

Lesson 29: Review of Matthew 18:1-14: "The Core Values of Greatness"

Many people aspire to greatness, to be celebrated for their achievements. Even among Christians many seek to be known as a great disciple, a powerful teacher or preacher, or even the most humble. But very few aspire to become the servant of all. This lesson helps us to consider three principles of Kingdom greatness. These principles ran counter to the expectations of Jesus' disciples then and what we expect now.

Love's Humility (Matthew 18:1-4) In Matthew 16 Jesus began saying that His Church would be a cross bearing church, a church under the cross: a suffering but loving people of God. Here in 18:1-4 we see that seeds of pride have taken root in the heart and sprout out of the mouths of the disciples. Their concern is for personal greatness in the Kingdom. Though not necessarily a bad question it is hard to miss the motives of the disciples by the way Jesus answered them. He takes a child to Himself and admonishes the disciples severely, "I tell you the truth, *unless you change and become like little children*, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." If all was well with the disciples motives then certainly they would not have been admonished to *change*.

If you look at Mark and Luke's record of this exchange you will find that they include a fact not included in Matthew, namely that the disciples had been *arguing* about who is the greatest. That they sought greatness in the kingdom was not an issue with Jesus as we see in 18:4, but the fact that they sought prominence through selfish ambition did become the problem. Many Christians have been temporarily defeated by *self's desire for prominence*. Put another way, many have sought self-promotion.

Jesus spells out clearly that the path to true Kingdom greatness is NOT through self-exaltation but through humility! He illustrates this by having a child come among them. You can see the child standing very quiet and unassuming among them, standing in humility. And you hear Jesus say, "Unless you change and become like one of these..." He says that unless you are *converted, changed from without*, that is, unless God works His work from the outside to the *inside of you*, "you won't even enter the kingdom." In other words it is not by rank or hierarchy that people rise to greatness in the Kingdom but by God working His power to convert the heart from self-service to simple humility. By this one becomes great in the Kingdom. And, if you have ever observed children it is not in their childlike nature to even be concerned with being great; they are simply desire to "be". So, would you desire the Lord to continue working true humility into your heart? Pray, yielding yourself to His will and purpose for your conversion in this area of your life!

Love's Sensitivity (Matthew 18:5-9) In these verses Jesus describes the church under the cross as sensitive to the needs of fellow believers. This "cross bearing" love is sensitive to those attitudes or actions which weaken or injure the faith of other believers.

A Christian cannot ever speak of his or her humility without running the risk of expressing great pride. Humility is simply to be practiced through acts of love and words that are gracious, refreshing and faith building. But, so often, even in the church believers like that (like the children Jesus spoke of) are looked down upon and not well received. Jesus commanded that believers should welcome believers *as if* they are welcoming Him! If Jesus came into our assemblies, or to our homes would we not be sensitive to His need for refreshment? Would we not offer hospitality, benevolence, kindness and compassion to Him? Of course we would! So, do likewise to one another!

Hardness of heart is not in short supply so, the church under the cross must cultivate sensitive hearts which are born out of humble hearts. Other wise, we run the risk of causing a "little one" to stumble. Causing another believer to stumble over our lack of sensitivity is very serious (see Matthew 18:5-9) and should not be present in any form in our churches or homes!

Love's Security (Matthew 18:10-14) The church under the cross expresses love through offering security and safety to believers by practicing humility and being sensitive toward one another.

Jesus said, "See to it that you do not look down on one of these little ones." Isn't it easy to get so busy that we forget to notice others? Imagine a mother ignoring her babies because she has too much to do? Soon the babies become restless, anxious and fearful! Christians are not to ignore other believers! Instead, like we learned in Philippians 2:1-8 and James 2:2-8 we are to give preference to one another through acts and deeds of self-sacrifice motivated by love! We do this by "looking out for" one another even as the angels occupy themselves with us. We not only avoid causing others to stumble, but when they do stumble we should also concern ourselves as God does in seeing to their return to safety!

Questions for Matthew 18:15-35: "Christian Confrontation and Christian Forgiveness"

1. From the notes on page 1, **A)** what impressed and/or helped you? **B)** Explain "A".

Introduction to Matthew 18:15-35: Even when we aim toward humility, sensitivity and providing safety and security among believers we will at times encounter conflict among ourselves. Sometimes we work through it rather easily. But often times we find that our blanket of love simply cannot cover the offense and we are compelled to confront the fellow believer in hopes of reconciliation! Our lesson this week covers the principles found in Matthew 18 on Christian confrontation and forgiveness.

2. Read Matthew 18:15-20. "Christian Confrontation: The Forging of Principle and Practice": **A)** Who is the "brother"? **B)** Explain what is meant by, "go and show him his fault, just between the two of you." **C)** What is meant by "If he listens to you, you have won your brother over"? **D)** If the issue is not resolved, what kind of people should the "two others" be? **E)** What is meant by "treat him as you would a pagan or tax collector." **F)** Explain verse 20 in context with 18:15-20.

3. Read Matthew 18:16-35: "Christian Confrontation and Forgiveness" **A)** What is the goal of the initial confrontation of 18:15? **B)** Considering the parable of the unmerciful servant and remembering the core values of greatness what attitude should the person doing the confronting have before confronting the other person? **C)** What is gained by *keeping the circle small* as in 18:16? **D)** If someone is excommunicated (18:17) what can the Christian or the Church do for the person excommunicated? What message must be given? **E)** Is giving "forgiveness" an act of "law" or "grace"? Why? **F)** Why did Jesus pick such a big number in 18:22?

4. Read Matthew 18:21-35: "Christian Forgiveness in Principle and Practice" **A)** Would you consider forgiving someone who has sinned against you to be "cross bearing"? Why or why not? **B)** Thinking of 18:21-22, Explain how the "law" keeps counting and "grace" does not. **C)** How does the parable illustrate big sins and little sins and the need for both to be forgiven? **D)** What do you learn about forgiveness from the parable? **E)** What do you think is meant by "turned over to the jailers to be tortured until he should pay back all he owed"? **F)** Does this mean that there is not any forgiveness for the unforgiving person? Or does it mean that many pressures will be added until that person is "broken" enough to forgive?