. 11:42; Lk. 11:43; Lk. 11:44; Lk. 11:46; Lk. 11:47; Lk. 11:52; Lk. 17:1; Lk. 21:23; Lk. 22:22; 1 Co. 9:16; Jude 1:11; Rev. 8:13; Rev. 9:12; Rev. 11:14; Rev. 12:12; Rev. 18:10; Rev. 18:16; Rev. 18:19

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#### **QUESTION - [What does it mean to be a stumbling block to someone else?](#)**

**ANSWER** - In the midst of a series of laws regulating the treatment of others, we find "Do not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind, but fear your God. I am the LORD" (Leviticus 19:14). Obviously, putting a rock or brick in front of a blind person is cruel, but the New Testament takes the practical adage and turns it into a spiritual metaphor.

After Peter rebuked Jesus, denying the crucifixion would take place, Jesus said, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's" (Matthew 16:23). Peter, under the influence of Satan, tried to distract Jesus from what He had come to do. He tried to make Jesus "stumble" in His path to the crucifixion. Paul reiterates the idea: "...but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness" (1 Corinthians 1:23). The idea that the Messiah would be crucified was a stumbling block to the Jews—something that tripped up their beliefs of what the Messiah would be like.

But most of the time, a "stumbling block" refers to something or someone who keeps another from a relationship with God. In Matthew 18:5-7, Jesus says, "And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me; but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes!" Just as it would be better to chop off one's hand than to sin (Matthew 18:8), in the Kingdom perspective, it would be better to drown than lead a child into sin. Similarly, in Romans 14:13, Paul points out that God alone judges; we are not to judge others but be concerned that we are not the ones leading them into the sin we're so concerned about.

Stumbling blocks also arise when the path is a little more ambiguous. The mature Christian life allows some freedoms that seem contrary to an obedient, disciplined faith. The Corinthians were concerned about eating meat sacrificed to idols. Modern issues include drinking alcohol in moderation or dancing. "But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak" (1 Corinthians 8:9). Our liberty is not worth another's walk with God. If something God allows would lead another

to sin, we need to avoid it. We are given great freedom as Christians, but the greatest is the freedom to consider others' welfare over our own.

Refraining from being a stumbling block means not leading another into sin. How we accomplish this depends on the situation and the hearts of those around us. The security we have in God's love and provision, both now and eternally, allows us to show concern to those who are weaker—those who need specific encouragement to understand who God is. In some situations, that means living in those freedoms to exemplify that God is a God of grace. In others, it means disciplining ourselves to building up weaker believers and not pushing them into a liberty they're not ready for. But, always, it means not encouraging another to act in a way the Bible specifically identifies as sin.

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## The Woe of the World

*(Inspired by Matthew 18:7)*

Woe to the world where temptations rise,  
A shadow cast beneath the skies.  
For stumbling blocks, though sure they be,  
Bring grief to hearts that long for Thee.

The world is broken, a fragile thread,  
Where traps are laid, and tears are shed.  
Yet greater the sorrow, the weight, the blame,  
For those who set the snare of shame.

Temptations come, as the Savior said,  
A trial that walks where all have tread.  
But woe to the one whose hand designs,  
The hurtful path, the wicked signs.

A heart that leads another astray,  
Will face the judgment on that day.  
So tread with care, and let love be,  
The guide that keeps our spirits free.

For though the world is fraught with woe,  
Through grace, God's mercy still will flow.  
Resist the snares, hold fast, be true,  
And let His light shine bright in you.

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**ILLUSTRATION** - According to the Associated Press, on the evening of February 6, 1996, several teenagers drove the rural roads east of Tampa, Florida, with the intent of playing pranks. Tragically, their game was anything but funny. They pulled some twenty street signs out of the ground, including the stop sign at one fateful intersection. The next day, three of their buddies, who had just finished bowling, breezed through that intersection without stopping. Their car sailed into the path of an eight-ton truck, and they were all killed. One year later, the three perpetrators of the deadly prank were convicted of manslaughter. In June of 1997, they stood in orange jail jump-suits and handcuffs before a judge in a Tampa courtroom, weeping and wiping their eyes, and were sentenced to fifteen years in prison. It is a dangerous thing with tragic consequences for anyone to take down a signpost on the highway. It is no less dangerous for anyone to vandalize the signposts that God puts on the highway of life. When we honor God's commandments, we point people in the right direction. If we dishonor God's commandments, if the example or testimony of our life stinks, we become a stumbling block and can unwittingly lead others to destruction. Jesus addresses this problem here. ([Mattoon Treasures from the Scriptures](#))

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“Woe to the world because of offenses. For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes.” —Matthew 18:7

As a high school senior, it gets harder and harder to stay on your walk with Christ. Sin is thrown at you constantly, and you find yourself having nobody to share your struggles with. Thankfully, there are those good friends that hold me accountable for what I do. I can go to my two best friends about any temptation or problem I have. As their friend, I also have to try to give them the best advice I can. When I give them advice, I go to Scripture first to make sure it's God's advice. As a brother in Christ, you want to lead your friends in the best direction possible. There is a group of guys that would do whatever they can to lead me and other peers astray, but they call themselves Christians. Jesus says in Mark 9:42, “But whoever causes the downfall of one of these little ones who believe in Me—it would be better for him if a heavy millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea.” I

don't know about you, but that doesn't sound too exciting. I don't want to be a stumbling block to anyone. We need each other, so always remember to keep your brothers in Christ accountable. They will be thankful for your concern and care for them in the future.

Christopher Coleman Bailey: 17, Albany, GA

Greater Second Mt. Olive Baptist Church and Sherwood Christian Academy, Albany, GA

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## Abraham Kuyper - NEEDFUL THAT STUMBLING COMES

Woe to the world because of the stumbling it causes. It is needful that stumbling comes, but woe to the person by whom it comes. Matthew 18:7

The terrible battle for God's children is how to navigate between the two reefs of despising the world on one side, and of getting completely tangled up in it on the other side.

The Lord's people are not permitted to leave the world. They have to live in it. Their calling is to be the salt that prevents rotting. A light in the darkness! A city set on a hill! But ..., and herein lies the difficulty, to be able to prevent the rotting, the salt has to be in close contact with what's spoiling. And that's precisely what nips and clips our faith!

We're talking about faith that has to walk the walk full of courage, thinking: "I will not falter!"

But two steps down the road it encounters an unexpected stumbling block, and a person trips and falls. A little farther along, a ditch has been dug; the person didn't anticipate it and falls into it. Still farther, a spiritual bandit sneaks up unnoticed and assaults them. They fall to the ground, knocked down by his heavy blows. So the soul becomes worn out and almost gives up as a result. It develops misgivings about trusting its faith. It sinks into despair and finally asks itself: "What good is my faith to me, anyway? It doesn't get me where I need to be!"

If only that battle were waged confidently in a believer's soul, they would ultimately get where we need to be. But, moving forward, a person actually seems to be moving backward without even noticing it. That's when the Lord God steps in and brings us there. To him be all the glory!

Meanwhile, the soul lives in fear, especially because in addition to all these dangers and obstacles a person also meets stumbling blocks. Stumbling blocks are all those words, circumstances, and other things that are met by a child of God and that tempt them into sin. That's because they give evil a beautiful and pious appearance. Or it's because a person plays around mentally with some indwelling sin. Our lives are full of these kinds of stumbling blocks.

It can't be otherwise. In the depths of its being, the world hates Christ. It feels that the Christ of God is its death. It succeeded in putting Christ to death on the cross. But that didn't help. He rose again. He ascended into heaven. And now from heaven he's a threat to the world once again. He lingers. He bides his time. He waits. But the world knows very well that his lingering, tarrying, and waiting are strictly for the purpose of gathering in his elect. When they are finally gathered into his kingdom, nothing will then restrain him. It knows that then its hour will have struck and all its glory will be finished. Then it will taste death at the hands of the Son of God.

This is why the world is motivated to oppose God's Son in its deep malice and bitterness. It's also why it's afraid of him and tries to drive him off, lest he destroy it with his outstretched arm. The world is like a snake being trampled by the Lion. So it hisses and spits poison and curls up to strike him. It's compelled to do this. But it won't pull it off.

This describes its hellish struggle against Christ. And however often it has attempted to bring its battle with Christ to a successful conclusion, it hasn't worked and hasn't helped the world's cause. Christ gives it no peace. New streams of its bitter, old enmity keep on welling up and flowing from the depths of its wickedness.

And God's children are caught between the snake and the Lion. That's where the snake promises them that it won't bite them as long as they don't acknowledge the Lion.

This, then, is the deep offense that is the cause of all stumbling blocks.

Christ says that the world is ungodly. And if the stumbling blocks looked ungodly, they wouldn't divert you from your course. But pay attention; they don't look ungodly, at least not when they present themselves to you. In your home! When they seek your approval at the gateway of your heart. Then they even look religious, sensitive, and vibrantly pious.

But from the other side, Christ sounds a warning: "My redeemed are pure!" But then the world approaches. It creeps into your heart. It mocks you and whispers so devilishly deep within you: "What a pretty, pure heart!" Having said that, it hauls up one by one all the miserable content of your inner life and causes that filthy pool of unrighteousness to bubble over from the depths.

And that's discouraging, for then our poor soul concludes that "the world is so much better and we are so much worse than we ever thought." Then we're offended. In a very real sense, we're offended in our heart! Offended by ourselves! Offended by the people of God! But above all, offended by the words of Christ that always turn out differently than he promised us! At times like that, our heart does a double take. We become despondent. Watching, Satan sees this and in all sorts of ways sends some ungodly message in our weaker moments that trips us up.

For anyone who has lived on a deeper level and experienced more frightening struggles, those times are a living hell. They're times when you wouldn't make it but for the words: "I tell you that the angels in heaven continually see the face of my Father who is in heaven." That's the reason why the words of this text come to you at such times. They prophesy that times of stumbling will come.

They prophesy that they must come. Finally, they prophesy a “woe to you,” but not about God’s children. It’s about what will be experienced by the world! The one who causes the stumbling will experience it most deeply.

That’s comforting!

It’s comforting because I simply know that it has to be that way. It’s comforting that Jesus knew that this is what will happen. So then, what I experience is nothing strange. Nothing against which Jesus has not made provision! In the hour of fear, therefore, I lean undismayed on the Lion of the tribe of Judah, who is powerful and will protect my poor soul from the striking snake.

The greatest danger for God’s children is not that they will suffer offense. The greatest danger is that you will let Satan use you as a stumbling block to your brother. May the Lord protect you from that in your going out and your coming in.

This is why the Lord adds the serious warning: “Woe to the person who causes them to stumble.”

Now look around you in the world. Look at those who profess their faith in religious circles and ask yourself whether it’s not often true that they cause “these little ones” to stumble.

No, I tell you, look into your own heart rather than at the circles of others around you. Study what’s in your own heart. What do you think? Is there as much as one Christian who has not at one time, perhaps many times over, caused their brother or sister to stumble?

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John Henry Jowett - THE VALUE OF ONE SOUL Matthew 18:7-14.

WHAT an infinite value the Lord attaches to one soul! “And one of them be gone astray!” I thought He might never have missed the one! And yet the Eastern shepherd says that out of his great flock he can miss the individual face. A face is missing, as though a child were absent from the family circle. When a soul is wandering in the far country there is an awful gap in the Father’s house! Is thy place empty? Is mine?

And mark the pangs of the Shepherd’s quest. He “goeth into the mountain and seeketh!” The Eastern shepherd goes out in tempest, and in rocky ravine, or in thorny scrub that tears the hands and feet, he seeks and finds his sheep. And my Lord sought me, in stony and thorny places, in the darkness of Gethsemane, and in the awful desolations of The Hill. And the Shepherd found His sheep, and He returns across the hills singing the song of the triumph of grace—

“And up from the mountains, thunder-riven,  
And up from the rocky steep,  
A cry arose to the gates of heaven,  
‘Rejoice! I have found My sheep!’  
And the angels echo around the throne,  
‘Rejoice! for the Lord brings back His own!’”

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**Mouse Trap** – (invented by Sir Hiram Stephen Maxim) - A very simple device made up of a flat wooden platform; A wire acting as a hammer; a spring that gives the hammer the quickness it needs; a metal bar that holds the hammer back; & a sensitive little catch; that when you touch it with the slightest pressure it releases the metal bar, and the hammer comes slamming down on its victim. There are many things in this world that trap not mice but men! There are traps of unforgiveness...which “sever” relationships. And thus imprison countless Christians in its jaws!

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#### **MORE ILLUSTRATIONS OF CAUSING OTHERS TO STUMBLE:**

**The Domino Effect:** Imagine a row of dominoes carefully set up in a line. If someone knocks over one domino, it causes a chain reaction, toppling all the others. When we lead others into sin, even unintentionally, it can have a ripple effect, influencing not only the individual but those around them as well.

**A Blind Guide:** A blind person leading another blind person across a busy street may inadvertently lead them into danger. Jesus referred to the Pharisees as “blind guides” (Matthew 15:14), highlighting how their spiritual blindness caused others to stumble. Misleading others through poor teaching or bad examples has serious consequences.

**A Tripping Hazard:** Leaving an obstacle in a walkway causes someone to trip and fall. The person who placed the obstacle might think it’s minor, but the one who trips could be seriously injured. When we act carelessly or selfishly, we may create spiritual “tripping hazards” for others, causing them to stumble in their faith.

**Poisoned Food:** If someone prepares food but neglects to check if it’s safe to eat, they could unintentionally poison the person consuming it. Offering others “poisoned” spiritual food—through bad advice, hypocrisy, or an ungodly example—can harm their spiritual health.

**A Distracting Road Sign:** Imagine a road sign pointing in the wrong direction (OR NO ROAD SIGN [AS IN THE EXAMPLE](#))



[ABOVE](#)), leading drivers off course and into danger. Our words and actions act as "signs" for others. If they mislead or confuse, they can cause others to stray from the path God intends for them.

**A Bad Role Model:** A child learns by imitating their parents or older siblings. If the role model exhibits harmful or sinful behaviors, the child adopts those same behaviors, believing them to be acceptable. As Christians, others watch us, especially younger or weaker believers. If our example leads them into sin, we've caused them to stumble. How's your walk beloved (not just in the light but in the dark for even what is in the dark will be revealed!)

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#### QUESTION -[What does it mean that we are not to cause others to stumble?](#)

**ANSWER** - The concept of not causing others to stumble is found in Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8. In these chapters, Paul talks about personal convictions and our responsibility to our fellow believers in Christ. He highlights several topics over which believers have disagreements—food, drink, and sacred days. In Paul's time, the disagreements were mostly concerning Jewish law versus the new freedom found in Christ. We experience much the same type of disagreements today, even over the same topics, to which we could add things like body piercings, tattoos, clothing style, movies, video games, books, and alcohol/tobacco. These are all areas for which the Bible does not provide specific instruction and yet are areas in which many feel conviction. Some of these things can lead to worldliness, sin, impurity or even just become an obsession/idol. But, on the flip side, legalism and avoidance of anything the world has to offer can also become an idol.

Paul tells the Romans, "So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God. Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way . . . So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves. But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin" (Romans 14:12-13, 22-23). Paul is telling us to enjoy our freedom in Christ, but along with that freedom comes the responsibility to protect those around us who have doubts about that freedom.

The example of alcohol is relevant here. Alcohol is not inherently evil, and the biblical prohibitions are not against drinking but against drunkenness. But someone who tends toward alcoholism very often knows he must not drink at all and believes others shouldn't drink, either, even in moderation. If a Christian has a friend who is convinced drinking is wrong, then drinking around that person may cause him/her to "stumble" or trip up. The Greek word for "stumble" gives the sense of stubbing one's toe. As Christians, we are forbidden to do anything that may cause our brothers and sisters in Christ to stub their toe, spiritually speaking. Stubbing the toe can cause a person to fall in the spiritual sense, or to damage or weaken his faith. In all things, the important lesson is to "make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification" (Romans 14:19). In this way, God is glorified, believers are edified, and the world sees in us "righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17).

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#### Related Resources:

- [Why is Jesus called the stumbling stone in Matthew 21:43-44?](#)
- [How can I avoid enabling someone else's sin?](#)

**Matthew 18:8 "If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than to have two hands or two feet and be cast into the eternal fire."**

BGT Matthew 18:8 Ε ἄ χε ρ σου π ο ς σου σκανδα λζει σε, κκοψον α τ ν κα β λε π σο · κα λ ν σο σπιν ε σε λθε ν ε ς τ ν ζω ν κυλλ ν χω λ ν ὁ ο χε ρας ὁ ο π δας χοντα βληθη ναι ε ς τ π ρ τ α νιον.

NET Matthew 18:8 If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire.

CSB Matthew 18:8 If your hand or your foot causes your downfall, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or lame, than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into the eternal fire.

ESV Matthew 18:8 And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire.

NIV Matthew 18:8 If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire.

NLT Matthew 18:8 So if your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It's better to enter

eternal life with only one hand or one foot than to be thrown into eternal fire with both of your hands and feet.

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

NJB Matthew 18:8 'If your hand or your foot should be your downfall, cut it off and throw it away: it is better for you to enter into life crippled or lame, than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire.

NAB Matthew 18:8 If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter into life maimed or crippled than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into eternal fire.

YLT Matthew 18:8 'And if thy hand or thy foot doth cause thee to stumble, cut them off and cast from thee; it is good for thee to enter into the life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast to the fire the age-during.

MIT Matthew 18:8 If your hand or your foot has a scandalous influence on you, chop it off and throw it away from you. Better it is to live your life handicapped or disabled than to have two hands or two feet that will be thrown into inextinguishable fire.

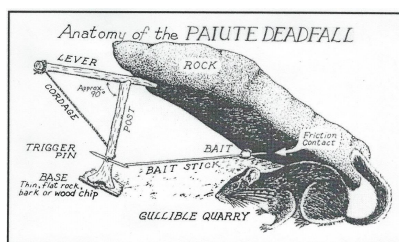
GWN Matthew 18:8 "If your hand or your foot causes you to lose your faith, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life disabled or injured than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into everlasting fire.

- **if:** Mt 5:29,30 14:3,4 De 13:6-8 Mk 9:43-48 Lu 14:26,27,33 18:22,23
- **and cast:** Isa 2:20,21 30:22 Eze 18:31 Ro 13:12 Php 3:8,9
- **maimed:** Mt 15:30,31
- **everlasting:** Mt 25:41,46 Isa 33:14 Mk 9:48,49 Lu 16:24 2Th 1:8,9 Rev 14:10 Rev 20:15 21:8

#### Related Passages:

Matthew 5:29-30+ (THE DANGER OF SIN) "If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 30 "If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell.

Mark 9:43-48+ "And if your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life crippled, than having your two hands, to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire, 44 [*where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED.*] 45 "And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame, than having your two feet, to be cast into hell, 46 [*where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED.*] 47 "And if your eye causes you to stumble, cast it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes, to be cast into hell, 48 where *THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED.* (Note: Brackets and italics indicate text not in best manuscripts)



Depiction of the Snare

### JESUS' SOBERING WARNING ABOUT STUMBLING

If the previous warning dealt with the dread consequences of ensnaring others, this passage deals with the consequences of ensnaring one's self! The previous passage warned of a horrible death in time, but the present (and subsequent passages) warns of an indescribable death in eternity!

**If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble** ([skandalizo](#)), **cut it off** ([ekkopto](#)) and **throw** ([ballo](#)) **it from you** -Jesus shifts from the previous passages speaking to "whoever" and now personalizes His warning. As easy as it may be to seduce immature

and weak believers into sin, it is easier to allow one's self to fall into sin. Your **hand** deals with what you handle and your **foot** with where you, and they work together to ensnare you and trap you into committing sin which is orchestrated by your will, which includes your desire. **Cut off** and **throw** are both in the [aorist imperative](#) which means "Do this now!" "Do not delay!" "The need is urgent!" Sometimes unsparing radical spiritual surgery must be done to spare the soul and must be done immediately and decisively with no halfway measures! And ultimately the accomplishment of this task requires us to [to depend on the Holy Spirit in order to obey](#). We must still make a decision of our will to follow through, but we need the Spirit to give us "the desire and the effort" (Phil 2:13NET+) or "desire and power" (Phil 2:13NLT+). In short, as sinful creatures (even saved sinful creatures) we are [100% Dependent](#) on God and [100% Responsible](#) to do whatever it takes in order to prevent stumbling (See this [Paradoxical Principle](#)) if we are to accomplish this vital task! As John Owen said "Be killing sin, lest it kill you!" This is a lifelong command because our [sinful flesh](#) will never give up trying to cause us to stumble!

Jesus' command here and in the next verse reminds me of Paul's similar command in Colossians 3:5+ "Therefore (based on the truth in Col 3:1-4+!) **consider** ([nekroo](#) also in [aorist imperative](#) and needing the Spirit to carry out) the members of your earthly body as **dead** to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry."

Take a moment to play and pray the words of this hymn [I Love the Lord](#)" (especially the words in bold font)...

... I love the Lord,  
He is filled with compassion.  
He turned to me  
On the day that I called.  
**From the snares of the dark,  
O, Lord, save my life,  
Be my Strength.**

**It is better** ([kalos](#)) **for you to enter** ([eiserchomai](#)) **life** ([zoe](#)) **crippled or lame** ([cholos](#)), **than to have two hands or two feet and be cast** ([ballo](#)) **into the eternal** ([aionios](#)) **fire** ([pur](#)) - Jesus now explains why He issued this radical, urgent command! His sobering warning means we must deal drastically with with sin! Take no prisoners! No compromise! Yes, Jesus uses [hyperbole](#) but it is to emphasize the importance of these commands He gives. And remember He was not calling for mutilation of our members, because we would still have the problem in our heart! The heart of our problem is always our heart! He is not saying believers will lose their salvation. Jesus' description is radical in order that it GETS OUR ATTENTION!!!

To reiterate Jesus is warning us not to procrastinate or delay! The need to accomplish this cutting off is urgent! Jesus' point is that anything or anyone that morally traps us (by our senses, visual, touch, and by expansion not excluding the other senses such as hearing), and causes us to fall into sin should be eliminated, radically and quickly. If we do not make every necessary effort to control our surroundings, what we watch, read and hear, who we keep company with and speak with, etc, then those things **will control us**. If you cannot control something, it needs to be "jettisoned" to keep the boat afloat so to speak.

The Old Testament account of Samuel hacking Agag to pieces (1 Sa 15:33+) is a good analogy for the need for Christians to take drastic steps to defeat the sin that remains in their lives. And what was the price to King Saul for not obeying? He lost his life and his reign! The "Agag's" in our life that cause us to stumble must be hacked to pieces so to speak.

*It is well when at the close of a man's ministry  
he can preach the same sermon as at the beginning.*

**Gilbrant** - As easy as it may be to seduce immature and weak believers into sin, it is easier to allow one's self to fall into sin. Temptations can come from without, but they also come from within our members. And as it is better to submit through surgery to the loss of a body part than to lose the whole body to disease and death, so also in the spiritual realm radical surgery may be necessary in the light of eternity. Three valued body parts—the hand, the foot, and the eye—are mentioned. These body parts can be used for evil or for good, but they do not act independently of the will. The hand symbolizes what is done, the foot where one goes, and the eye what is seen. ([Complete Biblical Library](#))

**And be cast** ([ballo](#)) **into the eternal** ([aionios](#)) **fire** ([pur](#)) - The main idea is that the cost to the soul in hell is so utterly devastating that if anything interferes with a man's right standing before God, causing him to stumble, that item should be eliminated regardless of cost. Nothing is valuable enough to cause us to miss the future consummation of God's kingdom. The only alternative is hell (gehenna). Surely, the actualization of hell is even worse than the visualization of it.

Jesus often spoke warnings of hell, with the entire passage (Mk 9:42-50) being a prime example. The undying **worm** indicates never-ending disintegration and the **unquenchable** fire indicates eternal suffering, however they may be implemented. The contemplation of such a future ought to drive men to "flee from the wrath to come" (Mt 3:7+) and believers to ceaseless praise and thanksgiving (1Th 1:10+ 2Th 1:9,10+) Instead this truth often impels skeptics to even more adamant unbelief and believers to an

indifference and to an antinomian or "cheap grace" attitude toward their costly "so great a salvation" (Heb 2:3). Genuine believers will not lose their salvation, but they will be disciplined in this life and will reduce their reward in the future life. The loving Creator is issuing this solemn warning because time is short and eternity is long and one needs to be certain of their eternity in Heaven (cf 2 Cor 13:5+).

**C H Spurgeon Commentary** - 8,9 - 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. 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 cost 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.** (ED: HE IS NOT SAYING A BELIEVER WILL LOSE HIS SALVATION, BUT IS SAYING THAT A PERSON WHO PROFESSES BELIEF AND PERSEVERES IN PERSISTENT SIN AS THEIR LIFESTYLE WILL BE LOST FOREVER REGARDLESS OF THEIR PROFESSION BECAUSE THEY WERE NEVER SAVED IN THE FIRST PLACE!) 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, simple minded 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.

**NET NOTE** - In Greek there is a wordplay that is difficult to reproduce in English here. The verb translated "causes ... to sin" (σκανδαλιζω, skandalizō) comes from the same root as the word translated "stumbling blocks" (σκάνδαλον, skandalon) in the previous verse.

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**Adrian Rogers** (see [sermon on Hebrews 4:12 page 106](#)) - Mt 18:8 - Do you think He was speaking literally? Do you think if you cut off your hand it would make you any more spiritual? No, what our Lord is saying here is this: You let the Word of God cut out of your life those things that offend. What He is saying is that if there is something cancerous in you, some work of your hand, some place that you attend, let the Holy Spirit of God remove it, so that healing and health may begin. Thank God for the sharpness, the sharpness of His Word.

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**Stay out of Temptation** - On the TV show Hee Haw, Doc Campbell is confronted by a patient who says he broke his arm in two places. The doc replies, "Well then, stay out of them places!" He may have something there. We cannot regularly put ourselves in the face of temptation and not be affected. When faced with the problem of temptation, we need to take the good doctor's advice and "stay out of them places."

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**JOHN OF THE CROSS** - However small an attachment may be, do not be too confident that you can cut it off at any time, but cut it off at once: for if you do not have the courage to destroy it when it is but beginning, how can you presume upon success when it has taken root and grown?

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#### **J I Packer - MATTHEW 18:8**

*Mortifying sin, however painful,  
is a necessity for life in Christ.*

While surrendering sins into which you drifted casually is not so hard, mortifying what the Puritans called besetting sins—dispositional sins to which your temperament inclines you, and habitual sins that have become addictive and defiant—is regularly a long-drawn-out, bruising struggle. No one who is a spiritual realist will ever pretend otherwise. It is a matter of negating, wishing

dead, and laboring to thwart inclinations, cravings, and habits that have been in you for a long time. Pain and grief, moans and groans, will certainly be involved, for your sin does not want to die, nor will it enjoy the killing process. Jesus told us, very vividly, that mortifying a sin could well feel like plucking out an eye or cutting off a hand or foot, in other words, self-mutilation. You will feel you are saying good-bye to something that is so much part of you that without it you cannot live. [Knowing God's Purpose For Your Life](#)

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### **Fleeing Temptation** [Celebrate Recovery Daily Devotional: 366 Devotionals](#)

“If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire.” MATTHEW 18:8

I had a conversation with a friend over coffee about how he just can't seem to get any victory over sexual addiction when he goes online. Another time, I met with a woman who couldn't seem to stop spending money when she went to the mall. Still another man told me that he couldn't say no to sweets if they were in the house. Then there was the woman who didn't think sobriety was possible for her because she worked at a bar.

These people, and many more, including me, are stumbling because of an area of their lives they'd be better off without, at least for a while. If going online causes us to stumble, we can install accountability software or take a break from the Internet. If we're spending too much money, we can stay away from the mall. If food offers temporary comfort but causes long-term ill effects, we shouldn't bring it into the house. If we work in a place that makes sobriety difficult, we can remove ourselves from that environment.

Some of these can be temporary changes, while others need to be permanent. If we know what is making us sin, we can distance ourselves from the temptation. That just makes sense. Once we've done that, God can help us find wholeness.

PRAYER Father, thank you for showing me that I sometimes sabotage my own recovery. I know that with your help and my common sense, I can find my way to wholeness. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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### **Martyn Lloyd-Jones - OUTSPOKEN ABOUT SIN** MATTHEW 18:8 [Walking with God Day by Day: 365 Daily Devotional Selections](#)

All talk about sin, say the self-expressionists, is utterly foolish, leading to self-repression, which is, they aver, the only sin. What used to be called sin is just expression of self, the greatest and the most vital possession that man has, they say. Not to sin, according to the old meaning of the term, is to do violence to the greatest gift he possesses. They plead, therefore, for the abolition of the word sin in its earlier associations. They deplore what they term the tragic spectacle of mankind shackled against its highest good by adherence to the warnings of the Bible, the Church, and the saints.

We can best consider this human view of life, and show its complete fallacy, by contrasting it with God's view as stated in the Bible. The teachings of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, are outspoken against sin. He said, “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. 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” (Matthew 18:8-9).

Now there we are reminded of the way in which every conceivable view of life and of men is invariably dealt with somewhere or another in the Scriptures. Modern man is constantly flattering himself and suggesting to himself that certain of his ideas are quite new. But here again we find an illustration of a view that prides itself on its modernity dealt with completely and exhaustively in the Bible.

The teachings of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, are outspoken against sin

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### **Walter Kaiser - Pluck Out Your Eye? - [Hard Sayings of the Bible](#)**

This saying is not so hard in the NIV form as it is in some older versions. The KJV says, “If thy right eye offend thee ... ,” which is generally meaningless to readers today; the verb offend no longer means “trip up” or anything like that, which in literary usage it still did in 1611. Less excusable is the ERV rendering, “If thy right eye causeth thee to stumble ... ,” because this introduced an archaism which in 1881 was long since obsolete.

The NIV rendering, however, is more intelligible. It means, in effect: “Don't let your eye lead you into sin.” How could it do that? By resting too long on an object of temptation. Matthew places this saying immediately after Jesus' words about adultery in the heart, and that is probably the original context, for it provides a ready example of how a man's eye could lead him into sin. In the most notable case of adultery in the Old Testament—King David's adultery with the wife of Uriah the Hittite—the trouble began when, late one afternoon, David from his palace roof saw the woman bathing (2 Sam 11:2). Jesus says, “Better pluck out your eye—even your right eye (as being presumably the more precious of the two)—than allow it to lead you into sin; it is better to enter into eternal life

with one eye than to be thrown into Gehenna (as a result of that sin) with two.”

Matthew follows up this saying about the right eye with a similar one about the right hand. This strong assertion seems to have stayed with the hearers; it is repeated in Matthew 18:8–9 (in dependence on Mk 9:43–48), where the foot is mentioned in addition to the eye and the hand.

Shortly after the publication of William Tyndale’s English New Testament, the attempt to restrict its circulation was defended on the ground that the simple reader might mistakenly take such language literally and “pluck out his eyes, and so the whole realm will be full of blind men, to the great decay of the nation and the manifest loss of the King’s grace; and thus by reading of the Holy Scriptures will the whole realm come into confusion.” So a preaching friar is said to have declared in a Cambridge sermon; but he met his match in Hugh Latimer, who, in a sermon preached the following Sunday, said that simple people were well able to distinguish between literal and figurative terms. “For example,” Latimer went on, “if we paint a fox preaching in a friar’s hood, nobody imagines that a fox is meant, but that craft and hypocrisy are described, which so often are found disguised in that garb.” (Hugh Latimer, Sermon preached in St. Edward’s Church, Cambridge, in 1529, quoted in J. P. Smyth, *How We Got Our Bible* (1885; London: Religious Tract Society, 1938), p. 102.)

In fact, it is not recorded that anyone ever mutilated himself because of these words in the Gospels. There is indeed the case of Origen, but if the story is true that he made himself a eunuch “for the kingdom of heaven’s sake,” that was in response to another saying, at which we shall look later.

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**DEALING WITH SIN** - On several occasions when visiting men in jail, I have seen them shake their heads mournfully and say, "I never thought it would come to this." When they began to break minor laws, they fully intended to change their ways before getting into serious trouble. But instead, one thing led to another, and they became more and more involved in a life of crime. Now they languish in jail, facing a long imprisonment.

These men failed to realize that sin always progresses. When we flout God's laws in one facet of life, a kind of mathematical law of addition and multiplication goes into effect. Soon sin affects other areas of our lives. It's foolish to think we can keep just one pet sin. That single sin will grow and spread unless we deal radically with it. That's why Jesus spoke of cutting off the offending hand and plucking out the offending eye (Matt. 18:8-9). By using such a strong figure of speech, He was saying, do whatever is necessary to stop.

We cannot afford to toy with sin. Three times in Romans 1, Paul said of unbelievers that "God gave them up" to their evil ways. In other words, He allows wickedness to run its downhill course until judgment falls and there's no escape. We can avoid the inevitable arithmetic of sin by trusting Jesus as Savior. His power in our lives can overcome any sin. —H. V. Lugt (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

No one becomes wicked all at once.

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### **The Cost of the Kingdom**

*(Inspired by Matthew 18:8-9)*

If your hand should lead you to sin,  
Cut it off, let new life begin.  
Better to walk with one hand whole,  
Than to lose forever your precious soul.

If your foot should tread the path of wrong,  
Turn away, where you don't belong.  
Better to limp to heaven's gate,  
Than to dance to hell and seal your fate.

And if your eye should tempt your heart,  
Pluck it out; let sin depart.  
For it's better to enter the kingdom blind,  
Than to see and leave eternal life behind.

These words are harsh, yet truth they bear,  
The cost of sin is beyond compare.  
No earthly limb or fleeting sight,  
Can outweigh the gift of heaven's light.

So guard your steps, your hands, your gaze,  
Let holiness guide all your days.  
For the path is narrow, the journey steep,  
But eternal joy is yours to keep.

**Matthew 18:9** "If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than to have two eyes and be cast into the fiery hell.

- **to enter:** Mt 19:17,23,24 Ac 14:22 Heb 4:11 Rev 21:27
- **than to:** Mt 16:26 Lu 9:24,25

#### Related Passages:

2 Samuel 11:1-5+ (DAVID'S EYE PROBLEM) Then it happened in the spring, at the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him and all Israel, and they destroyed the sons of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But David stayed at Jerusalem. 2 Now when evening came David arose from his bed and walked around on the roof of the king's house, and from the roof **he SAW a woman bathing**; and the woman was very beautiful in appearance. 3 So David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, "Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" 4 And David sent messengers and took her, and when she came to him, he lay with her; and when she had purified herself from her uncleanness, she returned to her house. 5 And the woman conceived; and she sent and told David, and said, "I am pregnant."

Psalm 119:37+ **Turn** away my eyes from looking at vanity, And **revive** me in Thy ways.

Proverbs 4:25+ Let your eyes look directly ahead, and let your gaze be fixed straight in front of you.

Proverbs 6:25+ Do not desire her beauty in your heart, nor let her catch you with her eyelids.

James 1:14+ But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. 15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

Psalm 101:3+ I will set no worthless thing before my eyes; I hate the work of those who fall away; It shall not fasten its grip on me.

### JESUS WARNS ABOUT WANDERING EYES!

**If** - "'If ... if" These are both FIRST CLASS CONDITIONAL SENTENCES which are assumed to be true from the author's perspective or for his literary purposes. These shocking hypothetical statements stress the seriousness of sin." ([Uitley](#))

**Your eye causes you to stumble** ([skandalizo](#)) - **Your eye** indicates the problem is not that you live in a sex crazed society. You have a choice over what your eye can look at or not look at. When the football game pans to the sideline (at you know what), you can consciously choose to look away. Don't delay. Don't underestimate the power of your God given imagination. D. L. Moody, certainly one of the more godly men of the modern era wisely recognized the source of the problem, admitting that...

*"I have more trouble with D. L. Moody  
than with any man I know."*

The man I see in the mirror each morning is my greatest impediment to holiness and godliness. Stop saying "The devil made me do it!" When you get up in the morning and look in the mirror to shave, you are looking at your worst problem, because blood bought, heaven bound men still contend daily with the [old Sin nature](#) inherited from Adam. Granted, [Sin](#) no longer has the right to reign as our master, because of our co-crucifixion and co-resurrection (cf Ro 6:11, 12, 13+), but it can still rear its ugly head!

*My heart follows where my eyes lead,  
Planting the harvest of every seed.  
(How does your garden grow?)*

**D A Carson** - Imagination is a God-given gift; but if it is fed dirt by the eye, it will be dirty. All sin, not least sexual sin, begins with the imagination. Therefore what feeds the imagination is of maximum importance in the pursuit of kingdom righteousness (Php 4:8+).

Not everyone reacts the same way to all objects. But if your eye is causing you to sin, gouge it out; or at very least, don't look! The alternative is sin and hell, sin's reward. The point is so fundamental that Jesus doubtless repeated it on numerous occasions. (See [Matthew](#))

*Our eyes, when gazing on sinful objects,  
are out of their calling and God's keeping.*

--Thomas Fuller

**Pluck it out** ([exaireo](#)) and **throw** ([ballo](#)) **it from you. It is better** ([kalos](#)) **for you to enter** ([eiserchomai](#)) **life** ([zoe](#)) **with one eye, than to have two eyes and be cast** ([ballo](#)) **into the fiery** ([pur](#)) **hell** ([geenna](#)) (lit = "Gehenna of fire") - [See the discussion](#) of **cut it off**. Our eyes are like the gate guarding the castle from enemy invasion which can result in defeat!

*The right way to put out the fire of lust  
is to withdraw the fuel of excess.*

-- William Jenkyn

**Job** understood the danger his eyes and so he made a covenant with them writing " How then could I gaze at a virgin?" (Job 31:14)

**Comment:** "Gaze" in Hebrew = consider carefully, diligently consider, discern, get understanding, look carefully, observe, paid close attention, pay heed. Do you get the picture that Job is trying to convey? He's not talking about a casual glance or an accidental viewing of an attractive woman (that would be virtually impossible to avoid in "non-blushing" America... but it is possible to make certain provisions -- all under grace of course -- and they include not going to PG-13 movies or even PG ratings... they have all become too sensual because the moral compass of Americans, especially the media moguls is going "due south" toward the abyss. We can chose not to watch talk shows that bring up "lusty" subjects so commonly these days. So Job is saying don't stare at her because if you do, Jesus says you've already committed adultery in your heart Mt 5:28... pluck your eye out before you do this! That's how enslaving this sin can be... so it requires radical surgery and complete extirpation! Don't just biopsy it! Cut it out completely!

*So guard your steps, your hands, your gaze,  
Let holiness guide all your days.  
For the path is narrow, the journey steep,  
But eternal joy is yours to keep.*

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**Hell** ([Gehenna](#)) ([1067](#)) [geenna](#) from Hebrew **gay** = valley + **Hinnom**) is literally the **valley of Hinnom**, the ravine or valley south of Jerusalem where the refuse and filth, bodies of dead animals, and bodies of criminals were cast and burned. These fires were continually kept burning, all a fit symbol of the future home of all unrepentant, unregenerate wicked men and women. It was a foul, forbidding place where the fire, smoke, and stench never ceased. It is thus fitting that geenna is where sin and unrepentant sinners will one day find it's "resting place".

**Gilbrant** - Originally geenna, or gehenna, was the name of a valley south of Jerusalem. Gê Hinnôm (Hebrew) equals Hinnom Valley (cf. Joshua 15:8; 18:16). Thus the Greek word has its origin in this Hebrew expression (cf. Aramaic gê Hinnâm). The valley itself was the site of child sacrifice during the time of King Ahab and Manasseh. There children were sacrificed to Molech. King Josiah declared the place unclean, and later it was referred to as the place of the dead. The form Gaienna is found in the Septuagint of Joshua 18:16, but it is not found in secular Greek writings. In the Old Testament the Valley of Hinnom was, to some extent, viewed as a symbol of Israel's apostasy from or rejection of God. As stated above, it was a site where offerings and sacrifices were made to Molech (2 Chr 33:6; Jer 32:35). As a result of this association with apostasy both the place and the word became associated with God's punishment and judgment (Jeremiah 7:32; 19:6). Later Judaism associated God's judgment of His people with the Valley of Hinnom. Several times the Old Testament explicitly associates the valley with God's judgment. Isaiah especially reflects such an understanding. In a picture of final things Isaiah envisioned salvation (a new heaven and a new earth, Isa 66:22,23ff.; cf. Revelation 21:1ff.) as well as judgment (the worm does not die and the fire will not be quenched, Isaiah 66:24; cf. Mark 9:48). In these cases gehenna is not a literal reference to a valley south of Jerusalem; instead it symbolizes the future judgment and punishment. ([Complete Biblical Library](#))

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**QUESTION** - [Did Jesus mean we should literally pluck out our eyes?](#)

**ANSWER** - In the [Sermon on the Mount](#), Jesus says something that must certainly have seized His hearers' attention: "If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body



to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell" (Matthew 5:29–30). Jesus repeats the admonition in Matthew 18:8–9, except there He adds the need to dispense with a foot as well as a hand and an eye.

