

Gospel of Matthew Chapter 18 -- John Karmelich

1. Chapter 18 is all about conduct.
 - a) Matthew is no longer trying to emphasize that Jesus is the Messiah.
 - b) By this point in Matthew, we now assume that fact.
 - c) Now we are focusing on what God expects of us in our conduct.
2. This chapter has five different topics that all tie together based on our conduct as believers.
 - a) The first story focuses on what conduct is required to be “great” in heaven.
 - i) This is where Jesus states that in order for us to be “great” in heaven, we need to have child-like faith. A small child is fully-dependant upon their parents for their needs. God wants us to have that same attitude toward Him.
 - b) The second story focuses on our conduct on the avoidance of sin.
 - i) Jesus teaches that the world is full of stumbling blocks that cause problems in our relationship with God.
 - ii) God takes these stumbling blocks seriously. This little section is full of graphic illustrations to show just how seriously God wants us to consider the danger of sin. Sin blocks our relationship with him.
 - c) The third story is about how God cares for all believers. Therefore, our conduct is important on how we treat all other believers.
 - i) This is the story about the “99+1” sheep. This story is where one sheep gets lost and the shepherd temporarily leaves the 99 to go get the missing one.
 - ii) The main point is that God cares about all believers. If some are doing better than others, God does not say to the lost, “oh well, too bad, let me focus on the 99”. He is interested in everyone getting saved.
 - d) The fourth story is about our conduct in church.
 - i) Jesus gives a set of guidelines on how to deal with an unrepentant person in sin.
 - ii) First we approach them ourselves. If that doesn’t work, we try again with 2-3 others, and if that doesn’t work we publicly deal with the issue in our church. If that person still doesn’t change, we are to outcast them.
 - iii) Sin is not to be tolerated in the church. This is not about being perfect; this is about realizing the sin is wrong and confessing that sin. Jesus is teaching that the conduct is not to be tolerated.
 - e) The final story about our conduct is on the topic of forgiveness.
 - i) Jesus gives an illustration of a man who forgave a second man of millions of dollars in debt, and that second man refused to forgive a third man of a few hundred dollars in debt. Jesus point is that the Father has forgiven us of tremendous sin, and we need to have that same attitude in forgiving others.
 - ii) What is important to see is the 4th and 5th story tying together.
 - a) In the 4th story, Jesus is teaching that we are to judge people of their sin.
 - b) In the 5th story, Jesus is teaching that we are to forgive people of their sin.
 - c) This is not a contradiction. The key is the sinning-person (that’s you and me!) is willing to ask forgiveness and say what we did is wrong. Further we are to ask God to work through us to change that behavior). We as Christians are then required to forgive that person, no matter how much they have hurt us or the church.
 - f) What one needs to see in all these stories is progression in maturity.
 - i) The first story talks about salvation itself and what it takes to be “great” in heaven.
 - ii) The second story teaches on why we are to avoid sin.
 - iii) The third story focuses on God himself and how he cares for all. Our dependence is upon God to be a better person.

- iv) Finally, we have the teachings about judging people and forgiveness. Both are taught in the bible. We need to have proper perspective about when to judge and when to forgive.
 - v) With the concept of “our conduct” in mind, let’s go to verse 1.
3. Verse 1: At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"
- a) Let’s start with the expression, “at that time”.
 - i) Matthew is emphasizing that this set of stories by Jesus took place around the same time as the events of the previous chapter. Why is that important?
 - ii) The last chapter had the “transfiguration”, where 3 of the disciples got to see Jesus change to bright-white, with Moses and Elijah appearing for a brief moment.
 - iii) Further, we had the story of the disciples’ inability to cast out a demon because of their “lack of faith”. Jesus was teaching on persistence of prayer.
 - b) In Verse 1, the disciples are asking who is the greatest in heaven.
 - a) Notice Luke’s account of the same story. “An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest.” (Luke 9:46, NIV)
 - ii) Remember that in the previous chapter, only 3 of the 12 got to go the mountaintop. Maybe there was some jealousy as to why Jesus picked only those three.
 - iii) Maybe their failure to cast out the demons got them to point fingers at each other. They could have been saying something like, “It’s your fault we couldn’t cast out those demons. I told you we needed to pray more.” ☺
 - c) In the final verses of the last chapter, the topic was “denying yourself to follow Jesus”.
 - i) These disciples gave up everything to follow Jesus.
 - ii) They may have been cast out from their local Jewish synagogues.
 - iii) They gave up their livelihood.
 - iv) It is understandable that they want to know what it takes to be great in heaven. Their focus was on the right place (heaven), but their hearts were in the wrong place (on themselves).
 - v) The personal application of these verses is coming up. Let’s move on to Verse 2.
4. Verse 2: He called a little child and had him stand among them. ³ And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.
- a) In this room where Jesus was talking, there was more than just Jesus and the disciples.
 - i) There was apparently at least one child in the room, maybe more.
 - ii) Some logically speculate that it was the child of one of the disciples.
 - iii) Paul commented on the fact on how some of the apostles had “believing wives” in 1st Corinthians 9:5.
 - b) One interesting bit of trivia is the bible never mentions anywhere that Jesus ever smiled.
 - i) If you want to attract a child to walk toward you, smiling is a requirement. I am as positive that Jesus was smiling in this scenario to the child.
 - c) Remember the disciples were arguing over who would be greatest in heaven.
 - i) One thinks that “greatness in heaven” requires much study, much prayer, and many works for God. The logical speculation is that to be great in heaven is to do lots of things for God. Jesus gave the exact opposite idea. To be great is to be child-like. I’ll explain the meaning of this on the next page.
 - d) One thing I wrote in my bible many years ago is “God is not impressed with my resume”.
 - i) God is not impressed by our years of education, or how many good deeds we have done for other people. Getting into heaven has nothing to do with “our good deeds outweighing our bad deeds” as many people wrongly think.

