

Introduction:

- Chapter 18 revolves around two questions:
 - vs. 1 “Who is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?” asked by the disciples. Parallel Mk 9:33-37; 42-47.
 - vs. 21 “Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me?”
- “The theme of this discourse is not so much individual discipleship ... but the corporate life of those who are joined by their common commitment as disciples.” France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 672). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co. It become a how community works out forgiveness.
- The emphasis in the first part is on self-discipline. But moving into the second part it begins to deal with sin and offenses within the community of believers. It supplies a guide as to how disciples are to live within community. It is not a “manual” of church discipline.
- The word, ekkleasia, appears in vs. 17. We last saw it in 16:18. The ekkleasia that Jesus, the 12 and those that followed him made up are the ones who are asking the two questions of this chapter. Pride and unforgiveness are two things that seem to always affect community.
- A prominent theme in this chapter is “little ones.” vs 3 They are all ‘little’ there are no great one in the Kingdom of God. *“Status-consciousness and formally constituted authority have no place. The focus is on the relationship and mutual responsibility of all members of the community, each of whom matters, and yet all of whom must regard themselves only as ‘little ones.’”* France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 674). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

I. A Question of Status

- A. The question of status is a reoccurring one in Mt. 20:26-28, and 23:11-12. And even at the last supper in Luke 22:24-27.
 1. The basic understanding of the question is: “Who is the top disciple?” What is the reason for the question? I am of the opinion that question exists because Jesus is talking about dying and someone needs to be in charge when that happens.
 2. If we look back, Peter is in the running for the top place. He declared that Jesus is the Christ. Jesus gives him the special place authority because of that. Then Peter and the other two special disciples get to take a trip up the mountain with Jesus. Peter gets to fish and pay his and Jesus tax with the gold coin in the fishes mouth.
- B. So who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?
 1. The disciples question sets up the discourse which Jesus speaks into.
 2. They are about status.
 3. Jesus is about them becoming like children. He is not looking at the characteristics that a child possess such as (innocence, humility, receptiveness, trustfulness or the like). He is focussed on a child’s status as that being the lowest on the “authority scale.” That Jesus says ‘take this place in vs 4’ affirms that this is what He is talking about.
 4. If the desire of the disciples is to exercise authority over others they have started at the wrong end of ‘becoming great’ It is obvious they are not valuing what God values.
- C. Verse 3 strongly warns the disciples: that their concern for status which they have just displayed is not compatible with God’s scale of values. True discipleship must involve the removal of this natural human tendency.

1. To turn around and become like a child is to start again with a new foundation. Repent and become like little children.
 2. The word translate humble in verse 4 is more accurately read, 'to humiliate' it is a most severe call to humility. Bottom of the authority ladder.
 3. As in chapter 19, the least become greatest.
- D. Verse 5 now takes us beyond just be humble but now into how the the community must treat such one as this. *"If you welcome a little child like this on my behalf you welcome me."*

II. The Danger of Stumbling Blocks

- A. *scandalon* - to trap, to cause to fall. The message is that anyone who causes one of these to fall out of relationship with God of cause that relationship to weaken is in grave danger.
1. Because of this it calls for extreme measures: vs 6-7
 2. Elimination of the source of the problem.8-9
 3. These verses contain some of the most sever teaching on punishment in the Gospels. They take hell very seriously here.
- B. There are two focuses beside the common theme of stumbling.
1. About causing trouble for other disciples, which is the general theme of the text.
 - a) "The seriousness of the charge lies in that these "little ones" have put their trust in Jesus but someone else (a fellow-disciple?) has damaged that trust." *France, R. T. (2007). The Gospel of Matthew (p. 681). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.*
 - b) "The "little ones" are so important to Jesus that to cause spiritual damage to even one of them is a more than capital offense." *France, R. T. (2007). The Gospel of Matthew (p. 682). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.*
 - c) Just because you are in that inner circle does not excuse ones behavior.
 2. The dangers created by the one doing the offending are enormous. So much so Jesus says it is better to cut off a limb than go to hell!
 3. So the effect is on both the one doing the offending and upon the community that the disciple affects.

III. Caring for the Little Ones 10-14 Parable of lost sheep

- A. The thought of disciples as little ones continue in this section. The point is made in verses 10 and 14 just how important these little ones are to Jesus.
- B. The one matters just as much as the many. It sends the message that the Father cares for them.
- C. It should also be note that to despise or look down on as in verse 10 is the opposite of welcome.
- D. The one that wanders off is worth going to get. The rejoicing is over the recovery of the sheep not over superiority.
- E. The implications vs 15-20

1. When a sheep/disciple wanders off get and gently get them.
2. "The disciple is envisioned as acting within the context of the whole community, but the focus is on the individual's attitude and action." *France, R. T. (2007). The Gospel of Matthew (p. 690). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.*
3. Jesus is making the point that this is not for the pastor to do but for the community to do.
4. Vs 17-20 Deal with the authority of the community.

Conclusion:

- Walk humbly
- Be gracious with others
- For there is true authority in community.