The graphic word pictures of Matthew 5 and 18 still grab attention today, and they raise the question of how literally we should take Jesus' commands in these passages. Does Jesus actually mean to say that we should pluck out our eyes or sever a hand if we are prone to sin? It may be of comfort to know that Jesus' instructions in these particular verses are not meant to be taken literally. We need not mutilate our bodies as a punishment for our sin. Rather, Jesus means that we should be prepared to make exceptional sacrifices if we want to follow Him (see Matthew 16:24).

Jesus had just warned His audience against using their eyes for lustful purposes (Matthew 5:28), so His prescribed remedy for lust—to pluck out an eye—makes sense, in a radical sort of way. But it is the radical nature of His statement that makes it so memorable.

When Jesus advises us to pluck out a sinful eye or cut off an unruly hand, He is employing a figure of speech known as hyperbole. Hyperbole is an obvious exaggeration or an intentional overstatement. Examples of hyperbole in modern speech would include statements like "This bag of groceries weighs a ton," "I've been waiting forever," and "Everyone knows that." The apostle Paul uses hyperbolic language in Galatians 4:15. Hyperbole, like other figures of speech, is not meant to be taken literally.

Jesus' purpose in saying, hyperbolically, that sinners should pluck out their eyes or cut off their hands is to magnify in His hearers' minds the heinous nature of sin. Sin is any action or thought that is contrary to the character of God. The result of sin is death, from which Jesus wants to preserve us (see Hebrews 2:9). Jesus warns of [hell](#) because He doesn't want people to go there (Matthew 5:29–30).

Sin takes people to hell (see Revelation 21:8), and that makes sin something to avoid at all costs. Jesus says that, whatever is causing you to sin, take drastic measures to get that thing out of your life. "It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. . . . It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell" (Matthew 18:8–9). *Nothing* is worth missing heaven for. *Nothing* is worth going to hell for. Nothing.

God takes sin seriously—seriously enough to sacrifice His only begotten Son to destroy it. We must take sin seriously as well. A lack of repentance is a crime punishable by eternal death. It is better to deny our flesh—to pluck out an eye or cut off a hand, as it were—than to risk sinning against God. God demands holiness (1 Peter 1:15), but we naturally tend to pamper ourselves and excuse our sin. That is why we need Jesus' shocking, radical hyperbole to wake us from our spiritual complacency.

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John Bunyan in *The Holy War* knew that the senses are the gateways to Mansoul. The eyegate and the eargate must be guarded. But mere resistance is not enough. It lacks dynamic unless it is offensive and issues from a positive faith. Soldiers in battle must have a rationale for the campaign. Without the knowledge that life's battles are part of the holy warfare, morale and the determination to resist the enemy would soon collapse.

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HUGH OF ST. VICTOR - The eye must not fix its gaze on anything that the soul may not desire without sin. The hearing must be pure and governed by discretion, deaf to all things vain and useless, ready to take in with delight the knowledge that is of God. Our speech must be seasoned with the salt of wisdom—to condemn all that is unprofitable or evil, to give utterance only to what is good and useful.

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**The Eyegate** - The eyegate opens onto a broad avenue that leads directly to the soul. Through it flow images that can kindle lust, stir up envy, and incite sinful pleasures.

In *The Confessions* of St. Augustine, the author told of his friend Alypius who, though not a Christian, hated the bloody entertainment of the Roman circus. One day some students forced Alypius into the amphitheater to watch the gladiators. "Though you hale my body to that place," he said, "can you force me also to turn my mind or my eyes to these shows?" So there he sat, eyes closed, mind fixed on nobler things. Just then a frenzied cry arose as a gladiator fell victim to a sword. Alypius opened his eyes for a brief moment. "So soon as he saw the blood," Augustine recorded, "he therewith drank down savageness; nor turned away, but fixed his eye, drinking in frenzy, unawares, and was delighted with that guilty fight, and intoxicated with the bloody pastime."

Our Lord, in a bold figure of speech, said, "if your eye caused you to sin, pluck it out." He didn't mean this to be taken literally. Rather He was saying, in effect, "Take the most drastic action necessary to keep your inner life pure."

*You may not be able to help the first look,  
but you can refuse the second*

Billy Graham once said, "You may not be able to help the first look, but you can refuse the second." When an impure image comes

to mind, whether from a book, a magazine, the TV, or real life, never “let the eyes have it.” Instead, fix the eyes of your soul on Jesus, who intercedes in heaven for us. He will keep you pure. (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

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**Jerry Bridges** writes that...Our minds are mental greenhouses where unlawful thoughts, once planted, are nurtured and watered before being transplanted into the real world of unlawful actions. People seldom fall suddenly into gluttony or immorality. These actions are savored in the mind long before they are enjoyed in reality. The thought life, then, is our first line of defense in the battle of self-control.

The gates to our thought lives are primarily our eyes and our ears. What we see or read or hear largely determines what we think. Memory, of course, also plays a big part in what we think, but our memories only store and feed back what originally comes into our minds through our eyes and ears. Guarding our hearts begins with guarding our eyes and ears. We must not allow that which panders to sexual lust, greed (called materialism in our present society), envy, and selfish ambition to enter our minds. We should avoid television programs, magazine or newspaper articles, advertisements, and conversations that arouse such thoughts. We should not only avoid them, but, to use Paul's words to Timothy, “flee from all this.” (Borrow [The Practice of Godliness](#) page 138)

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**Single Heart, Pure Heart - two songs by Craig Smith Take a moment** to listen to these songs, some of my favorites from Craig Smith,

### **[Single Heart](#)**

He had only one aim  
In placing us here  
This is His domain  
And His message is clear.

Single heart, Single mind.  
My eyes forward all the time.  
Single heart, purified.  
Undivided, unified.  
Single heart, Single mind.

May You find in us,  
Solitary trust  
May you find a single heart!

Here is another song [Pure Heart](#) -- **take a moment to ponder your life in light the words sung by Craig Smith and make it your prayer to the Father today:**

Over and over I hear it again  
That the Father desires pure heart  
Not to seek earthly treasure or the favor of man  
But to be found with pureness of heart

### **Chorus**

***Pure heart is what the Father desires  
Holy heart purified by God's holy fire  
Broken heart, proven to be faithful and true  
Fashion in me a heart that's thirsting for You***

Search ever chamber, expose them to me  
Create motives of honor and simplicity  
May you find faithfulness, integrity  
A heart which is worthy for Your eyes to see

### **Chorus**

My only ambition is to stand before You  
And find I was pleasing in Your sight  
An obedient child of God, faithful and true

**MAKE A DECISION OF YOUR WILL ABOUT WHAT YOU WATCH:**

You need to make a conscious decision of what you are going to allow into your life. David gave us a practical example when he declared:

I will set no worthless (belial [01100] = good for nothing, also used as another name for Satan! cp use of the Hebrew transliteration by Paul in 2Co 6:15) thing before (Hebrew means directly in front of) my eyes. I hate the work of those who fall away. It shall not fasten (dabaq [01692] = stick like glue, used in Ge 2:24 for man cleaving to his wife) its grip on me. (Ps 101:3)

**Comment:** What are those **worthless** things? Some are obvious such as R-rated movies, pornography, sensual novels, etc. But what about PG-13 rated movies? You be the judge but are the images and thoughts that are allowed entry into your heart edifying to you as a believer and God glorifying? What about most sitcoms on television today? It's almost impossible to find one that is not filled with sexual innuendo, curse words, off color jokes, etc. What do these things do to the heart? Will the "springs" be clean and unpolluted after exposure to such fare?

**George Hakewill** comments in regard to the phrase **it shall not fasten its grip on me..**

A bird may light upon a man's house; but he may choose whether she shall nestle or breed there, or not: and the devil or his instruments (the fallen world system) may represent a wicked object to a man's sight; but **he may choose** whether he will entertain or embrace it or not. For a man to set wicked things before his eyes is nothing else but to sin of set purpose, to set himself to sin, or to sell himself to sin, as Ahab did, 1 Kings 21:1-29.

**Albert Barnes** warns us...

A wicked plan or purpose is thus represented as having a tendency to fasten itself on a man, or to "stick to him" -- as pitch, or wax, or a burr does.

**Here are C H Spurgeon's comments on Ps 101:3:**

**I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes.** I will neither delight in it, aim at it or endure it. If I have wickedness brought before me by others I will turn away from it (Pr 8:13, Ro 12:9), I will not gaze upon it with pleasure. The psalmist is very sweeping in his resolve, he declines the least, the most reputable, the most customary form of evil -- no wicked thing; not only shall it not dwell in his heart, but not even before his eyes, for what fascinates the eye is very apt to gain admission into the heart, even as Eve's apple first pleased her sight and then prevailed over her mind and hand.

**I hate the work of them that turn aside.** He was warmly against it; he did not view it with indifference, but with utter scorn and abhorrence. Hatred of sin is a good sentinel for the door of virtue. There are persons in courts who walk in a very crooked way, leaving the high road of integrity; and these, by short cuts, and twists, and turns, are often supposed to accomplish work for their masters which simple honest hearts are not competent to undertake; but David would not employ such, he would pay no secret service money, he loathed the practices of men who deviate from righteousness. He was of the same mind as the dying statesman who said, "Corruption wins not more than honesty." It is greatly to be deplored that in after years he did not keep himself clear in this matter in every case, though, in the main he did; but what would he have been if he had not commenced with this resolve, but had followed the usual crooked Policy of Oriental princes? How much do we all need divine keeping! We are no more perfect than David, nay, we fall far short of him in many things; and, like him, we shall find need to write a psalm of penitence very soon after our psalm of good resolution.

**It shall not cleave to me.** I will disown their ways, I will not imitate their policy: like dirt it may fall upon me, but I will wash it off, and never rest till I am rid of it. Sin, like pitch, is very apt to stick. In the course of our family history crooked things will turn up, for we are all imperfect, and some of those around us are far from being what they should be; it must, therefore, be one great object of our care to disentangle ourselves, to keep clear of transgression, and of all that comes of it: this cannot be done unless the Lord both comes to us, and abides with us evermore. (cf Ro 8:13+).

**Eyes for the Worthy**

*(Inspired by Psalm 101:3)*

I will set no worthless thing before my gaze,  
No fleeting shadow, no empty praise.  
For what I behold shapes the heart within,  
Drawing me closer—or leading to sin.

Why dwell on idols that rust and decay?  
Why fix my eyes where temptations play?  
The Lord has called me to things divine,  
To seek what's holy, His truth to find.

The glitter of gold, the lure of the vain,  
Cannot compare to His lasting gain.  
So I turn my eyes from the fleeting show,  
To the light of His love, where blessings flow.

Let my vision rest on what is pure,  
On treasures eternal, steadfast, and sure.  
For the heart follows where the eyes lead,  
Planting the harvest of every seed.

I will fix my sight on the righteous path,  
Shielding my soul from the tempter's wrath.  
With eyes uplifted to heaven's throne,  
I find my joy in Christ alone.

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Psalm 119:37+ **TURN AWAY** (Hiphil = a command; and in the Septuagint, the Greek verb [apostrepho](#) is in the [aorist imperative](#) a plaintive plea to God to DO IT NOW, to give me the power of the Spirit to TURN AWAY. Apostrepho means to cause to change from incorrect to correct behavior) my eyes from looking at **vanity** (Hebrew = shav = futility, worthlessness = that which has no result or use and thus is worthless. Sometimes shav describes an idol, with emphasis on that which is worthless. Shav is translated in Greek [Septuagint] by the word [mataiotes](#) = state of being without use or value and thus that which manifests emptiness, futility, purposelessness, transitoriness), and revive me in Thy ways.

#### **Spurgeon Comments:**

Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity. He had prayed about his heart, and one would have thought that the eyes would so surely have been influenced by the heart that there was no need to make them the objects of a special petition; but our author is resolved to make assurance doubly sure. If the eyes do not see, perhaps the heart may not desire: at any rate, one door of temptation is closed when we do not even look at the painted bauble. Sin first entered man's mind by the eye, and it is still a favourite gate for the incoming of Satan's allurements: hence the need of a double watch upon that portal. The prayer is not so much that the eyes may be shut as "turned away"; for we need to have them open, but directed to right objects. Perhaps we are now gazing upon folly, we need to have our eyes turned away; and if we are beholding heavenly things we shall be wise to beg that our eyes may be kept away from vanity. Why should we look on vanity? -- it melts away as a vapour. Why not look upon things eternal? Sin is vanity, unjust gain is vanity, self conceit is vanity, and, indeed, all that is not of God comes under the same head. From all this we must turn away. It is a proof of the sense of weakness felt by the Psalmist and of his entire dependence upon God that he even asks to have his eyes turned for him; he meant not to make himself passive, but he intended to set forth his own utter helplessness apart from the grace of God. For fear he should forget himself and gaze with a lingering longing upon forbidden objects, he entreats the Lord speedily to make him turn away his eyes, hurrying him off from so dangerous a parley with iniquity. If we are kept from looking on vanity we shall be preserved from loving iniquity.

Whatever is of vanity, make me to pass without seeing it. The sentiment is strikingly like that in our Lord's prayer: "Lead us not into temptation." Having prayed for what he wanted to see, the Psalmist here prays for the hiding of what he would not see.

And quicken thou me in thy way. Give me so much life that dead vanity may have no power over me. Enable me to travel so swiftly in the road to heaven that I may not stop long enough within sight of vanity to be fascinated thereby. The prayer indicates our greatest need, -- more life in our obedience. It shows the preserving power of increased life to keep us from the evils which are around us, and it, also, tells us where that increased life must come from, namely, from the Lord alone. Vitality is the cure of vanity. When the heart is

full of grace the eyes will be cleansed from impurity. On the other hand, if we would be full of life as to the things of God we must keep ourselves apart from sin and folly, or the eyes will soon captivate the mind, and, like Samson, who could slay his thousands, we may ourselves be overcome through the lusts which enter by the eye.

**William Cowper** on Psalm 119:37:

By the eyes oftentimes, as by windows, death enters into the heart; therefore to keep the heart in a good estate three things are requisite, First, careful study of the senses, specially of the eyes; for it is a righteous working of the Lord... that he who negligently uses the external eye of his body, should be punished with blindness in the internal eye of his mind. And for this cause Nazianzen, deploring the calamities of his soul, wished that a door might be set before his eyes and ears, to close them when they opened to anything that is not good... The second thing is, a subduing of the body by discipline (cp Titus 2:11, 12, 13+). And the third is, continuance in prayer (Col 4:2+, 1Th 5:17+, Eph 6:18+, Ro 12:12b+).

**Wolfgang Musculus** (1563)

Notice that he does not say, I will turn away mine eyes; but, "Turn away mine eyes." This shows that it is not possible for us sufficiently to keep our by our own caution and diligence; but there must be divine keeping. For, first, where soever in this world you turn yourself, provocations to [commit sin] are met with. Secondly, with the unwary, and with far different persons, the eyes, the servants of a corrupt heart, wander after the things which are the vanities. Thirdly, before you are aware, the evil contracted through eyes creeps in to the inmost recesses of the heart, and [sows] the seeds of perdition (cp Mt 5:29, 30-note). This the Psalmist himself had experienced, not without greatest trouble both of heart and condition.

**Albert Barnes** makes a great (and pragmatic) point that...

An ugly object loses much of its deformity when we look often upon it. Sin follows this general law, and is to be avoided altogether, even in its contemplation, if we would be safe. A man should be thankful in this world that he has eyelids; and as he can close his eyes, so he should often do it.

**Thomas Manton**

Turn away, then quicken (revive). The first request is for the removing the impediments of obedience, the other for the addition of new degrees of grace. These two are fitly joined, for they have a natural influence upon one another. Unless we turn away our eyes from vanity, we shall soon contract deadness of heart. Nothing causes it so much as an inordinate liberty in carnal vanities. When our affections are alive to other things, they are dead to God. Therefore the less we let loose our heart to [focus on] these things, the more lively [revived] and cheerful are we in the work of obedience. On the other side, the more the rigour of grace is renewed, and the habits of it quickened into actual exercise, the more is sin mortified and subdued. Sin dieth, and our senses are restored to their proper use.

**Joseph Caryl**

Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity. That sin may be avoided we must avoid whatsoever leads to or occasions it. As this caused Job (Job 31:1) to covenant strongly with his eyes, so it caused David (**Ed**: The author of Ps 119 may be David but we cannot be dogmatic) to pray earnestly about his eyes. "Turn away mine eyes (or as the Hebrew may be rendered, make them to pass), from beholding vanity."

The eye is apt to make a stand, or fix itself, when we come in view of an ensnaring object; therefore it is our duty to hasten it away, or to pray that God would make it pass off from it... He that fears burning must take heed of playing with fire: he that fears drowning must keep out of deep waters. He that fears the plague must not go into an infected house. Would they avoid sin who present themselves to the opportunities of it? (Of course not!)

**John Morison**

Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity. It is a most dangerous experiment for a child of God to place himself (or herself) within the sphere of seductive temptations. Every feeling of duty, every recollection of his own weakness, every remembrance of the failure of others, should induce him to hasten to the greatest possible distance from the scene of unnecessary conflict and danger.

**William Kay**

Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity. From gazing at the delusive mirages which tempt the pilgrim to

leave the safe highway.

### **Charles Bridges**

Is it asked -- "What will most effectually turn my eyes from vanity?" Not the seclusion of contemplative retirement -- not the relinquishment of our lawful connection with the world ["in the world, but no of the world"!]  
-- but the transcendent beauty of Jesus unveiled to our eyes, and fixing our hearts (cp Heb 12:2, Ro 13:14 -  
put on Jesus).

### **William Seeker** (1660)

Turn away mine eyes, etc. The fort royal of your souls is in danger of a surprise while the outworks of your senses are unguarded. Your eyes, which may be floodgates to pour out tears, should not be casements to let in lusts. A careless eye is an index to a graceless heart. Remember, the whole world died by a wound in the eye. The eyes of a Christian should be like sunflowers, which are opened to no blaze but that of the sun (Son).

### **Matthew Henry**

For restraining grace that he might be prevented and kept back from that which would hinder him in the way of his duty: "Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity." For constraining grace, that he might not only be kept from everything that would obstruct his progress heavenward, but that he might have that grace which was necessary to forward him in that progress: "Quicken (revive) thou me in thy way."

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**Blind Eyes** - A blind man was once asked if he had no desire that his sight should be restored to him; he answered boldly, "No; because Jesus says, 'If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out.' God probably saw that mine eyes would offend me, so as to endanger my soul, and so He has prevented this great evil, by plucking them out Himself; and I thank Him for it."

**Kill The Spider!** - We sometimes have mixed feelings about our sins. We are afraid of being hurt by them, and we want to be forgiven. But we aren't sure we want to be rid of them right now.

A man told me he has a bad habit that is hindering his fellowship with God and hurting his Christian testimony. He says he prays that God will forgive him for his addiction—but he doesn't stop. He reminds me of the story about the man who often went forward at the end of church services to kneel and pray, "Lord, take the cobwebs out of my life." One Sunday morning his pastor, tired of hearing the same old prayer, knelt beside him and cried out, "Lord, kill the spider!"

Yes, sometimes it takes radical action to break a sinful habit. We need to do more than ask God for cleansing each time we succumb to temptation. We must take whatever steps are needed to get the cobwebs out of our life. We must confess our sin and determine to be done with it. Then we must feed our mind with God's Word and do all we can to stay away from the people and places that tempt us to sin. That's what Christ meant when He said, "If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out" (Matthew 5:29).

Kill the spider and you'll get rid of the cobwebs. —H V Lugt ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

It's not enough to say to God,  
"I'm sorry, I repent,"  
And then go on from day to day  
The way I always went. —Anon.

### **Admitting sin is no substitute for quitting sin.**

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**NO LOOPHOLES-** **W. C. Fields**, the comedian, film actor, and known agnostic, surprised one of his friends who found him thumbing through a Bible while on his deathbed. Amazed, his friend asked what he was doing. Fields replied, "I'm looking for a loophole."

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**Tough Choices** - On July 20, 1993, while cutting down oaks in a Pennsylvania forest, Don Wyman got his leg pinned beneath a fallen tree. No one could hear his yells for help. After digging for more than an hour to try to free his bleeding, shattered leg, he hit stone. He would bleed to death unless he did something drastic. Wyman made his decision. Using a wrench and the starter cord from his chain saw as a tourniquet, he cut off the flow of blood to his shin. Somehow he had the fortitude to amputate his own leg below the knee with his pocket knife. He crawled to his vehicle and drove to a farmer's home. The farmer got him the help that saved his life. Like Don Wyman, men who want to follow Christ face tough choices. We have sinful habits we want to keep as badly as our leg. We also have a Lord and Savior who calls us to repent. It takes strength to cut off our wickedness. —Craig Brian Larson

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**Halfway Measures** - It would have been unthinkable for Allied leaders to let Adolf Hitler surrender and then reinstate him as dictator

of his country. But that's exactly what King Ahab did to Ben Hadad, an unspeakably cruel king who started two wars against God's people. Eventually, just as God's prophet predicted, Ahab was killed on orders from the very man he had spared (1Ki. 22:1ff).

This is not a lesson in how to treat enemies. Rather, Ahab's fatal example illustrates the danger of taking halfway measures in dealing with sin.

I know a man who has spent much of his life in prison because of violent crimes he did while drunk. When released, he starts out well because he avoids alcohol. But then he thinks he can drink in moderation. Soon he's in trouble again.

Don't take halfway measures with dishonesty, lack of self-control, or sexual impurity. Instead, deal radically with your sinful tendencies. (Read what Jesus said in Matthew 5:29,30 about the eye or hand that causes you to sin.) And "put to death" your sinful inclinations (Col. 3:5).

Don't put yourself in situations where you are likely to be tempted. Ask God to help you take a wholehearted approach to tackling sin. Halfway measures are doomed to fail. --H V Lugt

We can't afford to play with fire  
Or tempt a serpent's bite;  
We can't afford to think that sin  
Brings any true delight.  
"--Anon.

**To be moderate in sin is no more possible than to be moderate in death.**

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The cartoon depicted a frustrated father changing a flat tire in the rain. His two children were peering out the car window. In response to their complaining, he said, "Don't you understand? This is life. This is what's happening. We can't switch to another channel!" Television and reality—does the former distort the latter? After 10 years of research, media analyst Kenneth Curtis measured TV's impact on society. He concluded that the omnipresent, flickering screen constantly tries to tell us what behavior and attitudes are desirable. He described the effect of TV as a subtle process that has become a significant force in defining reality. If this is true, we had better be careful about what we watch. The networks are not committed to portraying Christian values. Many things that are presented as acceptable are in fact dangerous. Furthermore, watching TV makes us passive observers rather than active participants in solving life's problems. The violence, sex, and materialism on TV can make us insensitive to our calling as Christians to be salt and light in a sinful world.

Only as we meditate on God's Word ([Psalm 1:2](#)) can we have the right perspective. To avoid a distorted view of life, we must allow God's truth to define reality. —M R De Haan II

Our thoughts are shaped by what we see,  
And thoughts affect our soul;  
So if we'd profit from TV,  
We must be in control. —DJD

**The Bible is the best TV guide.**

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**Sinning In Moderation?** - A magazine advertisement for the MTV special The Seven Deadly Sins carried this line: "Lust: Where would we be without it?" A popular radio and television personality said that greed can be good because it makes capitalism work well. An MTV commentator said, "A little lust, pride, sloth, and gluttony--in moderation--are fun, and that's what keeps your heart beating."

Gluttony in moderation? That's doubletalk. How can we practice excess in moderation? Moderation is a virtue, but it can never apply to an action that is immoral.

There may be nothing wrong with eating some goodies, especially those marked "lite," "cholesterol free," or "low calorie." But there is no such thing as "light lust" or "low-calorie greed." Lust, greed, or sin of any kind and in any amount is always wrong.

Christians who are serious about pleasing the Lord will continually examine and judge their inner thoughts and motives. They'll confess and repent of greed as a motive for making more and more money. And they'll work at disciplining their thoughts and actions.

Enjoy a few "lite" desserts. But don't fall for the idea that a little sinning is all right if done in moderation. --H V Lugt

O Lord, help us to recognize

When we begin to compromise;  
And give us strength to follow through  
With what we know is right and true. --Sper

**Moderation in sin is no more possible  
than moderation in death.**

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**Remember** the axiomatic truth...

Sow a thought and reap an act.  
Sow an act and reap a habit.  
Sow a habit and reap a character.  
Sow a character and reap a destiny.

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It is greater work to resist vices and passions than to sweat in physical toil. He who does not overcome small faults (Ed: But even these "small" ones enabled by the indwelling Spirit!), shall fall little by little into greater ones. THOMAS À KEMPIS

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In his provocative book, *Reclaiming Surrendered Ground*, author and biblical counselor Jim Logan debunks the myth that "private" sexual habits such as pornography are basically harmless because no one else is involved. Many men who use pornography buy into this false and dangerous argument. Logan cites Scripture and examples from his counseling ministry which show that practicing sexual lust leads to spiritual bondage which can have devastating effects on a person's marriage and family relationships.

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What makes sex online far more compelling than any shrink-wrapped smut [is] instant gratification in endless variety—you never get to the end of the magazine and have to start looking at the same pictures again. With old porn, once you view it, you've consumed it. You've chewed the flavor out of the gum. This can't be done on the Net. The gum never runs out of flavor. A new piece of flesh waits behind every old one, and expectation bids you to go further. Much further. Because as long as there's more to come, you'll keep looking. This is all so new. No stimulus like this ever existed before. —Greg Gutfield,

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**J I Packer** - [Knowing God's Purpose For Your Life](#)

*Mortifying sin, however painful,  
is a necessity for life in Christ.*

While surrendering sins into which you drifted casually is not so hard, mortifying what the Puritans called besetting sins—dispositional sins to which your temperament inclines you, and habitual sins that have become addictive and defiant—is regularly a long-drawn-out, bruising struggle. No one who is a spiritual realist will ever pretend otherwise. It is a matter of negating, wishing dead, and laboring to thwart inclinations, cravings, and habits that have been in you for a long time. Pain and grief, moans and groans, will certainly be involved, for your sin does not want to die, nor will it enjoy the killing process. Jesus told us, very vividly, that mortifying a sin could well feel like plucking out an eye or cutting off a hand or foot, in other words, self-mutilation. You will feel you are saying good-bye to something that is so much part of you that without it you cannot live.

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**Martyn Lloyd-Jones** - **THE NATURE OF SELF** MATTHEW 18:9 [Walking with God Day by Day: 365 Daily Devotional Selections](#)

The modern cult of self-expression fails to realize the true nature of self. It talks much about giving expression to self, and yet we can show very easily that its very ideas concerning that self are false and do violence to man's true nature. Obviously, before expression must come definition; and our objection is not so much to the idea of self-expression per se as to the utterly false view of that self that is taken by so many today. The gospel answer to this modern cult is not a doctrine of repression, but rather a call to the realization of the true nature of the self. The clash between the biblical view and that of moderns comes out very clearly in the quoted lines above, especially in the emphasis that Christ places on the word thee. "If thine eye offend thee . . . cast it from thee . . . it is better for thee . . ."

The modern view does not differentiate between the self and the various factors that tend to influence the self, the various factors that the self uses in order to express itself. They claim that man in himself is but the result of these and their effects. Our Lord, on the other hand, draws that distinction very clearly and definitely in His emphasis on the word thee. That He does so is perhaps the real cause of all the modern confusion.

According to Christ, man is not a machine, nor is he an animal led and governed by whim. He is bigger than the body, bigger than tradition, history, and all else. For there is within man another element called the soul.



There is within man another element called the soul.

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### **Guarding the Eyegate**

*(Inspired by Matthew 18:9)*

Oh, the eyes, the soul's clear gate,  
Through which desires infiltrate.  
A fleeting glance, a subtle snare,  
Can lead the heart to dark despair.

Guard your gaze, let virtue reign,  
Turn from sights that lead to pain.  
For what you see can plant a seed,  
Of either joy or sinful greed.

If your eye should tempt your heart,  
To stray from truth, to sin's dark art,  
Pluck it out, the Savior pleads,  
Lest it guide to hell's dire deeds.

The cost of purity may seem steep,  
To shield your soul, the watch must keep.  
But better the sacrifice today,  
Than lose eternity's bright ray.

Fix your eyes on what is pure,  
On heaven's treasures that endure.  
Let light, not darkness, fill your sight,  
And lead you to the path of right.

For through the gate of guarded view,  
Flows life that's holy, just, and true.  
So guard it well, this sacred door,  
And find His peace forevermore.  
(Philippians 4:8+)

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See my [in depth commentary](#) on Proverbs 4:23 **Watch** over your heart with all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life.

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### **Failing Memory**

Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things, and revive me in Your way. —Psalm 119:37

Today's Scripture: Psalm 119:33-40

A New York Times article linked the increase of computer storage with the decrease of data in the human mind. Our electronic aids now remember phone numbers, driving directions, and other information we used to learn by repeated use. In schools, memorization and oral recitation are disappearing from the curriculum. We have become, according to the Times, "products of a culture that does not enforce the development of memory skills."

Yet never have we as followers of Christ been in greater need of hiding God's Word in our hearts (Ps. 119:9-11). Scripture memory is more than a helpful mental exercise. The goal is to saturate our minds with God's truth so that our lives will conform to His ways. The psalmist wrote: "Teach me, O Lord, the way of Your statutes, and I shall keep it to the end. . . . Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things, and revive me in Your way" (Ps. 119:33,37).

Why not begin committing Scripture to memory? Daily consistency and review are keys to success. And just like physical exercise, this spiritual discipline is enhanced when done with a small group or with a friend.

Let's not forget to remember and follow the life-giving wisdom of God's Word. By: David C. McCasland [Our Daily Bread. Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#)

God's Word will change your life

If you will do your part  
To read, to study, and obey,  
And hide it in your heart.  
—Sper

Let the Bible fill your mind, rule your heart, and guide your life.

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### **Watch What You Watch**

Read: 1 Corinthians 6:9-20

Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things. —Psalm 119:37

Is your living room the site of daily murders? Do you routinely entertain guests who swear at you and make fun of your faith? Have you ever had somebody drop by and try to convince you that sexual sin is a joking matter and that violence is entertaining?

You've had all these things happen in your house if you've watched many of the programs on TV. This is not late-breaking news. The moral content of television has been on the decline for years. But that doesn't mean we have to go down with it.

The psalmist, who knew as much about TV as most of us know about tending sheep, said, "Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things" (Ps. 119:37). That's a good verse to post over our TV set.

For the most part, the entertainment world is serious about casting off restraints. Just as seriously, we should protect our minds. These guidelines can help:

- Avoid jokes about sex (1 Cor. 6:18; Eph. 5:3-4,12).
- Don't listen to vulgar language (Eph. 5:4).
- Don't let ads cause you to covet (Ex. 20:17; Col. 3:5).
- Don't let your eyes cause you to sin (Mt. 18:9).

Honor God with your viewing habits. When it comes to entertainment, watch what you watch. By Dave Branon [Our Daily Bread](#), [Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#)

Temptation's face is young and soft  
And smooth in its appeal;  
But when it's through it ruins lives  
With velvet fists of steel.  
—Gustafson

Use self-control with your remote control.

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### **Guarding the Eyegate**

*(Inspired by Matthew 18:9)*

Oh, the eyes, the soul's clear gate,  
Through which desires infiltrate.  
A fleeting glance, a subtle snare,  
Can lead the heart to dark despair.

Guard your gaze, let virtue reign,  
Turn from sights that lead to pain.  
For what you see can plant a seed,  
Of either joy or sinful greed.

If your eye should tempt your heart,  
To stray from truth, to sin's dark art,  
Pluck it out, the Savior pleads,  
Lest it guide to hell's dire deeds.

The cost of purity may seem steep,  
To shield your soul, the watch must keep.

But better the sacrifice today,  
Than lose eternity's bright ray.

Fix your eyes on what is pure,  
On heaven's treasures that endure.  
Let light, not darkness, fill your sight,  
And lead you to the path of right.

For through the gate of guarded view,  
Flows life that's holy, just, and true.  
So guard it well, this sacred door,  
And find His peace forevermore.  
(See Proverbs 4:23+, Philippians 4:8+)

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## QUESTION - [What is Gehenna?](#)

**ANSWER** - The word *gehenna* is the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew *ge-hinnom*, meaning "Valley of [the sons of] Hinnom." This valley south of Jerusalem was where some of the ancient Israelites "passed children through the fire" (sacrificed their children) to the Canaanite god Molech (2 Chronicles 28:3; 33:6; Jeremiah 7:31; 19:2–6). The place is called "Tophet / Topheth" in Isaiah 30:33. In later years, Gehenna continued to be an unclean place used for burning trash from the city of Jerusalem. Jesus used Gehenna as an illustration of hell.

God so despised the [false god Molech](#) that He explicitly forbade the Israelites from having anything to do with him in Leviticus 18:21. He even warned them of the impending judgment He would send their way if the Jews didn't keep their attention and worship directed toward Him. In another prophetic warning, God re-named the Valley of Hinnom as the Valley of Slaughter (Jeremiah 19).

But the Israelites didn't listen, and evil kings of Judah such as Ahaz used the Valley of Hinnom for their demonic practices (2 Chronicles 28:3). To punish Judah, God brought Babylon against them, and that pagan nation carried out His judgment against Judah's idolatry and rebellion. It wasn't until after 70 years of exile that the Jews were allowed back into Israel to rebuild. Upon their return the Valley of Slaughter was re-purposed from a place of infanticide to an ever-burning rubbish heap (2 Kings 23:10). Child sacrifice and other forms of idol-worship ceased in Israel. Gehenna became a place where corpses of criminals, dead animals, and all manners of refuse were thrown to be destroyed.

The Gehenna Valley was thus a place of burning sewage, burning flesh, and garbage. [Maggots and worms](#) crawled through the waste, and the smoke smelled strong and sickening (Isaiah 30:33). It was a place utterly filthy, disgusting, and repulsive to the nose and eyes. Gehenna presented such a vivid image that Christ used it as a symbolic depiction of hell: a place of [eternal torment](#) and constant uncleanness, where the fires never ceased burning and the worms never stopped crawling (Matthew 10:28; Mark 9:47–48).

Because of Jesus' symbolic use of Gehenna, the word *gehenna* is sometimes used as a synonym for *hell*. In fact, that's how the Greek word is translated in Mark 9:47: "hell." The occupants of the lake of fire/gehenna/hell are [separated from God](#) for all of eternity. [GotQuestions.org](#)

## Related Resources:

- [Study of Eternal Punishment](#)
- [Who will go to hell? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [How can I not go to hell? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [Where is hell? What is the location of hell? | GotQuestions.org](#)

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

KJV 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.

BGT Matthew 18:10 ρ τε μ καταφρον σητε ν ς τ ν μικρ ν το των· λ γω γ ρ μ ν πι ο γ γελοι α τ ν ν ο ρανο ς δι παντ ς βλ πουσι τ πρ σωπον το πατρ ς μου το ν ο ρανο ς.

NET Matthew 18:10 "See that you do not disdain one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in

heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.

CSB Matthew 18:10 "See that you don't look down on one of these little ones, because I tell you that in heaven their angels continually view the face of My Father in heaven.

ESV Matthew 18:10 "See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven.

NIV Matthew 18:10 "See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.

NLT Matthew 18:10 "Beware that you don't look down on any of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels are always in the presence of my heavenly Father.

NRS Matthew 18:10 "Take care that you do not despise one of these little ones; for, I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven.

NJB Matthew 18:10 'See that you never despise any of these little ones, for I tell you that their angels in heaven are continually in the presence of my Father in heaven.

- **See** : Mt 18:6,14 12:20 Ps 15:4 Zec 4:10 Lu 10:16 Ro 14:1-3,10,13-15,21 Ro 15:1 1Co 8:8-13 9:22 11:22 16:11 2Co 10:1,10 Ga 4:13,14 6:1 1Th 4:8 1Ti 4:12
- **their angels**: Mt 1:20 2:13,19 24:31 Ge 32:1,2 2Ki 6:16,17 Ps 34:7 91:11 Zec 13:7 Lu 16:22 Ac 5:19 10:3 12:7-11,23 27:23 Heb 1:14
- **continually see the face**: 2Sa 14:28 1Ki 22:19 Es 1:14 Ps 17:15 Lu 1:19

#### Related Passages:

Psalm 91:11 For He will give His angels charge concerning you, To guard you in all your ways.

Acts 12:15+ And they said to her, "You are out of your mind!" But she kept insisting that it was so. And they kept saying, "It is his angel."

## CHERISHING THE LITTLE ONES UNDER HEAVEN'S WATCH

**R C H Lenski** - With the little child most likely still in his arms as he sat in Oriental fashion, Jesus reverts to v. 5, etc., and amplifies what he has already said. There he warned against the extreme mistreatment, any entrapment of his little ones. (Borrow [Matthew page 690](#))

**See** ([horao](#) - [present imperative](#)) **that you do not despise** ([kataphroneo](#)) **one of these little ones** - Note this command to see, take heed, take care or beware is in [present imperative](#) calling for concentrated, continuous practice which in turn calls for us to [depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#). You are not to think little of, to look down on, or to treat with contempt or disregard **little ones**, referring to believers. They are not to be disregarded, as though they amounted to little or nothing, unimportant, of little worth and so to treat them with disrespect, disdain or contempt. Note the number **one** which means that every single little **one** is precious in His sight. To sum up disciples must not only deal radically with sin in their own lives, they must also studiously avoid looking down on their brothers and sisters (cf. Ro 14:3, 10, 15).

**For I say to you that their angels** ([aggelos/angelos](#)) **in heaven continually see the face** ([prosopon](#)) **of My Father who is in heaven** - He explains why the little ones are not to be despised. He says there are angels who have access to the Father that in some manner care for these little ones. The writer of Hebrews asks of angels "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?" (Heb 1:14+) In ancient royal courts, those who "saw the face" of the king had direct access to him, symbolizing privilege, favor, and the ability to present petitions on behalf of others. **Angels** who **continually see the face** of God are depicted as having immediate and constant access to Him. This suggests their readiness to act on His behalf and their ongoing communication with Him about the "little ones." This imagery emphasizes that God is deeply involved in the care of His people, particularly the vulnerable. It conveys that nothing concerning the "little ones" escapes His notice.

**John Broadus** - There is in this no sufficient warrant for the popular notion of "guardian angels," one angel especially assigned to each individual; it is simply said of believers as a class that there are angels which are their angels; but there is nothing here or elsewhere to show that one angel has special charge of one believer... It cannot be positively asserted that the idea of guardian angels is an error, but there is no Scripture which proves it true, and passages which merely might be understood that way do not suffice for the basis of a doctrine

**John MacArthur** makes an excellent point writing "The fact that Almighty God is so concerned about the care of His beloved children that He has hosts of angels in His presence ready to be dispatched to their aid demonstrates clearly how valuable believers are and how unthinkable wicked it is to look with disdain on someone whom God so highly prizes."

*Certainly Jesus means that the Father takes special care of his "little ones" who believe in Him.*

-- A T Robertson

**C H Spurgeon Commentary** - 10,11 - 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 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?

**Illustration** - A Teacher's Kindness: A child in a classroom struggles to keep up with their peers. Instead of dismissing them as "unimportant," the teacher patiently helps, encourages, and guides them. Over time, the child gains confidence and grows. In the same way, Christians are called to uplift and nurture the "little ones," seeing their value and helping them grow in faith.

**Illustration** - The Ignored Invitation - Imagine a banquet where one guest is dressed poorly and another is dressed lavishly. The host gives all their attention to the well-dressed guest while ignoring the other. The neglected guest feels unwelcome, though they were equally invited. In the same way, when we ignore or look down on fellow believers, we forget that all are equally invited to God's kingdom and valued by Him.

**Illustration** - A Parent's Vigilance: Imagine a parent watching over their child at play, always attentive and ready to intervene if harm approaches. The child may not be aware of the parent's constant vigilance, but the parent's love drives their care. God's angels, who continually see His face, serve in a similar way, always vigilant and ready to act for the "little ones" under God's command.

