

### Matthew 18:1 – 18

<sup>1</sup> At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, ‘Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’ <sup>2</sup> And he called a child to himself and set him before them, <sup>3</sup> and said, ‘Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup> Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>5</sup> And whoever receives one such child in my name receives me; <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> 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! <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> [For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.] <sup>12</sup> 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? <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> So it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish. <sup>15</sup> If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> 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.

<b>14:13 – 33</b>	<b>14:34 – 15:20</b>	<b>15:21 – 28</b>	<b>15:29 – 39</b>	<b>16:1 – 12</b>	<b>16:13 – 17:13</b>
Jesus feeds the 5,000	Jesus disputes with Pharisees	The Canaanite woman asks for miraculous healing	Jesus feeds the 4,000	The Pharisees come to ask Jesus for a sign	Jesus asks, “Who do you say I am?”
From the towns (Mt.14:13)	Gennesaret (Mt.14:34), likely the Gentile side	Tyre and Sidon (Mt.15:21), Gentile lands	Along the Sea of Galilee (Mt.15:29, called ‘Galilee of the Gentiles’ in Mt.4:15)	The region of Magadan (Mt.15:39), along the Galilee	Caesaria Philippi
Jews 5 loaves of bread 12 baskets full leftover	Defiling comes from the heart, and is therefore universal – both Jew and Gentile are defiled	The children’s bread is thrown to ‘the dogs.’	Gentiles 7 loaves of bread 7 baskets full leftover	Jesus reminds his disciples to beware the teaching of the Pharisees (outward focus)	Take up our cross, see Jesus transfigured

## Questions

1. Who is the 'child' that Jesus is speaking about?
  - a. The greatest in the kingdom of heaven (18:2)
  - b. Someone new in the kingdom of heaven, since the 'child' is a symbol of new birth and new identity, i.e. the meaning of 'unless you are converted' (18:3)
  - c. One of these little ones who believe in me (18:6 and 10) – a new Christian
  - d. The one sheep who goes astray, the one that is straying (18:12)
    - i. Notice the continuity of 'one of these little ones' in v.6 and v.14. This analogy to a lost sheep is a specific case in which the 'child' (new Christian) strays into a sin
    - ii. Notice that the analogy to a lost sheep is used in Luke 15 to talk about evangelism to the lost; but Matthew uses it here to talk about the restoration of another Christian. Just because we know it from Luke 15 doesn't mean we know it in Matthew 18. It is historically likely that Jesus used this figure of speech in two different ways on two different occasions.
  - e. your brother who sins (18:15)
2. By comparison, why is it easy to think that the person who has been Christian the longest is the greatest in the kingdom? They know more, they have more moral and spiritual stature, etc.
3. There are two separate issues that come up for old Christians dealing with new Christians: stumbling them and correcting their sin.
4. What does it mean to cause a new Christian to stumble?
  - a. Typically, we think that 'stumble' means 'I do a behavior that is sinful or borderline sinful that encourages them to sin also.' Like dancing, drinking alcohol, partying, gambling, etc. And that sort of thing might be worth talking about, but is that what Jesus means here? I don't think so.
  - b. How did a new Christian come to believe in Jesus in the first place? By humbling themselves and simply believing in Jesus (v.4 – 5). So perhaps stumbling them means to make them not be humble.
  - c. We cause a new Christian to stumble by adding unnecessary behaviors or attitudes to faith in Jesus. Original context: Jesus has been training his Jewish disciples to serve the Gentiles. What if they linked 'Jewish culture' (e.g. circumcision, Sabbath, and kosher food) with the gospel message, so that the Gentiles bought into any or all of the following: works-righteousness, Jewish ethnocentrism, heresy, cultural imperialism, moral judgmentalism? Notice Jesus' warning in v.10, 'Do not despise one of these little ones...' The Jewish disciples might have despised Gentile Christians because they came from such a different place from them, culturally and behaviorally.
    - i. Notice that this is why Paul got so upset in Galatians.
    - ii. In Matthew 15:1 – 20, Jesus emphasized the heart and implicitly declared all foods to be edible. The kosher food laws served the purpose of foreshadowing the clean vs. unclean distinction in the heart, which Jesus was dealing with. It was no longer necessary to symbolize it externally, and it was certainly inappropriate to make moralistic comparisons between people based on the observance of that symbolism.
    - iii. In the colonial period, European missionaries said, 'Africa needs the gospel and capitalism.' In light of this passage, what do you think of that?
  - d. In what ways might our 'despising' new Christians cause them to start trying to 'earn' something that Jesus wants them to simply receive?
  - e. When this happens, there is something in our hearts that is a problem. Notice that the language of 'cut it off and throw it from you' in 18:8 – 9 was also used in 5:27 – 32 when Jesus addressed the problem of lust in the heart. We are to deal with heart issues ruthlessly.
5. What does it mean to help a fellow Christian, especially a new Christian (your brother, v.15) when he or she sins?
  - a. If the other Christian is not really paying attention to Jesus' heart level transformation and mission to the world, esp. as articulated in Mt.5 – 7.
  - b. If the other Christian is being 'legalistic' or 'culturally imperialistic' with other people. In other words, if they are making other people stumble.
  - c. How have you done this? How did it go?
  - d. Do we kindly and insightfully do this kind of accountability in our Christian community?
6. What is the 'binding and loosing' stuff?

- a. One possibility is that it involves victory over sin. You help a fellow Christian when you address an area of their life, they agree with you that it is sin, and then the power of Jesus is there to claim a victory (small or large) over it. Hence, this could happen in a counseling session, a small group, or something like an Alcoholics Anonymous session. You bind the sin and loose the power of Jesus.
- b. Another possibility is that it involves Christian community. You help an unrepentant Christian by binding them from the community because there is a power and protection from Jesus in the community. This would mean 'excommunication' of some sort, of 'loosing' that person from the spiritual bonds of fellowship. Naturally, this is much more serious. The interpretation here is not totally firm, but notice 18:19 – 35 also, and Paul in 1 Corinthians 5.