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**Despise** (2706) **kataphroneo** from **kata** = down + **phroneo** = to think, have understanding <> **phren** = mind, faculty of perceiving and judging) literally means to think down upon and so to despise, scorn, hold in contempt, not care for because it is thought to be without value. It means to "think little of". The idea is to look down on someone or something with contempt or aversion, with the implication that one considers the object of little value or as unworthy of one's notice or consideration. To **despise** something is to look down on it as inferior and not worth consideration or care. It is to disdain it and treat it with contempt as being worthless.

**KATAPHRONEO - 9V** - Matt. 6:24; Matt. 18:10; Lk. 16:13; Rom. 2:4; 1 Co. 11:22; 1 Tim. 4:12; 1 Tim. 6:2; Heb. 12:2; 2 Pet. 2:10

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**Has an Angel Helped You This Week?** SCRIPTURE: Acts 12 (Nelson's Annual Preacher's Sourcebook 2004)

**INTRODUCTION:** Has an angel helped you this week? Hebrews 1:14 says that angels are ministering spirits sent to serve those who inherit salvation. The early Christians benefited from angelic ministry. Angels are mentioned in the Book of Acts in chapters 1, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 23, and 27. In Acts 12, we have three fascinating insights about this angelic ministry.

1. The Delivering Angel (vv. 7–11).
2. The Personal Angel (v. 15). Luke passes along the comment, "It is his angel," without comment, leaving unanswered the question about the Jewish belief that each of God's children has an angel assigned to him or her. (see Matt. 18:10; Dan. 10:21; Ps. 91:11).
3. The Death Angel (vv. 20–24). Angels can kill people. They are sometimes God's instruments of judgment.

**CONCLUSION:** We may not be able to see them, and we aren't sure of all their activities, but we know the angels of God are watching over us.

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### **Ways We May Despise or Look Down on Other Believers**

1. **Through Pride or Superiority:** Thinking of ourselves as better, more spiritual, or more mature than others can lead to dismissing their value or contributions. Example: Believing a new believer's struggles make them "lesser" in the kingdom. Criticizing others for

not knowing as much Scripture or theology. This attitude fosters division and discouragement within the church.

**2. Ignoring or Neglecting Their Needs:** Failing to care for or help others when they are in need shows a lack of love and concern. Example: Avoiding a struggling believer because their problems feel inconvenient. Refusing to support or encourage someone going through a spiritual battle. This neglect can cause others to feel isolated, unloved, or unworthy.

**3. Judging or Criticizing Harshly:** Passing harsh judgment on others for their faults, mistakes, or spiritual weaknesses instead of showing grace. Example: Pointing out someone's flaws publicly without compassion. Assuming the worst about someone based on appearances or limited knowledge. Harsh criticism can crush someone's spirit and damage their relationship with God and the church.

During one of Dwight L. Moody's British campaigns he was repeatedly mocked in the press for his lack of proper English and his homey style. When asked to speak at Cambridge University, the epitome of British intellectualism and sophistication, Moody apparently decided to capitalize on that image in order to gain the attention of the audience. His comment no doubt also had the effect of pointing up the superficiality and irrelevance of the criticism of his grammar. He opened his message with the words, "Don't let nobody never tell you God don't love you, cause He do."

**4. Imposing Legalism:** Holding others to extra-biblical standards or traditions that create unnecessary burdens. Example: Criticizing someone for their worship style or appearance because it doesn't align with personal preferences. Demanding perfection instead of walking alongside someone in grace and discipleship. Legalism stifles spiritual growth and creates a culture of fear and performance.

**5. Failing to Forgive:** Harboring resentment or refusing to extend forgiveness to a fellow believer leads to division and bitterness. Example: Avoiding reconciliation because of past disagreements. Holding onto grudges instead of pursuing peace and unity. This not only damages relationships but can also lead others to stumble in their faith.

**6. Showing Partiality:** Favoring certain believers based on status, wealth, or outward appearances while ignoring others. Example: Welcoming prominent or influential people while neglecting those who are poor or quiet. Building cliques within the church that exclude others. Partiality creates divisions in the body of Christ and undermines the unity Jesus calls for.

**7. Causing Others to Stumble:** Acting in ways that tempt or lead others into sin, or discouraging their spiritual growth. Example: Exercising personal freedoms (e.g., alcohol consumption, entertainment choices) without regard for how it might affect a weaker believer. Mocking or dismissing someone's convictions or struggles. This can damage a believer's conscience or cause them to turn away from faith altogether.

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## **The Angels Watch**

*(Inspired by Matthew 18:10)*

Do not despise the little one,  
Their journey here has just begun.  
Though small in stature, they are known,  
Before God's throne, they're never alone.

For angels guard with watchful care,  
Each child who breathes God's precious air.  
Their faces gaze upon the King,  
In heaven's courts where praises ring.

What worth is found in fragile hearts,  
In lives where innocence imparts.  
The Father's love for them runs deep,  
A sacred trust we're called to keep.

So let us cherish, guard, and guide,  
The little ones who by us abide.  
For in their joy, their laughter bright,  
Resides a glimpse of heaven's light.

Beware the thoughtless words or deeds,  
That trample tender hearts and needs.

For God's own eyes are ever near,  
And angels' voices fill His ear.

Honor the children, the young, the small,  
For through their faith, He speaks to all.  
In their simplicity, God's truth is shown,  
And through their lives, His love is known.

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**PRECIOUS IN HIS SIGHT** - Some Christians need to be humbled because they have too exalted an opinion of themselves; others stand in constant need of encouragement because they have a tendency to dwell too much upon their own inadequacies. One of the problems a minister faces is that of preaching messages which will convict the proud without utterly discouraging those who have a difficult time believing they could possibly be precious in the sight of God.

Our Savior, using a little child as an object lesson, very effectively humbled the self-seeking disciples; yet, at the same time, He showed lowly believers that they were important in God's sight. He told the Twelve they needed to become like that little one, ever realizing their personal inadequacy and their complete dependency upon Him. If they failed to do so, they would not be fit to take their places in His kingdom. Our Lord then pointed out that every Christian, however obscure and unimportant in the eyes of man, is still precious to God. To fellowship with these lowly ones is to honor the Savior (Matt 18:5), but should unbelievers seek to harm them, Jesus warns that such persecutors will be severely judged (Matt 18:6, 7). Moreover, to despise any of those who come to Christ in a childlike spirit is to take a position which is completely contrary to God's attitude toward them. He has, in fact, appointed holy angels as their representatives in the court of Heaven. As the shepherd is concerned about one straying sheep, so the Lord Jesus places great value upon even the lowliest believer.

Christian, you are important to God! He will judge all who seek to harm you and has provided you with angelic guardians. You need not fear that He will ever let you perish! (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

The humble, God will keep and bless;  
They are the objects of His grace.  
To such, His promises are sure;  
Their angels e'er shall see His face!  
— Bosch

To have the comforts of grace and God's full blessing, humble yourself; for the holy place is ever the lowly place!

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**GUARDIAN ANGELS?** MATTHEW 18:10 [Discovering God: 365 Daily Devotions - Page 323](#)

When a construction worker in Austria went to take his lunch break, he slipped on some tiles and plunged off a roof, falling twenty-six feet. Despite landing on concrete, he was unhurt. He got up and went off to enjoy his lunch. An Austrian newspaper, reporting the story, speculated that his guardian angel must have been watching over him.[56]

For centuries, theologians have debated whether everyone has a guardian angel. We get excited thinking about the prospect, and there are a couple of verses that may indicate the possibility (Matthew 18:10; Acts 12:15). We don't know everything about how angels sometimes protect people. We do know for certain that a host of angels are available to do God's bidding on our behalf. Elisha was surrounded by many angels in 2 Kings 6:17, and several angels carried Lazarus to heaven in Luke 16:22. According to Psalm 91, God gives His angels (plural) charge over us to keep us in our ways.

Whatever we believe about guardian angels, we know that angels are involved in our lives every day and at every juncture of life.

Through the long night watches may Thine angels spread their white wings above me, watching round my bed. SABINE BARING-GOULD

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**Wayne Grudem - Do People Have Individual Guardian Angels? - [Systematic Theology - see page 345](#)**

Scripture clearly tells us that God sends angels for our protection:

For he will command his angels concerning you  
to guard you in all your ways.  
On their hands they will bear you up,  
lest you strike your foot against a stone. (Ps. 91:11–12)

But some people have gone beyond this idea of general protection and wondered if God gives a specific “guardian angel” for each individual in the world, or at least for each Christian. Support for this idea has been found in Jesus’ words about little children: “In heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 18:10). However, our Lord may simply be saying that angels who are assigned the task of protecting little children have ready access to God’s presence. (To use an athletic analogy, the angels may be playing “zone” rather than “man-on-man” defense.)<sup>7</sup> When the disciples in Acts 12:15 say that Peter’s “angel” must be knocking at the door, this does not necessarily imply belief in an individual guardian angel. It could be that an angel was guarding or caring for Peter just at that time. There seems to be, therefore, no convincing support for the idea of individual “guardian angels” in the text of Scripture.

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Gems of Gold - “Take heed that ye offend not one of these little ones.” (Matt. 18:10.)

Offend another!  
Wilt Thou, Lord, forgive!  
What pangs to others must my words have brought,  
My hasty words—what wreckage they have wrought  
Upon my brother!  
Teach me how to live.

Offend another!  
That would cause Thee pain;  
Thy weakest child is of Thy life, a part,  
May I not wound him by my anger’s dart—  
For he’s my brother—  
Let me wrath restrain.

Some are afraid to offend a “great one” in the church, who exercises authority; Christ, however, said, “Take heed that ye offend not one of these ‘little ones.’

The little one could hardly offend the truly great; or, the weak one offend the truly strong. It is God’s “little one,” that we must tenderly shield.

Offenses against God’s “little ones” cause them to falter. Therefore, Christ said: “Take heed that ye cause not one of these little ones to stumble.” How careful the spiritual saints should be, lest some carnal believer find in him, that which will shake his feeble faith.

The youth seeks the guidance, and the helping hand of his senior; even so, babes in Christ will look to matured saints for aid.

God help us, lest by word or deed, or even by an impatient look, we cause someone, weaker than we, to fall.

Christ even taught us to love our enemies, not to revenge ourselves upon them.

We need to guard our words, and watch our way  
Lest we should cause some “little one” to fall;  
We need to help the feeble, guide the small,  
And ne’er to cause their trembling feet to stray.

God’s “little ones” look up to us for aid,  
They think of us as stalwarts, true, and tried,  
As those in whom they truly may confide;  
Beware lest we should make their souls afraid.

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**PRINCE AND SIMPLE FOLK** [The Christian History Devotional: 365 Readings & Prayers](#)

“See that you do not look down on one of these little ones.” MATTHEW 18:10

1537: In 1534 the Catholic Church had a new pope, and at first he did not seem to be an improvement over his predecessors. His name was Alessandro Farnese, born into a rich, ambitious, and immoral Italian family, and he had fathered four illegitimate children before becoming pope. Taking the name of Paul III, the new pope made two of his grandsons—both teenagers—cardinals. He oversaw the completion of the opulent Farnese family palace in Rome and of Michelangelo’s magnificent painting of The Last Judgment. He commissioned one of the other great artists of the time, Titian, to paint his portrait. In short, Paul III, like so many of the popes before him, seemed more interested in living like a prince than a saint.

And yet, he did not ignore the spiritual issues of the day—such as the Protestant Reformation which had broken huge chunks of Europe away from the Catholic Church. He summoned a council to deal with the Reformation, and its first session began at Trent, Italy, in 1545. Paul also gave some thought to an issue an ocean away: how the European colonists should treat the native peoples



of America. On June 2, 1537, he issued the decree *Sublimus Deus* in which he prohibited Catholics from making slaves of the Indians. While it was obvious that the Indians were primitive in many ways, the pope declared that they were human beings with souls and that they were to be treated as objects of God's love and, when possible, converted to Christianity.

The same man who made two of his grandsons cardinals also appointed some worthy men to the post, and some genuine reforms did take place while Paul III was pope. The church had to pray for future popes to be even less worldly and more spiritual.

Prayer: Lord, turn our gaze from the enticements of this world to the souls of those in need of salvation. Amen.

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**Spurgeon Study Bible** - See to it that you don't despise one of these little ones, because I tell you that in heaven their angels continually view the face of my Father in heaven." There is an angel to watch over each child of God. The heirs of heaven have those holy angels to guard them day and night. These sacred beings not only watch over the people of God, but they also at the same time see God's face. They do his bidding always and without question, obeying the voice of the Father and seeing his face all the while. And if these little ones are thus honorably attended by the angels of God, no one of us must ever despise them. They may be well dressed, or they may be dressed poorly, but the angels attend to them like royalty; and therefore we should treat them as such.

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**Walter Kaiser - Guardian Angels?** - [Hard Sayings of the Bible](#) (from discussion on Acts 12:15)

Rhoda was a slave in the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, and was assigned to door-keeping duty. Inside the house a group of Christians were gathered in prayer for Peter, who was chained in Herod Agrippa's most secure dungeon and slated for execution the next morning. They had prayed and fasted for days, but Herod had not changed his mind. The situation looked similar to that of James son of Zebedee, who had been beheaded earlier that year. Then in the middle of the night someone knocked on the door. Rhoda went to the door and may have opened a peephole to see a man she did not recognize in the darkness. He spoke a greeting. She recognized the voice of Peter. Not bothering to unbar the door, she rushed away to the room where the others were praying and breathlessly announced that Peter was standing at the door. Acts 12:15 is the response she received. It is hardly surprising under the circumstances (given that they apparently did not believe their prayers for deliverance would be answered and perhaps were already praying that Peter would be faithful and calm in his execution). But it is a surprise that when Rhoda insisted that there was a man at the door and that he did sound like Peter, they responded, "It must be his angel." What does this phrase mean? If they meant "ghost" or "disembodied spirit," why didn't they say "his ghost" or "his spirit"?

If they meant that Peter's disembodied spirit were appearing at the door, which is what some commentators assume, they could have used other terms. For example, in Mark 6:49 (Mt 14:26) the disciples saw Jesus walking on the water at night and cried out in fear because "they thought he was a ghost" (phantasma, "apparition"). In Luke 24:37 the disciples in the upper room were similarly terrified by the risen Christ, "thinking they saw a ghost" (pneuma, usually translated "spirit"). But here under similar conditions they use the term "angel" (angelos), which just a few verses earlier was used for "the angel of the Lord" (as it is five times in Acts 12:7-11). It is likely, then, that they meant something different from a ghost or a disembodied spirit.

According to Matthew 18:10 children (and presumably everyone) have angels that have direct access to God himself. They are usually called "guardian" angels, although we do not know if they guard anyone, just that they represent them before God. This "guarding" (if there is any) may be similar to what Jacob described as "the Angel who has delivered me from all harm" (Gen 48:16)—if this expresses a belief in a given angel accompanying him and caring for him. Protection through an angel also appears in Daniel 3:28 and Daniel 6:22, although it seems that these angels come for momentary deliverance rather than for continuous protection as in the Genesis account. Whatever the exact meaning of these passages, Jewish angelology developed far beyond them. While no two Jewish groups would likely have agreed in full on the topic, some Jews did believe that angels were capable of taking human form and representing particular individuals, as we can see in the Apocrypha. In Tobit 5 the archangel Raphael appears to Tobias as a human being and accompanies him on a journey, protecting and rewarding him. He has impersonated "Azarias the son of the great Ananias, one of your relatives" (Tobit 5:12 RSV), although there is no indication that Tobias or Tobit had ever met Azarias. So convincing is this angel that only toward the end of the book does Raphael find it advisable to reveal who he really is. A similar belief in angels taking human form appears in Hebrews 13:2, although there they appear as strangers, seeming to be simple Christian travelers.

This information makes the passage in Acts clear. Since Peter was known to be in prison, when a person sounding like Peter arrived the believers in the house concluded that it must be his "guardian" angel, whom they naturally assumed would act like Peter. This situation differs from those involving Jesus, where there was some reason for the apostles to believe that they might be seeing an apparition (it was a dark and stormy night, Mk 6:49) or a spirit or ghost (it was after his death, Lk 24:37). But as far as these Christians knew Peter was not yet dead, although he was surely in prison; nor would they have expected an apparition to knock before entering a prayer meeting. From their point of view Rhoda's experience could only mean that Peter's "guardian" angel had

come, either to inform them of his death or in some other way to guide their prayers. Only when the door is flung open and the figure stands in the light are they convinced they are not welcoming an angel, but Peter himself—perhaps due to his having the marks and smells of a person fresh out of prison.

Interesting as this passage is, it simply witnesses to the beliefs of the Christians in that house. The author of Acts reports rather than endorses their views. Only from Hebrews and similar passages can we gather what evidence there is in the New Testament for angels in human form. And Matthew makes the only clear reference to “guardian” angels. Yet, taking into consideration these passages and their evidence for the real existence of angels in human form, within this context in Acts the only thing that appears to have been lacking in the worldview of the Christians in Mary’s home is the belief that God, who specializes in eleventh-hour deliverances, might just release Peter and that it could be him, not his angel, at the door.

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**No Love** - The Bible says that in the last days "the love of many will grow cold", indicating a terrible breakdown in the ability to treat even those closest to us properly. A sad example of this condition comes from North Chicago, where prosecutors say a father poured sulphuric acid down the throat of his infant son, and then he put sulphuric acid in a can of baby formula, and then he conspired with the mother to blame the manufacturer of the baby formula, hoping for a large cash settlement. The baby boy, after 27 months, his throat and insides irreparably burned, died.

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**QUESTION - [Do we have guardian angels? WATCH VIDEO](#)**

**ANSWER** - Matthew 18:10 states, “See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.” In the context, “these little ones” could either apply to those who believe in Him (v. 6) or it could refer to the little children (vs. 3-5). This is the key passage regarding guardian angels. There is no doubt that good angels help protect (Daniel 6:20-23; 2 Kings 6:13-17), reveal information (Acts 7:52-53; Luke 1:11-20), guide (Matthew 1:20-21; Acts 8:26), provide for (Genesis 21:17-20; 1 Kings 19:5-7), and minister to believers in general (Hebrews 1:14).

The question is whether each person—or each believer—has an angel assigned to him/her. In the Old Testament, the nation of Israel had the archangel (Michael) assigned to it (Daniel 10:21; 12:1), but Scripture nowhere states that an angel is “assigned” to an individual (angels were sometimes sent to individuals, but there is no mention of permanent assignment). The Jews fully developed the belief in guardian angels during the time between the Old and New Testament periods. Some early church fathers believed that each person had not only a good angel assigned to him/her, but a demon as well. The belief in guardian angels has been around for a long time, but there is no explicit scriptural basis for it.

To return to Matthew 18:10, the word “their” is a collective pronoun in the Greek and refers to the fact that believers are served by angels in general. These angels are pictured as “always” watching the face of God so as to hear His command to them to help a believer when it is needed. The angels in this passage do not seem to be guarding a person so much as being attentive to the Father in heaven. The active duty or oversight seems, then, to come more from God than from the angels, which makes perfect sense because God alone is omniscient. He sees every believer at every moment, and He alone knows when one of us needs the intervention of an angel. Because they are continually seeing His face, the angels are at His disposal to help one of His “little ones.”

It cannot be emphatically answered from Scripture whether or not each believer has a guardian angel assigned to him/her. But, as stated earlier, God does use angels in ministering to us. It is scriptural to say that He uses them as He uses us; that is, He in no way needs us or them to accomplish His purposes, but chooses to use us and them nevertheless (Hebrews 1:7). In the end, whether or not we have an angel assigned to protect us, we have an even greater assurance from God: if we are His children through faith in Christ, He works all things together for good (Romans 8:28-30), and Jesus Christ will never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5-6). If we have an omniscient, omnipotent, all-loving God with us, does it really matter whether or not there is a finite guardian angel protecting us?

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**Matthew 18:11 [“For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.”]**

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- Mt 9:12,13 10:6 15:24 Lu 9:56 15:24,32 19:10 Jn 3:17 10:10 Jn 12:47 1Ti 1:15

**[“For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.”]**

**NET NOTE** - TECHNICAL NOTE - The most important MSS (x B L\* Θ\* f1, 13 33 892\* pc e ff sy sa) do not include Mt 18:11 “For the Son of Man came to save the lost.” The verse is included in D Lg W Θc 078vid lat sy, but is almost certainly not original, being borrowed, as it were, from the parallel in Luke 19:10. The present translation (NET) follows NA27 in omitting the verse number as well, a procedure also followed by a number of other modern translations. (**NET** = “See that you do not disdain one of these little

ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.")

**Matthew 18:12 "What do you think? If any man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one that is straying?"**

KJV 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?

BGT Matthew 18:12 Τ μ ν δοκε ; ν γ νητα τινι νθρ π κατ ν πρ βατα κα πλανηθ ν ξ α τ ν, ο χ φ σει τ νεν κοντα νν α π τ ρη κα πορευθε ς ζητε τ πλαν μενον;

NET Matthew 18:12 What do you think? If someone owns a hundred sheep and one of them goes astray, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go look for the one that went astray?

CSB Matthew 18:12 What do you think? If a man has 100 sheep, and one of them goes astray, won't he leave the 99 on the hillside and go and search for the stray?

ESV Matthew 18:12 What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray?

NIV Matthew 18:12 "What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off?

NLT Matthew 18:12 "If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them wanders away, what will he do? Won't he leave the ninety-nine others on the hills and go out to search for the one that is lost?

YLT Matthew 18:12 'What think ye? if a man may have an hundred sheep, and there may go astray one of them, doth he not -- having left the ninety-nine, having gone on the mountains -- seek that which is gone astray?

- **What do you think:** Mt 21:28 22:42 1Co 10:15
- **If any man has a hundred sheep:** Mt 12:11 Ps 119:176 Isa 53:6 Jer 50:6 Eze 34:16,28 Lu 15:4-7 Jn 10:11-21 1Pe 2:25
- **on the mountains:** 1Ki 21:17 Eze 34:6,12

No Man Left Behind

## NO SHEEP LEFT BEHIND

The title is a play on the motto of the U S Marines "No Man Left Behind." This passage could also be entitled "The Shepherd's Pursuit of the One" "Leaving the Ninety-Nine for the Lost"

**What do you think** ([dokeo](#) - present tense) (Literally "What does it seem to you")? - This was a common rhetorical question with teachers seeking to engage their students and is a call to ponder the parable about to be taught. Jesus wants them to be thinking about the stray sheep problem He is about to present. Remember the context has been discussing little ones and here is an illustration that would reflect a "little one" (sheep) that has gone astray and that they are not to be despised for having gone astray.

**If** - Both Mt 18:12 and Mt 18:13 are THIRD CLASS CONDITIONAL SENTENCES which meant probable future action but [see note](#) for more detail. One writer says that these "if's" imply the sad possibility that the sheep may have no desire to be found.

**Any man has a hundred sheep** ([probaton](#)) - This was a modest sized flock in Israel, for more than 200 sheep was not uncommon. But even with 100, this shepherd senses that one is missing.

**Utley** points out that " In Luke 15:4-7+ this same parable refers to the spiritually lost, self righteous Pharisees. This shows that Jesus used the same parables in different ways to different audiences."

**And one of them has gone astray** ([planao](#)) - Another way to describe this one stray sheep is a believer who has become backslidden (the most common interpretation of the stray sheep). It is interesting that in a similar parable in In Luke 15:4-7+ Jesus used the stray sheep to refer to the unbelievers, the spiritually lost, self righteous Pharisees indicating how Jesus used similar parables in different ways.

**MacArthur** points out that "From this parable we see that Christ's love, illustrated in that of the shepherd, is personal and individual. It does not matter which sheep goes astray. The Lord is equally concerned for any **one of them**. He is just as much aware and

concerned when a poor believer in the slums wanders from Him as when a respected church leader stumbles into sin. The parable also illustrates the truth that the Lord's care for His people is patient. He is infinitely patient with their self-willed, sinful foolishness and He will not give up on a single one, even though that person might be the least promising and the least faithful of all His children. ([Matthew Commentary - Page 120](#))

**Does he not leave ([aphiemi](#)) the ninety-nine on the mountains ([oros](#)) and go and search ([zeteeo](#) - present tense - continuously seeking) for the one that is straying ([planao](#) - present tense) -** Here we see the fact that the shepherd is willing to leave the 99 (presumably someone was watching for him but that is not part of the story - some writers think they were at some risk) and show that his heart is to seek the lost. He is not waiting for the stray sheep to return. This surely reflects God's desire to seek out and restore the straying believer.

*He who would not have us despise the little will not have us neglect the lost.*

**C H Spurgeon Commentary** - 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?

**THOUGHT** - Jesus calls His followers to emulate the shepherd's care by seeking out and helping restore those who stray. While God is the ultimate Shepherd, believers are called to reflect His heart by pursuing and lovingly guiding back those who have wandered from the faith. Are you proactive in reaching out some of His sheep who have gone astray, showing them His love and concern? Spurgeon adds that our first "temptation is to despise one, because only one; the next is to despise one, because that one is so little; the next, and perhaps the most dangerous, form of the temptation, is to despise one, because that one has gone astray."

This parable shows how each believer is deeply valued by the Chief Shepherd, Jesus, regardless of their status, mistakes, or spiritual condition. It demonstrates how the Chief Shepherd actively seeks those who have strayed from Him, driven by love and compassion. The fact that the Chief Shepherd doesn't wait for the lost sheep to return but goes after him, showing His initiative in restoring relationships with those who have wandered.

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**ILLUSTRATION** - The effort taken by a shepherd to retrieve one lost sheep has been illustrated in modern times by the story of the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls by a shepherd looking in a Qumran cave for a lost sheep.

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William Barclay points out that this parable shows us the character of God's love, being like the care a shepherd gives for a lost sheep.

- It is individual love.
- It is patient love.
- It is seeking love.
- It is rejoicing love.
- It is protecting love.

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### **An Important Reminder**

On a visit to the nursing home, our pastor noticed a man slumped in a wheelchair in the hallway. The man's hands hung limply, his head was bowed. Pastor Tanner heard him repeating amidst a string of profanities, "I can't remember, I can't remember." Kneeling down beside the wheelchair, Pastor Tanner looked in the man's face and asked, "Don't you remember—Jesus loves you?" There was a momentary pause before the man lifted his head, raised his arms in the air and said, "I remember, I remember!" It was all the sermon we needed when pastor retold the story. —Phyllis Herzog. *Christian Reader*, Vol. 36, no. 5.

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### **Where God's Heart Is [The One Year At His Feet Devotional](#)**

"If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills

and go to look for the one that wandered off?" Matthew 18:12

*"The salvation of one soul is worth more than  
the framing of a Magna Carta of a thousand worlds."*

—John Keble

IN WORD David says that the Lord is his Shepherd. Jesus says that He is the Good Shepherd. And in Matthew 18, Jesus tells us that the Shepherd is zealously focused on restoring lost sheep.

The implications of this for our understanding of God are clear: He is a seeking God. If we want to know what His priorities in the world are, we need look no further than here. He tells us. He is passionate about pursuing lost sheep. He will gladly leave behind the ninety-nine in their comfort and safety in order to track down a single, misguided sheep. All heaven rejoices when that sheep is found (Luke 15:7, 10).

The implications of this are so clear for us: As co-laborers with God, we are also to be seeking on His behalf. He is a missionary God, He sent a missionary Son into the world, and He calls us to have a missionary mind. If we are to be like Him, we, too, must have a consuming, searching passion for lost sheep.

IN DEED Do we want to align ourselves with God's plan? Then we must single-mindedly pray for those who are lost. We must work to find them and to bring them into the Good Shepherd's fold. We must give our resources toward this end. We must behave like a shepherd who is not content with a 99 percent success rate. God does not rest as long as there are lost sheep, and neither can we.

Today, there are more than four billion sheep outside the Shepherd's fold. Half of them live so far out of the fold that there are no representatives of the Shepherd nearby. If we want to be in tune with God's priorities, we must pray, give, train, tell, send, go—and never rest—as long

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**Rob Morgan - The Bibleless Peoples** - Borrow [From this Verse page 208](#)

The world's largest missionary force, Wycliffe Bible Translators, was started by a question posed in 1918 to missionary Cameron Townsend. Townsend had come to Guatemala to sell Spanish Bibles, which many of the nation's tribal groups could not read. As Townsend tried to distribute his wares among the quarter-million Cakchiquel-speaking people, one man asked him an unforgettable question: "If your God is so great, why can't He speak my language?"

Townsend was so challenged that he settled among the Cakchiquel, studied their language, and began translating the Bible. A local religious leader called it "the work of the devil," but having little else to read, this man devoured the Cakchiquel Bible and was converted. He burned his false gods, saying, "I served them all my life. I thought it was time they served me, so I made kindling wood out of them and cooked my beans." Thus the Cakchiquel Church was born.

Townsend soon began asking, "If God is so great, why couldn't He speak all the languages of Brazil and Mexico and Africa and Asia?" Traveling to Chicago, he shared his vision with missionary leaders, but they advised him to devote his life to the Cakchiquels.

Townsend returned deeply troubled, uncertain of himself, unsure of the future. In desperation, he asked God to guide him, then opened his Bible and put his finger on a verse at random. It was Matthew 18:12: "What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying?"

That was Townsend's answer. "Yes, Lord," he prayed, "I'll leave the 250,000 Cakchiquel and go in quest of the Bibleless peoples."

The worldwide work of Wycliffe began in the heart of "Uncle Cam" Townsend then and there. Over 2,000 language groups have now at least part of the Bible in their language, and nearly 6,000 translators are currently working in over 50 countries.

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**C H Spurgeon - One lost sheep** Matthew 18:12–13 (Full sermon [One Lost Sheep](#))

The great depths of Christ's love are the same to all his flock, but on the surface there is sometimes a holy storm of joy when any one of them has been newly restored after wandering. Learn the occasion of this demonstrative joy. The wandering one has caused great sorrow. We were all grieved that our brother should become a gross backslider, that such an earnest Christian as he seemed to be should disgrace his profession. Our Lord is still more grieved than we are. When the erring one comes back, we feel a new joy in him. In proportion to the sorrow felt over the wanderer, is the joy manifested when he is restored. Moreover, great apprehensions were aroused; we feared that he was not the Lord's and that he would go back unto perdition. We trembled for him. That black dread is all over now: the sheep is safe; the doubtful one is saved and restored to the fold. In proportion to the weight of the apprehension is the intensity of the relief. The Shepherd had exercised also great labour over the lost one. He went up among the mountains to find his sheep, but now his labour is fully rewarded, for he has found his lost sheep. He remembers no more his travel

and travail, for joy that the sheep is safe. Besides, in this newly-restored one, there are marks of salvation which cause joy. He has been torn with the briars, but he is resting now. See how he lies down in the tender grass! He was weary, worn and almost dead with his wanderings, but now, how happy he is in the presence of his shepherd! How closely he keeps to his shepherd's footsteps! All this goes to make the shepherd glad!

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#### **QUESTION - [Why would God leave the 99 to find 1?](#)**

**ANSWER** - Both Matthew 18 and Luke 15 record Jesus' parable about a shepherd who leaves 99 sheep in the fold to go in search of one that had wandered away. Jesus gave this illustration in response to the Pharisees who were incensed that Jesus "welcomes sinners and eats with them" (Luke 15:2). The religious leaders in Jesus' day had structured their system to exalt the self-righteous and exclude anyone who did not live up to their often arbitrary standards (Matthew 23:28). They had added so many rules and regulations to God's law that no one could keep them all, including the ones who drafted them. When Jesus came along, His methodology confused them. He seemed to be from God, yet He rebuked the outwardly righteous and welcomed the wicked. How could this man know God?

So Jesus told them [a story](#), as He did many times in order to explain spiritual truths: "What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish" (Matthew 18:12-14). The people of Jesus' day understood the relationship between shepherds and sheep, but the significance of a shepherd going in search of one lost sheep is sometimes lost on us. It seems strange that a shepherd would leave his flock to search for one missing sheep.

We might consider the shepherd leaving the 99 to find the 1 this way: a father and his five children are asleep in their home when the smoke detectors go off. The father awakens to find his house filled with smoke and the sound of flames and crackling timber coming nearer. Panicked, he races to his children's bedrooms and begins to rouse them. Calling to some and carrying others, he stumbles down the stairs and out the front door. He deposits the sleepy children on the grass a safe distance away and then turns. Gasping for air, he squints through the smoke to count kids: "Tim, Sally, Angel, Jojo—where's Lilly!" He is missing his youngest, three-year-old Lilly. Four children are safe, one is not. What will this father do?

God is a Father. He counts His kids. He rejoices that some are safely [in Christ](#), prepared for eternity and nestled near His heart. But some are missing. Where's Karen? Where's Abdul? Where's Jose? The Father sent Jesus on a rescue mission "to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10). God does not abandon the 99. They are already safely in His kingdom, attended by His angels, and guided by His Holy Spirit (Romans 8:14; Hebrews 13:5). But His heart aches for those not yet in the fold.

So the [Good Shepherd](#) pursues the lost sheep, woos them, calls to them, and allows circumstances into their lives designed to make them look up. It is often in the bleakest of circumstances that we finally surrender our demands to have our own way. We finally submit to our Shepherd, who carries us back to the fold (Luke 15:5). In John 10, Jesus again refers to Himself as the Good Shepherd, saying, "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd" (verses 16-17). Then in verses 27-29 He says, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand." The 99 are still important to Him, but He knows the flock is not complete without the lost sheep. And a good shepherd always goes after the lost sheep.

In Luke's gospel, two other parables follow the one about the one lost sheep, and both of them reinforce Jesus' main point, which is the value of individuals. The parable of the lost coin (Luke 15:8-10) and the [parable of the lost son](#), also known as the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32), continue the theme of God as a pursuer of lost people. We were all lost at one time, and the Lord came after us. If He had not taken the initiative, no one could be saved (John 6:44). So, when our Good Shepherd wants to pursue another lost lamb, the 99 who are in the fold can joyfully support the rescue.

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**G Campbell Morgan** - In this question we have an instance of a method which our Lord often adopted in His teachings, which is arresting, and most suggestive. It was that of appealing to men to test Divine actions by their own. In doing this, He was assuming man's capacity for understanding God, and His assumption was based upon His knowledge of human nature. He knew its depravity, and once, in making use of this very method of appeal, He declared it as He said, "If ye then, being evil." Nevertheless, He also knew that if man could be brought to true thinking, to reasoning with God, he could understand God. In some senses this was a superlative instance, for here He was interpreting God's attitude toward the lost; and He appealed to that instinct in man—"any man," as He said—which would send him out to the mountains to seek the one sheep which had gone astray. Is there not something here which we should do well to remember and imitate in our dealing with men, when we desire to explain and justify the ways of God to them? It must be done with carefulness. We cannot argue the ways of God from the ways of men, but we may be perfectly sure that

the ways of God may be illustrated to men by what they will understand of themselves, if they will think simply and truly. (Life Applications from Every Chapter of the Bible)

**Matthew 18:13** "If it turns out that he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray.

- **he rejoices:** Ps 147:11 Isa 53:11 62:5 Jer 32:37-41 Mic 7:18 Zep 3:17 Lu 15:5-10,23,24 Jn 4:34-36 Jas 2:13

## THE SHEPHERD'S JOY IN RESTORATION OF ONE STRAY

If ([see note](#)) it turns out that he finds ([heurisko](#)) it, truly ([amen](#)) I say to you, he rejoices ([chairō](#)) over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray ([planao](#)) - One would have thought the shepherd might be frustrated and angered by having to exert extra effort to find one when 99 were so obedient. But this not the shepherd's heart (surely picturing Jesus) and instead of anger he expresses joy.

**John MacArthur** explains why he rejoices more for 1 found - There is special joy expressed for the sheep that is found not because it is more valued or loved than the others but because its danger, hardship, and great need elicit special concern from the caring shepherd. In the same way, when one child in a family is ill, particularly if it is seriously ill, a mother will devote much more time and attention to him than to the other children, often more than to all the rest together. And when that child finally gets well, the mother does not rejoice for the children who have been healthy all along but for the one who was sick and suffering. And if the brothers and sisters are loving, they, too, will rejoice in the restoration of their sibling.

**C H Spurgeon Commentary** - 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.

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### The Shepherd's Heart

A hundred sheep, a fold complete,  
Yet one has wandered, lost its feet.  
The hills are wide, the valleys deep,  
But love will not let one stray sheep sleep.

The shepherd leaves the ninety-nine,  
To seek the one, a love divine.  
Through thorny paths and rugged ground,  
Until the lost is safely found.

Rejoicing echoes through the skies,  
For one restored, no love denies.  
The heavens sing, the angels cheer,  
A soul once lost is now so near.

Oh, wondrous grace, a shepherd's plea,  
To find the lost, to set them free.  
No love compares, no heart so true,  
For every lost one, He seeks you too.

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**ILLUSTRATION** - For several days in the fall of 1987, the whole world had its attention and compassion fixed on a little girl, not quite

two years old, who was trapped in an abandoned well shaft in west Texas for three days. When, after much strenuous work, difficult drilling, and painstaking excavation, she was finally rescued, there was rejoicing all across the land, and she was sent thousands of cards and presents as she recuperated in the hospital. It was not that she was more precious or worthy than countless other little girls, but that her need at that time was so great. Because the Lord Jesus has such tender compassion on all His needy little ones, so that their well-being brings Him great joy, we should find ourselves in holy fear of ever looking down on such ones.- John MacArthur

**Matthew 18:14 “So it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish.**

- **So it is not the will:** Lu 12:32 Jn 6:39,40 10:27-30 17:12 Ro 8:28-39 Eph 1:5-7 1Pe 1:3-5
- **your Father who is in heaven:** Mt 5:16 6:9,32
- **that one of these little ones perish:** Isa 40:11 Zec 13:7 Jn 21:15 1Co 8:11-13 2Ti 2:10 Heb 12:13 2Pe 3:9

#### Related Passages:

Isaiah 57:15 For thus says the high and exalted One Who lives forever, whose name is Holy, “I dwell on a high and holy place, And also with the contrite and lowly of spirit In order to revive the spirit of the lowly And to revive the heart of the contrite.

### NONE FORGOTTEN NONE FORSAKEN

**So it is not the will**([thelema](#)) **of your Father Who is in heaven**([ouranos](#)) **that** ([hina](#)) **one of these little ones perish** ([apollumi](#))- God’s heart is for all His children to remain in fellowship with Him, and He desires none to **perish**. In this context (the lost sheep depicting a believer) the verb perish does not speak of being lost eternally in Hell. A genuine believer cannot lose their salvation so the idea of perish is

*God’s will is not to punish or abandon the lost  
but to restore them to His fold.*

**THOUGHT-** God’s love for His people is personal, relentless, and joyful. This passage reminds us that no one is beyond His reach or care. As believers, we are called to imitate God’s heart by valuing, pursuing, and celebrating the restoration of those who have gone astray. God values each person deeply, especially the “little ones”—those who are humble, vulnerable, or seemingly insignificant in the world’s eyes. We should ever seek to treat other straying believers who have been restored with the same value and care as God does, recognizing that every soul is precious to God.

*God’s love pursues us  
even when we stray.*

**C H Spurgeon Commentary** - 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.

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FUNERAL SERMON Suitable for the Death of a Child, Baby, or Pre-born Infant

Scripture: Matthew 18:14: “Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.”

Introduction: I don’t know how many little caskets I’ve buried through the years, or how many grieving parents I’ve tried to comfort. These things are very hard, among the hardest we face. I’ve never adjusted to it, and I know that we’re in the presence today of a level of pain almost beyond bearing. But I do know this. I represent the God of all Comfort, and I have a book whose message is



sufficient, even for times like this. The Bible says about Jesus Christ, that He does all things well. The Bible also promises that all things work together for good to those who love the Lord. Those two great truths, the first about the person of Christ and the second about the providence of God, apply to our hearts today. The Bible assures us that children go to heaven to be with the Lord. The Lord loves children and isn't willing for any of them to perish. Not one of them will be lost. Let me show you three Scriptures on this.

1. "I Shall Go to Him" (2 Sam. 12:16–23+). When David said in verse 23: "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me," he understood that he would see his baby again in heaven, that the child had gone to be with the Lord. His grief was great, but his joy came from anticipating the coming reunion.

2. "She Is Not Dead But Sleeping" (Mark 5:21–43). The mourners at the funeral of this little girl were wailing in grief, but that wasn't Jesus' perspective when He arrived on the scene. Christ looked at the little form lying there and said three remarkable things:

A. She is not dead! Those words are for every mom, dad, or grandparent who has lost a little one. This child that miscarried, this child that was stillborn, this child that was aborted, this child that died of SIDS, this child who perished in the natural disaster—these children are not dead. This is Bible-speak. This is Jesus-talk.

B. ...but sleeping. This little body is resting, and his (her) soul is with Jesus.

C. Talitha, cumi... Little girl, I say to you, arise. The miracle of this little girl's resurrection was a token of what He is going to do when He comes again, and the dead in Christ are raised first.

3. It Is Well with the Child (2 Ki 4:8–37). In this passage, a woman's son dies, and in her grief she goes to see the prophet Elisha who asks her if all is well with her family and with her son. Before telling him specifically what had happened, she made a remarkable observation: "It is well." There is something about those words that have comforted thousands of heartbroken parents. It is well with the child.

**Conclusion:** Our earthly lifespan is brief at best, and very shortly we'll all be together in the Lord forever if we know Him as our Savior. We shall be with this child again. He (or she) is not dead, but sleeping. It is well with the child, for the Lord Jesus isn't willing that any of these little ones should perish. Wherefore comfort you yourselves with these words.

#### **Related Resource:**

- Borrow John MacArthur's book [Safe in the Arms of God](#) - This book offers biblical insights and comfort to grieving parents, affirming that children who pass away are embraced by God's grace

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#### **QUESTION - [Who will go to hell? WATCH VIDEO](#)**

**ANSWER** - [Hell](#) has become a controversial subject in recent years, even among Christians. However, the controversy is entirely man-made. The rejection of the reality of hell stems from a human inability to reconcile the love of God with eternal punishment or from an outright rejection of God's Word. Even some professing Christians have come to unbiblical conclusions. Some have tried to redefine hell, create an intermediate state not found in Scripture, or deny hell altogether. In doing so, they are ignoring Jesus' warning in Revelation 22:19, "If anyone takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this scroll."

Hell is mentioned 167 times in the Bible, sometimes called Gehenna, Hades, the pit, the Abyss, or everlasting punishment (Proverbs 7:27; Luke 8:31; 10:15; 2 Thessalonians 1:9). Jesus spoke of heaven and hell as real places (Matthew 13:41–42; 23:33; Mark 9:43–47; Luke 12:5). The story Jesus told about the rich man and Lazarus was an actual event that demonstrated the reality of the two eternal destinations (Luke 16:19–31+). Heaven is the dwelling place of God (2 Chronicles 30:27) where Jesus has gone to "prepare a place" for those who love Him (John 14:2). Hell was created for "the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41). But because every human being is a sinner, every person past the age of accountability has already been condemned to hell (Romans 3:10; 5:12; John 3:18). We all deserve hell as the just punishment for our rebellion against God (Romans 6:23).

Jesus was clear that "no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again" (John 3:3). He was also clear that hell is an eternal punishment for those who do not obey Him (Matthew 25:46). 2 Thessalonians 1:8–9 says that in the end God "will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might." John the Baptist said about Jesus, "His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matthew 3:12).

John 3:18 explains in the simplest terms who will go to heaven and who will go to hell: "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son." So, those who go to hell are specifically those who do not believe in Jesus' name. To "believe" goes beyond a mental recognition of

the truth. To believe in Christ for salvation requires a transfer of allegiance. We stop worshiping ourselves, we forsake our sin, and we begin to worship God with our heart, soul, mind, and strength (Matthew 22:36–37; Mark 12:30).

God desires that every person spend eternity with Him (Matthew 18:14; 2 Peter 3:9), but He honors our decision to accept or reject Him (John 4:14). Anyone who so desires can go to heaven (John 1:12). Jesus already paid the price for our salvation, but we must accept that gift and transfer ownership of our lives to Him (Luke 9:23). Heaven is perfect, and God cannot take anyone there who insists on holding on to his or her sin. We must allow Him to cleanse us of our sin and make us righteous in His sight (2 Corinthians 5:21). John 1:10–12 shows us the problem and the solution: “He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”

We can choose to trust in Jesus’ payment for our sin, or we can choose to pay for our sins ourselves—but we must remember that the payment for our sin is eternity in hell. C. S. Lewis said it this way: “There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says in the end, ‘Thy will be done.’”

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#### Related Resources:

- [How is eternity in hell a fair punishment for sin?](#)
- [Where is hell? What is the location of hell?](#)
- [Is hell literally a place of fire and brimstone?](#)
- [What was Jesus’ teaching on hell?](#)
- [Why does God send people to hell?](#)

**Matthew 18:15 “If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.**

- **if:** Mt 18:35 Lev 6:2-7 Lu 17:3,4 1Co 6:6-8 8:12 2Co 7:12 Col 3:13 1Th 4:6
- **go:** Lev 19:17 Ps 141:5 Pr 25:9,10
- **you have won:** Pr 11:30 Ro 12:21 1Co 9:19-21 Jas 5:19,20 1Pe 3:1

#### Related Passages:

Proverbs 11:30 The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, And he who is wise wins souls.

## HOW SHOULD CHRISTIANS HANDLE DISPUTES?

This section (Mt 18:15-17) could also be subtitled "Reproving in Love, Restoring in Peace", "Winning a Brother Through Reconciliation", "Private Correction, Eternal Restoration", "The Path to Reconciliation", "Confronting in Love, Restoring in Grace", "Reproving in Love, Restoring in Peace", "The Ministry of Reconciliation", "When Sin Breaks Fellowship, Love Restores", "Steps to Win Back a Brother", "Private Correction: A Path to Healing", "Restoring Unity Through Gentle Confrontation".

**If** - These are a series of (five) **Third Class Conditional Sentences**, Mt 18:15 (twice), Mt 18:16, 17 (twice). A **Third Class Conditional Sentence** in Greek grammar expresses a **probable or potential condition**. It reflects a situation that may or may not happen, depending on circumstances or choices. These sentences are particularly common in the New Testament and often deal with actions or events that are possible but not certain. Third class conditional sentences present **potential conditions** with real-life implications. They often invite believers to reflect on their choices, actions, and attitudes in light of God’s truth. Third class conditionals often challenge us as believers to trust in God’s promises and take steps of faith (remembering that faith is linked with Spirit enabled obedience). The apodoses (main clauses) often reassure believers of God’s faithfulness when they meet the condition. Remember that this instruction on handling sin is in the context of Jesus "dissertation" of "little ones." The brother who sins would certainly be in the category of "little ones." And it goes without saying that we are not to "despise one of these little one." (Mt 18:10±)

**Your brother** ([adelphos](#)) **sins** ([hamartano](#)), **go** ([hupago](#) - go your way) **and show him his fault** ([elegcho](#)) **in private** - The KJV has "shall trespass against thee," but the earliest and best manuscripts doubt the authenticity of "**against you**" after "if your brother sins." So let us first note Jesus' instruction (commands, not suggestions) deals with brothers, so this is clearly in the context of

Christian brotherhood (and by extension applicable to the Church, although this entity was not yet defined or in existence).

**Spurgeon** comment is good but is related to the KJV which has **against you** which is not in the best Greek texts - We must not let trespass rankle in our bosom, by maintaining a sullen silence, nor may we go and publish the matter abroad. We must seek out the offender, and tell him his fault as if he were not aware of it; as perhaps he may not be."

**Go** and **show** = The first command (first step in reconciliation) is to **go** ([hupago](#)) in the [present imperative](#) calling for this continually be the first "step" (pun intended), and frankly a step that requires the "goer" to go Spirit filled (not critical spirit filled) or in [dependence on the Holy Spirit](#). In short, the first step is for the goer to look in the mirror and make sure his face is clean (so to speak - that is, that he has confessed his own sins and repented of any known sin). If this first step is bypassed, the chances of Spirit wrought reconciliation are significantly reduced (in my opinion).

The second command is to **show him his fault** ([elegcho](#)), this command in the [aorist imperative](#), giving the sense of "Just do it!" Do not hesitate. Do not procrastinate (It would be easy to delay this task). Obviously the goer may be somewhat uncomfortable (because he knows that he is a sinner and could fall prey to the same sin as the offending brother - study Gal 6:1-5+). The condition for the gentle confrontation is without accompaniment, thus alone and **in private**. The goer must continually be mindful that his goal is not condemnation but reconciliation and restoration. As a Spirit filled goer keep this axiom ever in your mind - aim to restore, not to shame.

**THOUGHTS** - Are you willing to lovingly expose or confront sin in a way that leads others to restoration? Is your conscience clean before God, making you suitable to be a goer (if not find someone else)? If you are on the receiving end beloved, do you humbly receive correction as an opportunity for growth in grace and a closer walk with Christ?

If ([note](#)) **he listens** ([akouo](#) aorist active subjunctive) **to you, you have won** ([kerdaino](#)) **your brother** ([adelphos](#)) - **Listens to you** implies a face to face encounter, not a text message or email. The responsibility lies with the "goer" to initiate the setting so that he listens. In other words, you don't want to do this in the foyer of the church after the Sunday worship service! Bathe your approach and your words in prayer (you might even be led to fast before you approach your brother). You (as the goer) should pray he will open his heart to your gentle confrontation so that it will be received and not rejected. As noted above, be sure you yourself are "right" before the Lord and that you are filled with His Holy Spirit (Eph 5:18+), including a Christ-like attitude of humility (and see 1Co 10:12+). You want to win your brother back into the flock, not flagellate him. Your goal is restoration of relationship not revenge of a wrong committed. Remember that the idea of won is not winning like winning an argument, because as the old saying goes you can win the argument and lose the war. You want to approach this delicate matter with the goal of restoration (equates with winning the brother) and not with a desire to defend yourself as being correct in your pointing out his offense.

**C H Spurgeon Commentary** - MATTHEW 18:15-35 THE KING'S LAW CONCERNING OFFENSES - So far from despising any, we are to seek their good, even when they have done us wrong. Here is a case of personal offense: we are to endeavor to make peace with our brother who has trespassed against us. The offended is to seek the offender. We must not let the trespass rankle in our bosom, by maintaining a sullen silence; nor may we go and publish the matter abroad. We must seek out the offender, and tell him his fault as if he were not aware of it; as perhaps he may not be. Let the remonstrance be between thee and him alone. It may happen that he will at once rectify the wrong; and then we have gained, not our suit, but something worth far more — our brother. We might have lost him: happily, a frank word has won him. God be praised!

**Believer's Study Bible** - Mt 18:15-17 Here and in Mt 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 repentance was forthcoming in the erring brother (cf. 1 Cor. 5:1-13; 2 Cor. 2:5-11; Gal. 6:1, 2).

**Matthew Henry Concise** - Mt 18:15-20. If a professed Christian is wronged by another, he ought not to complain of it to others, as is often done merely upon report, but to go to the offender privately, state the matter kindly, and show him his conduct. This would generally have all the desired effect with a true Christian, and the parties would be reconciled. The principles of these rules may be practised every where, and under all circumstances, though they are too much neglected by all. But how few try the method which Christ has expressly enjoined to all his disciples! In all our proceedings we should seek direction in prayer; we cannot too highly prize

the promises of God. Wherever and whenever we meet in the name of Christ, we should consider him as present in the midst of us.

**NET NOTE** - The Greek term “brother” can mean “fellow believer” or “fellow Christian” (cf. BDAG 18 s.v. δελφός 2.a) whether male or female. It can also refer to siblings, though here it is used in a broader sense to connote familial relationships within the family of God. Therefore, because of the familial connotations, “brother” has been retained in the translation here in preference to the more generic “fellow believer” (“fellow Christian” would be anachronistic in this context). **TECHNICAL NOTE** - ‡ The earliest and best witnesses lack “**against you**” after “if your brother sins.” It is quite possible that the shorter reading in these witnesses (x B, as well as 0281 f1 579 pc sa) occurred when scribes either intentionally changed the text (to make it more universal in application) or unintentionally changed the text (owing to the similar sound of the end of the verb μαρτήσ [hamartēsē] and the prepositional phrase ες σέ [eis se]). However, if the MSS were normally copied by sight rather than by sound, especially in the early centuries of Christianity, such an unintentional change is not as likely for these MSS. And since scribes normally added material rather than deleted it for intentional changes, on balance, the shorter reading appears to be original. NA27 includes the words in brackets, indicating doubts as to their authenticity.

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**Show...fault** (expose) (1651) **elegcho** or **elencho** is a primary verb but is related to **elegchos** = bringing to light) means to **bring to the light** something hidden (especially sin) with the implication that there is adequate proof of wrongdoing (Jn 3:20, Eph 5:11). To expose, to convince someone of their error or sin, leading to a sense of conviction or acknowledgment of wrongdoing (Jn 16:8), to convict (prove guilty), to reprove, to shame or disgrace and thus to **rebuke** another in such a way that they are compelled to see and to admit the error of their ways. To confront someone about their behavior with the intent of correcting them, often in a direct but loving manner. (Rev 3:19). This sense of **elegcho** involves not just pointing out faults but doing so with the goal of restoration and growth. To show someone that they have done something wrong and summon them to repent. Sound doctrine is one way to confront and correct false beliefs (Titus 1:9), which underscores the vital importance of Bibliocentric exhortation! **(1)** To scrutinize or examine carefully, **bring to light, expose.** **(2)** To **convict**, to show to be wrong. **Elegcho** was used in the Greek law courts not merely of a reply to an opposing attorney, but of a refutation of his argument. **(3)** To **convince** someone of error. **(4)** show to be false or erroneous **(5)** To **reprove, admonish** in the sense of setting right. **(6)** To **rebuke, reprove by chastisement.**

**Elegcho** is often used in the context of God or the Holy Spirit bringing conviction of sin to lead people to repentance and spiritual growth. Whether exposing, convicting, or rebuking, the aim of **elegcho** is not to humiliate but to bring the person back into right standing with God and others. **Elegcho** is a biblical tool for maintaining truth, correcting errors, and encouraging spiritual maturity within the church and individual lives.

**Barclay** - Demosthenes said that (**elegcho**) describes the situation in which a man unanswerably demonstrates the truth of the things that he has said. Aristotle said that (**elegcho**) means to prove that things cannot be otherwise than as we have stated them. Christian rebuke means far more than flinging angry and condemning words at a man. It means speaking in such a way that he sees the error of his ways and accepts the truth. ([The Daily Study Bible](#))

**Vincent** has a lengthy discussion of the meaning of **elegcho** explaining that it "has several phases of meaning. In earlier classical Greek it signifies **to disgrace or put to shame**. Thus Ulysses, having succeeded in the trial of the bow, says to Telemachus, “the stranger who sits in thy halls disgraces (**elegchei**) thee not” (“Odyssey, xxi., 424). Then, to **cross-examine or question**, for the purpose of **convincing, convicting, or refuting**; to **censure, accuse**. So Herodotus: “In his reply Alexander became confused, and diverged from the truth, whereon the slaves interposed, **confuted** his statements (**elegchon**, cross-questioned and caught him in falsehood), and told the whole history of the crime” (1:115). The messenger in the “Antigone” of Sophocles, describing the consternation of the watchmen at finding Polynices’ body buried, says: “Evil words were bandied among them, guard **accusing** (**elegchon**) guard” (260). **Of arguments, to bring to the proof; prove; prove by a chain of reasoning.** It occurs in Pindar in the general sense of to conquer or surpass. “Having descended into the naked race they surpassed (**elegzan**) the Grecian band in speed (“Pythia,” xi., 75). (**Bolding added.** Vincent, M. R. Word studies in the New Testament. Vol. 2, Page 1-102)

**ELEGCHO** - 17V - **convict(2), convicted(2), convicts(1), expose(1), exposed(2), rebuke(1), refute(1), reprimanded(1), reprove(4), reprovved(1), show...fault(1).** Matt. 18:15; Lk. 3:19; Jn. 3:20; Jn. 8:46; Jn. 16:8; 1 Co. 14:24; Eph. 5:11; Eph. 5:13; 1 Tim. 5:20; 2 Tim. 4:2; Tit. 1:9; Tit. 1:13; Tit. 2:15; Heb. 12:5; Jas. 2:9; Jude 1:15; Rev. 3:19

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**QUESTION** - [How should sin in the church be handled?](#)

**ANSWER** - The Bible is clear about God’s desire for us to reflect His holiness (1 Peter 1:15), and it is clear about the need for church discipline to deal with sin in the church. Since one of the jobs of the church is to demonstrate the goodness and holiness

of God, a church with a member who persists in sin must take steps to address the state of that person's soul as well as protect the church body from being corrupted by unchallenged sin in its membership.

Jesus gave us an outline to follow when we must confront another professing Christian: "If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector" (Matthew 18:15–17). So the first step in handling sin in the church is for someone with knowledge of the situation, often the pastor or an elder, to confront that person in love, expressing concern and explaining the spiritual ramifications if the sin continues.

If the sinning member refuses to [repent](#), a second step must be taken. The one who originally confronted the person needs to take along other godly people and visit the sinning member again. The presence of others may serve to induce the sinner to repent; if not, there are witnesses to all that is said and done, preventing any false claims or denials later. This interview needs to include Scripture-based reproof and opportunities for restoration. Verses such as 1 John 3:3–10, 5:18, Luke 14:25–27, Matthew 7:16–23, and Ephesians 5:3 may be helpful at this time.

If, after the second step, the church member still refuses to repent of the sin, Jesus says to "tell it to the church" (Matthew 18:17), an action that would bring even more pressure to bear. If that fails, then the offending member is to be removed from the church and considered an unbeliever (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:9–13). This process shows the seriousness of sin in the church and the need to strive for reconciliation. The steps that Jesus outlines to protect the purity and reputation of the church should not be sidestepped or ignored.

What kinds of sins should a church confront? Since everyone is a sinner, including the pastor and elders, where do we draw the line between the sins everyone commits and those worthy of confrontation? The answer seems to be the lifestyle sins committed by those who will not inherit the kingdom of God (see 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 and Galatians 5:19–20; see also Titus 3:10–11). These are public, ongoing sinful choices that are differentiated from those sins we commit in our hearts because we live in the flesh. For example, a Christian struggling with impure thoughts or personal jealousies is not defaming the name of Christ as he wrestles with those sins. They are private and unwanted. They are sins for which the person needs repentance, but they are not lifestyle choices. However, a professing Christian who lives in open, unrepentant adultery, sexual immorality, drunkenness, or any of the other sins on Paul's lists must be confronted.

Sin in the church must be handled properly, that is, in a biblical manner. Church leaders who choose a sinful path are not exempt from discipline: "Those elders who are sinning you are to reprove before everyone, so that the others may take warning" (1 Timothy 5:20). Unfortunately, many churches today never practice church discipline, even in glaring instances of impropriety and obvious sin. The result is that the ministry of the church is undermined and the legitimacy of its message cast in doubt. If the Bible says that Christians don't do X, but there are assumed Christians in our church who are doing X, with no consequences, then outsiders are right to wonder whether we take the Bible seriously.

God spoke to Israel words that still echo through the church: "If my people, which are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and forgive their sins, and heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:14). Imagine the healing that would take place in the world if all churches would follow the biblical pattern for handling sin in their midst.

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**Spurgeon Study Bible** - "If your brother sins against you, go and rebuke him in private. If he listens to you, you have won your brother." Do not say, "You must come to me." Go to him; he has trespassed against you. It is a personal affair; go and seek him. It is useless to expect the person who does the injury to try to make peace. The injured one always has to forgive, though he has nothing to be forgiven. It always comes to that, and the injured one should, if he is of the mind of Christ, be the one to start the reconciliation.

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**AS WE FORGIVE OTHERS** - Joe Stowell [Strength for the Journey: Day By Day With Jesus - Page 225](#)

AS FAR AS THE EAST IS FROM THE WEST, SO FAR HAS HE REMOVED OUR TRANSGRESSIONS FROM US.—Psalm 103:12

Have you ever noticed how we are more prone to talk about other people's problems than we are to confront them? Which means that often the last person to know about the problem is the very one who has the problem. Love demands a better way.

Because God loved us, He took the initiative to come to us in our sin (Genesis 3:8–24; John 3:16–17). If we love, an important part of that love is the willingness to approach those who have sinned with the intent of restoring them. Since timing is important, we must bathe the encounter in prayer, asking God to provide the right opportunity and receptivity.

Galatians 6:1 gives us key instructions about our approach to the person who has sinned. First, we must be in tune with and in

fellowship with God—gentle and without bitterness, revenge, or hostility in our hearts. We must be willing to see the problem from the other person’s point of view and be cautious—taking care, lest, in the process, we too fall into sins like anger, bitterness, or sins of the tongue. As we humbly show the person his faults, it is important that we convey love for his best interests and avoid a judgmental, “holier than thou” attitude.

Matthew 18:15 gives instructions for the procedure to be followed. “Go and show him his fault, just between the two of you” (Matthew 18:15). There is great freedom in the interchange if we can assure the one we are talking to that we have discussed this with no one else!

If the person responds, he is restored to God’s fellowship and to ours, and forgiveness removes the sin “as far as the east is from the west” (Psalm 103:12). If the person does not respond, Scripture encourages us to take another person back with us for another meeting, and then go to the church if that meeting is unsuccessful (Matthew 18:16–17).

What a joy it would be to live among fellow travelers who love each other enough to deal with sins instead of tolerating sin by simply talking about it behind each other’s back.

Is there someone you need to approach concerning sin? Do it prayerfully, claiming God’s grace to forgive one another.

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### **The Path to Reconciliation**

*(Inspired by Matthew 18:15-17)*

When a brother stumbles, and wounds your soul,  
Let love and truth take gentle control.  
Go to him quietly, heart open wide,  
Speak of the hurt, with grace as your guide.

If he should listen, your bond is restored,  
A brother reclaimed, a friendship implored.  
But if he resists, take others along,  
Two or three voices to right the wrong.

Together in truth, with love as the key,  
Pursue the path to unity.  
For where two or more in His name agree,  
Christ stands among in harmony.

But if the heart remains defiant still,  
And turns from the call of the Father’s will,  
Bring it before the gathered fold,  
Let wisdom and prayer their counsel uphold.

Yet even if the bond must sever,  
Love does not cease; it endures forever.  
For mercy flows where hearts repent,  
And grace redeems the time we’ve spent.

So seek the lost, forgive the pain,  
Extend the hand to heal again.  
For in this work, God’s heart is shown,  
Reclaiming each soul as His very own.

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**F B Meyer - Our Daily Homily** - Matthew 18:15 Go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone.

“Where is thy brother, child?”

“I do not know, Lord; I have not seen or spoken to him these many days; and, as far as I am concerned, I would not mind if I never saw him again; he is as good as lost to me.”

“Hast thou wronged him, that this gulf has yawned between you? Remember that I said, if on coming to the altar, thou shouldest remember that thy brother hath some complaint against thee, thou wert to leave thy gift, and seek to be reconciled; then return to offer thy gift.”

“Yes, Lord, I remember well. But that is not the case now; my brother has nothing against me; he is in the wrong, not I; he has trespassed against me, not I against him. It is therefore for him to come to me, not for me to go to him.”

“Is it likely that he will come to thee?”

“I do not think it is, Lord. He is not one of thy disciples; and it is most unlikely that he will ever cross my threshold to apologize and

ask forgiveness.”

“Then thou must go to him, and tell him his fault between thee and him alone, and do thy best to win him back.”

“But I think he is most likely to put the wrong construction on my going, and to account that I feel myself in the wrong.”

“Thou art thy brother’s keeper, and thou must win him out of his fault, and lovelessness, and wandering. He is drifting away—not from thee only, but from Me. I know he was in the wrong at first; but thou art in the wrong now, and thou must go and tell him his fault, and try to wash his feet and win him back.”

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### **QUESTION - [How should Christians handle disputes \(Matthew 18:15-17\)?](#)**

**ANSWER** - Christians have often turned to the principles of Matthew 18 for guidance in handling disputes. There Jesus says, “If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector” (verses 15–17). From these verses, several guidelines can be found for resolving conflicts between Christians.

First, a Christian who has a conflict with another Christian is called to address the matter with the other person personally. When matters are handled privately, misunderstanding can be addressed, and there is great potential for the other person to respond positively. In addition, a private meeting helps to avoid the problem of gossip that can occur when a matter is taken to others instead of the person involved.

Second, if a private discussion does not solve the issue, a Christian is to take one or two other believers and meet with the person with whom they have conflict. The clause “that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses” refers to the Old Testament law that required a charge to be supported by two or more witnesses to be valid. In the case of personal conflict, this principle allows for additional witnesses to observe the matter firsthand and help determine the proper course of action.

Third, when there is no resolution after steps one and two, the matter is to be taken before the local church. Only in rare cases will a Christian seeking to follow the Lord refuse to resolve conflict when the entire congregation is involved.

Finally, if the person in the center of the conflict refuses to respond positively even when the entire congregation is involved, then that person is to be considered as “a pagan or a tax collector.” This simply means to excommunicate the person, removing the negative influence from the congregation.

In 1 Corinthians 5, the apostle Paul speaks of a believer who had been sexually immoral, apparently with his stepmother. Rather than condemning the act, the Corinthian Christians had tolerated the behavior. Paul taught they should remove this person from their church family (1 Corinthians 5:3). Later, in 2 Corinthians, this same person had turned from this lifestyle, and Paul advised the Corinthian believers to accept him again. The goal of discipline is not to be mean or cold-hearted but to condemn sinful behavior and issue a call to change. In 2 Corinthians 2:8, Paul writes, “I beg you to reaffirm your love for him” (ESV).

Christians are called to handle disputes in love, with a goal of restoration. Conflict should be handled according to the steps listed in Matthew 18. This style of conflict resolution is based on a desire for holy living and love for the person who has committed wrong.

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### **FINDING JOY IN CHURCH DISCIPLINE**

Topics: Adultery; Body of Christ; Church Discipline; Church Membership; Repentance; Restoration; Testimony

References: Matthew 18:15–20; Luke 17:1–4; 1 Corinthians 5:1–7; Galatians 6:1; Philippians 1:6; 2 Thessalonians 3:14–15; Titus 3:10

A few years ago, we had to discipline a man by removing him from membership for repeated and unrepentant adultery. We followed the guidelines of Matthew 18.

His response was, “I know what you have to do, so do what you must, because I don’t care! I plan to never darken the doors of this church again anyway. So why should I care?” He proceeded to divorce his wife in civil court.

His wife continued to attend church. At cell group meetings, we prayed for God to do whatever was necessary to open this man’s eyes and bring him back into a right relationship with God.

More than two years later, this man called me and asked if we could meet. In my office he broke down, saying the “Hound of Heaven” had been on his trail for nearly two years, and he couldn’t take much more. He wanted to confess his sin, turn from his wicked ways, and renew his marriage. Even his wife, who had said she probably could never trust him again, was amazed at the change in his life.

After his divorce, this man, who was in the U.S. Army Reserves, had been sent overseas with his unit to process the bodies of

soldiers who died in Iraq. Daily he was confronted with the brevity of life and permanence of eternity. After returning home, he met with the elders at our church, confessed his sin, and asked to be forgiven for his arrogance and the impact of his sin on the church. What a joy it was to later announce to the congregation that discipline against this man was lifted and he was restored to full fellowship in the church!

When we do things God's way, he does not always respond quickly with the results we desire, but his way is always right, best, and true. With praise, the whole church got to see God at work, restoring both the man and his marriage. —Bob Ahlberg, Roscoe, Illinois

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#### **QUESTION - [What does the Bible say about church discipline?](#)**

**ANSWER** - Church discipline is the process of correcting sinful behavior among members of a local church body for the purpose of protecting the church, restoring the sinner to a right walk with God, and renewing fellowship among the church members. In some cases, church discipline can proceed all the way to [excommunication](#), which is the formal removal of an individual from church membership and the informal separation from that individual.

Matthew 18:15–20 gives the procedure and authority for a church to practice church discipline. Jesus instructs us that one individual (usually the offended party) is to go to the offending individual privately. If the offender refuses to acknowledge his sin and repent, then two or three others go to confirm the details of the situation. If there is still no repentance—the offender remains firmly attached to his sin, despite two chances to repent—the matter is taken before the church. The offender then has a third chance to repent and forsake his sinful behavior. If at any point in the process of church discipline, the sinner heeds the call to repent, then “you have gained your brother” (verse 15, ESV). However, if the discipline continues all the way through the third step without a positive response from the offender, then, Jesus said, “let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector” (verse 17, ESV).

The process of church discipline is never pleasant just as a father never delights in having to discipline his children. Sometimes, though, church discipline is necessary. The purpose of church discipline is not to be mean-spirited or to display a holier-than-thou attitude. Rather, the goal of church discipline is the restoration of the individual to full fellowship with both God and other believers. The discipline is to start privately and gradually become more public. It is to be done in love toward the individual, in obedience to God, and in godly fear for the sake of others in the church.

The Bible's instructions concerning church discipline imply the necessity of [church membership](#). The church and its pastor are responsible for the spiritual well-being of a certain group of people (members of the local church), not of everyone in the city. In the context of church discipline, Paul asks, “What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside?” (1 Corinthians 5:12). The candidate for church discipline has to be “inside” the church and accountable to the church. He professes faith in Christ yet continues in undeniable sin.

The Bible gives an example of church discipline in a local church—the church of Corinth (1 Corinthians 5:1–13). In this case, the discipline led to excommunication, and the apostle Paul gives some reasons for the discipline. One is that sin is like yeast; if allowed to exist, it spreads to those nearby in the same way that “a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough” (1 Corinthians 5:6–7). Also, Paul explains that Jesus saved us so that we might be set apart from sin, that we might be “unleavened” or free from that which causes spiritual decay (1 Corinthians 5:7–8). Christ's desire for His bride, the church, is that she might be pure and undefiled (Ephesians 5:25–27). The testimony of Christ Jesus (and His church) before unbelievers is important, too. When David sinned with Bathsheba, one of the consequences of his sin was that the name of the one true God was blasphemed by God's enemies (2 Samuel 12:14).

Hopefully, any disciplinary action a church takes against a member is successful in bringing about godly sorrow and true repentance. When repentance occurs, the individual can be restored to fellowship. The man involved in the 1 Corinthians 5 passage repented, and Paul later encouraged the church to restore him to full fellowship with the church (2 Corinthians 2:5–8). Unfortunately, disciplinary action, even when done correctly and in love, is not always successful in bringing about restoration. Even when church discipline fails to bring about repentance, it is still needed to accomplish other good purposes such as maintaining a good testimony in the world.

We have all likely witnessed the behavior of a youngster who is always allowed to do as he pleases with no consistent discipline. It is not a pretty sight. Nor is the overly permissive parent loving, for a lack of guidance dooms the child to a dismal future. Undisciplined, out-of-control behavior will keep the child from forming meaningful relationships and performing well in any kind of setting. Similarly, discipline in the church, while never enjoyable or easy, is necessary at times. In fact, it is loving. And it is commanded by God.

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#### **QUESTION - [What is excommunication in the Bible?](#)**

**ANSWER** - First, we should note that the Bible never uses the word *excommunication*. It's a word that has been adopted by some



religious groups, especially by the Catholic Church, to denote the formal process of removing someone from membership and participation in the church, from relationship with the church community, or, in the Catholic view, even from the family of God.

While the Bible does not teach that a Christian can lose his salvation, it does describe the process of [church discipline](#) in several passages. The final step of church discipline is excommunication—a removal from the local church.

In Matthew 18:15–17, Jesus teaches His disciples about excommunication. The Lord details a multi-step approach for responding to sinful offenses in the church community:

**Step 1:** Go to the person privately, tell him how he has sinned against you, and be reconciled if he is willing. If the offending person repents, no more action is required.

**Step 2:** If he won't listen, go back with two or three witnesses to have the conversation again, establishing the facts and the evidence.

**Step 3:** If he still refuses to listen and repent from his sinfulness, bring him before the full church body and make the case against him.

**Step 4:** If there is still no repentance, the church is to excommunicate the sinner. Jesus' words are "let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector" (Matthew 18:17ESV).

The Jews saw both groups Jesus mentions—[Gentiles](#) and [tax collectors](#)—as outsiders. Gentiles were pagan idolaters, and tax collectors were in collusion with Rome. In Jesus' day, religious Israelites would not associate beyond what was strictly necessary with Gentiles or tax collectors. They would not have meals with them, for instance, or invite them to social gatherings. So, when Jesus says to view the [unrepentant](#) sinner in the church as "a Gentile and a tax collector," He is instructing the church to officially and with clear communication stop having close fellowship with the unrepentant sinner; the sinner is to be put out of the close-knit community of Christians. This is excommunication.

What is the purpose of excommunication? The dismissal of an unrepentant, defiant sinner from the community of believers is not about public shaming or judgment. It's about loving that person enough to do what is best for him or her and about doing what is best for the church as a whole.

We have an example of excommunication and its aftermath in two passages from Paul. A man in the church in Corinth was having sex with his step-mother, a sin so egregious "that even pagans do not tolerate [it]" (1 Corinthians 5:1). Paul rebukes the Christians in Corinth for accepting this man's incest. Apparently, the Corinthians had misunderstood the grace of God so badly that they had come to believe all sin should be tolerated, maybe even celebrated proudly, as evidence of God's grace and forgiveness (verse 2).

Paul says, "No way." Sin in the church must be dealt with. He instructs the Corinthians to come together for the purpose of excommunication. The local body of believers was, under [apostolic authority](#), to turn this man over to Satan for "the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 5:4–5). Evidently, in this particular case, there was a physical affliction of supernatural origin associated with the excommunication; it was excommunication with an added apostolic curse.

Scripture does not indicate that every excommunication is followed by physical consequences. The general principle, however, is that excommunication lets the sinner experience the full, painful consequences of his sinful choices so that he will repent, submit to God, and be saved from spiritual ruin. The motive for excommunication is not punishment or vengeance but reformation and spiritual health.

Paul's second letter to the Corinthians deals with the follow-up to excommunication. In 2 Corinthians 2:5–11, Paul seems to be talking about the very same person he had instructed the church to excommunicate. The sinner had repented, and Paul writes, "The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient. Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him" (verses 6–8). As soon as the excommunicated believer repents, he should be welcomed back into warm relationship with the church community. Once repentance has been established, the excommunication should be fully reversed. The goal has been accomplished.

So, who is eligible for excommunication? The Bible is clear that excommunication is only for church members (not unbelievers) and only in response to obvious and ongoing sin from which a person refuses to repent despite multiple exhortations: "I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler. Do not even eat with such people" (1 Corinthians 5:11).

#### **Five important things to remember about excommunication:**

1. The Bible never instructs individual Christians to decide on their own or even in a small group to

“excommunicate” another believer. Excommunication is meant to be a formal action taken by the local church as a whole.

2. Excommunication is primarily about relationship. Those in the church are specifically instructed to stop sharing meals with the unrepentant person (1 Corinthians 5:11), to limit their contact with him.

3. This process of excommunication is for believers, for those who declare themselves to have sincerely trusted in Christ for their salvation. Excommunication is the church’s response to one who says, “Yes, I’m a Christian, and, no, I will not turn from this sin.”

4. The process of excommunication is not meant for someone who admits his sin and is repentant but continues to struggle to break free of it. If a believer sins and, when confronted, says, “Yes, that was wrong. I’m sorry. I want to start again,” he is to be forgiven—even if he has sinned in the same way repeatedly (Matthew 18:21–22). In such a case, Scripture doesn’t suggest that person’s sin should be exposed to the full church as a kind of penalty, unless he chooses to reveal it himself.

5. The goal of excommunication is restoration. According to Jesus, the whole process of removing a member from the church is to be gradual, deliberate, and cautious. If at any point in the process the sinning person repents, then “you have gained your brother” (Matthew 18:15), and the fellowship is restored.

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#### Related Resources:

- Article by [D A Carson on Abusing Matthew 18](#)
- [How should sin in the church be handled?](#)
- [What is disfellowshipping?](#)
- [Why is it sinful for a church to cover up abuse?](#)
- [What does the Bible say about shunning?](#)
- [When is it necessary to rebuke another believer?](#)
- [What does the Bible mean when it says, “Do not judge”?](#)

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**Norman Geisler** (Source: [When Cultists Ask](#)) - MATTHEW 18:15–18—Does this passage prohibit public criticism of a pastor’s (or teacher’s) doctrine, as Word-Faith teachers argue?

**MISINTERPRETATION:** Some Word-Faith teachers believe this passage prohibits Christians from publicly criticizing the doctrine of a pastor or a teacher. Even if the doctrine is clearly false, and the pastor is teaching it publicly from the pulpit or on television, the pastor should not be criticized publicly but rather should be contacted privately about the matter. Addressing the issue of speaking out against “God’s anointed,” Kenneth Copeland said, “There are people attempting to sit in judgment right today over the ministry that I’m responsible for, and the ministry that Kenneth E. Hagin is responsible for. . . . Several people that I know had criticized and called that faith bunch out of Tulsa a cult. And some of ‘em are dead right today in an early grave because of it, and there’s more than one of them got cancer” (Copeland, “Why All Are Not Healed,” audio tape).

**CORRECTING THE MISINTERPRETATION:** This passage deals with personal ethics and morals, not with biblical doctrine. If a Christian does something unethical or he sins, he should first be contacted privately about the matter. If the individual fails to respond, increasingly confrontational steps are to be taken (Matt. 18:15–18).

False doctrine that is publicly proclaimed from a platform—such as from a pulpit, a television show, or a radio show—is to be confronted publicly according to the New Testament pattern. The apostle Paul publicly confronted Peter when his actions compromised the liberty of the gospel (Gal. 2:11–14). He publicly dealt with Hymenaeus and Alexander regarding their blasphemy (1 Tim. 1:20). He publicly dealt with Alexander the coppersmith for his harmful activities (2 Tim. 4:14). The apostle John publicly dealt with Diotrephes, who propagated false doctrine and refused to listen to what John and other Christian leaders had to say (3 John 9).

Though Word-Faith teachers often cite Matthew 18 in an effort to maintain church unity in an atmosphere of love, it is important to understand that true church unity is rooted not only in love but in truth. As Paul affirmed, the church is the “pillar and support of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15). Members of the church are called to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3 NASB). We are to “examine everything carefully” and “hold fast to that which is good” (1 Thess. 5:21). We are to follow the example of the Bereans in testing all doctrinal teachings against the Scriptures (Acts 17:11). Without a commitment to the truth, there can be no true church unity.

**Matthew 18:16** “But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that **BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED.**

- **So that:** 1Ki 21:13 Jn 8:17 2Co 13:1 1Ti 5:19 Heb 10:28 1Jn 5:7,8 Rev 11:3

#### **Related Passages:**

Numbers 35:30+ ‘If anyone kills a person, the murderer shall be put to death at the evidence of witnesses, but no person shall be put to death on the testimony of one witness.

Deuteronomy 17:6+ “On the evidence of two witnesses or three witnesses, he who is to die shall be put to death; he shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness.

Deuteronomy 19:15+ “A single witness shall not rise up against a man on account of any iniquity or any sin which he has committed; on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed.

John 8:17+ “Even in your law it has been written, that the testimony of two men is true.

2 Corinthians 13:1+ This is the third time I am coming to you. EVERY FACT IS TO BE CONFIRMED BY THE TESTIMONY OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES.

1 Timothy 5:19+ Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses.

### **WHEN ONE ISN'T ENOUGH THE ROLE OF WITNESSES**

**But** (term of contrast) **if** ([note](#)) **he does not listen** ([akouo](#)) **to you, take** ([paralambano](#)) **one or two more with you, so that** ([hina](#) - term of purpose) **BY THE MOUTH** ([stoma](#)) **OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES** ([martus/martys](#)) **EVERY FACT** ([rhema](#) - spoken word, "charge") **MAY BE CONFIRMED** (established) - Jesus invokes the OT principle requiring a minimum number of witnesses needed to present evidence. This implies that the other brother who goes with you is cognizant of the offense and can offer valid testimony to the one who is being confronted. This procedure will ensure that the matter is handled fairly and accurately and prevent false accusations. When you go to the one being confronted with two or three men, this clearly shows the man that seriousness of the confrontation and that it is an issue which needs resolution (and possibly reconciliation depending on the sin being confronted). Taking 2 or 3 is never to be with the intent of "ganging up" on the person, and the one confronted needs to be reassured the goal is restoration, repentance and reconciliation not condemnation. Taking 2 or 3 also demonstrates that this issue affects the broader community and not just the one man who initially presented the offense. The 2 or 3 witnesses will ensure the issue is clearly understood and fairly documented. It is important if possible to make sure the 1 or 2 that are brought along are spiritually mature and impartial. Spurgeon makes an excellent point of the advantage of 2 or 3 witnesses for in so doing you will have assured yourself against misrepresentation. The inclusion of witnesses also ensures that the effort to reconcile is not a personal vendetta but a collective concern for truth and restoration. Finally, we need to make sure the issue is well-documented and based on truth, not assumptions or hearsay. The goal is clarity and fairness for all involved.

**C H Spurgeon Commentary** - If the brother has trespassed very badly, he will probably be sullen, or impertinent, and he will not hear thee . Do not, therefore, give him up; persevere in seeking peace. Give your own pleadings the support of companionship: take with thee one or two more. Possibly the offender may notice what is said by the other brethren, although he may be prejudiced against you; or he may attach weight to united expostulation which he might not feel if the complaint came from one only. By calling in worthy arbitrators, you give the offender a fairer opportunity to set himself right. This time, let us hope, the brother will be won. But if not, you will have secured yourself against misrepresentation: that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word, may be established. It is by misquotation of words that quarrels are fomented; and it is a great thing to have the means of rectifying erroneous reports. Although it is a very unwise thing to interfere in quarrels, yet from this text it is clear that we should be willing to be one of the two or three who are to assist in settling a difference.

Addressing sin or conflict is a process that moves from private discussion to broader involvement if necessary. This step-by-step approach prevents hasty or unfair actions while allowing opportunities for repentance and reconciliation. Be patient and deliberate in resolving issues, following Jesus' outlined process with humility and grace.

**THOUGHT:** Do I approach conflicts with a desire to restore relationships, or am I more focused on proving my perspective? Am I patient enough to follow the gradual, biblical process for resolving issues?

**Matthew 18:17 “If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.**

- **tell:** Ac 6:1-3 15:6,7 1Co 5:4,5 6:1-4 2Co 2:6,7 3Jn 1:9,10
- **let:** Ro 16:17,18 1Co 5:3-5,9-13 2Th 3:6,14,15 1Ti 6:5 2Jn 1:10,11
- **a Gentile:** Mt 6:7 Ezr 6:21 Eze 11:12 2Co 6:14-17 Eph 4:17-19 5:11,12
- **a tax collector:** Mt 5:46 11:19 21:31,32 Lu 15:1 18:11 19:2,3

## WHEN THE CHURCH MUST INTERVENE

Some other titles to consider for this verse include - "The Final Step in Reconciliation" "The Role of the Church in Accountability" "Calling the Church to Restore and Uphold" "From Private to Public: Addressing Unrepentance" "When Listening Ends, Separation Begins" "The Weight of Persistent Refusal" "A Heart Closed to Restoration" "When Grace is Rejected" "The Cost of Unrepentance" "The Church as an Instrument of Restoration" "The Church's Duty to Address Sin" "A Call to Holiness in the Church" "Preserving Unity Through Discipline" "When the Church Speaks" "Treat Him as a Gentile and Tax Collector: A Call to Boundaries" "A Community Distanced, But Not Hopeless" "Separating, Yet Hoping for Repentance" "Firmness in Truth, Hope in Grace" "Grace Extended, Accountability Upheld" "A Last Step for Reconciliation" "Church Discipline: A Path to Repentance"

If ([note](#)) he refuses to listen ([parakouo](#)) to them, **tell** ([aorist imperative](#)) it to the church ([ekkllesia/ecclesia](#)); and if ([note](#)) he refuses to listen ([parakouo](#)) even to the church ([ekkllesia/ecclesia](#)) - **Refuses to listen** indicates a deliberate act (active voice = choice of one's will, thus willfully) of ignoring or rejecting what is heard and speaks of a sense of rebellion or resistance to authority or instruction of the party that refuses to listen. This individual is directly rejecting accountability and is showing a spirit unwilling to submit to authority. **The church** ([ekkllesia/ecclesia](#)) is the local assembly of believers.

**Let him be** ([eimi](#)) > esto = [present imperative](#) to you as a Gentile (ethnikos) and a tax collector ([telones](#)) - This command (note present tense calling for continual exclusion) calls for spiritual estrangement and exclusion from fellowship, or what some might call "excommunication." Since they are refusing to submit to Biblical authority (and God's appointed representatives, such as elders), they are essentially to be treated like the pagans who were godless or like tax-collectors who were greatly detested. Of course the door of fellowship is always open to the one who repents of his sin and acknowledges that before the church.

**C H Spurgeon Commentary** - Men capable of injuring their fellows are often so hardened that they reject the kindest expostulation. If a brother acts in this way, shall we give him up? No, we must make a filial effort: Tell it unto the church. The whole assembly of the faithful must at last hear the case, and they must plead with him. He is to have an opportunity of hearing the judgment and advice of the whole brotherhood. Should this last attempt fail if he neglect to hear the church, he must be left as incorrigible. No pains and penalties are affixed. The brother is left to himself: he is regarded as being like the rest of the unbelieving world. This is the utmost stretch of our severity. He is one who needs converting, like the Gentiles outside; but towards even a heathen man and a publican we have kindly feelings; for we seek their salvation, and we seek that of the excommunicated brother in the same way. In all probability, the obstinate friend will ridicule the action of the community; and yet there is some possibility that he will be impressed thereby, and led to a better mind. At any rate, from the first personal visit of the injured brother down to the last act of disownment, nothing has been done vindictively, but all has been affectionately carried out, with the view of setting the brother right. The trespasser who will not be reconciled has incurred much guilt by resisting the attempts of love, made in obedience to the command of the great Head of the church.

**NET NOTE** - To treat him like a Gentile or a tax collector means not to associate with such a person. The tax collectors would bid to collect taxes for the Roman government and then add a surcharge, which they kept. Since tax collectors worked for Rome, they were viewed as traitors to their own people and were not well liked.

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**Refuses to listen** (3878) ([parakouo](#) from **para** = aside, beside, alongside, implying error hence "hear wrongly" + [akouo](#) = to hear) means to hear amiss, to hear slightly, to hear inattentively, failure to listen properly. It describes hearing what is not intended for one to hear, thus overhearing or hearing something unintentionally (Mk 5:36). Describes being unwilling to hear, thus refusing to listen or disregarding (Mt 18:17).

**Gilbrant** The word means "to hear accidentally," "to eavesdrop," "to hear imperfectly," or "to take no heed of." In the Koine Greek, such as is found in the papyri, the word is rarely used (*Moulton-Milligan*). In the **Septuagint** the word surfaces seven times, four of which are found in Esther where it means "refuse to hear, obey, or observe" (Esther 3:3; 4:14; 7:4). The other reference is in Isaiah 65:12, where God promised

punishment to those who “refused to listen” (cf. Tobit 3:4). In the **New Testament** parakouō means “refuse to listen” or to simply “overhear” something. Mark 5:36 uses the word to mean “overhear.” Jesus overheard a message that was not intended for Him; He responded to the bad news with His famous “fear not” exhortation. He did not ignore the matter, He confronted the issue. In the passage on church discipline (Matthew 18:17), parakouō is used twice of a person who refuses to listen to the charges being brought against him. Thus he disobeys the exhortations to reform and to make proper amends. ([Complete Biblical Library](#))

**PARAKOUO** Matt. 18:17; Mk. 5:36

**PARAKOUO IN SEPTUAGINT** - Est. 3:3; Est. 3:8; Est. 4:14; Est. 7:4; Isa. 65:12;

**Gentile** (1482) (**ethnikos** from **ethnos** = nation, a group of people) **Ethnikos** is an adjective that in the NT conveys the sense of heathen, those who are unconnected with the Jewish people and the God of salvation. Pagans is the idea in each of these texts, and this especially refers to the Gentiles in contrast to the Jews. **Ethnikos** refers to someone outside the covenant people of Israel, usually indicating those who were not part of God's chosen people under the Old Covenant. By extension, **ethnikos** can imply someone who practices idolatry or lives without the knowledge of the one true God.

**ETHNIKOS - 4V -Gentile(1), Gentiles(3)**. Matt. 5:47; Matt. 6:7; Matt. 18:17; 3 Jn. 1:7

**Tax collector** (publican) (5057) **telones** from **telos** = tax + **onéomai** = to buy) means a reaper of the taxes or customs, tax-collector, one who pays to the government a certain sum for the privilege of collecting the taxes and customs of a district. The public revenues of the Greeks and Romans were usually farmed out. Among the latter, the purchasers were chiefly of the equestrian order and were distinguished as being of a higher class because they rode horses, or they were at least persons of wealth and rank like Zacchaeus who is called the chief tax collector (architelones [754] in Lu 19:2). These farmers also had subcontractors or employed agents who collected the taxes and customs at the gates of cities, in seaports, on public ways and bridges. These, too, were called **telomnai** (pl.), publicans, or eklégontes (n.f.), (ek [1537], out of, + légo [3004], in its original sense meaning to collect), those who collected out of the people. Such publicans in countries subject to the Roman Empire were the objects of hatred and detestation so that none but persons of worthless character were likely to be found in this employment.

While **tax collectors** were hated by the Jews, it was not a crime to be a tax collector. The crime was to in defrauding and extorting the people which usually "went with the territory!" When the tax collectors came to John the Baptist to be baptized, it is notable that he did not tell them to quit their jobs but he told them to “Collect no more than what you have been ordered to.” (Lk 3:13<sup>±</sup>). Jesus Himself affirmed the propriety and legality of paying taxes when He commanded "render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." (Lk 20:25<sup>±</sup>).

**John MacArthur** gives this background on **tax collectors** - The Roman occupation of Israel involved more than just a military presence; the nation was also subject to Roman taxation. The taxes in Galilee, for example, were forwarded by tax collectors to Herod Antipas, and by him to Rome. Antipas sold tax franchises to the highest bidder, and such franchises were a lucrative business. Tax collectors had a certain amount that they were required to collect, and whatever they collected beyond that they were permitted to keep (cf. Luke 3:12-13). In addition to the poll tax (on everyone, including slaves), income tax (about one percent), and land tax (one tenth of all grain, and one fifth of all wine and fruit), there were taxes on the transport of goods, letters, produce, using roads, crossing bridges, and almost anything else the rapacious, greedy minds of the tax collectors could think of. All of that left plenty of room for larceny, extortion, exploitation, and even loan sharking, as tax collectors loaned money at exorbitant interest to those who were unable to pay their taxes. Tax collectors also employed thugs to physically intimidate people into paying, and to beat up those who refused. (See [Luke Commentary](#))

**TELONES - 20V** - Matt. 5:46; Matt. 9:10; Matt. 9:11; Matt. 10:3; Matt. 11:19; Matt. 18:17; Matt. 21:31; Matt. 21:32; Mk. 2:15; Mk. 2:16; Lk. 3:12; Lk. 5:27; Lk. 5:29; Lk. 5:30; Lk. 7:29; Lk. 7:34; Lk. 15:1; Lk. 18:10; Lk. 18:11; Lk. 18:13

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**Norman Geisler** (Source: [When Cultists Ask](#)) - MATTHEW 18:17—Does this verse refer to the visible authority of the Roman Catholic church on earth?

**MISINTERPRETATION:** Roman Catholics claim that the authority Jesus granted to his disciples here is invested in the Catholic church today as the visible representative of Christ on earth.

**CORRECTING THE MISINTERPRETATION:** Jesus said in Matthew 18:17: “If he [the offender] refuses to listen to them [the offended and his witnesses, vv. 15–16], tell it to the church” (NIV). But this is far short of the Roman Catholic claim that this proves

the divine authority of the Roman See. "The church" referred to was a local assembly of believers, such as they were no doubt accustomed to having in their local synagogue. There is no reference here to a universal (catholic) church.

The New Testament church as a united, gifted, and empowered body of believers did not come into existence until the Day of Pentecost (Acts 1:8; 2:1–5, 42–47). So, whatever "church" means in the context of Matthew 18, it does not refer to what Roman Catholics mean by a visible church which administers the sacraments and infallibly teaches and disciplines the faithful.

Matthew 18 does not speak of any universal apostolic authority to settle all disputes of faith and practice. It refers only to cases involving "sins" and "faults" by which one "brother" has offended another (18:15). This falls short of what Catholics claim for the divine authority of the visible Roman church. Even if this text spoke about the need for submission to God-ordained authority in all matters of doctrine and conduct (which it does not), it would not support the Catholic argument for a visible church. For clearly this passage does not show that this authority is to be found in the visible Roman Catholic church, as opposed to other visible churches, some of which, Eastern Orthodoxy, are even older.

**Matthew 18:18 "Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."**

- Mt 16:19+ Jn 20:23+ Ac 15:23-31 1Co 5:4,5 2Co 2:10 Rev 3:7,8

### Related Passages:

Matthew 16:19+ "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

John 20:23+ "If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained."

Depiction of Binding/Loosing on Earth  
What is Already Bound/Loosed in Heaven

## HEAVENLY AUTHORITY REFLECTED ON EARTH

Other titles for this verse might be "Earthly Actions, Heavenly Realities" "Stewarding Heaven's Authority on Earth" "The Responsibility of Binding and Loosing" "Reflecting Heaven's Justice on Earth" "What Heaven Binds, Earth Reflects" "Heaven's Will Made Visible on Earth" "Heaven's Verdict, Earth's Confirmation"

**Truly (amen) I say to you** - Note that **Truly (amen)** indicates this can be fully trusted. Note also that **you** is plural so the instruction to bind and loose was for all the disciples, not just Peter (Mt 16:19+). And keep the context in mind, for Jesus is still talking about instruction in church discipline.

**Amplified** - "Whatever you bind [forbid, declare to be improper and unlawful] on earth will have [already] been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose [permit, declare lawful] on earth will have [already] been loosed in heaven."

**Wuest** expanded translation: and whatever you bind on earth [forbid to be done], shall have been already bound [forbidden to be done] in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth [permit to be done], shall have already been loosed in heaven [permitted to be done]."

Mt 18:18 and Mt 16:19+ are very similar except that Mt 18:18 is addressed to the group of disciples whereas Mt 16:19+ is addressed only to Peter.

**Whatever you bind (deo) on earth (ge) shall have been bound (deo) in heaven (ouranos) ; and whatever you loose (luo) on earth (ge) shall have been loosed ( luo) in heaven (ouranos)** - The expressions **shall be bound in heaven** and **shall be loosed in heaven** are examples in Greek of the periphrastic future perfect passive construction and should, therefore, be translated "will have been bound already" and "will have been loosed already" in heaven. In other words, pronouncement of "binding" or "loosing" is dependent upon what heaven has already willed, rather than earth's giving direction to heaven. I agree with Bruce Barton, that in the present context, "The "binding" and "loosing" refer to the decisions of the church in conflicts and discipline (ED: just discussed in Mt 18:15-17)." (See [Life Application Commentary - P83](#) or [borrow](#))

*When the church follows Christ's pattern for discipline, it conforms its decisions to what God has already done and thereby receives Heaven's approval and authority.*

**MacArthur** adds that "The idea is not that God is compelled to conform to the church's decisions but that, when the church follows Christ's pattern for discipline, it conforms its decisions to what God has already done and thereby receives heaven's approval and authority." Perfect passives are also used in John 20:23+ in regard to forgiving or retaining sins. Believers have authority to declare that Sins are either forgiven or not forgiven when that declaration is based on the teaching of God's Word. If a person has received Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, the church can tell him with perfect confidence that his sins are **loosed**, that is, forgiven, because he has met God's condition for forgiveness, namely, trust in His Son. If, on the other hand, a person refuses to receive Christ as Savior and acknowledge Him as Lord, the church can tell him with equal confidence that his sins are **bound**, that is, *not* forgiven, because he has not met God's condition for forgiveness. (See [Matthew Commentary - Page 137](#))

*The expressions "bind" and "loose" were common to Jewish legal phraseology meaning to declare something forbidden or to declare it allowed.*

-- [Gotquestions](#)

**Broadus** - Bind and loose, in the Talmud and other Rabbinical writings (Lightf., Wet., Wün., Edersh.), signify to interpret and apply the law and traditions on any subject with strictness or with laxity, and hence in general to forbid or allow. The strict school of Shammai is represented as binding many things which the school of Hillel loosed. Comp. on Mt 19:3. In Rabbinical phrase it would be said that in Acts 15:10 Peter advocated loosing what the Judaizers wished to bind. (Matthew 16 Commentary)

**Grant Osborne** - The passive verbs used here are divine passives (**ED**: "shall have been bound" and "shall have been loosed"), which means that God is behind the community's decisions regarding forgiveness or condemnation of its wandering sheep/members. (See [Matthew - Page 687](#))

*Jesus delegates authority to human leaders in the church who are called to govern his church on earth, under his ultimate authority, through the application of his Word.*

-- [ESV Study Bible](#) page 1854 (Borrow)

In another note on Matthew 18, **Broadus** writes that Jesus "is directly addressing the disciples alone (Mt 18:1), probably only the Twelve; but He has just mentioned the action of a church, and so the reference here seems to be not to apostolic action, but to church action (Bleek, Keim). Whatever Christ's people, assembled in their organized congregation or church, may decide, is ratified in heaven, i.e., by God—unless, of course, the decision be in itself wrong. The point is that the church has God's authority to decide. The reference here is especially to the settlement of a difficulty between brethren, but the statement is a general one. The power some time before given to Peter (Mt 16:19+), is now clearly given to others; the only question being whether it is to the apostles or to a church."

**Guzik** - "Binding" and "loosing" were administrative terms in daily Jewish life; whenever a Jew came up against the Law of Moses, that Jewish person was either "bound" or "loosed" in regard to that law. To **loose** was to permit; to **bind** was to prohibit. To **loose** was to free from the law, to **bind** was to put under the law. "Their regular sense, which any Jew would recognize was to **allow** and to **forbid**. To **bind** something was to declare it forbidden; to **loose** was to declare it allowed. These were the regular phrases for taking decisions in regard to the law." (Barclay)

**John MacArthur** helps understand what Jesus is saying - Then He said it to the whole duly constituted assembly of redeemed people. You mean we (BELIEVERS TODAY) can go into the world and say your sins are bound on you, your sins are loosed from you, your sins are forgiven, your sins are not forgiven, you can do that, you can't do that? What authority. That's right. You say, "Well, now wait a minute. Where did we get that authority? How in the world can we have that authority?" I'll tell you how. Very simple. Where is all of the truth needed to apply to every situation? It's in the Word of God, isn't it? It says what you're doing shall have already been done, where? In heaven. You want to know how we can know what heaven is approving and disapproving? It's right here (IN THE BIBLE), isn't it? I have the authority, if a person comes up to me, I can say to that person, "Have you received Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior?" If he says yes, I say then your sins are forgiven, your sins are **loosed**. If someone says to me, "I have never received Jesus Christ," I have the authority based on the Word of God to say to that individual your sins are retained, your sins are not forgiven. And I have the authority to know that what I said to that individual, heaven has already said because heaven has revealed it right here (IN THE BIBLE). That's the authority. It is not some authority isolated from the Word of God. ([Sermon](#))

**Donald Hagner** - Here the binding and loosing have to do directly with matters of church discipline, whereas in 16:19 they concern matters of conduct more generally. However, in both instances the ultimate issue concerns membership in the community. In the

present instance, which addresses the case of one who has “sinned” (Mt 18:15), the connection with John 20:23 (“If you forgive [φ τῆ] the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain [κρατ τῆ] the sins of any, they are retained”) becomes more apparent. Loosing is the equivalent of forgiving, binding of retaining. The leadership thus has the ability to make decisions concerning unrepentant sinners in the community—decisions that carry authority such that they are said to be likewise fixed in heaven. At stake is nothing less than the ultimate welfare of the offending individual. (Borrow [Word Biblical Commentary page 532](#))

**C H Spurgeon Commentary** - Our Lord had inaugurated the church by handing its keys to Peter as representing the whole brotherhood; and now he distinctly recognizes those keys as being in the hands of the whole church. Verily I say unto you, “Whatsoever ye shall bind.” Those who bind are all the disciples, or the whole of the church which had been called in to make peace between the two brethren Each church has the keys of its own door. When those keys are rightly turned by the assembly below, the act is ratified above: that which they bind on earth shall be bound in heaven. If, by God’s grace, erring brethren repent, and are freed from the censure of the assembly, the Lord on high sanctions the deed, according to his word — Whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. This is to be understood with the limitation that it is really a church of Christ which acts, that it acts in his name, and rightly administers his laws. A deep solemnity surrounds the binding and loosing of true Christian assemblies. It is no light thing to act as a church, and no little thing to be put forth from it, or to be restored again to its fellowship. Our Lord made this clear by commencing with his authoritative preface — Verily I say unto you.

**Summary** - The church is entrusted with authority to make decisions regarding matters of sin, forgiveness, and discipline, reflecting heaven’s will. This authority is not arbitrary but aligns with God’s sovereignty and the guidance of His Word and Spirit. The phrase “*shall have been bound in heaven*” indicates that the church’s decisions must reflect what is already established in heaven. Binding reflects accountability for wrongdoing, while loosing involves forgiveness and restoration when repentance occurs. Approach issues of sin with love, fairness, and a focus on restoration and reconciliation rather than on punishment. The authority to bind and loose is not given to individuals alone but to the community of believers (the church) acting together under God’s direction. It is incumbent on the church to involve spiritually mature men in the decision-making processes regarding matters of discipline in order to ensure just and fair handling of these often delicate matters.

**John MacArthur** - Jesus’ promises in Mt 18:18,19 have suffered serious misinterpretation throughout the history of the church, the most extreme being the Roman Catholic doctrine that the church has the divine authority to forgive sin. Many charismatics use these promises—along with others, such as those of Matthew 7:7 and Mt 21:22—to claim from God every imaginable blessing and privilege just for the asking. (See [Matthew Commentary - Page 137](#))

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#### **QUESTION** [What does the Bible mean by binding and loosing? SEE VIDEO](#)

**ANSWER** - The concept of “binding and loosing” is taught in the Bible in Matthew 16:19+:

“I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

In this verse, Jesus is speaking directly to the apostle Peter and indirectly to the other apostles. Jesus’ words meant that Peter would have the right to enter the kingdom himself, that he would have general authority symbolized by the possession of the keys, and that preaching the gospel would be the means of opening the kingdom of heaven to all believers and shutting it against unbelievers. The book of Acts shows us this process at work. By his sermon on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14-40), Peter opened the door of the kingdom for the first time. The expressions “bind” and “loose” were common to Jewish legal phraseology meaning to declare something forbidden or to declare it allowed.

Peter and the other disciples were to continue Christ’s work on earth in preaching the gospel and declaring God’s will to men and they were armed with the same authority as He possessed. In Matthew 18:18, there is also a reference to the binding and loosing in the context of church discipline. The apostles do not usurp Christ’s lordship and authority over individual believers and their eternal destiny, but they do exercise the authority to discipline and, if necessary, excommunicate disobedient church members.

It’s not that the apostles were given the privilege of changing God’s mind, as if whatever they decided on earth would be duplicated in heaven; rather, they were encouraged that, as they moved forward in their apostolic duties, they would be fulfilling God’s plan in heaven. When the apostles “bound” something, or forbade it on earth, they were carrying out the will of God in the matter. When they “loosed” something, or allowed it on earth, they were likewise fulfilling God’s eternal plan. In both Matthew 16:19+ and Mt 18:18, the syntax of the Greek text makes the meaning clear: “Whatever thou mayest bind upon the earth shall be having been bound in the heavens, and whatever thou mayest loose upon the earth shall be having been loosed in the heavens” (Matthew 16:19+, Young’s Literal Translation). Or, as the Amplified Bible puts it, “Whatever you bind [forbid, declare to be improper and unlawful] on earth will have [already] been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose [permit, declare lawful] on earth will have [already] been loosed in heaven.”



Jesus taught that the apostles had a special task on earth. Their words of authority, as recorded in the New Testament epistles, reflect God's will for the church. When Paul declared an anathema on those who pervert the gospel, then we know that anathema was already declared in heaven (see Galatians 1:8–9).

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**QUESTION - [Is the Catholic concept of absolution biblical?](#) | [GotQuestions.org](#)**

**ANSWER** - One common definition of absolution is “the formal remission of sin imparted by a priest, as in the sacrament of penance.” The Roman Catholic Church centers its teaching on the need for absolution, and the priest's role in obtaining that forgiveness, on a single passage in the Gospel of John. “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; If you retain the sins of any, they are retained” (John 20:23+). But does this passage teach the necessity of the Catholic practice of absolution? Does the Bible speak of or condone the practice of absolution?

Regarding the forgiveness of sins, the Bible is clear that God alone can forgive sins (Mark 2:7; Luke 5:21), and Christ, being God, has the power to do so, but He never communicated any such power to His apostles, nor did they ever assume any such power to themselves or pretend to exercise it. In fact, it is the mark of antichrist to attempt anything of the kind because, in doing so, one usurps the divine prerogative and places himself in God's seat. Rather, John 20:23+ is to be understood only in a doctrinal or ministerial way, by preaching the full and free remission of sins through the blood of Christ, according to the riches of God's grace. To as many as repent of their sins and believe in Christ, all disciples of Christ can confidently declare that all their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake and to His glory.

In John 20:23+, Jesus is speaking directly to His disciples. It is important to note here that He is not just talking to the 11 apostles but also to other followers of Jesus called disciples (see Luke 24), as well as to all who would ever follow Him. This is important because the Catholic Church holds that only their priests (through a “passing of the absolution torch” called [apostolic succession](#)) have the authority to grant absolution.

***The Bible is clear: no priest is needed to mediate between God and man,  
“For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus”***

--1 Timothy 2:5+

***The Catholic teaching of absolution is not scriptural.***

If absolution from sin is the meaning of Jesus' words in John 20:23+, then we must ponder exactly what His intention was when He gave His followers authority to forgive sin (or not). Did He make them judges and invest in them power to pass judiciary sentence, granting or withholding divine pardon, as the Catholic Church teaches? Or did Jesus make them His ambassadors to proclaim forgiveness through faith in His name, as Christians believe? In other words, can a sinner receive forgiveness directly from God through faith, or must he avail himself of the Catholic priest's mediation? The Bible is clear: no priest is needed to mediate between God and man, “For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5). The Catholic teaching of absolution is not scriptural.

**Matthew 18:19 “Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven.”**

- **That if:** Mt 5:24 21:22 Mk 11:24 Jn 15:7,16 Ac 1:14 2:1,2 4:24-31 6:4 Ac 12:5 Eph 6:18-20 Php 1:19 Jas 5:14-16 1Jn 3:22 5:14-16 Rev 11:4-6
- **it shall:** Jn 14:13,14 16:23

**TWO TOGETHER  
ONE ANSWER**

**Again** (“furthermore”) **I say to you** - The adverb **again** (palin) links this verse with the previous discussion of church discipline (especially the “I tell you the truth of v18). “I say to you” is repeated 6x in Matthew 18 - Mt 18:3, 10, 13, 18, 19, 22.

This verse is frequently interpreted as related primarily to intercession of any type, but **John MacArthur** explains that “to interpret this verse as promising believers a blank check for anything they might agree to ask God for not only does not fit the context of church discipline but does violence to the rest of Scripture. Such an interpretation is tantamount to magic, in which God is automatically bound to grant the most foolish or sinful request, simply because two of His children conspire to ask Him for it. The idea flies in the face of God's sovereignty and completely undercuts the countless scriptural commands for believers' obedient submission to His will. (See [Matthew Commentary - Page 138](#))

**D A Carson** adds "These two verses (Mt 18:19-20) should not in this setting be taken as a promise regarding any prayer on which two or three believers agree (v. 20). Scripture is rich in prayer promises (Mt 21:22; John 14:13-14; 15:7-8, 16); but if this passage deals with prayer at all, it is restricted by the context and by the phrase *peri pantos pragmatos* (NIV, "about anything"), which should here be rendered "about any judicial matter": the word *pragma* often has that sense (cf. 1 Cor 6:1; BAGD, s.v.), a sense nicely fitting the argument in Matthew 18. (See [The Expositor's Bible Commentary - Abridged Edition](#))

**David Abernathy** in **An Exegetical Summary of Matthew 17-28** has this note summarizing more than 10 conservative commentaries - What specifically is being promised regarding answered prayer? In this setting it is not a promise regarding any prayer on which two or three believers agree. Jesus is referring to any judicial matter [EBC-D A Carson, NAC-C Blomberg]. This concerns prayers for guidance in matters of church discipline [CC-J. Gibbs, BECNT-David Turner, EBC, Lns-R C H Lenski, NAC, NIBC-R Mounce, NIGTC-J. Nolland, NTC-Wm Hendriksen, TH-Barclay Newman, TRT-M. Carlton, WBC-D. Hagner].

We do a disservice to the Scripture if we yank this verse out of context of matters of church discipline (Mt 18:15-18).

**That if (3rd class condition - note) two of you agree (sumphoneo ~ "symphony") on earth (ge) about anything** (literally "every [pas] matter = **pragma**) **that they may ask (aiteo) , it shall be done for them by My Father (pater) Who is in heaven (ouranos) -** Who are the **two**? Many think this applies to the two witness in Mt 18:16. To **agree** means to agree by talking a thing over. In other words they agree before the formulate their prayer. Regarding the matter of discipline, the **two will ask** for guidance. Lenski says "They will inquire as to what Christ's will is in the matter and will thus "ask" of him what he will be sure to give and will not ask amiss."

**Broadus** adds on agree that "The Greek word *sumphoneo* is used primarily of musical instruments that make the same sound, then of harmony, symphony, where the sounds agree, though not identical, then of agreement in general."

*"Many popular preachers misuse this (v19) as a prayer promise and teach that our prayers control God, who has to give us "whatever we ask for."*

-- Grant Osborne

**Grant Osborne** - even though some say this is a disconnected saying on prayer, it is not intended as such but as a further statement regarding the authority of the church and its leaders in discipline situations. So while "**ask for**" (*aiteo*) is often used of prayer in the NT, here it is specifically a prayer for wisdom and the Spirit's guidance in decisions regarding discipline.<sup>11</sup> Thus "any matter" (*pantos pragmatos*) is virtually synonymous with *pas rhema* in Mt 18:16, "every matter" that the church is facing in issues of discipline. The phrase here was commonly used in legal/judicial "matters", The earth/heaven contrast is pivotal. The "heavenly Father" is in sovereign control of all earthly matters, and the only guarantee that earthly concerns will work out occurs when they are placed under God's control. That is especially true in discipline issues, when God's guidance must be behind the church's decision. (See [Matthew - Page 687](#))

**David Turner** - The promises in Mt 18:19-20 of answered prayer and God's presence also refer to the solemn matter of the sinning brother. It is possible that the two who agree in Mt 18:19 are two members of a three-member court that represents the community (m. Sanhedrin 1:1; Hagner 1995:533). During the discipline process, the church may be assured that their deliberations on earth will be confirmed by their Father in heaven and that Jesus is present with them throughout the difficulties. (See [The Gospel of Matthew - The Gospel of Mark - Page 240](#))

**Donald Hagner** - What the disciples agree to on earth in disciplinary matters of the church may be taken as also the will of heaven. This promise is by its context thus **more restricted in character than those** of Mt 7:7 and Mt 21:22. (Borrow [Word Biblical Commentary page 532](#))

**C H Spurgeon Commentary** - 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.

**NET NOTE** - Grk "if two of you ... agree about whatever they ask, it will be done for them by my Father who is in heaven." The passive construction has been translated as an active one in keeping with contemporary English style, and the pronouns, which change from second person plural to third person plural in the Greek text, have been consistently translated as second person

plural.

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### QUESTION - [What are the keys of the kingdom?](#)

**ANSWER** - The biblical passage that makes reference to the “keys of the kingdom” is Matthew 16:19+. Jesus had asked His disciples who people thought He was. After hearing several of the more popular opinions, Jesus aimed His question directly at His disciples. Peter, responding for the twelve, acknowledged Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the Living God. After this great confession, Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:17–19).

Keys are used to lock or unlock doors. The specific doors Jesus has in mind in this passage are the doors to the [Kingdom of Heaven](#). Jesus is laying the foundation of His church (Ephesians 2:20). The disciples will be the leaders of this new institution, and Jesus is giving them the authority to, as it were, open the doors to heaven and invite the world to enter. At this point it is important to understand how, biblically speaking, one enters the Kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus said that, unless one is [born again](#), he will not see the Kingdom of Heaven (John 3:3). One is born again as the Holy Spirit works through the Word of God to bring about new life in a dead sinner. The content of the message is the substitutionary death of Christ and His subsequent resurrection (Romans 10:9–10). So the faithful preaching of the gospel is the key to the kingdom.

In Matthew 16:19+ Jesus is specifically addressing Peter, so it is significant that, in the book of Acts, Peter figures prominently in the “opening of doors” to three different groups of people so they can enter the Kingdom. In Acts 2, it is Peter who preaches in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost; about three thousand Jewish people are saved that day. Peter’s preaching had “unlocked the door” of heaven for the Jews. Later, in Acts 8, the Samaritans believe the gospel and receive the Holy Spirit; again, Peter (and John) was present for this event. Peter had “unlocked the door” for the Samaritans. Then, in Acts 10, Peter brings the gospel to a Roman centurion’s household, and they, too, receive the Holy Spirit. Peter had “unlocked the door” for the Gentiles. The “keys” that Jesus had given him worked in each case.

Of course, keys can be used to lock doors as well as open them. Part of the gospel message is that faith is necessary. Without faith in Christ, the door to heaven is shut and barred (see John 3:18). As the apostles preached the gospel, those who responded in faith and repentance were granted access to the Kingdom of Heaven; yet those who continued to harden their hearts and reject the gospel of God’s saving grace were shut out of the Kingdom (Acts 8:23).

The context of Matthew 16 also refers to a [binding and loosing](#).” To better understand this concept, we turn to Matthew 18:15–20, where Jesus gives the guidelines for church discipline, using the same “binding and loosing” language we find in Matthew 16. The apostles were not to usurp Christ’s authority over individual believers and their eternal destiny, but they were to exercise authority to discipline erring believers and, if necessary, excommunicate disobedient church members. Based on God’s Word, believers today can declare an unrepentant sinner to be unsaved (“bound”) and a repentant believer in Jesus Christ to be saved (“loosed”). The binding or loosing, based on one’s rejection or acceptance of the gospel, reflects heaven’s perspective on the matter. In heaven, Christ ratifies what is done in His name and in obedience to His Word on earth.

God’s will is that sinners be granted access to heaven through the righteousness of Christ. Consider Jesus’ warning to the Pharisees: “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in” (Matthew 23:13). If the gospel message is distorted or ignored, or if unrepentant sin is not adequately disciplined, the doors to the Kingdom of Heaven are being shut in people’s faces.

**Matthew 18:20 “For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.”**

- **two:** Ge 49:10 Jn 20:19,26 1Co 5:4 1Th 1:1 Philemon 1:2
- **there:** Mt 28:20 Ex 20:24 Zec 2:5 Jn 8:58 Rev 1:11-13 2:1 21:3

## IN THE CONTEXT OF DISCIPLINE JESUS IS PRESENT

**For** ([gar](#)) - Term of explanation, explaining the basis for what was just stated in Mt 18:19.

**Where two or three have gathered together** ([sunago](#)) **in My name** ([onoma](#)), **I am there in their midst** - Remember that context is

king for accurate interpretation and here we are still in the context of the decision of the church regarding discipline of a sinning member. Some think the **two or three** are the two or three witnesses who confronted the sinning brother (in Mt 18:16, 19).

**Grant Osborne** - To gather "in My Name" (ἐς τὸ μὲν ὄνομα) means to be in union with Jesus, part of his community, and under his authority (cf. 7:22; 10:22; 18:5). So Jesus is especially present among them, not just metaphorically but through the Spirit of Christ in their midst. This does not mean Jesus is with us only corporately and not individually, for as in 1 Cor 5:4 we can know that "the power of the Lord Jesus is present" with us. ([Matthew - Page 688](#))

*This verse is also frequently misinterpreted...*

**MacArthur** - Jesus also assures His people that He Himself acts with them when they work to purify the church: For wheretwo or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst. Not only does the Father confirm discipline when it is administered according to His Word, but the Son adds His own divine confirmation. This verse is also frequently misinterpreted, though not with such serious error as in the misinterpretations of the two previous verses. **To use this statement to claim the Lord's presence at a small worship service or prayer meeting does not fit the context of church discipline and is superfluous. Christ is always present with His people, even with a lone believer totally separated from fellow Christians by prison walls or by hundreds of miles.** The context demands that the two or three are witnesses in the process of discipline. To ask or to do anything in God's name is not to utter His name but to ask and to work according to His divine will and character. For the witnesses to have gathered in His name is therefore for them to have faithfully performed their work of verifying the repentance or impenitence of a sinning brother or sister on the Lord's behalf. When the church gathers in the Lord's name and for His cause and glory, it must be engaged in self-purifying ministry under His power and authority, and with His heavenly confirmation and partnership. (See [Matthew Commentary - Page 138](#))

*God is present with any legitimate meeting of His people, whatever its size, and there is no need to mishandle Scripture to prove it.*

**David Turner** agrees that Mt 18:20 is frequently taken out of the church discipline context and misinterpreted writing "The flippancy in which 18:19 is often cited to assure small meetings of Christians that God is with them is disturbing because it twists a solemn passage into a cliché. No doubt God is present with any legitimate meeting of His people, whatever its size, and there is no need to mishandle Scripture to prove it. Taking this solemn passage out of context cheapens it and profanes the sacred duty of the church to maintain the harmony of its interpersonal relationships. (See [Matthew Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament](#))

**C H Spurgeon Commentary** - The presence of Jesus is the fixed center of the assembly, the warrant for its coming together, and the power with which it acts. The church, however small, is gathered in his name. Jesus is there first: I am in the midst of them. We are gathered together by the holy impulses of Christian brotherhood, and our meeting is in the name of Jesus, and therefore there he is; near, not only to the leader, or to the minister, but in the midst, and therefore near to each worshipper. We meet to do him honor, to hear his Word, to stir each other up to obey his will; and he is there to aid us. However small the number, we make a quorum; and what is done according to the laws of Christ is done with his authority. Hence it is that there is great power in united prayer from such persons: it is Jesus pleading in his saints. This should prevent Christian men from giving or taking offense; for if Jesus be in our midst, our peace must not be broken by strife.

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**QUESTION - [What is the meaning of "where two or three are gathered" SEE VIDEO](#)**

**ANSWER** - Matthew 18:20 is often used to give legitimacy to a small prayer meeting or church service. The pastor might say something like

*"There are just a few of us here tonight, but we are glad that we don't have to have a huge crowd for God to listen to us. After all, Jesus promises, 'Where two or more are gathered in my name, I am there.'"*

This sounds comforting until it is analyzed and taken to its logical conclusion. What if there are not two? What if there is only one who is praying in isolation? Does that mean Jesus is not there? If the answer is "no," then we come back to asking, "What does Matthew 18:20 really mean?"

We will take a look at the context of "where two or three are gathered." The NIV groups Matthew 18:15–20 together as one paragraph. The paragraph divisions, of course, are not an inspired part of the text, as the originals were written without any spaces. However, the NIV paragraph division is based on the content of the passage and seems to be right on target in this case.

Matthew 18:15–17 tells how to deal with sin in the church; it is a passage on what is commonly called ["church discipline"](#):

“If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.”

Verse 18 then gives assurance that, when this process is followed, God is working in it:

“Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

And then, verses 19–20 give a final assurance:

“Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”

*The context of “where two or three are gathered together in my name”  
....has to do with church discipline and the confrontation of the wayward sinner*

The context of “where two or three are gathered together in my name” (Matthew 18:20KJV) has to do with church discipline and the confrontation of the wayward sinner. In verse 16, the principle has been invoked of needing “two or three witnesses” in making an accusation (cf. Deuteronomy 19:15). It seems that the mention of “two or three” in verse 20 echoes that principle; the “two or three” are confronting sin in the church.

Jesus cites the Old Testament Law that said an accusation from a single individual is insufficient to bring action in a criminal case. However, two or three witnesses who agree are sufficient to establish a matter. The law in Deuteronomy regulated a human court. Jesus applies this to the “heavenly court.” When the erring brother or sister in the church is confronted by “two or three witnesses” and refuses to repent, these witnesses bring the matter before the church. Jesus assures us that, when this happens, it is not just the witnesses who are bringing action against the wrongdoer, but He is there with them. Church discipline is sanctioned by both the Father and the Son. This is important because we live in an age when it is not fashionable to confront or “judge” anyone’s lifestyle as sinful. Those who do step forward to call out sin in the church can take heart in the fact that they are not acting alone; Christ is with them in the endeavor.

*The two or three who gather in Jesus’ name are not coming together in a prayer meeting or a worship service but in a matter of church discipline.*

The process of church discipline calls for “two or three,” and this seems to be the best application for this verse. The two or three who gather in Jesus’ name are not coming together in a prayer meeting or a worship service but in a matter of church discipline. The two or three witnesses have confronted the sinner in a spirit of humility (see Galatians 6:1), and the sinner has not repented. So the two or three take the matter to the Lord in prayer and then confidently move forward with the process outlined in Scripture, knowing that they are not being bullies or busybodies, for God endorses their efforts—Jesus is “with them.”

**Matthew 18:21 Then Peter came and said to Him, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?”**

- till: Mt 18:15 Lu 17:3,4

## **PETER THOUGHT HE WAS BEING GENEROUS**

Remember the context - Jesus has just finished a discussion of church discipline and binding and loosing (forgiving) as might occur in a situation in which a brother sins against another brother.

*Forgiveness is not a matter of mathematics. Just forget the arithmetic.*

*It’s a matter of the heart, not of the head.*

--[Adrian Rogers](#)

Then Peter ([petros](#)) came ([proserchomai](#)) and said to Him, “Lord ([kurios](#)), how often shall my brother ([adelphos](#)) sin ([hamartano](#)) against me and I forgive ([aphiemi](#)) him? Up to seven times?” - By now it is very likely Peter used the word **Lord** ([kurios](#)) with an increasing awareness of the divinity and Lordship of Jesus. In the Jewish tradition of Peter’s time, rabbis commonly taught that forgiving someone **up to three times** was sufficient. This idea was derived from interpretations of passages in Amos (cf

Amos 2:4, 6), where God forgives Israel's sins "three times" before declaring judgment. Peter thought he was being generous by using the number "seven" (for it speaks of completeness and perfection in many Biblical contexts) to describe how often he needed to bestow forgiveness on a repeat offender. After all, he has more than doubled the normal cultural expectation! Notice also that even the way Peter phrases his question ("**how often?**"), he believes there is a limit and seeks to know Jesus' limit on forgiveness. It's like Peter is asking "When is enough forgiveness enough!" We can also see behind Peter's question is surely the fact he is grappling with the tension between justice (accountability for repeated wrongs) and mercy (continually extending forgiveness). He assumes there is a limit to the mercy one is called to bestow on a repeat offender. Don't we all have a bit of "Peter" in us?

*Have many of us grace enough  
even for a sevenfold forgiveness?*

**C H Spurgeon Commentary** - Peter's question was opportune, giving a further opening for our Lord to enlarge upon the removal of offenses. Peter takes it for granted that he would forgive, and he only wishes to know how far he may carry this forgiveness. Doubtless he thought that he had given great latitude when he suggested till seven times. Probably he felt that he would need great grace to get so far as that in the patient endurance of his brother's sinning against him. It is true Peter did not go far enough; but do we go as far? Are not some professors very mindful of small grievances? Have many of us grace enough even for a sevenfold forgiveness?

**NET NOTE** - Here the term "brother" means "fellow believer" or "fellow Christian" (cf. BDAG 18 s.v. δελφός 2.a), whether male or female. Concerning the familial connotations, see also the note on the first occurrence of this term in v. 15.

*Though we live wholly on mercy and forgiveness,  
we are backward to forgive the offences of our brethren.*

**Matthew Henry Concise** - Mt 18:21-35. Though we live wholly on mercy and forgiveness, we are backward to forgive the offences of our brethren. This parable shows how much provocation God has from his family on earth, and how untoward his servants are. There are three things in the parable: 1. The master's wonderful clemency. The debt of sin is so great, that we are not able to pay it. See here what every sin deserves; this is the wages of sin, to be sold as a slave. It is the folly of many who are under strong convictions of their sins, to fancy they can make God satisfaction for the wrong they have done him. 2. The servant's unreasonable severity toward his fellow-servant, notwithstanding his lord's clemency toward him. Not that we may make light of wronging our neighbour, for that is also a sin against God; but we should not aggravate our neighbour's wronging us, nor study revenge. Let our complaints, both of the wickedness of the wicked, and of the afflictions of the afflicted, be brought to God, and left with him. 3. The master reproved his servant's cruelty.

*The greatness of sin magnifies the riches of pardoning mercy;  
and the comfortable sense of pardoning mercy,  
does much to dispose our hearts to forgive our brethren.*

The greatness of sin magnifies the riches of pardoning mercy; and the comfortable sense of pardoning mercy, does much to dispose our hearts to forgive our brethren. We are not to suppose that God actually forgives men, and afterwards reckons their guilt to them to condemn them; but this latter part of the parable shows the false conclusions many draw as to their sins being pardoned, though their after-conduct shows that they never entered into the spirit, or experienced the sanctifying grace of the gospel. We do not forgive our offending brother aright, if we do not forgive from the heart. Yet this is not enough; we must seek the welfare even of those who offend us. How justly will those be condemned, who, though they bear the Christian name, persist in unmerciful treatment of their brethren! (ED: HENRY ALLUDES TO THE JUST CONDEMNATION OF THOSE WHO PROFESS CHRIST BUT DO NOT POSSESS CHRIST IN A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP) The humbled sinner relies only on free, abounding mercy, through the ransom of the death of Christ. Let us seek more and more for the renewing grace of God, to teach us to forgive others as we hope for forgiveness from him.

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#### **D L Moody —Matthew 18:21, 22.**

PETER did not seem to think that he was in danger of falling into sin; his question was, How often should I forgive my brother? But very soon we hear that Peter has fallen. I can imagine that when he did fall, the sweet thought came to him of what the Master had said. The voice of sin may be loud, but the voice of forgiveness is louder.

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#### **"BROTHERED TO FORGIVE"**

I have read that when a sea-worm perforates the shell of an oyster, the oyster immediately closes the wound with a pearl. I think it is something like that which happens when God helps me to forgive a man who has wronged me to the very heart. For thine own sake, forgive. And for thy brother's sake, forgive. "What am I brothered for?" says George Macdonald, "if not to forgive" (Matt. 18:21,

How oft shalt thou forgive thy brother?

That depends:

How often has Thy Lord forgiven thee?

Thy debt was great; it could not greater be,

And yet, thou art forgiven and set free!

Wilt thou not then forgive thy brother

Who offends?

Or, wilt thou thrust him in the darksome jail,

And cause him at thy ignominy to quail

Until he pays thee all thou dost entail?

If thou wilt not forgive thy brother.

What impends?

As thou hast done, thy Lord will do to you:

He'll punish thee till thou hast paid His due;

In all His dealings God is righteous, true.

The Lord taught His disciples to pray, saying, "Forgive us our trespasses even as we forgive those who trespass against us." How could we pray otherwise? If we forgive not men their trespasses, think ye that our Heavenly Father will forgive us?

How great was the debt which we owed our Lord. We could never pay it. He, however, by His grace, and upon the merits of the blood of His own Son, freely forgave us. Shall we, the forgiven, not forgive?

By comparison the debts which are due to us are nothing when laid side by side with the debts we are due to Him.

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God. Let us love our enemies, for God loved us when we were enemies.

Forgive? I'll go my foe one better:

If he hungers, him I'll feed,

If he thirsts, I'll meet his need,

I'll forgive, as God to me

Didst forgive iniquity.

Forgive? He owes me but a little:

How can I God's love forget,

And refuse to pay my debt?

Help me Lord, Thy love to know,

Unto all Thy mercies show.

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### **P G Matthew —Matthew 18:21**

God desires that we live healthy lives. In Exodus 15:26, God told his people, "I am the Lord, who heals you," and in 1 Peter 2:24 we read, "By his wounds you have been healed." But no one can live a truly healthy life unless he first repents, puts his faith in Jesus Christ, and then begins to forgive others. When we receive forgiveness from God for our infinite sin against him and then practice a life of forgiveness toward our fellow believers, including our spouse and children, then we will enjoy health of body and soul.

In ancient Judaism there was a limit placed on the number of times a person had to forgive another. In fact, the rabbis taught that God would forgive his people only up to three times. Peter came to Jesus with this idea that there is a limit to forgiveness. How did Jesus respond? He rejected outright the idea of putting any limits on forgiveness. "Not seven times, but seventy-seven times," Jesus replied. Jesus' answer spoke to the core issue behind Peter's question, which is man's basic unwillingness to forgive others.

Man needs forgiveness continuously from God, and I am sure none of us wants to put any limits on the forgiveness we receive. But we often want to place constraints when it comes to our forgiving those who have sinned against us. Jesus insists, however, that we forgive without limit, just as God forgives us. If we have experienced the infinite forgiveness of God for our infinite sin, then forgiveness will be a way of life for us. Just as we receive forgiveness from God for the sins we commit daily, so we must daily forgive those who sin against us. If we refuse to do so, we will experience divine chastisement in this life.

I believe that some Christians are ill because they will not forgive their husbands or wives or others in the church. Perhaps you are currently experiencing such sickness in your spirit, mind, or body. Have you ever considered that your malady may be the result of

your unwillingness to forgive someone? If you are so convicted, I urge you to repent of this serious sin today and begin to live a healthy life of unlimited forgiveness.

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**Adrian Rogers** - This is an excerpt from Dr Rogers sermon Matthew 18:21 - [THE POWER OF FORGIVENESS](#) - scroll down to page 1376 for the full sermon

*"I believe that the sin that is causing Christians more difficulty than any other is the sin of an unforgiving spirit."*

I remind you there was an evangelist who was the Billy Graham of his day, Dwight L. Moody. Moody did not have a seminary education, but he had a great mind and a penetrating insight into the things of God and human nature. Dwight L. Moody said, "I believe that the sin that is causing Christians more difficulty than any other is the sin of an unforgiving spirit." And, he said he believed that that sin, more than any other sin, was holding back the power of God in prayer in the hearts and lives of people. Now, I cannot prove that he is right. I think, most likely, he is. But, for him to even say that means that forgiveness is a problem that many people have not properly dealt with.....

Now, let me say that many people in this building and outside this building who are listening by radio are chained in a prison. And, some are chained there by the chains of guilt, and others are chained by the chains of bitterness. Now, those who are chained by the chains of guilt are chained there because they have done wrong and they have not yet gotten forgiveness. Those who are chained by bitterness are chained in a prison, not because they have done wrong and have not yet gotten forgiveness, but somebody has wronged them and they have not forgiven that individual. And, I want to speak to those who may not yet have forgiven somebody who has wronged you, and I want to say that bitterness is a terrible prison. I believe that bitterness has caused murders. It has caused wars. It has caused divided churches. It has caused divorces. And, we need to learn how to deal with bitterness. We need to learn how to forgive one another.

Now, one of God's greatest gifts to us is forgiveness. Thank God He has forgiven us. Thank God for His grace that forgives us. Now, to forgive literally means "to release a debt." When we sin, we sin against God, and heaven has sued us for damages. There's a debt that we cannot pay. When forgiveness comes, the debt is cancelled. If, for example, you owe me a thousand dollars, and you cannot pay, and I say, "I forgive the debt," it cost me a thousand dollars to forgive that debt. There are no free pardons. Forgiveness costs. The forgiver forgives the forgivee, and the forgiver pays the debt. And so, there are no cheap forgivenesses. When the Lord Jesus Christ forgave us, it was not cheap. Although our forgiveness was free, there was a price paid. For example, Ephesians chapter 1, verse 7 says: "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace." (Ephesians 1:7) Remember what we said? Grace is "God's riches at Christ's expense." It cost the precious blood of Jesus for God to forgive us.

Here is the outline of the topics covered in this sermon

- I. The Reasons for Forgiveness
  - A. We Should Forgive One Another, Because God Has Forgiven Us
  - B. If You Do Not Forgive, You Shut Out the Forgiveness of God
  - C. An Unforgiving Spirit Will Do Us Great Emotional Damage
  - D. Forgiveness Destroys a Broken Fellowship
- II. The Requirements for Forgiveness
  - A. Forgive Freely
  - B. Forgive Fully
  - C. Forgive Finally
- III. The Results of Forgiveness
  - A. Release
  - B. Reconciliation
  - C. Revival

Conclusion

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Matthew.18:21,22 Otto the Great, a 10th-century king of Germany, once attended services at the cathedral of Frankfort. As he entered, he was approached by an emaciated man dressed in sackcloth. Pleading for mercy, his hands raised in prayer, the poor penitent fell prostrate at the monarch's feet. The monarch suddenly recognized that this was his own brother Henry, who years before had severely wronged him. Remembering the ill treatment and insults he had received at his hand, he angrily pushed the former rebel out of the way with his foot. The religious services had already begun as he moved into the cathedral. Suddenly, as if



the voice of God were speaking, he heard the minister read Mat-thew 18:21,22. Conscience-stricken, the emperor re-turned to where the repentant one lay sobbing. Raising him to his feet, he planted on his brow a fraternal kiss of brotherhood and pardon.

But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them who despitefully use you, and persecute you. Matthew 5:44

When Samuel Marsden went to Australia as a chaplain, he was assigned to minister to a group of convicts. Although many of the men were friendly, Marsden's earnest contending for the faith incurred the wrath of some who disliked his outspoken way of rebuking them for their sin. One afternoon while walking along a riverbank not far from his home, he saw an ex-convict jump into the river, apparently intending to commit suicide. Throwing off his coat, the chaplain plunged bravely into the swiftly flowing stream and sought to rescue him. To his horror he found that the man had merely decoyed him into the water to choke him and try to drown him. Eventually the rather tough and wiry Marsden exhausted his evil opponent and dragged him to the shore. Much to the surprise of the defeated one, Marsden invited him to his house, where he gave him dry clothing. The chaplain said, "I won't tell a soul what happened. I know God has already forgiven you, and so do I." The conscience-smitten man recognized that here indeed was one who practiced what he preached. He soon was led to Christ and later became a devoted assistant to the chaplain.

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See [devotional on Anger Danger](#) - We all feel helpless and cut off at times. It may seem that not even God can hear or answer our cries for help. This was the psalmist David's fear in a time of trouble: "I am cut off from Your sight!" Yet he discovered that the Lord had not forgotten him and was able to rejoice: "You heard my cry for mercy when I called to You for help". ([See full devotional on Mt 18:21-35](#))

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#### TODAY IN THE WORD

In The Training of the Twelve, A. B. Bruce commented on Peter's question in today's reading:

"To be so earnest about the duty of forgiving, and even to think of practicing the duty so often as seven times towards the same offender, betrayed the true child of the kingdom; for none but the graciously-minded are exercised in that fashion. But to imagine that pardon repeated just so many times would exhaust obligation and amount to something magnanimous and divine, was very simple. Poor Peter, in his ingenuous attempt at the magnanimous, was like a child standing on tiptoe to make himself as tall as his father, or climbing to the top of a hillock to get near the skies."

There are no limits to genuine forgiveness--God's love is infinite. We're looking at the parable of the unmerciful servant twice this month (see October 25) from two different angles. Our point today follows from Peter's question. Since the Jewish rabbis said to forgive three times, his question may have been showing off, in which case Jesus' response humbled him. Or, as Bruce concluded above, Peter may have really been trying to grasp Jesus' teaching on forgiveness. In this case, he was shown how far short his understanding of God's love fell.

How many times should we forgive? "Seventy-seven times" (or "seventy times seven," NASB) is a figurative number to show that true forgiveness doesn't keep score (see Gen. 4:24 for a contrast). From the point of view in the parable, it makes no difference if the debt is millions or only a few dollars. Forgiveness wipes the slate clean. In fact, in view of the Bible's descriptions of forgiveness as "remembering no more," we might say that every act of forgiveness is a "first time."

#### TODAY ALONG THE WAY

In today's parable, Jesus clearly instructed His disciples about the unrelenting nature of forgiveness: true forgiveness knows no bounds.

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#### GOD FORGAVE MY SIN IN JESUS' NAME MATTHEW 18:21-22 [NIV, Once-A-Day: Walk with Jesus: 365 Days in the New Testament](#)

Forgive and forget.

Peter was certainly comfortable with that principle. After all, hadn't Jesus already taught him that if he forgave others when they sinned against him, his heavenly Father would also forgive him? And hadn't the sacrificial system he had grown up with taught him that God forgives the sins of his people?

Yes, Peter was certainly comfortable with forgiveness—seven times. But seventy-seven times?

Unfortunately, all of us since Adam are like Peter in this respect—all except one. John Flavel reminds us to imitate him who is infinite forgiveness.

#### WALK WITH JOHN FLAVEL

"Imitate our pattern Christ and labor for meek forgiving spirits. I shall only propose two reasons for doing so: for the honor of Christ,

and for your own peace. His glory is more than your life, and all that you enjoy in this world. Oh, do not expose it to the scorn and derision of his enemies. Let them not say, 'How is Christ a lamb, when his followers are lions? How is the church a dove, that smites and scratches like a bird of prey?'

"Consider also the quiet of your own heart. What is life worth, without the comfort of life? What comfort can you have in all that you possess in the world as long as you do not have possession of your own soul? If inside you are full of tumult and revenge, the Spirit of Christ will become a stranger to you; that dove delights in a clean and quiet heart. Oh, then imitate Christ in this excellency also!"

#### WALK CLOSER TO GOD

The rest of the chapter is the parable of the unmerciful servant. The main character refused to forgive as he had been forgiven. Notice that he was "handed ... over to the jailers to be tortured" (Matthew 18:34).

Are you "tortured" by an unforgiving spirit? Ephesians 4:32 has the answer: Meditate on Christ's forgiveness. There is no better way to cultivate your own.

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#### F B Meyer - FORGIVENESS

"Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? until seven times?"-- Mat 18:21.

THE RELIGIOUS teachers of Christ's day taught that four times was the extreme limit of forgiveness. Peter exceeded this in his estimate, but how far even he fell short of the Divine ideal! Seven was to the Jews the number of perfection, so that no expression could more forcibly convey the impression of ever-renewed, eternal, repetition than "seventy times seven!" What comfort there is for each one of us here! For if God expects man to forgive his brother thus, how may we not count on His forgiveness!

This parable shows the great wrong we do to ourselves as well as to our brother, when we fail to forgive. Here was a man who had been forgiven the enormous debt of two millions sterling, but was not softened and chastened by its remission, for he went immediately from his Master's presence to lay violent hands on an unfortunate fellow-servant, who owed him less than a five-pound note. He is deaf to the reasons which had filled his own mouth previously, and oblivious of everything except that this debt should be paid instantly.

Are we not all tempted to abuse the forgiving love of God, and to be censorious, vindictive, implacable, and unforgiving? If you want to be the reverse of this, consider how much you have been forgiven! Sit down and count up your enormous debt to God, and how freely He has forgiven you. Only the forgiving are forgiven--"If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." If we are unrelenting, slow to recognize merit, quick to observe faults, cherishing ill-will and resentment for injuries inflicted, perhaps years ago; and if we cling to and nourish this spirit, we may be sure that we have never been forgiven.

How are we to attain the state of mind which forgives so often, and can win the most wayward? The parable teaches us that we must receive God's pardon in a right spirit, that we must remember our own failures and sins, and that we must ever be willing to cast the mantle of forgiving love over the sins and failures of those around us.

#### PRAYER

O Lord, may we hear Thee say to us: Thy sins which are many are all forgiven; Go in peace; and may we, in our turn, forgive as we have been forgiven, and may the sun not go down upon our wrath. AMEN.

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#### **Bumper Cars** — by Joe Stowell

Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times? —Matthew 18:21

Life is a lot like "bumper cars" at an amusement park. You get in your car, knowing that you will get hit . . . you just don't know how hard. And when you get hit, you step on the gas pedal, chase the one who has hit you, and hope to bump that person harder than they have bumped you.

That may be a fun strategy for bumper cars, but it's a terrible strategy for life. When you get bumped in life, bumping back only escalates matters and in the end everyone suffers damage.

Jesus had a better strategy: Forgive those who have "bumped" us. Like Peter, we may wonder how many times we have to forgive. When Peter asked Jesus, "Up to seven times?" Jesus answered "Up to seventy times seven" (Matt. 18:21-22). In other words, there are no limits to grace. We should always extend a spirit of forgiveness. Why? In the story of the forgiving master, Jesus explained that we forgive not because our offenders deserve it but because we've been forgiven. He says, "I forgave you . . . because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?" (vv.32-33).

Since we are among those who've been forgiven much, let's stop the damage and share that blessing with others.

Lord, remind us of how deeply we have offended You and how often You have extended the grace of forgiveness to us. Teach us to forgive others and to trust You to deal with those who sin against us. (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

Forgiveness is God's grace in action through us.

**Matthew 18:22 Jesus \*said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.**

- but: Mt 6:11,12,14,15 Isa 55:7 Mic 7:19 Mk 11:25,26 Ro 12:21 Eph 4:26,31,32 5:1 Col 3:13 1Ti 2:8

## FORGIVENESS WITHOUT LIMITS

Other titles that could apply include "Seventy Times Seven: The Measure of Grace" "Beyond Seven: The Call to Infinite Forgiveness" "Forgiving as God Forgives" "The Boundless Grace of Forgiveness" "Seventy Times Seven: Mercy Multiplied" "Mercy Without Bounds" "Seventy Times Seven: A Call to Radical Obedience" "Forgiveness Without Keeping Score" "Forgiveness as a Kingdom Command" "The Math of Mercy: Seventy Times Seven" "Forgiveness Mirroring Heaven"

**Jesus ([lesous](#)) \*said to him, "I do not ([ou](#)) say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven** -The product 490 is clearly not calling for a literal number of times of forgiveness, but calling for forgiveness without any set limits, an unlimited number of times! Forgiveness like God has shown every believer in Christ is removing each of our sins as far as the east is from the west, which depicts without limit (Ps 103:12 - Play [As Far as East to West](#))! So if you are offended the 491 time you should still gravitate to forgive the offender! As an aside, this is not naturally possible (i.e., in our fallen flesh) but requires dependance on a supernatural source, the Holy Spirit! As I like to say forgiveness is IM-possible, but is HIM-possible!

*Forgiveness is man's deepest need  
and God's highest achievement.*

-- Horace Bushnell

**C H Spurgeon Commentary** - Our Lord intends to teach us to forgive always and without end. He sets no limit. I say not unto thee, "until seven times. " measured mercy is not according to the command. We may read the words of our Lord in this verse as seventy-seven times, or as seventy times seven, or four-hundred and-ninety times: there is no occasion to be very definite about numbers where an indefinite number is meant. We should make too small an account of offenses to occupy time in counting them, or in reckoning the number of times that we have overlooked them.

### Seventy Times Seven

*(Inspired by Matthew 18:22)*

How many times must I forgive,  
The wounds that pierce, the pain they give?  
"Not seven times," the Savior said,  
"But seventy times seven instead."

Forgiveness vast, beyond the score,  
A grace that flows forevermore.  
No ledger kept, no grudge retained,  
A heart set free, no love constrained.

For who among us stands unmarked,  
By sins of thought, of deed embarked?  
Yet mercy met us in our shame,  
Through Christ, who bore our guilt and blame.

So cast aside the bitter chain,  
Release the hurt, dissolve the stain.  
For every pardon freely shown,  
Reflects the mercy we've been shown.

It's not a count, a final sum,

But a call to echo where love comes from.  
To forgive, as Christ forgave us all,  
Responding to His gracious call.

Seventy times seven—love's perfect design,  
A boundless grace, both yours and mine.  
For in forgiveness, we truly see,  
The heart of God, eternally.

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**QUESTION - [What did Jesus mean when He said that we should forgive others seventy times seven? WATCH VIDEO](#)**

**ANSWER** - Jesus said we are to forgive others "seventy times seven" in response to Peter's question, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" (Matthew 18:21-22). To fully understand what Jesus was saying, we must look at the context of the whole chapter, for Jesus was speaking not only about forgiving one another but about Christian character, both in and out of the church. The admonition to forgive our brother seventy times seven follows Jesus' discourse on discipline in the church (Matthew 18:15-20), in which He lays down the rules for restoring a sinning brother.

Peter, wishing to appear especially forgiving and benevolent, asked Jesus if forgiveness was to be offered seven times. The Jewish rabbis at the time taught that forgiving someone more than three times was unnecessary, citing Amos 1:3-13 where God forgave Israel's enemies three times, then punished them. By offering forgiveness more than double that of the Old Testament example, Peter perhaps expected extra commendation from the Lord. When Jesus responded that forgiveness should be offered four hundred and ninety times, far beyond that which Peter was proposing, it must have stunned the disciples who were listening. Although they had been with Jesus for some time, they were still thinking in the limited terms of the law, rather than in the unlimited terms of grace.

By saying we are to forgive those who sin against us seventy times seven, Jesus was not limiting forgiveness to 490 times, a number that is, for all practical purposes, beyond counting. Christians with forgiving hearts not only do not limit the number of times they forgive; they continue to forgive with as much grace the thousandth time as they do the first time. Christians are only capable of this type of forgiving spirit because the Spirit of God lives within us, and it is He who provides the ability to offer forgiveness over and over, just as God forgives us over and over.

Jesus' [parable of the unforgiving servant](#) follows directly after His "seventy times seven" speech, driving home the point that if we are forgiven the enormous debt of sin against a holy God, how much more should we be eager to forgive those who sin against us, who are just as sinful as they? Paul parallels this example in Ephesians 4:32 where he admonishes us to forgive one another "even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you." Clearly, forgiveness is not to be meted out in a limited fashion but is to be abundant, overflowing, and available to all, just as the measureless grace of God is poured out upon us.

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**Related Resources:**

- [List of links related to forgiveness/unforgiveness](#)
- [Multiple illustrations and quotes related to forgiveness/unforgiveness](#)
- [Exposition of "Forgiveness" in Ephesians 4:32](#)
- [Exposition of "Forgiveness" in Colossians 3:13](#)
- [Exposition of "Forgiveness" in Matthew 6:12 and Matthew 6:14-15](#)

**NT words for forgive/forgiveness:**

- Forgiveness ([859](#)) [aphesis](#)
- Forgive (send away from, cancel the debt, release, let go) ([863](#)) [aphiemi](#)
- Forgive (grant, freely give, bestow) ([5483](#)) [charizomai](#)

**Excellent 5 Part Sermon Series on Forgiveness by Dr Ray Pritchard:**

- [1\) Forgiveness Healing the Hurt We Never Deserved](#)
  - [2\) Forgiveness and the Lord's Prayer](#)
  - [3\) Judge Not!](#)
  - [4\) Is Total Forgiveness Realistic](#)
  - [5\) The Final Step-Blessing Your Enemies](#)
-

## QUESTION - [What does the Bible say about unforgiveness? WATCH VIDEO](#)

**ANSWER** - The Bible has quite a bit to say about forgiveness and unforgiveness. Perhaps the most well-known teaching on unforgiveness is Jesus' parable of the unmerciful servant, recorded in Matthew 18:21-35. In the parable, a king forgives an enormously large debt (basically one that could never be repaid) of one of his servants. Later, however, that same servant refuses to forgive the small debt of another man. The king hears about this and rescinds his prior forgiveness. Jesus concludes by saying, "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart" (Matthew 18:35). Other passages tell us that we will be forgiven as we forgive (see Matthew 6:14; 7:2; and Luke 6:37, for example).

Do not be confused here; God's forgiveness is not based on our works. Forgiveness and salvation are founded completely in the person of God and by Jesus' redeeming work on the cross. However, our actions demonstrate our faith and the extent to which we understand God's grace (see James 2:14-26 and Luke 7:47). We are completely unworthy, yet Jesus chose to pay the price for our sins and to give us forgiveness (Romans 5:8). When we truly grasp the greatness of God's gift to us, we will pass the gift along. We have been given grace and should give grace to others in return. In the parable, we are appalled at the servant who would not forgive a minor debt after having been forgiven his unpayable debt. Yet, when we are unforgiving, we act just as the servant in the parable.

Unforgiveness also robs us of the full life God intends for us. Rather than promote justice, our unforgiveness festers into bitterness. Hebrews 12:14-15 warns, "Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root rises up to cause trouble and defile many." Similarly, 2 Corinthians 2:5-11 warns that unforgiveness can be an opening for Satan to derail us.

We also know that those who have sinned against us – whom we may not want to forgive – are held accountable by God (see Romans 12:19 and Hebrews 10:30). It is important to recognize that to forgive is not to downplay a wrongdoing or necessarily to reconcile. When we choose to forgive, we release a person from his indebtedness to us. We relinquish the right to seek personal revenge. We choose to say we will not hold his wrongdoing against him. However, we do not necessarily allow that person back into our trust or even fully release that person from the consequences of his sin. We are told that "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). While God's forgiveness relieves us from eternal death, it does not always release us from the death-like consequences of sin (such as a broken relationship or the penalty provided by the justice system). Forgiveness does not mean we act as if no wrong has been done; it does mean we recognize that grace abundant has been given to us and that we have no right to hold someone else's wrongdoing over his head.

Time and again, Scripture calls us to forgive one another. Ephesians 4:32, for example, says, "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." We have been given much in the way of forgiveness, and much is expected from us in response (see Luke 12:48). Though forgiveness is often difficult, to be unforgiving is to disobey God and to depreciate the greatness of His gift.

### Related Resources:

- [Since God withholds forgiveness, can we?](#)

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If you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. - Matthew 6:14

### TODAY IN THE WORD

On an August day twenty-six years ago, Darryl Stingley was a wide receiver with a bright future. That day, during an exhibition football game, safety Jack Tatum tackled Stingley hard, paralyzing him.

How did Stingley respond? He forgave. And as the years have past, he's kept a spirit of forgiveness. Last year, when he read in the newspaper that Tatum had lost part of a leg due to complications from diabetes, he said, "Maybe the natural reaction is to think he got what was coming to him, but I don't accept human nature as our real nature. Human nature teaches us to hate. God teaches us to love. . . . Now life and God have taught me to have compassion."

For us, as followers of Christ, forgiveness must be part of our spiritual lives. That's one of the central lessons in today's reading. We see in today's passage that we serve a God who has a special heart for children (Mt 18:5, 10). Their guardian angels always have access to His throne. We also serve a God who wants His people to live in unity (Mt 18:15–20). Jesus here set down a procedure for confronting other believers about sin (cf. 1 Cor. 5) and promised to be present in even the smallest gatherings of His followers.

Most of all, we serve a God who mercifully forgives and requires us to do the same. Peter had given what he thought was a generous answer to his own question. Forgiving seven times went well beyond the rabbis' rule of forgiving three times—but Jesus said not to count or keep track at all. To illustrate, He told a parable revealing that whatever "debt" someone owes us, it's nothing compared to the "debt" we owe God. The servant had requested more time, but the king went beyond that request to give the gift of

total forgiveness.

#### TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Has someone sinned against you? Are you holding on to a grudge? Whether it's for something big or small, let it go—ask God for the grace and strength to forgive. Do whatever it takes to let that person know about your decision to forgive, and that you've done so because of and through God's much greater forgiving love.

**Matthew 18:23** "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves.

- **For this reason the kingdom of heaven:** Mt 3:2 13:24,31,33,44,45,47,52 25:1,14
- **a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves:** Mt 25:19-30 Lu 16:1,2 19:12-27 Ro 14:12 1Co 4:5 2Co 5:10,11

### ILLUSTRATION OF GOD'S FORGIVENESS

Mt 18:23-35 is often called "The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant" the idea of debts owed and forgiven being used as a symbol of forgiveness.

**For this reason** - This begs the question "what reason?"

The kingdom ([basileia](#)) of heaven ([ouranos](#)) may be compared ([homoioo](#)) to a king ([basileus](#)) who wished ([thelo](#)) to settle ([sunairo](#)) accounts ([logos](#)) with his slaves ([doulos](#)) - Jesus frequently used terms of comparison to emphasize spiritual truths and this truth on the importance of forgiveness is one of the most important truths for believers to grasp, as illustrates the importance of forgiveness and the consequences of refusing to forgive others as God has forgiven us.

**C H Spurgeon Commentary** - The **kingdom of heaven** is again brought forward. We must not forget that this is the key of Matthew's Gospel ([SEE BELOW](#)). In all kingdoms there must be a king, a tribunal, and a time for judgment of those under rule. The personal servants of a king must expect to give in a special account as to how they have used their lord's goods. Our Lord is that certain king, who would take account of his servants. Even if he called no one else to give an account, he would assuredly call his own servants to a settlement.

**KINGDOM OF HEAVEN - 31V** - Matt. 3:2; Matt. 4:17; Matt. 5:3; Matt. 5:10; Matt. 5:19; Matt. 5:20; Matt. 7:21; Matt. 8:11; Matt. 10:7; Matt. 11:11; Matt. 11:12; Matt. 13:11; Matt. 13:24; Matt. 13:31; Matt. 13:33; Matt. 13:44; Matt. 13:45; Matt. 13:47; Matt. 13:52; Matt. 16:19; Matt. 18:1; Matt. 18:3; Matt. 18:4; Matt. 18:23; Matt. 19:12; Matt. 19:14; Matt. 19:23; Matt. 20:1; Matt. 22:2; Matt. 23:13; Matt. 25:1

**NET NOTE** - Though *doulos* is normally translated "servant," the word does not bear the connotation of a free individual serving another. BDAG notes that " 'servant' for 'slave' is largely confined to Biblical transl. and early American times ... in normal usage at the present time the two words are carefully distinguished" (BDAG 260 s.v. 1). The most accurate translation is "bondservant" (sometimes found in the ASV for *δοσλος*) in that it often indicates one who sells himself into slavery to another. But as this is archaic, few today understand its force.

**Settle accounts (4868)** (**sunairo** from [sun/syn](#) = with, together + [airo](#) = take away, lift up) When combined, **sunairo** means to take up together and conveys the idea of bringing together, gathering up, or reconciling and then to settle accounts or balance accounts with another. In some contexts, it can mean to gather information and form a conclusion or to sum up ideas as when bringing together arguments or evidence to reach a conclusion. **Sunairo** can mean to reconcile or settle which conveys the idea of resolving or reconciling differences, especially in a dispute. Settling accounts or disputes by bringing the parties or issues together. The word **sunairo** does not appear frequently in the New Testament but resonates with themes of unity, reconciliation, and resolution.

**SUNAIRO - 3V - settle (2), settled (1)** - Matt. 18:23; Matt. 18:24; Matt. 25:19. No uses in the Septuagint.

**QUESTION - [What is the meaning of the Parable of the Unforgiving/Unmerciful Servant?](#)**

**ANSWER** - We find the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant only in Matthew 18:23-35. The Apostle Peter had asked how many times one should forgive, "Till seven times?" and Jesus answered, "Not seven times but seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:21-22). The

context of this passage is Jesus teaching His disciples about the "kingdom of heaven." We can take some very important principles from this parable and apply them to our lives today.

The servant whose lord forgave him much, ten thousand talents, equivalent to several millions of dollars, was unwilling to forgive another servant who owed him a hundred denarii. A denarius was a day's wage and was worth approximately sixteen cents. Therefore, compared to what the first servant was forgiven, this was a very small amount. The principle here is, "the one forgiven much should forgive much." In other words, the principle of forgiveness is that grace or forgiveness to another is without limit. The disciples are not to count the number of times they forgive. Rather, as the parable teaches, they are to forgive much because God has forgiven much.

In the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant, Jesus is presenting a new principle that is similar to the basis of the forgiveness command for believers found in Ephesians 4:32, "And be ye kind to one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." Jesus is teaching His disciples pre-cross, and therefore in the pre-church age, but the basis for forgiveness is the same. Because God has forgiven us, we are to forgive each other. Therefore, because we have received much grace, "while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8), we are commanded to give that same grace to others. In the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant, the first servant's debt was forgiven, and he was not required to repay until his unforgiving nature was discovered. In contrast, our sin debt was paid in full by Christ and is the only basis for God's forgiveness. We cannot repay our debt to God or earn our salvation. It is a gift of grace (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Therefore, in the Parable of the Unforgiving / Unmerciful / Unjust Servant, Jesus is teaching His disciples, and us by extension, that forgiveness should be in like proportion to the amount forgiven. The first servant had been forgiven all, and he then should have forgiven all. In like manner, a child of God by faith through Christ has had all sins forgiven. Therefore, when someone offends or sins against us we should be willing to forgive him from a heart of gratitude for the grace to which we ourselves are debtors.

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**Norman Geisler** (Source: [When Cultists Ask](#)) - MATTHEW 18:23–35—Can one's forgiveness be canceled once it is given, as Seventh-Day Adventists claim?

**MISINTERPRETATION:** Based on the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant (Matt. 18:23–35), Seventh-day Adventists teach that one's forgiveness can be canceled after it has been bestowed. They claim that "the actual blotting out of sin, therefore, could not take place the moment when a sin is forgiven, because subsequent deeds and attitudes may affect the final decision. Instead, the sin remains on the record until the life is complete—in fact, the Scriptures indicate it remains until the judgment" (Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine, 1957, 441).

**CORRECTING THE MISINTERPRETATION:** This is a parable, and parables should not be taken literally. They have a point to make, and that point is illustrated in the parable of which not every aspect is to be taken literally. For example, God is illustrated as an "unjust judge" in one parable (Luke 18:1–18), but the point is not to teach about the attribute of God's justice but that he is merciful in answering persistent prayer.

The Bible makes it unmistakable that God does not renege on his promises. Paul declared that "God's gifts and his call are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:29 NIV). God does not take back what he gives in grace. Many other passages of Scripture teach that salvation is an unconditional gift (John 10:26–29; Rom. 8:36–39). And God's Word does not contradict itself.

**Matthew 18:24** "When he had begun to settle them, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him.

- owed: Lu 7:41,42 13:4 \*marg: Lu 16:5,7

#### Related Passages:

Ezra 9:6 and I said, "O my God, I am ashamed and embarrassed to lift up my face to You, my God, for our iniquities have risen above our heads and our guilt has grown even to the heavens.

### AN INSURMOUNTABLE DEBT OWED

When he had begun ([archo](#)) to settle ([sunairo](#)) them, one who owed ([opheiletes](#) - under obligation) him ten thousand talents ([talanton](#)) was brought ([prosago](#)) to him - Jesus begins this illustration by describing the debt of the slave as essentially so large that it would be impossible for him to pay it back or work it off in many lifetimes!

**BDAG** on the incredible debt of **10,000 talents** - In our lit. only in Mt 18:24; 25:15-28. In 18:24, at 6,000 drachmas or denarii to the Tyrian talent, a day laborer would need to work 60,000,000 days to pay off the debt. Even assuming an extraordinary payback rate of 10 talents per year, the staggering amount would ensure imprisonment for at least 1,000 years.

*Ten thousand talents combines the largest Greek numeral with the largest unit of currency.*

-- [New Bible Commentary p928 \(borrow\)](#)

**C H Spurgeon Commentary** - Ten thousand talents was an immense amount for a servant to owe his king. Some reckon that it was equivalent to two millions of our money. It was debt which could not be paid; overwhelming, and almost incalculable. This debt cropped up as soon as the king had begun to reckon: it was a matter of notoriety, too vast to be concealed. The debtor was brought bound before his lord, but his vast debt was his strongest bond ten thousand talents! Yet what is this amount to the burden of our obligations to God? O my soul, humble thyself as thou answerest the question, "How much owest thou?"

**NET NOTE** - A talent was a huge sum of money, equal to 6,000 denarii. One denarius was the usual day's wage for a worker. L&N 6.82 states, "a Greek monetary unit (also a unit of weight) with a value which fluctuated, depending upon the particular monetary system which prevailed at a particular period of time (a silver talent was worth approximately six thousand denarii with gold talents worth at least thirty times that much)."

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**Talents** (5007) **talanton** means a balance, hence that which is weighed, i.e. a talent (about 3000 shekels in weight, cf. 3603) Over time, it came to represent a **unit of currency** in the ancient world, denoting a very large sum of money or material wealth. (1) as a measure of weight varying in size from 28 to 36 kilograms, or 60 to 80 sixteen-ounce pounds, equivalent to 3,000 Hebrew shekels; When used for precious metals, it represented a significant amount of monetary value. (2) as a large unit of money varying in value with the metal involved, whether gold, silver, or copper, it is possible to translate variously as millions, thousands, or hundreds (of dollars, francs, pesos, etc.) A talent was a huge sum of money, equal to 6,000 denarii. One denarius was the usual day's wage for a worker. Louw Nida states, "a Greek monetary unit (also a unit of weight) with a value which fluctuated, depending upon the particular monetary system which prevailed at a particular period of time (a silver talent was worth approximately six thousand denarii with gold talents worth at least thirty times that much)." In a broader sense, **talanton** took on a metaphorical meaning of **resources, gifts, or abilities** entrusted to someone for stewardship.

**Talanton** symbolizes the profound responsibility of stewardship. Whether in finances, gifts, time, or opportunities, God calls His followers to use and multiply what He has entrusted to them for His glory and the benefit of others.

**TALANTON - 14X/8V - talent(3), talents(11).** Matt. 18:24; Matt. 25:15; Matt. 25:16; Matt. 25:20; Matt. 25:22; Matt. 25:24; Matt. 25:25; Matt. 25:28

**TALANTON IN THE SEPTUAGINT** - Ex 25:39 (Hebrew = **kikkar** - most common meaning is that of "talent." This unit of monetary value was doubtless disk-shaped, the precursor of the coin (not minted until the late seventh-early sixth century b.c. and not widely used until Persian times). A talent, according to Obadiah inscriptions (it is presumed to be the same for the Israelites) was the weight of 3000 shekels, ca. sixty-five pounds. However, there is an enormous amount of debate, and a biblical talent could conceivably weigh ten more pounds. In any case, it is the largest unit of weight (and thus, value) measure in the Hebrew Bible.); Ex 38:24; Ex 38:25; Ex 38:27; Ex 38:29; 2 Sam. 12:30; 1 Ki. 9:14; 1 Ki. 9:28; 1 Ki. 10:10; 1 Ki. 10:14; 1 Ki. 16:24; 1 Ki. 20:39; 2 Ki. 5:5; 2 Ki. 5:22; 2 Ki. 15:19; 2 Ki. 18:14; 2 Ki. 23:33; 1 Chr. 19:6; 1 Chr. 20:2; 1 Chr. 22:14; 1 Chr. 29:4; 1 Chr. 29:7; 2 Chr. 3:8; 2 Chr. 8:18; 2 Chr. 9:9; 2 Chr. 9:13; 2 Chr. 25:6; 2 Chr. 25:9; 2 Chr. 27:5; 2 Chr. 36:3; Ezr. 7:22; Ezr. 8:26; Est. 1:7; Est. 3:9; Est. 4:7; Zech. 5:7;

**Matthew 18:25** "But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made.

- **commanded:** Lev 25:39 2Ki 4:1 Ne 5:5,8 Isa 50:1

## **"THE WEIGHT OF AN UNPAYABLE DEBT**

Other appropriate titles might be "A Debt Beyond Repayment" "The Burden of a Debt Unpaid" "When the Bill Comes Due" "A Debt



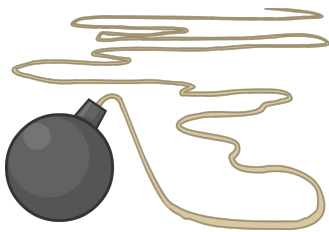
Too Great, A Mercy Too Deep" "The Path to Redemption Begins" "The Stage for Mercy is Set" "A Family Sold, A Lesson Told" "A Servant's Debt, A King's Verdict"

**But since he did not have the means to repay (apodidomi) , his lord (kurios) commanded (keleuo) him to be sold (piprasko), along with his wife and children (teknon) and all that he had, and repayment to be made (apodidomi) -** Given the astronomical debt, the lord orders an unspeakable payment which includes his beloved wife and children.

**C H Spurgeon Commentary** - The debtor was penniless: he had not to pay. The creditor takes possession of the man: his lord commanded him to be sold. His wife, his children, and all that he had were to be sold also; but all put together, when payment was to be made, it came to nothing compared with the enormous debt. The sale of the man and his family was according to Oriental justice: the generous lord here described did not hesitate to exact it, and the debtor himself raised no question about the righteousness of the proceeding. Our Lord does not justify the act of the lord in the story: he simply uses the custom as a part of the scenery of his parable. We may be thankful that the spirit of Christianity has utterly abolished a law which made unoffending children suffer for their father's default, by the loss of their liberties. The servant was in a sad plight indeed when nothing remained his own, and even his own personality was sold away from him. He had not to pay; yet by royal order payment was to be made: he was wretched indeed.

**Matthew 18:26 "So the slave fell to the ground and prostrated himself before him, saying, **Have patience** with me and I will repay you everything.'**

- **'Have patience:** Mt 18:29 Lu 7:43 Ro 10:3



### PLEASE LENGTHEN THE FUSE LORD

**So the slave (doulos) fell (pipto) to the ground and prostrated (proskuneo) himself before him, saying, 'Have patience (makrothumeo) with me and I will repay (apodidomi) you everything -** The verb **makrothumeo** calls for one to show forbearance or longsuffering. The root of the verb literally means something like "a long burn" which pictures a long fuse before a bomb explodes (see also **makrothumia**). The slave is in effect asking for his lord to lengthen the fuse, so to speak!**Have patience (makrothumeo)** is in the form of a command (**aurist imperative**), but clearly the slave is not commanding his lord to show mercy, but the command is more like an urgent plea to please do this now. The slave falling and prostrating reflects his recognition of his master's authority and his utter helplessness as suppliant. His appeal is in hope that the master would respond with mercy and not justice.

This slave is a picture of us all for

*We all owed a debt we could not pay.*

*Jesus paid a debt He did not owe.*

**C H Spurgeon Commentary** - He could not pay, but he could humble himself before his lord. He fell down and worshipped him. He owned the debt, and begged for time "Have patience with me ." Moreover; he gave a promise to discharge his obligations: "I will pay thee all. " The promise was not worth the breath which spoke it. It is a very usual thing for men who can incur an enormous debt to make light of the payment, and fancy that a bill at three months is as good as gold. They dream that time is money, and that a promise is a payment. Many a poor sinner is very rich in resolutions. **This servant debtor thought he only needed patience; but indeed he needed forgiveness!** It seems strange that he did not see this, since the debt was so great, and he had nothing wherewith to pay, but was utterly bankrupt: yet it is a well known fact, that men do not see their true condition before the Lord God, even when they perceive that in many things they come short.

**Martin Luther** - Before the king drew him to account, he had no conscience, does not feel the debt, and would have gone right along, made more debt, and cared nothing about it But now that the king reckons with him, he begins to feel the debt. So it is with us. The greater part does not concern itself about sin, goes on securely, fears not the wrath of God. Such people cannot come to the

forgiveness of sin, for they do not come to realize that they have sins. They say indeed, with the mouth that they have sin; but if they were serious about it they would speak far otherwise. This servant, too, says, before the king reckons with him, so much I owe to my lord, namely ten thousand talents;... But now that the reckoning is held, and his lord orders him, his wife, his children, and everything to be sold, now he feels it. So, too, we feel in earnest when our sins are revealed in the heart, when the record of our debts is held before us.... Then we exclaim: I am the most miserable man, there is none as unfortunate as I on the earth! Such knowledge makes a real humble man, works contrition, so that one can come to the forgiveness of sins.

**NET NOTE** - Grk "falling therefore the slave bowed down to the ground." The redundancy of this expression signals the desperation of the slave in begging for mercy. **TECHNICAL NOTE** - The majority of MSS (x L W 058 0281 f1, 13 33 it syp,h co) begin the slave's plea with "Lord" (κύριε, kurie), though a few important witnesses lack this vocative (B D Θ 700 pc lat sys,c Or Chr). Understanding the parable to refer to the Lord, scribes would be naturally prone to add the vocative here, especially as the slave's plea is a plea for mercy. Thus, the shorter reading is more likely to be authentic.

**Prostrated** (bowed down) ([4352](#)) **proskuneo** from **pros** = before + **kuneo** = kiss or adore) means to prostrate oneself in homage before another in the full sense of worship, not mere reverence or courtesy. When Jesus Christ was born into this world, He was attended and worshipped by angels. (Lu 2:13f). **Proskuneo** represents the most common Near Eastern act of adoration and reverence and also carries the idea of profound awe and respect. Some believe that the root word **kuneo** may be related to **kuon** which is the Greek word for dog and which then could be picturing a dog licking his master's hand.

The word **proskuneo** literally means to kiss toward someone, to throw a kiss in token of respect or homage, to prostrate oneself in homage, to do reverence to, to adore and so to worship and show respect. In the ancient Oriental (especially Persia) the mode of salutation between persons of equal rank was to kiss each other on the lips. When the difference of rank was slight, they kissed each other on the cheek. When one was much inferior, he fell upon his knees touched his forehead to the ground or prostrated himself, and as he was bowing down he would be throwing kisses toward the superior. It is this latter mode of salutation that is intended by the Greek writers in the use of the verb **proskuneo** .

**PROSKUNEO IN THE GOSPELS** - Matt. 2:2; Matt. 2:8; Matt. 2:11; Matt. 4:9; Matt. 4:10; Matt. 8:2; Matt. 9:18; Matt. 14:33; Matt. 15:25; Matt. 18:26; Matt. 20:20; Matt. 28:9; Matt. 28:17; Mk. 5:6; Mk. 15:19; Lk. 4:7; Lk. 4:8; Lk. 24:52; Jn. 4:20; Jn. 4:21; Jn. 4:22; Jn. 4:23; Jn. 4:24; Jn. 9:38; Jn. 12:20;

**Matthew 18:27 "And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt."**

- moved: Jdg 10:16 Ne 9:17 Ps 78:38 86:5,15 145:8 Ho 11:8

## THE MASTER MOVED BY MERCY

Other titles might be "Freedom Through Forgiveness" "An Act of Undeserved Mercy" "Mercy Triumphs Over Justice" "From Debt to Deliverance" "Debt Erased, Freedom Restored" "Set Free by Mercy" "A Debtor to Mercy Alone" (see [Toplady's hymn below](#)) "Grace Overflows Where Debt Abounds"

**And the lord ([kurios](#)) of that slave ([doulos](#)) felt compassion ([splanchnizomai](#)) and released ([apoluo](#)) him and forgave ([aphiemi](#)) him the debt** - The master responds to the slave's desperate plea for patience (Mt 18:26), with far more than patience, instead showing deep, gut-level empathy, overwhelming mercy and forgiveness of an impossible-to-repay debt. Note that the master set the slave free from any obligation to repay the debt, doing so not because the slave deserved it but because he sought to bestow a free gift, a beautiful picture of our Father's gift of grace to sinners such as us.

*The penniless debtor was unbound, and his debt was forgiven him:  
his lord loosed him, and forgave him.*

**John MacArthur** adds "Here is an extraordinary picture of God's compassionate love for the genuinely repentant sinner who throws himself on His mercy." (See [Matthew Commentary - Page 150](#))

**C H Spurgeon Commentary** - Humility and prayer prevailed; for the lord of that servant was such a king as the whole universe cannot rival for pity and grace. The debtor received far more than he dared to ask; for the measure of the gracious deed was not his own sense of need, nor even his own prayers, but the compassion of his lord. The heart of the great creditor was touched, and his whole being was moved with pity. The penniless debtor was unbound, and his debt was forgiven him: his lord loosed him,

and forgave him. We know what this means. This was kindness indeed! There could be no greater thing done for the debtor; and all was so free, so noble, so perfect, that it ought to have produced a great effect upon him, and have led him in his measure, to imitate the royal example. Hard was the heart which such a fire of love could not soften.

*We forgive because we have been forgiven by God,  
and no offence against us can remotely compare with the  
incalculable amount we ourselves have been forgiven.*

-- [New Bible Commentary p928 \(borrow\)](#)

Beloved of God, this parable and the master's forgiving the impossible to repay debt of the slave reminds me of the great words of the Augustus Toplady's hymn, which is surely the anthem of every blood bought, heaven bound saved sinner. Play this beautiful rendition and ask God's Spirit to help you truly ponder each line as He uses this truth to comfort your heart and soul. And see if you can keep from shedding a tear of gratitude to our Great Forgiving Father.

<b>A DEBTOR TO MERCY ALONE</b> Original lyrics by Augustus Toplady 1771	<b><u>A DEBTOR TO MERCY ALONE</u></b> Music & altered words by Bob Kauflin 1998
<p>A debtor to mercy alone, of covenant mercy I sing; nor fear, with Your righteousness on, My person and off'ring to bring. The terrors of law and of God With me can have nothing to do; My Savior's obedience and blood Hide all my transgressions from view.</p> <p>The work which His goodness began, the arm of His strength will complete; His promise is yea and amen, and never was forfeited yet. Things future, nor things that are now, nor all things below or above, can make Him His purpose forgo, or sever my soul from His love.</p> <p>My name from the palms of His hands eternity will not erase; impressed on His heart it remains, in marks of indelible grace. Yes, I to the end shall endure, as sure as the earnest is giv'n; more happy, but not more secure, the glorified spirits in heav'n.</p>	<p>A debtor to mercy alone, Of covenant mercy I sing, I come with Your righteousness on My humble offering to bring The judgments of Your holy law With me can have nothing to do; My Savior's obedience and blood Hide all my transgressions from view.</p> <p>The work which You goodness began, the arm of Your strength will complete; His promise is yes and amen, And never was forfeited yet. The future or things that are now, No power below or above, Can make You Your purpose forgo, Or sever my soul from Your love.</p> <p>My name from the palms of Your hands Eternity will not erase; Impressed on You heart it remains, In marks of indelible grace. Yes, I to the end shall endure, Until I bow down at Your Throne Forever and always secure Forever and always secure Forever and always secure A debtor to mercy alone</p>

**Felt compassion** (4697) [splanchnizomai](#) from [splanchnon](#) = bowel, viscera) means to experience a deep visceral feeling for someone, to feel compassion for, to feel [sympathy](#), to take [pity](#) on someone. [Compassion](#) is the sympathetic consciousness of others' distress together with a desire to alleviate it. This verb expresses an outward flow of one's life in contrast to our natural tendency toward self centeredness. It is notable that 8/12 NT uses describe this deep seated emotion in Jesus. It follows that if we desire to imitate Jesus, we need to be men and women of deep compassion!

**Zodhiates** note on [splanchnon](#) - In Class. Gr. writers, it is chiefly spoken of the upper viscera of animals, as the heart, lungs, and liver which were eaten during or after the sacrifice... Figuratively, the inward parts indicating the breast or heart as the seat of emotions and passions. In the NT, of the gentler emotions as compassion, tender affection indicating the mind, soul, the inner man (2Co 6:12, Philemon 1:7, 20; 1Jn 3:17; Sept.: Pr 12:10 (cf. Ge 43:30; 1Kgs. 3:26) (Borrow [The Complete Word Study Dictionary](#) page 1306)

**Released** (sent away) (630) [apoluo](#) from [apó](#) = marker of dissociation, implying a rupture from a former association, separation

+ **luo** = loose) is used often of sending a person or a group away from someone (Mt 14:15, 22, 23, 32, etc). **Apoluo** frequently has the sense of to let loose from or to release (as from under arrest or from another's custody), as in Acts 17:9. To let go free or set at liberty. **Apoluo** is used in all four Gospels describing the **release** of Barabbas instead of Jesus (Jn 18:39, Mt 27:15, 17, 21, etc, cf Acts 16:35) **Apoluo** in Luke 6:37+ is used with the sense of forgive and most versions (NET, NIV, KJV, ESV) translate it as "forgive" = "forgive, and you will be forgiven." Figuratively apoluo speaks of setting someone "free" of illness (Luke 13:12+ "Woman, you are **freed** from your sickness.") To let loose from, to loose or unbind a person or thing. To forgive a debt and thus release from the obligation to pay it off - Mt 18:27 To release persons accused or imprisoned Mt 27:15; Mk15:6; Lk 22:68; Jn 19:10; Ac 4:21; 26:32; 28:18

**Friberg** (summary) - (1) of a prisoner or debtor set free, release, pardon (Mt 27.15); (2) of divorce send away, dismiss, let go (Mt 1.19; 19.3); (3) of a crowd or assembly dismiss, send away (Mt 14.15); (4) middle go away, depart (Acts 28.25); (5) euphemistically, for death let die, let depart (Lk 2.29) (Borrow [Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament](#) )

**Apoluo** was used in secular Greco-Roman writings of discharge from the military, of release from jail or of setting a debtor free (these latter meanings also commonly found in the NT writings). To dismiss (as innocent) - As legal term, to grant acquittal, set free, release, pardon.

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### The Debt of Forgiveness (Matthew 18:23-35)

In this parable, Jesus paints a powerful picture of forgiveness. A servant owes a king an insurmountable debt—10,000 talents—an amount so vast it could never be repaid in a lifetime. The king, moved by compassion, cancels the debt entirely. Yet, this same servant, freshly forgiven, refuses to extend mercy to a fellow servant who owes him a fraction of what he owed the king.

The message is clear: we are the servant forgiven of an immeasurable debt. Our sin against God is far greater than any wrong others could commit against us. Yet, through Christ, God cancels our debt entirely, not by diminishing its weight but by absorbing the cost Himself.

Still, how often do we, like the unmerciful servant, hold grudges, demand repayment, or withhold forgiveness from those who wrong us? The parable warns us of the spiritual danger in refusing to forgive: by doing so, we fail to reflect the mercy we've been shown.

#### Application:

1. **Recognize Your Forgiveness** Reflect on the magnitude of God's forgiveness in your life. The sins He has wiped clean, the grace He has extended freely—it's a debt you could never repay.
2. **Extend Grace Freely** When others wrong you, remember the mercy God has shown you. Forgiveness isn't about condoning the offense; it's about releasing the offender and entrusting justice to God.
3. **Forgiveness as Worship** When we forgive, we honor God. It's an act of obedience that mirrors His love and demonstrates trust in His justice and grace.

**Prayer:** Lord, thank You for forgiving the debt I could never repay. Your mercy is overwhelming, and I am humbled by Your grace. Help me to remember this when others wrong me. Teach me to forgive as You have forgiven me, with a heart full of love and compassion. May my forgiveness glorify You and bring healing to those around me. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

**Matthew 18:28** "But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.'

- **hundred denarii;** Mt 20:2
- **he seized him:** De 15:2 Ne 5:7,10,11 10:31 Isa 58:3 Eze 45:9

### RECIPIENT OF GREAT MERCY REFUSES TO GIVE MERCY

Other appropriate titles might be "The Unforgiving Servant" "Mercy Forgotten: The Servant's Hypocrisy" "A Forgiven Debtor's Injustice" "A Debt Demanded, A Lesson Ignored" "The Irony of the Unforgiving Servant" "Mercy Received, Mercy Withheld" "A Hundred Denarii vs. Ten Thousand Talents" "The Choking Grip of Unforgiveness" "From Forgiven to Demanding" "Demanding What

I Cannot Repay" "A Heart That Fails to Forgive"

**But that slave (doulos) went out (exerchomai) and found (heurisko) one of his fellow slaves (sundoulos) who owed (opheilo) him a hundred denarii (denarion) ; and he seized (krateo) him and began to choke (pnigo) him, saying, 'Pay back (apodidomi) what you owe (opheilo) -** Notice this forgiven slaves' response to being the beneficiary of amazing mercy and forgiveness to actively, willfully (both **went** and **found** are active voice = choice of his will to) seek and hunt down an equal (not his own slave but a fellow slave) who owed him a comparatively small amount. Estimating that a denarius was a Roman silver coin that represented about one day's wage for a common laborer the debt owed equated to roughly 100 days' wages, piling in comparison to the astronomical debt he had been forgiven! **Seized (krateo)** describes the forgiven slave's forceful, aggressive act of grabbing his fellow slave and then repeatedly choking him (**choke** is in the imperfect tense = over and over!) for failure to pay back this far lesser debt! His aggressive behavior contrasts starkly with the compassion shown to him by his master! He clearly had or choose to have "short term memory loss"!

**Adam Clarke on began to choke** - "There is no word I am acquainted with, which so fully expresses the meaning of the original... as the Anglo-saxon term throttle: it signified (like the Greek) to half choke a person, by seizing his throat."

*A hundred denarii is not a negligible amount (a hundred days' wages),  
but is a mere six-hundred-thousandth of the first sum!*

-- [New Bible Commentary p928 \(borrow\)](#)

**THOUGHT** - The contrast in the two debts challenges us as believers to recognize the enormity of God's forgiveness in our lives and to extend grace and mercy to others, even when their offenses feel significant to us. They are not nearly as offensive our our sins have been against a Holy God! The physical act of seizing and choking illustrates the destructive grip of unforgiveness. It demonstrates how an unforgiving heart can manifest even harsh and damaging actions toward those they refuse to forgive! Or to say it another way, an unforgiving heart can seize and choke relationships. Letting go (a sense conveyed by both [apoluo](#) and [aphiemi](#)) of a grudge or bitterness, rather than seizing and choking, reflects a heart aligned with our Father's heart of mercy and grace. We all need to ask ourselves are there relationships where I am "seizing" control instead of releasing forgiveness? How does this verse challenge me to respond to those who have wronged me? Am I reflecting the mercy I have received from God in my actions toward others? (I am looking in the mirror as I pen these questions beloved!)

*The debt was very very small, but the claim was urged with intense ferocity.  
Our little claims against our fellow-men are too apt to be  
pressed upon them with unsparing severity.*

**C H Spurgeon Commentary** - The same servant, but how different his bearing! Just now he was a lowly suppliant, but now he is a hectoring tyrant. He went out from the presence of his gracious lord, scarcely waiting to express his gratitude. He found one of his fellow servants; not his servant, nor his inferior, but one who was his equal, and his companion in service. This man owed him an hundred pence: a mere trifle when compared with the enormous debt which had been forgiven. We expect that he will at once wipe out that little score; but no: he laid hands on him, violently seizing him, for fear he should get away for a time. He took him by the throat, and bullied him with peremptory demands. He would have no patience with his debtor; he would not let him breathe if he did not pay. The debt was very very small, but the claim was urged with intense ferocity. Our little claims against our fellow-men are too apt to be pressed upon them with unsparing severity. The claimant had not even patience for an hour, but throttled his fellow-servant with the rough demand, "Pay me that thou owest," What right had he to be choking his lord's servant? He was injuring one who belonged to his own king. Our fellow-servant is our Lord's servant, and not ours to bully and oppress as we please.

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**Choke (4155)**(**pnigo** means to choke, strangle, suffocate (Mk 5:13+ = pigs **drowned** - so suffocated by drowning). Gilbrant writes that "In classical Greek **pnigō** primarily means "choke" or "strangle." In the classical era the verb also meant "stifle," as from exposure to great heat, and "drown." Compound words that include **pnigō** are more common (**apopnigō**, **sumpnigō**) and are used in much the same way as **pnigō** (cf. *Liddell-Scott*). The verb and its compounds are rare in the Septuagint. However, it is interesting to note that **pnigō** is used metaphorically to refer to the torment of Saul after the evil spirit came to him (1Sa 16:14,15+ [Lxx 1 Kings 16:14,15] [Only uses in Septuagint]). The Greek verb here translates the Hebrew **bā'ath**, "fall upon, terrify, startle," or "overwhelm. Related words include **apopnigō** , to stifle, choke severely; **epipnigō**, to choke by overcrowding; **pniktós**, an animal choked to death but not bled; **sumpnigō** , to throttle.

**PNIGO - Only 2v - Matt. 18:28; Mk. 5:13**

Matthew 18:29 "So his fellow slave fell to the ground and began to plead with him, saying, **Have patience** with me and I will repay you.'

- **Have patience:** Mt 18:26 6:12 Philemon 1:18,19

## A FUTILE PLEA FOR COMPASSION

So his fellow slave ([sundoulos](#)) fell ([pipto](#)) to the ground and began to plead ([parakaleo](#) - imperfect tense = again and again) with him, saying, '**Have patience** ([makrothumeo](#)) with me and I will repay ([apodidomi](#)) you - The action of falling signified humbling himself (the root meaning of humble means low to the ground!), but it was to no avail. The plea for patience (and time to repay) was repeated over and over also to no avail. The slave's actions and words should have stirred a sense of **déjà vu** French for "**already seen**" and reminded him of the feeling that he had experienced when faced with the prospect of an astronomical debt.

**THOUGHT** - We as forgiven sinners too often struggle to show the same forgiveness we ourselves have received! One is reminded of Paul's exhortation to the saints at Ephesus to be "forgiving each other, **JUST AS** (Here is the [fulcrum](#), the critical comparison which should motivate our forgiveness of each other! ) God in Christ also has forgiven you.(Eph 4:32+)

**C H Spurgeon Commentary** - It ought to have startled the tyrant when he heard his own prayer addressed to himself. It was word for word what he had said; and the suppliant's posture was just what his own had been when before his lord: he fell down at his feet. That poor promise, too, "I will pay thee all, " was repeated in his ear, and with much more likelihood of its being fulfilled. Surely he would give the same answer as his lord had granted him! Not he: he was servile, and of an evil spirit; his lord was a king, and acted royally.

Matthew 18:30 "But he was unwilling and went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed.

- but: 1Ki 21:27-29 22:27

## THE FORGIVEN SERVANT'S UNFORGIVING HEART

**But** - A sad term of contrast. In spite of the similar actions and pleading that had garnered gracious forgiveness from his master, the forgiven slave did an "about face!"

**He was unwilling** ([ou](#) = absolutely not + [thelo](#) = willing) **and went** ([aperchomai](#)) **and threw** ([ballo](#)) **him in prison** ([phulake](#)) **until** (time phrase) **he should pay back** ([apodidomi](#)) **what was owed** ([opheilo](#)) - The forgiven slave's unwillingness to forgive the debt and his harsh action to imprison the fellow slave demonstrated not only his hypocrisy but his lack of compassion. He was a perfect illustration of a person with a hard, unforgiving heart. Forgiveness is not optional but essential.

**THOUGHT**- Do you any relationships where grudges or unforgiveness might be lingering. Enabled by the Holy Spirit and for the glory of your Father, you need to seek to take intentional steps to release resentment and offer genuine forgiveness, even if it's hard. Remember that unforgiveness not only hurts the person being judged (not forgiven) but also enslaves (and "imprisons") the one who refuses to forgive, leading to bitterness and spiritual stagnation because it grieves and quenches the power of the Holy Spirit. Believers need to be quick to forgive and encourage others to do the same to resolve conflicts constructively. Are there people in my life I've refused to forgive, even after receiving forgiveness for my own mistakes? Am I allowing bitterness or resentment to imprison me emotionally or spiritually?

*Mercy received should always  
translate into mercy given.*

**C H Spurgeon Commentary** - Not he could not, but he would not . He gave no time, proposed no composition, promised no mercy, He used the law of his own generous king as a means of treading down his poor fellow-servant. He personally attended to the debtor's arrest: he went and cast him into prison. He sees him sentenced to a debtor's dungeon, without hope of coming out again

unless by payment. It was his lord's own prison, too: he was making use of his generous sovereign's lock-up to gratify his own malevolence. He vowed that his fellow-servant should lie there till he should, pay the debt. Base conduct this! As common as it is base!

**Matthew 18:31** "So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened.

- **they:** Ps 119:136,158 Jer 9:1 Mk 3:5 Lu 19:41 Ro 9:1-3 12:15 2Co 11:21 Heb 13:3
- **and came:** Ge 37:2 Lu 14:21 Heb 13:17

### THE PATHOS AND CRY OF THE WITNESSES

So when his fellow slaves ([sundoulos](#)) saw ([horao](#)) what had happened, they were deeply ([sphodra](#)) grieved ([lupeo](#)) and came ([erchomai](#)) and reported ([diasapheo](#) - told in detail, made thoroughly clear) to their lord ([kurios](#)) all that had happened - The fellow slaves witnessed the betrayal of mercy and sought to bring to light the unforgiving servant's unjust treatment. Notice the general principle of the "ripple effect" of sin which impacts others (in this case causing deep grief), even though we may think our sin is hidden from view! (cf Nu 32:23, Ge 44:16, Josh 7:19-21, Pr 26:26, Eccl 12:14, Lk 12:2, 1Co 4:5) In this case unforgiveness of one had a collective impact on the community. The fellow slaves' response to report in detail to the master demonstrates not that they are tattle-tales but are showing a righteous reaction to sin, reacting to it the way God would. We also see the importance of accountability in this group of fellow slaves.

**C H Spurgeon Commentary** - Others could see the evil of his conduct if he could not. His fellow servants saw what was done: he was a notable character, and what he did was sure to be observed. Much had been forgiven him, and much was expected from him. His fellow servants were very sorry for the imprisoned debtor, and sorry that any fellow-servant of theirs should degrade himself by acting in a manner so opposite to the treatment which he had received from his lord. They were right in reporting the transaction to head-quarters; for such a foul offense ought to be known where right could be done. Instead of carrying out lynch law, they told unto their lord all that was done. This was a very sensible course of conduct on their part. Let us adopt this plan if we are ever in similar circumstances, instead of indulging in foolish gossip and angry denunciation.

**Matthew 18:32** "Then summoning him, his lord \*said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me.

- **You wicked slave** : Mt 25:26 Lu 19:22 Ro 3:19

#### Related Passages:

Matthew 25:26+ "But his master answered and said to him, 'You wicked, lazy slave, you knew that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I scattered no seed.

Luke 19:22+ "He \*said to him, 'By your own words I will judge you, you worthless slave. Did you know that I am an exacting man, taking up what I did not lay down and reaping what I did not sow?

### THE CONSEQUENCES OF MERCY DENIED

Other titles that might be appropriate include "Forgiven Yet Unforgiving" "The Master's Rebuke" "Mercy Refused, Judgment Rendered" "The Unmerciful Heart" "A Debt of Forgiveness" "The Reckoning of a Hardened Heart" "Forgiveness Forgotten" "When Mercy Is Not Passed On" "Judged by Your Own Measure" "The Cost of Unforgiveness" "The Slave Who Spurned Mercy"

**Then** (marking progression in the narrative) **summoning** ([proskaleo](#)) **him, his lord** ([kurios](#)) **\*said to him, 'You wicked** ([poneros](#)) **slave** ([doulos](#)), **I forgave** ([aphiemi](#)) **you all that debt** ([opheilē](#)) **because you pleaded** ([parakaleo](#)) **with me.** - The master calls the unforgiving slave to himself and reminds him of mercy he had received because of his plea. **Pleaded** ([parakaleo](#)) **with me**, the same verb used to describe what his fellow slave had done to no avail. Note the emphasis of the degree of forgiveness. All means all without exception, surely a picture of how we are to forgive others the "debts" they owe us. Not 90%

forgiveness, for only 100% forgiveness is acceptable before our Master in Heaven. The word for **wicked** ([poneros](#)) speaks of active evil, evil seeking to do harm.

*In the light of God's incalculable grace to us, it is ludicrous,  
as well as wicked, for us to refuse to forgive others.*

-- [New Bible Commentary p928 \(borrow\)](#)

**THOUGHT** - To forgive is to mirror God's grace, mercy and love. It is not only an act of kindness (which of course it is) but it is also a spiritual discipline that aligns us with God's will. This verse calls on all of us as followers of Christ to reflect on the depth of God's "astronomical" forgiveness of our sins against Him and the moral obligation we have forgive others as a Spirit led response. Withholding forgiveness from others contradicts the grace and mercy we have received, and will have an adverse impact on our spiritual life. How do I respond to God's forgiveness in my life? Do I truly understand the depth of His mercy regarding the greatness of my debt Jesus has paid for in full (Jn 19:30+)? Am I holding onto grudges or resentment toward others? Enabled by God's Spirit do I practice forgiveness as generously as I have been forgiven? Is there someone in my life I need to forgive today? How can I take the first step?

**C H Spurgeon Commentary** - 32, 33 - The wretch was not condemned unheard: his lord only judged him after that he had called him. His lord and king set the matter before him very clearly, and appealed to his own judgment upon the case. He reminded him of what he appeared to have forgotten: at least, he had acted as if it had never happened. His lord addressed him in words of burning indignation: "O thou wicked servant. " It was atrocious wickedness of heart which had permitted him to indulge in such unworthy conduct. "I forgave thee all that debt. " What an all it was! How freely was the debt removed! "I forgave thee." The reason given was, "because thou desiredst me. " Not because thou hadst deserved such leniency, or couldst ever repay it. The inference from such abounding generosity was clear, strong unanswerable. The last words of the verse are forcible in the highest degree: "Shouldst not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant " How readily should we forgive the little offenses from which we suffer, since our Lord has pardoned our grievous transgressions! No offense of a fellow-servant can be compared with our sins against our Lord. What a model for our compassion is set before us in those words, "even as I had pity on thee "! The culprit made no defense. What could he say? He was unable even to make another appeal to mercy. He had refused mercy, and now mercy refused him.

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**Wicked** (4190) [poneros](#) from **poneo** = work or toil, Robertson says the idea is that labor is an annoyance, bad, evil; Noun [poneria](#) derived from **poneros**) means evil including evil, malignant character, pernicious (see Webster 1828 definition below), that which is morally or socially worthless, wicked, base, bad, degenerate. **Poneros** denotes determined, aggressive, and fervent evil that actively opposes what is good. **Poneros** is not just bad in character (like [kakos](#) - see note), but bad in effect (injurious)! **Poneros** describes evil in active opposition to good. It means not only evil in its nature but viciously evil in its influence and actively harmful. **Poneros** used to describe Satan (ho poneros = "Evil one"), the god of this age, who is corrupting man and dragging him to destruction. This denotes someone who is not content in being corrupt themselves. They seek to corrupt others and draw them into the same destruction!

There are two Greek words for evil - **poneros** and [kakos](#), the latter describing that which is inherently evil. **Poneros** on the other hand refers to the one who (or the thing that) is not only evil but is not content unless it carries out active evil, evil is actively harmful, hurtful and corrupting. It is therefore not surprising that **poneros** is one of the synonyms for "Satan" himself. The Greek ho poneros means "the (specific) evil" (translated "the evil one") and is used of the Devil ([diabolos](#)) in Mt 13:19, 38, Eph 6:16, 2Th 3:3, 1Jn 2:13-14, 3:12, 5:18-19. Indeed, the Devil is called the **evil one**, not only because he is intrinsically evil, but also because he is an evil doer, out to deceive and harm his victims.

**PONEROS IN THE GOSPELS** - Matt. 5:11; Matt. 5:37; Matt. 5:39; Matt. 5:45; Matt. 6:13; Matt. 6:23; Matt. 7:11; Matt. 7:17; Matt. 7:18; Matt. 9:4; Matt. 12:34; Matt. 12:35; Matt. 12:39; Matt. 12:45; Matt. 13:19; Matt. 13:38; Matt. 13:49; Matt. 15:19; Matt. 16:4; Matt. 18:32; Matt. 20:15; Matt. 22:10; Matt. 25:26; Mk. 7:22; Mk. 7:23; Lk. 3:19; Lk. 6:22; Lk. 6:35; Lk. 6:45; Lk. 7:21; Lk. 8:2; Lk. 11:13; Lk. 11:26; Lk. 11:29; Lk. 11:34; Lk. 19:22; Jn. 3:19; Jn. 7:7; Jn. 17:15;

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**A PEACE OF HIS MIND** MATTHEW 18:32 – 33 [NLT, Personal Worship Bible, eBook: New Living Translation](#)

The parable of the unforgiving debtor is blunt. Unforgiving equals wicked? Yes, replies Jesus. He concludes the parable with, "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart" (Matthew 18:35). Receiving forgiveness from God, reaching up in thankfulness to God, releasing forgiveness out to others, rewarded back with the peace of God.



In God's great economy, the beneficiaries must soon be the benefactors. The debtor in the parable owed millions of dollars, yet all of it was forgiven by the king. Our sin is the spiritual equivalent of such a debt, yet all of it is forgiven by the King of kings. The newly forgiven debtor in the parable was owed a comparatively small sum by another servant, perhaps a few thousand dollars. Yet he did not extend any mercy.

Do we reach up in thankfulness, and then reach out in forgiveness to others as an expression of that gratitude? Or do we make no connection at all between the two debts?

Who is it that you need to extend forgiveness to today? As an act of worship, reach up in thankfulness to God. Reach out with forgiveness to that person. Be rewarded with peace.

PRAYER

King of kings, help me to freely forgive ...

### Matthew 18:33 Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?

- even: Mt 5:44,45 Lu 6:35,36 Eph 4:32 5:1,2 Col 3:13

## THE CALL TO COMPASSION

Other appropriate titles might be "Should Mercy Not Be Shared?" "Reflecting Divine Forgiveness" "Mercy Demands Mercy" "A Challenge to Forgive" "As I Have Forgiven You" "The Mirror of Mercy" "Extending the Gift of Grace" "A Lesson in Empathy" "Forgiven to Forgive" "The Reflection of God's Mercy" "The Responsibility of Forgiveness" "Mercy is Meant to Multiply" "Learning to Show Mercy"

**Should you not also** (NJB - were you not bound to) **have had mercy** ([eleeo](#)) **on your fellow slave** ([sundoulos](#)) , **in the same way that** (just as) **I had mercy** ([eleeo](#)) **on you** - The master emphasizes that because he was forgiven such a huge debt, he should have been willing to pass along similar mercy to his fellow slave. The master's condemnation emphasizes that hypocrisy in forgiveness is unacceptable. Men who have received mercy should be willing to extend mercy to those by whom they are offended, just as God extended His mercy to each of us in Christ. This is the immutable standard of the kingdom of heaven and the citizens thereof. Receiving forgiveness carries a responsibility to extend it to others and failing to do so invites God's judgment.

**Oswald Chambers** - I have no right to say that I believe in forgiveness as an attribute of God if in my own heart I cherish an unforgiving temper. The forgiveness of God is the test by which I myself am judged. (Borrow [Complete Works of Oswald Chambers page 384](#) - this is an interesting compilation of 2 pages of Chamber's statements under the Topic heading **BELIEF**)

### Matthew 18:34 "And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him.

- **handed him over**: Mt 5:25,26 Lu 12:58,59 2Th 1:8,9 Rev 14:10,11

## JUDGMENT FOR THE UNMERCIFUL

Other titles that might be appropriate include "The Consequences of Unforgiveness" "Righteous Anger and Divine Justice" "Handed Over: The Cost of a Hardened Heart" "Mercy Withdrawn: A Lesson in Accountability" "When Grace Turns to Judgment" "The King's Wrath: A Debt Unpaid" "A Warning Against Hypocrisy" "Justice Served: The Price of Unforgiveness" "From Mercy to Wrath: The King's Judgment" "Tortured by Unforgiveness" "The High Cost of Hypocrisy" "When Mercy is Forfeited" "The Master's Judgment: A Warning to the Unmerciful" "The Pitfall of a Hardened Heart" "The Price of Refusing Compassion"

**And his lord** ([kurios](#)) , **moved with anger** ([orgizo](#) - enraged), **handed him over** ([paradidomi](#) - to the power of) **to the torturers** ([basanistes](#)) **until** ([until](#)) **he should repay** ([apodidomi](#)) **all that was owed** ([opheilo](#)) **him** - The **lord** represents the heavenly Father (as interpreted in Mt 18:35). The forgiven but unforgiving slave now receives a rude reckoning for his failure to forgive and his evil actions. This is also an example of righteous anger against the servant's lack of mercy, and shows that God is

deeply grieved by his hypocrisy. What is the meaning of this punishment of torment? For believers this clearly does not refer to eternal ruin and torment for once truly saved you are saved forever. Nor does it refer to the non-Biblical teaching of purgatory. For believers to hold onto unforgiveness and/or grudges can lead to spiritual and emotional torment. The only key out of that "dungeon" is to grant forgiveness to those who have offended you! Believers need to make no mistake about the truth that God is compassionate and forgiving, but He is also just and a persistent heart attitude of unforgiveness can result in divine discipline (cf loss of fellowship described with unforgiveness in Mt 6:14-15+).

**THOUGHT** - To reiterate the basic principle is as God forgives us (vertical relationship), we are called to forgive others (horizontal relationship) and neglecting one disrupts the other. Do feel far from God beloved? If so could the "culprit" be unforgiveness?

**C H Spurgeon Commentary** - His lord was wroth: he who could be so compassionate was necessarily a man of warm feelings, and therefore he could be angry. Naturally, he was compassionate towards the poor debtor in prison, and this made him indignant with the wretch who had imprisoned him. It was righteous wrath which gave up the unforgiving servant to tremble punishment: delivered him to the tormentors, the proper executioners of justice. His punishment would be without end, for it was to last till he should pay all that was due; and the debtor could never pay the ten thousand talents. Things must take their course with malicious spirits. They have put themselves beyond the reach of mercy. Love's own greatness necessitates great indignation at the malice which insists upon revenging its little wrongs. The sovereignty of God is never unjust: he only delivers to the tormentors those whom the law of the universe necessarily condemns.

**David Turner** - If one presses the details, it will be impossible for the evil unforgiving servant ever to repay all that he owes to the king. Perhaps there is a hint here of the horror of eternal punishment (cf. Mt 18:6-9). (**ED**: SOME WRITERS USE THE LOGIC THAT SINCE THE DEBT COULD NOT POSSIBLY BE PAID THE TORTURE SYMBOLIZES ETERNAL PUNISHMENT. I WILL LEAVE THAT TO YOU TO DECIDE IF THAT IS WHAT JESUS IS TEACHING.) The connection with Mt 6:14 is clear. Disciples dare not presume that God will forgive them if they are unwilling to forgive their fellow disciples. And this forgiveness must be genuine, from the heart (See [The Gospel of Matthew - The Gospel of Mark - Page 243](#))

**Warren Wiersbe** does not favor this passage alluding to eternal punishment - - Keep in mind that this has nothing to do with salvation; it is a matter of "family forgiveness" between siblings in Christ, not between God and the sinner; so do not read eternal judgment into v. 34. God will certainly deal with a believer who harbors an unforgiving spirit. (See [Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament - Page 69](#))

**Craig Blomberg** - Verse 34 does not promulgate any doctrine of purgatory. Even when one allegorizes the prison, torturers, and repayment, one winds up with a picture of hell, not purgatory, since this man could almost certainly never repay his debt or escape. Nor is it obvious that the retraction of forgiveness has a clear spiritual analogue. (See [Matthew: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition](#))

**ESV Study note** (p 1860) on Mt 18:34 - 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).

**NET NOTE** - Grk "handed him over to the torturers," referring specifically to guards whose job was to torture prisoners who were being questioned. According to L&N 37.126, it is difficult to know for certain in this instance whether the term actually envisions torture as a part of the punishment or is simply a hyperbole. However, in light of the following verse and Jesus' other warning statements in Matthew about "fiery hell," "the outer darkness," etc., it is best not to dismiss this as mere imagery. (**ED**: THUS IS SEEMS THE NET NOTE FAVORS THIS AS AN ALLUSION TO ETERNAL PUNISHMENT.)

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**Torturers** (930) (**basanistes** from **basanizo** = to torment) describes one who elicits the truth by the use of the rack, thus an inquisitor, one who elicits information by torture. A torturer also used of a jailer doubtless because the business of torturing was also assigned to him. There were no official tormentors under either Roman or Jewish law, but jailers might torture prisoners. The idea of tormentors probably derived from the practice of Oriental despots who tortured their subjects. Mt 18:34 is the only use of this word.

- [What does the Bible say about torture?](#)

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**Charles Swindoll - THE ULTIMATE CLASS ACT Matthew 18** [Day by Day with Charles Swindoll: Daily Devotions](#)

Class Action is a class act. It's a film about two lawyers who go head-to-head, both in court and in life. They are father and daughter . . . on opposite sides of a complicated case charged with the full spectrum of emotions.

It is the father-daughter interplay that gives the story its definition. During her early teen years her father was often on the road, busily engaged in various cases and crusades. During that impressionable era of her life, he was not only unfaithful to her mother,

he was virtually out of touch with the family. The daughter's resentment of her father's lifestyle festered into full-blown competition, both privately and professionally. Nothing would please her more than winning that class-action suit in the courtroom . . . a perfect place to unleash her rage, to humiliate her father and retaliate on behalf of her mother, whom she idolizes.

Behind this brilliant woman's drive and accomplishments lie demons of bitterness. Unknown to the young woman, her soul awaits that moment when she can finally forgive her father . . . and be free.

What is true in the make-believe world of film is all the more true in the real world of life. Jesus Himself spoke of forgiveness on several occasions. Like the time Peter asked Him if forgiving someone "seven times" was sufficient. After all, that was over twice the going rate according to the Pharisees' teaching. To paraphrase Jesus' terse answer: "Would you believe seventy times seven?" In other words, an infinite number of times . . . no limit.

Jesus then went on to point out that without forgiveness there cannot be freedom, and He told them the story of a man who, after having been forgiven an enormous debt, refused to forgive someone who owed him a measly twenty bucks. The man who would not forgive was called back before the king, who "handed him over to the torturers" (Matt. 18:34). That word means "inquisitors," conveying the idea of personal torment . . . internal torture. Jesus added: "So shall My heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart" (18:35). We are most like beasts when we kill. We are most like men when we judge. We are most like God when we forgive.

Of all the actions you can carry out, that one is the ultimate class act.

*Freedom and forgiveness  
both begin with the same letter.*

**Matthew 18:35 "My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart."**

- **do:** Mt 6:12,14,15 7:1,2 Pr 21:13 Mk 11:26 Lu 6:37,38 Jas 2:13
- **from:** Pr 21:2 Jer 3:10 Zec 7:12 Lu 16:15 Jas 3:14 4:8 Rev 2:23

#### **Related Passages:**

Matthew 5:9+ "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."

Ephesians 4:32+ "**Be present imperative** see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#) kind to one another, tenderhearted, **forgiving** ([charizomai](#) - present tense) one another, (NOW FOR THE MOTIVATION) just as God in Christ **has forgiven** ([charizomai](#) - the root is [charis](#) = grace!!!) you."

Colossians 3:13+ bearing with one another, and **forgiving each other**, whoever has a complaint against anyone; **just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.**

Matthew 6:12+; Mt 6:14,15+ 'And **forgive** ([aphiemi aorist imperative](#) - USED NOT TO COMMAND GOD BUT TO EXPRESS URGENCY, OUR GREAT NEED) us our debts, as we also have **forgiven** ([aphiemi](#)) our debtors. (NOW NOTE FORGIVENESS IS THE ONE ASPECT OF DISCIPLE'S PRAYER JESUS EXPOUNDS UPON! MUST BE IMPORTANT!) 14 "For if (first class condition = since or what follows is assumed true) you **forgive** ([aphiemi](#)) men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also **forgive** ([aphiemi](#)) you. 15 "**BUT** (OH MY - A STRIKING CONTRAST) if (first class condition) you do not **forgive** ([aphiemi](#)) men, then your Father will not forgive ([aphiemi](#)) your transgressions (SPEAKS OF HINDERED FELLOWSHIP WITH OUR FATHER, NOT OUR ETERNAL DESTINY).

### **THE DIVINE PAYMENT FOR AN UNFORGIVING SPIRIT**

**My heavenly** ([ouranios](#)) **Father** ([pater](#)) **will also do** ([poieo](#)) **the same to you, if each of you does not forgive** ([aphiemi](#)) **his brother** ([adelphos](#)) **from your heart** ([kardia](#)) - God as **Father** resides in and rules over all from Heaven. Believers have a "**heavenly calling**" (Heb 3:1) and therefore should be willing and able (they possess the Spirit) to forgive others, as they seek to live as pleasing to their heavenly Father and to imitate His great, gracious forgiveness in Christ. Why should we forgive from the **heart**? Because our **heart** (our "control center" so to speak) is the heart of our problem, the seat and seed of our unforgiving spirit. You can say "I forgive" with your lips, but the seed of unforgiveness remains planted in your **heart**! Just as seeds of crabgrass can be difficult

to eradicate, seeds of unforgiveness in the soil of our heart can be very difficult to remove. Enabled by the Spirit (we cannot accomplish this removal in reliance on our fleshly strength or resolve) we can take the measures necessary to remove the "crabgrass-like" seeds of unforgiveness (and bitterness) from the soil of our hearts. And do not be deceived by your fallen flesh which will tell you that you can speak the words "I forgive" saying you bury the hatchet ([see below](#)) while your fallen flesh says just be sure to leave the handle exposed in case they hurt you again. While **brother** ([adelphos](#)) could refer to our believing brethren, the need for forgiveness transcends God's family members and extends to anyone with whom we harbor an unforgiving (usually also resentful) spirit. The prison called unforgiveness is a horrible dungeon to live in. Only giving forgiveness can set us free and as the Son promised we will be free indeed! The sunlight of joy breaks through into our heart again.

The "Disciple's Prayer" ([see above](#)) is a perfect illustration of the importance of forgiving others, for if we fail to forgive others, we hinder our fellowship with our heavenly Father. Jesus emphasized a direct relationship between forgiving others and receiving forgiveness from God. Forgiving others does not earn God's forgiveness but demonstrates a heart transformed by grace. May God grant that this simple understanding of God's forgiveness motivate you to forgive others. Amen.

**THOUGHT** - Just as talents (resources) are entrusted to us, so is forgiveness. We are accountable for how we "invest" in relationships by extending grace. As blood bought, heaven bound, Spirit filled, grace dispensing men and women who serve a forgiving King, forgiveness is not optional but is essential for reflecting God's mercy and living in alignment with His will. If you are having trouble with forgiving another human being, you need to pause and ask yourself do I fully grasp the magnitude of God's forgiveness in my life? Are there people in my life I struggle to forgive? Why? How does my unwillingness to forgive affect my relationship with God and others? (This question is rhetorical! An unforgiving spirit, quenches and grieves the Spirit and hinders fellowship with the Father! If we don't feel close to God, guess who moved?) You might want to take a pen and paper and write down what steps can you take today to extend forgiveness and show God's grace (doing so of course by God's grace)! It will set you free from the "torture" of your soul (unforgiveness does affect you whether you acknowledge it or not). And remember, you are never more like your heavenly Father than when you are showing forgiveness to those who do not deserve it!

*Continued anger against our brother  
shuts heaven's gate in our own faces.*

**C H Spurgeon Commentary** - This is the great moral lesson. We incur greater wrath by refusing to forgive than by all the rest of our indebtedness. We cannot escape from condemnation if we refuse to pardon others (ED: CAVEAT IS THAT UNFORGIVENESS IN BELIEVERS DOES NOT RESULT IN ETERNAL CONDEMNATION! JESUS PAID FOR ALL OUR SINS - Jn 19:30+). If we forgive in words only, but not from our hearts, we remain under the same condemnation. Continued anger against our brother shuts heaven's gate in our own faces. The heavenly Father of the Lord Jesus will be righteously wrathful against us, and will deliver us to the tormentors if we do not from our hearts forgive every one his brother's trespasses. Lord, make me of a meek, forgiving spirit! May my heart be as ready to pardon offenses as it is to beat!

**ESV Study note** (p 1860) on Mt 18:35 - 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.

**HCSB Study Bible note** (p 1650) - Since the debt could not possibly be repaid, the torture symbolizes eternal punishment.

**King James Bible Commentary**. One behaving in this manner falls into the condemnation of the lost. The searching threat of verse Mt 18:35 does not mean that a true believer will be lost, but if he claims to be born of God, he will act like a born-again person. True forgiveness "from the heart" of a regenerate man is one of the true signs of genuine salvation and conversion (cf. Eph 4:32). Saved people are both forgiven and forgiving. Unforgiving people prove that they have never been born of God.

**Warren Wiersbe** - 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. ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

**David Guzik** adds a lengthy comment - Jesus taught an important and often neglected principle regarding forgiveness. There are many sincere Christians who withhold forgiveness from others for mistaken reasons – and they feel entirely justified in doing so. Their reasoning works like this: We should not forgive another person who sins against us until they are properly repentant. This is because repentance is mentioned in the context of our commands to forgive (such as in Luke 17:4), and because our forgiveness to others is to be modeled after God's forgiveness of us. Since God does not forgive us apart from repentance, so we should not

forgive others unless they properly repent to us. We even have the duty to withhold such forgiveness and to judge their repentance, because it is ultimately in their best interest to do so.. This thinking – even if it means well – is incorrect and ultimately dangerous. This parable shows us why it is incorrect for us to think, “God doesn’t forgive me without my repentance; therefore I must withhold forgiveness from others who sin against me until they properly repent.” That thinking is wrong, because I do not stand in the same place as God in the equation, and I never can. God stands as One who has never been forgiven and never needed forgiveness; I stand as one who has been forgiven and needs continual forgiveness.. Therefore – if it were possible – we should be far quicker to forgive than God is, without precondition of repentance, because we stand as forgiven sinners who must also forgive. We have an even greater obligation to forgive than God does. Since we have been forgiven so much, we have no right to withhold forgiveness from others. We are the debtor forgiven almost an infinite debt; will we hold on to the small debts others owe to us? If anyone had the right to withhold forgiveness it is God – and He forgives more freely and more completely than anyone we know. What possible right do we have to hold on to our unforgiveness? It is also important to understand that a distinction can and should be made between forgiveness and reconciliation. True reconciliation of relationship can only happen when both parties are agreeable to it, and this may require repentance on one or both of the parties in the conflict. Yet forgiveness can be one-sided. Furthermore, forgiveness does not necessarily shield someone from the civil or practical consequences of their sin. For example, a homeowner may personally forgive the man who robbed his house, yet it is still appropriate for the robber to be arrested and put in jail. On a personal level, forgiveness is required. On a civil and societal level, the man should be punished by the magistrates (Romans 13).. Nevertheless, the principle clearly stands. In context, this parable was given to make us more forgiving, not less forgiving. No one could reasonably read this parable and think that Jesus was trying to restrict the forgiveness of His disciples.

**NET NOTE** - Here the term “brother” means “fellow believer” or “fellow Christian” (cf. BDAG 18 s.v. δελφός 2.a), whether male or female. Concerning the familial connotations, see also the note on the first occurrence of this term in v. 15.

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**Heavenly** (3770) **ouranios** means of or in heaven.

**OURANIOS - 9V** - Matt. 5:48; Matt. 6:14; Matt. 6:26; Matt. 6:32; Matt. 15:13; Matt. 18:35; Matt. 23:9; Lk. 2:13; Acts 26:19

**Forgive** (863) **aphiemi** (Includes an in depth discussion on forgiveness) from **apo** = prefix speaks of separation, putting some distance between + **hiemi** = put in motion, send) conveys the basic idea of an action which causes separation. Literally **aphiemi** means to send from one's self, to forsake, to hurl away, to put away, let alone, disregard, put off. It conveys the basic idea of an action which causes separation and refers to total detachment, total separation, from a previous location or condition. It means to send forth or away from one's self. It refers to the act of putting something away or of laying it aside. In secular Greek **aphiemi** initially conveyed the sense of to throw and in one secular writing we read "let the pot drop" (**aphiemi**). From this early literal use the word came to mean leave or let go. It is worth noting that the most common way **aphiemi** is translated in the NAS is **left** (to go away from a place, to depart from, to remove oneself from an association with, to leave behind - [ponder how these might relate to "forgiveness!"]) (38x) followed by **forgive** (23x) and **forgiven** (23x).

In secular Greek literature, **aphiemi** was a fundamental word used to indicate the sending away of an object or a person. **Aphiemi** was used to describe the voluntary release of a person or thing over which one has legal or actual control. The related noun **aphesis** meant described a setting free. .Later it came to include the release of someone from the obligation of marriage, or debt, or even a religious vow. In its final form it came to embrace the principle of release from punishment for some wrongdoing. .

**Colin Brown** adds that **aphiemi** means "With a personal object, to send forth, send away (of a woman, to divorce; of a meeting, to dissolve, end), to let go, to leave, dispatch; with an impersonal object, to loose (e.g. a ship into the sea), to discharge (e.g. arrows), to give up. In the figurative sense the verb (**aphiemi**) means to let alone, permit, let pass, neglect, give up (taking trouble, etc.); in Josephus, Ant., 1, 12, 3, to lose one's life, die. The **legal use is important**: to release from a legal bond (office, guilt, etc. and also, a woman from marriage, e.g. Hdt., 5, 39), to acquit (e.g. cancellation of criminal proceedings, Plato, Laws, 9, 86, 9d), to exempt (from guilt, obligation, punishment, etc.; e.g. Hdt., 6, 30). Similarly the noun **aphesis** (e.g. Demosthenes, 24, 45) means release, pardon, or remission, etc ([New International Dictionary of NT Theology. 1986. Zondervan](#))

The Greek Old Testament, the Septuagint, contained many of these ideas. In the Old Testament **aphiemi** spoke of releasing a prisoner or remitting a debt, but it also came to mean pardon or forgiveness. **Aphiemi** is used in Lev 16:10 to describe sending the scapegoat into the wilderness, a foreshadowing of the ultimate forgiveness Jesus' death in our place provided for us by grace, not merit.

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**Stephen Olford** - —Matthew 18:35 [According to Your Word: Morning and Evening](#)

Here is certainly strong language! How can the believer read such a verse and not see to it that he has a forgiving spirit?

The apostle Paul teaches the same truth. He says, “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted [corresponding with his heart in the verse above], forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you” (Eph. 4:32).

And John: “Whoever hates his brother is a murderer” (1 John 3:15).

Thus, a forgiving spirit is essential. In fact, it is the positive fruit of one born of God. In another place, it is given as the condition for prevailing prayer. O Lord, cultivate in me the same forgiving spirit You have shown me.

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### **Nancy Leigh DeMoss - Feeling Unforgiven?**

“So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”—  
Matthew 18:35

WE OFTEN QUOTE THIS PETITION from the Lord’s Prayer: “Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors” (Matt. 6:12 NKJV). But the wording of that request should lead us to ask ourselves, “What if God only forgave me to the extent that I’ve been willing to forgive those who have sinned against me?” It’s sobering to think about.

And it’s something we can’t ignore, for in the verses that follow directly after the Lord’s Prayer, we hear Jesus saying, “If you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (verses 14–15).

Strong words. They are so stark and direct, in fact, that we who are saved by grace yet unforgiving in our hearts find ourselves looking for loopholes, dodging the obvious, trying to convince ourselves that He must have meant something less exacting.

Yet in reality, we find nowhere to hide. When we refuse to forgive, something is blocked in our relationship with the Father. The Scripture affirms what our own experience confirms—a clear connection between our willingness to extend forgiveness to others and our ability to appropriate and experience His forgiveness for our sins.

I have met many believers who find it difficult to accept and experience God’s love and forgiveness. There can be any number of reasons for that, of course. But one of the biggest is a refusal to forgive others. Those who hold on to bitterness, who refuse to forgive, cannot hope to enjoy the full, sweet taste of His compassion and mercy.

Do you struggle with doubting or distrusting God’s mercy toward you? Could there be any unforgiveness in your heart that is limiting your capacity to experience His grace and forgiveness?

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### **Adrian Rogers** - excerpt from full sermon [THE FREEDOM OF FORGIVENESS](#) - SCROLL TO PAGE 423

Second reason: not only the grace factor, but the guilt factor. Now, notice what Jesus said in Matthew chapter 6, verses 14 and 15: “For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” (Matthew 6:14–15) Now, you think about that.

The person who refuses to forgive destroys the bridge over which he must travel. An unforgiving spirit is unforgivable.

Forgiving and being forgiven go together. The only person who can afford not to forgive is the person who will never need forgiveness. Notice the prayer: “Father, forgive us, as we forgive those ...” (Matthew 6:12) Now friend, if you don’t intend to forgive that person who has wronged you, that’s a very foolish—and even a stupid—prayer for you to pray: “Father, you treat me like I’m treating them. Father, forgive me as”—in the same manner—“I forgive others.” Now, you think about what you’re praying. You say, “Well, I’m not going to forgive the other person,” then, “Father, don’t forgive me.” “Well, I’ll forgive her, but I’ll never have any more to do with her.” God says, “Okay. I’ll forgive you and never have any more to do with you.” You see what you’re asking? “Father, forgive us as”—in the same manner that—“we forgive those who sin against us.” (Matthew 6:12)

May I tell you, friend—listen carefully—an unforgiving spirit is not merely you missing a blessing; it is a wicked, vile, gross sin, in the same category as stealing or blasphemy. Why? Because, what is God? God’s nature, Brother Jim, is a nature to forgive. That is the nature of God. And aren’t we glad that He is a forgiving God? We’re so glad of that. Well, then, if you don’t forgive, you’re not like God. And if you’re not like God, what is that? Ungodliness. An unforgiving spirit is ungodly. It is ungodly. It is a terrible thing.

Jesus illustrated this with a story. Take your Bibles, and turn to Matthew chapter 18 here, for just a moment, because we’re going to be there for a second—Matthew chapter 18. Jesus, speaking about forgiveness, illustrates it this way; He gave a parable—Matthew 18, beginning in verse 23: “Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, who would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, who owed him ten thousand talents”—now, just underscore that: ten thousand talents. Here’s a man taking inventory; here is a man who’s having an audit done, and he finds out that a man owes the king ten thousand talents—“But forasmuch as he had [nothing with which] to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made”—that is, he’s to be put in debtor’s prison—“The servant therefore fell

down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all”—but we’re going to see that was a vain boast because there was no way he could have done it—“Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.” (Matthew 18:23–27) “Loosed him” means that he “set him free.”

Now, don’t miss what Jesus is saying in this parable. If you’re not careful, you’re going to miss it. When He said, “ten thousand talents,” He was talking about an enormous debt. A talent was the largest measure of money known in the Roman world. The research that I did said that it would be equal to the wages of ten thousand men for seventeen years. In today’s dollars, it would be billions of dollars. When Solomon built the temple, the wonderful temple that he built there, and overlaid it with gold, the Bible says there were five thousand talents of gold in that magnificent temple. (1 Chronicles 29:7) This man owes ten thousand talents. As a matter of fact, the word talent here literally means “without number.” It was used for that number. Sometimes the Bible translates it “myriads”—just “myriads.” It’s the Greek word we get our word myriad from. It means it’s just some astronomical amount of money. This man is in debt. There is no way possible that he can pay, and the king forgives him. At that moment, it cost the king ten thousand talents.

Now, what happened, according to this story? Well, you find out that that man who had been forgiven goes out and finds someone that owes him money. Look, if you will, in verse 28: “But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow servants, [who] owed him an hundred [denarii]—now, a denarius is a day’s labor—and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me what thou owest.” (Matthew 18:28) “Pay what you owe.” Now, here’s a man who’d been forgiven myriads; here’s a man who’s been forgiven billions, and he has somebody that owes him a hundred days’ wages, takes him by the throat, and says, “Pay me.” And the man says, “I can’t pay you right now. Have mercy.” But Matthew 18, verse 30 says, “And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.” (Matthew 18:30)

Do you see it? Do you see the analogy that Jesus is making? And Jesus speaks of the wickedness of that man who had been forgiven and would not forgive. (Matthew 18:32) And so, here’s what Jesus said in verse 35. He talks about, then, the king, who is very wroth and has that man who had been forgiven taken and put in prison himself. And He says in Matthew 18, verse 35: “So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.” (Matthew 18:35) Now, what is our Lord saying? Our Lord is saying, “It is absolutely wicked for those of us who have been forgiven so much to refuse to forgive somebody else.”

Is there somebody who’s wronged you and you’re holding back forgiveness, and you have had our Lord, with the gold of His blood and the silver of His tears, to pay your sin debt? Do you know what James says in James 2, verse 13? “For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath [shown] no mercy.” (James 2:13) Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 5:7: “Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.” (Matthew 5:7)

Why should I forgive? Listen, friend, I need to forgive because of the grace factor: I have been forgiven. I need to forgive because of the guilt factor: I will still need to be forgiven day by day. And only a person who never sins can afford not to forgive, which is no one.

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## **David Jeremiah - DELIBERATELY FORGIVE**

We also do a better job being a channel of God’s grace when we—like Christ—deliberately forgive those who have sinned against us.

By God’s grace, hymn writer Fanny Crosby was able not only to forgive the doctor who ruined her vision, but she was also able to thank God for her blindness. She wrote this little prayer: “I am praying, Blessed Savior, to be more and more like Thee. I am praying that Thy Spirit like a dove may rest on me.”<sup>2</sup>

And her blessed Savior—and ours—once told a story of a servant who owed an enormous sum of money to his master. It was impossible for him to pay it, so the master graciously forgave the debt. But the debtor, freed from his obligation, found a man who owed him a small sum and threw him into debtor’s prison for failing to repay the loan. When the master heard of it, he summoned his servant and said, “You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?” The master threw his servant to the torturers.

Then Jesus spoke these stark words: “So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses” (Matthew 18:35)....

Psychologists are discovering how the act of forgiving others actually improves mental and even physical health. In one recently published study, participants attended a six-hour workshop explaining how holding a grudge can cause psychological and physical damage; they were also taught techniques for forgiving others. The majority of those people who chose to forgive reported significant improvement in their relationships as well as in their physical and emotional health.<sup>3</sup>

How relevant is the Bible’s advice!

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## J R Miller - Matthew 18:35

If we have truly received divine forgiveness—we will be forgiving toward others. As one says, "If you get pardon from God, you will give it to a brother; if you withhold it from your brother, you thereby make it manifest that you have not gotten it from God."

So we are brought face to face with a most solemn practical teaching which we dare not ignore. Have we the forgiving spirit? Can we sincerely pray, "Forgive us our sins—as we forgive those who sin against us"? No doubt the lesson is hard, for it is so against nature; yet we all know by experience that the cherishing of resentment never brings peace to our hearts. People say, "Revenge is sweet;" but it is not true. It really makes bitterness for him who cherishes it. The gratification of a moment, becomes pain afterward.

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## Oswald Chambers —Matthew 18:35

THE FULL FRUIT OF SANCTIFICATION is biblically demanded of the one who has received the grace of sins forgiven. If the unmerited mercy of God shown to me is not reshown to others, my justification is annulled. If the unmerited forgiveness of God awarded to me is not exercised toward others, my justification is annulled.

Forgetting is the essence of divine forgiveness. Unless my forgiveness of other people "forgets" their trespasses against me, the grace of God in me is a mere painted flower, and I am a play actor.

Listen to this warning: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7).

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## Nancy Leigh DeMoss —Matthew 18:34 NKJV [The Quiet Place: Daily Devotional Readings - Page 1](#)

MEDICAL RESEARCH has consistently shown that people who harbor pent-up emotions such as anger, bitterness, and inner hostility will often manifest these issues in their physical bodies. Such individuals frequently show a propensity for high blood pressure, impaired immune function, muscle spasms, hormonal changes, memory loss, even an increased risk of heart attack. Interestingly, both the words anger and angina share the same Greek root.

Please hear me. I'm not saying for a moment that every ache or pain is caused by bitterness or unforgiveness. I don't want to make anyone who suffers from organically rooted diseases to feel condemned, or to suggest that you shouldn't pursue medical treatment for physical ailments. But I'm convinced that more often than we realize, some of the chronic mental, emotional, and even physical disorders that people struggle with are rooted in anger we're unwilling to release. God never intended our bodies to hold up under the weight of unresolved conflict.

In the parable of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18, Jesus linked a refusal to forgive with God turning us over to "torturers" ("tormentors" [KJV]; "jailers" [ESV]). When I find myself dealing with persistent, unexplainable physical symptoms, I think it's important to at least ask the Lord if there's anything He's trying to get my attention about, any residual anger or bitterness that might be taking a toll on my body.

Being a forgiving person will not guarantee a pain-free life. But I can't help wondering how much pain we might be spared (and how much money we could save on doctors' and therapists' bills) if we refused to let bitterness take root in our hearts.

Is there any unresolved issue in your heart that could be having an adverse effect on you—physically, mentally, emotionally?

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**Burying the Hatchet** - Old Joe was dying. For years he had been at odds with Bill, formerly one of his best friends. Wanting to straighten things out, he sent word for Bill to come and see him. When Bill arrived, Joe told him that he was afraid to go into eternity with such a bad feeling between them. Then, very reluctantly and with great effort, Joe apologized for things he had said and done. He also assured Bill that he forgave him for his offenses. Everything seemed fine until Bill turned to go. As he walked out of the room, Joe called out after him, "But, remember, if I get better, this doesn't count!"

**Background on Bury the Hatchet** - The phrase has its roots in a tradition among Native American tribes, particularly during peace negotiations. Tribes would literally bury a hatchet, tomahawk, or other weapon as a symbolic act of ending hostilities and committing to peace. This ceremonial gesture was meant to show that both parties had no intention of engaging in further conflict. Today, the phrase is used figuratively to describe reconciliation in a variety of contexts.

We may smile at this story. Yet what a clear picture this gives of the way we sometimes treat one another. The forgiveness we profess is often superficial (Not from the heart, Mt 18:35, Ezek 36:26, 27). It may be prompted by fear, or to gain some selfish advantage, or to clear our conscience—not out of genuine love for God (cf Lk 7:41-47) and the one who has wronged us. Yes, we



may say we forgive, but when the least little friction arises, we are quick to resurrect past grievances. We must understand the breadth and length and height and depth of God's forgiveness in Christ on the Cross, foreshadowed by these beautiful pictures...

- Psalm 103:12 As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us. (ED: Where is the east and west pole?)
- Isaiah 38:17 "Lo, for my own welfare I had great bitterness; It is You who has kept my soul from the pit of nothingness, For You have cast all my sins behind Your back.
- Isaiah 44:22 "I have wiped out your transgressions like a thick cloud And your sins like a heavy mist. Return to Me, for I have redeemed you."
- Micah 7:18-19+ "Who is a God like You, who pardons iniquity And passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of His possession? He does not retain His anger forever, Because He delights in unchanging love. 19 He will again have compassion on us; He will tread our iniquities under foot. Yes, You will cast all their sins Into the depths of the sea. (Then put up a "No Fishing" sign like Corrie Ten Boom likes to say!)

In short, **we like to "bury the hatchet" with the handle sticking out.** That way we can easily pick it up again and use it to our advantage. How different is the forgiveness Jesus talked about! (Mt 18:15-22). If our sinless Lord is willing to forgive us--with all our faults--how can we withhold pardon from those who have sinned against us? True Christlike forgiveness buries the hatchet completely.

*Those who say they will forgive but can't forget,  
simply bury the hatchet but leave the handle out for immediate use.*

--D. L. Moody

*Misunderstanding [forgiveness](#)  
often keeps us in bondage to grudges.*

--[Gotquestions.org](#)

Christ the Lord our debt has paid—  
All our sins on Him were laid;  
We like Him should try to live,  
Always ready to forgive!  
—Bosch

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**Garth Brooks** ("[We Bury The Hatchet](#)" on the Album: Ropin The Wind) has a song which speaks of the unforgiving heart...

### **We bury the hatchet**

#### **But leave the handle stickin' out**

We're always diggin' up things  
We should forget about  
When it comes to forgettin'  
Baby, there ain't no doubt  
We bury the hatchet  
But leave the handle sticking out

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One more **Illustration** - **WHEN FORGIVENESS SEEMS IMPOSSIBLE** - **Corrie ten Boom**, author of **The Hiding Place**, was taken captive and spent time in Nazi concentration camps during World War II. While in prison, Corrie saw incredible abuse, so inhumane that it drove the prisoners to incredible depths, including intentionally allowing lice to breed on their bodies because the more lice they had, the less likely it would be that the guards would molest them! And Corrie even witnessed the death of her own dear sister.

After the war, God sent Corrie ten Boom on a mission of mercy through the war-torn cities to encourage residents to choose **forgiveness** over **bitterness**. She would motivate her audiences by sharing some of the atrocities she had experienced, implying that if she could forgive such horrors, so could her listeners. One night speaking, she immediately recognized the man who came walking down the aisle as a particularly cruel guards in one of the concentration camps. The man did not recognize her however. As he approached Corrie he said...

Fraulein, you don't know me, but I was a guard in one of those camps. After the war, God saved me. I wish I could go back and undo those years. I can't, but I've just been prompted by God to come tonight and ask you, **would you please forgive me?**

Then he extended his hand to her. Can you imagine the horrible thoughts and memories that raced through Corrie's mind as she

recognized his face and then even worse, heard his incredible plea for forgiveness? How could she? Corrie said her arms froze at her side and she was literally unable to move. The flashbacks in her mind replaying the atrocities, the death of her sister, the abuse. And then God's Spirit said to her,

Corrie, what have you been telling everyone else to do? As an act of your will, will you choose to forgive?

Corrie went on to explain what happened next...

I reached out my hand, and I put it in his, and I said, 'You're forgiven.'

She later reported that at that moment...

It was like a dam broke loose—all the bitterness and resentment—and God set me free.

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#### **QUESTION - [What does the Bible say about grudges?](#)**

**ANSWER** - We all have reasons to hold grudges. People wrong us. Situations hurt us. Even God does not always do what we think He should do, so we get [angry](#). We hold offenses against those who have wronged us, and often against God who we think should have done things differently. A grudge is nothing more than a refusal to forgive. So, since this tendency is inherent in all of us and seemingly unavoidable, what does the Bible say about it?

God has such a strong concern about grudges that He included a specific command about them when He gave the Law to the Israelites. Leviticus 19:18 says, "Do not seek [revenge](#) or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord." It is interesting that God concluded this particular command with the words "I am the Lord." In doing so, God reminded us that He is the Lord, not us. To hold a grudge is to set ourselves up as judge and jury—to determine that one person's wrong should not be forgiven. No human being has the right or authority to do that. Romans 12:19 says, "Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord."

Misunderstanding [forgiveness](#) often keeps us in bondage to grudges. We think that to forgive is to excuse sin or pretend the offense did not matter. Neither is true. Forgiveness is not about the other person. Forgiveness is God's gift to us to release us from the control of someone who has hurt us. When we retain a grudge, we give someone we don't like power over our emotions. Without forgiveness, just the thought of an offender can send acid to our stomachs and heat to our faces. In essence, we make that person an idol, giving him or her control over us (Deuteronomy 32:39). But when we forgive, we release to God any right to vengeance or restitution. Forgiveness puts our relationship with God back in proper alignment. We acknowledge that He is the Judge, not us, and that He has the right to bring about any resolution He chooses. Forgiveness is the choice to trust God rather than ourselves with the outcome of the offense.

We often hold on to grudges because we feel we have the responsibility to see that justice is done or that others know how badly we were hurt. But when we release the situation to God, along with the right to dictate the ending, we free the Lord to work as He sees fit without our anger getting in the way (Matthew 18:21–22).

It is important to remember that forgiveness and reconciliation are not synonymous. Forgiveness is a matter of the heart. It is an act of surrender to God's will and is primarily between us and God. We release to Him our right to hang on to anger (Psalm 115:11). However, reconciliation depends on the true repentance and proven trustworthiness of the offender. For example, in the case of spousal abuse, the victim must forgive as part of her ongoing healing. She can release her anger to God. But, at the same time, she must keep protective boundaries in place until the abuser has proven over time that he is worthy of her trust (see Proverbs 26:24–25).

"The anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God" (James 1:20). We do God no favors by trying to "help" Him right a bad situation through our vengeance. He does not need our anger. He needs our cooperation as we submit to doing things His way (Proverbs 3:5–6). And God's way is always to forgive as He has forgiven us (Matthew 18:35; Ephesians 4:32).

We can release a grudge with a simple act of our will, by offering the whole situation to God and letting go of it. Forgiveness brings healing to our souls and allows God to build His strength and character into our lives as we allow Him to reign as our only God (Romans 8:29).

#### **Related Resources:**

- [What does the Bible say about resentment?](#)
  - [What does the Bible say about bitterness?](#)
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D A Carson - EDITORIAL ON ABUSING MATTHEW 18 D. A. Carson is research professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois.

Several years ago I wrote a fairly restrained critique of the emerging church movement as it then existed, before it morphed into its present diverse configurations.<sup>1</sup> That little book earned me some of the angriest, bitterness-laced emails I have ever received—to say nothing, of course, of the blog posts. There were other responses, of course—some approving and grateful, some thoughtful and wanting to dialogue. But the ones that displayed the greatest intensity were those whose indignation was white hot because I had not first approached privately those whose positions I had criticized in the book. What a hypocrite I was—criticizing my brothers on ostensible biblical grounds when I myself was not following the Bible’s mandate to observe a certain procedure nicely laid out in Matt 18:15–17.

Doubtless this sort of charge is becoming more common. It is regularly linked to the “Gotcha!” mentality that many bloggers and their respondents seem to foster. Person A writes a book criticizing some element or other of historic Christian confessionalism. A few bloggers respond with more heat than light. Person B writes a blog with some substance, responding to Person A. The blogosphere lights up with attacks on Person B, many of them asking Person B rather accusingly, “Did you communicate with Person A in private first? If not, aren’t you guilty of violating what Jesus taught us in Matthew 18?” This pattern of counter-attack, with minor variations, is flourishing.

To which at least three things must be said:

(1) The sin described in the context of Matt 18:15–17 takes place on the small scale of what transpires in a local church (which is certainly what is envisaged in the words “tell it to the church”). It is not talking about a widely circulated publication designed to turn large numbers of people in many parts of the world away from historic confessionalism. This latter sort of sin is very public and is already doing damage; it needs to be confronted and its damage undone in an equally public way. This is quite different from, say, the situation where a believer discovers that a brother has been breaking his marriage vows by sleeping with someone other than his wife, and goes to him privately, then with one other, in the hope of bringing about genuine repentance and contrition, and only then brings the matter to the church.

To put the matter differently, the impression one derives from reading Matt 18 is that the sin in question is not, at first, publicly noticed (unlike the publication of a foolish but influential book). It is relatively private, noticed by one or two believers, yet serious enough to be brought to the attention of the church if the offender refuses to turn away from it. By contrast, when NT writers have to deal with false teaching, another note is struck: the godly elder “must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it” (Titus 1:9 NIV).

Doubtless one can think up some contemporary situations that initially might make one scratch one’s head and wonder what the wise course should be—or, to frame the problem in the context of the biblical passages just cited, whether one should respond in the light of Matt 18 or of Titus 1. For example, a local church pastor may hear that a lecturer in his denominational seminary or theological college is teaching something he judges to be outside the confessional camp of that denomination and possibly frankly heretical. Let us make the situation more challenging by postulating that the pastor has a handful of students in his church who attend that seminary and are being influenced by the lecturer in question. Is the pastor bound by Matt 18 to talk with the lecturer before challenging him in public?

This situation is tricky in that the putative false teaching is public in one sense and private in another. It is public in that it is not a merely private opinion, for it is certainly being promulgated; it is private in the sense that the material is not published in the public arena, but is being disseminated in a closed lecture hall. It seems to me that the pastor would be wise to go to the lecturer first, but not out of obedience to Matt 18, which really does not pertain, but to determine just what the views of the lecturer really are. He may come to the conclusion that the lecturer is kosher after all; alternatively, that the lecturer has been misunderstood (and any lecturer with integrity will want to take pains not to be similarly misunderstood in the future); or again, that the lecturer is dissimulating. He may feel he has to go to the lecturer’s superior, or even higher. My point, however, is that this course of action is really not tracing out Jesus’ instruction in Matt 18. The pastor is going to the lecturer, in the first instance, not to reprove him, but to find out if there really is a problem when the teaching falls in this ambiguous category of not-quite-private and not-quite-public.

(2) In Matt 18, the sin in question is, by the authority of the church, excommunicable—in at least two senses.

First, the offense may be so serious that the only responsible decision that the church can make is to thrust the offender out of the church and view him or her as an unconverted person (18:17). In other words, the offense is excommunicable because of its seriousness. In the NT as a whole, there are three categories of sins that reach this level of seriousness: major doctrinal error (e.g., 1 Tim 1:20), major moral failure (e.g., 1 Cor 5), and persistent and schismatic divisiveness (e.g., Titus 3:10). These constitute the negative flipside of the three positive “tests” of 1 John: the truth test, the obedience test, and the love test. In any case, though we do not know what it is, the offense in Matt 18 is excommunicable because of its seriousness.

Second, the situation is such that the offender can actually be excommunicated from the assembly. In other words, the offense is excommunicable because organizationally it is possible to excommunicate the offender. By contrast, suppose someone in, say, Philadelphia were to claim to be a devout Christian while writing a book that was in certain ways deeply anti-Christian. Suppose a church in, say, Toronto, Canada decided the book is heretical. Such a church might, I suppose, declare the book misguided or even heretical, but they certainly could not excommunicate the writer. Doubtless they could declare the offender persona non grata in their own assembly, but this would be a futile gesture and probably counter-productive to boot. After all, the offender might be perfectly acceptable in his own assembly.<sup>2</sup> In other words, this sort of offense might be excommunicable in the first sense—i.e., the false teaching might be judged so severe that the offender deserves to be excommunicated—but is not excommunicable in the second sense, for the organizational reality is such that excommunication is not practicable.

The point to observe is that whatever the offense in Matthew 18, it is excommunicable in both senses: the sin must be serious enough to warrant excommunication, and the organizational situation is such that the local church can take decisive action that actually means something. Where one or the other of these two senses does not apply, neither does Matthew 18.

One might of course argue that it is the part of prudential wisdom to write to authors before you criticize them in your own publication. I can think of situations where that may or may not be a good idea. But such reasoning forms no part of the argument of Matthew 18.

(3) There is a flavor of play-acting righteousness, of disproportionate indignation, behind the current round of “Gotcha!” games. If Person B charges Person A, who has written a book arguing for a revisionist understanding of the Bible, with serious error and possibly with heresy, it is no part of wisdom to “Tut-tut” the narrow-mindedness of Person B and smile condescendingly and dismissively over such judgmentalism. That may play well among those who think the greatest virtue in the world is tolerance, but surely it cannot be the honorable path for a Christian. Genuine heresy is a damnable thing, a horrible thing. It dishonors God and leads people astray. It misrepresents the gospel and entices people to believe untrue things and to act in reprehensible ways. Of course, Person B may be entirely mistaken. Perhaps the charge Person B is making is entirely misguided, even perverse. In that case, one should demonstrate the fact, not hide behind a procedural matter. And where Person B is advancing serious biblical argumentation, it should be evaluated, not dismissed with a procedural sleight-of-hand and a wrong-headed appeal to Matthew 18.