- e) So what does Jesus mean by being “child-like”?
- i) First of all, it is not about being childish. Temper tantrums don’t get you extra points in heaven. ☺
 - ii) To be child-like is to be totally dependant upon other people.
 - iii) Think about the worries of a little child:
 - a) Do they worry about the mortgage?
 - b) Do they worry about if there is enough food in the refrigerator?
 - c) Do they worry about politics?
 - d) They are fully dependant upon their parents or caretakers for their survival and their happiness.
 - e) When they need something, they come to their parents.
(Ok, they cry and whine sometimes, but that’s beside the point. ☺)
 - iv) Jesus says in Verse 3 that unless you become as little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.
 - a) Let me paraphrase from the point of view of someone wanting to be saved.
“God, I don’t understand all of this stuff about Jesus. I just know that I’ve messed up my life and I can’t fix it without you. I want to be a better person and I can’t do it on my own. I want Jesus to pay the price for my sins and change my ways”.
 - (1) That prayer is a great first prayer for a new Christian. If someone prays that prayer sincerely and starts changing their life based on that belief, they will now have eternal life.
 - b) That is being child like. You aren’t trying to fix it yourself, you are asking God to take over. Like a little child dependant upon their parents, you are dependant upon God for our lives and look to God for daily guidance.
 - v) Jesus then says in Verse 4 that whoever humbles himself as this little child will be the greatest in heaven.
 - a) The topic is our dependence upon God.
 - b) To be child-like is to be fully dependant upon God.
 - c) Growth and maturity as a Christians is not only to confess sins when we mess up, but also to find new areas of our lives where we are trying to live our lives without God’s help.
 - (1) Even after many years of following Jesus, I find different aspects of my life where I am trying to “do it myself” as opposed to letting God take over. Maturity as a Christians is growing in our dependence upon God for every aspect of our life.
 - d) Does this mean that whoever is the most “child-like” is #1 in heaven?
 - (1) I don’t think so. This is not about who gets to sit next to Jesus in heaven for eternity. This is about our stature as believers.
 - (2) God wants us to mature as believers. Maturity is to grow in our dependence upon God. To be “great” as a Christian is to fully depend upon God for every aspect of our lives.
- f) What Jesus is trying to teach here is about humility.
- i) I used to wrongly think that humility was to think little about yourself and think more about others. That is the wrong attitude.
 - ii) Humility is to not think about your own needs.
 - iii) It is about putting others before yourself.
 - iv) Please think about this in perspective. God does want us to pray for our own needs as well. (“Give us this day our daily bread”). Humility before God is to be in service and to put other’s needs before our own. God does care for our needs and wants us to pray for them. It is about balance and perspective.

5. Verse 5: "And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me.
 - a) This is a good verse to place on the wall of the room where the small children are kept during church service.
 - b) This verse teaches us not to look down upon believers because they are immature in their faith. It further teaches the importance of how we are teach little children.
 - c) Most people who commit their lives to serving Jesus do so as teenagers.
 - i) Statistically, the older you get, the lower the odds of you turning your life over to Jesus. The majority of Christians made that commitment as teenagers.
 - a) What does that say about the importance of teaching our youth?
 - b) What does that say about the importance of youth ministry?
 - c) What does that say about "welcoming" little children as you do adults?
 - d) Notice the words "like this" in Verse 5. Whoever welcomes a little child "like this" welcomes Jesus. What does Jesus mean by "like this"?
 - i) It ties back to the earlier verses. It is about our full dependence upon God.
 - ii) When adults or children are willing to commit their lives to be fully dependant upon God we are to welcome them. Christianity is never designed to be an exclusive club for existing members.
6. Verse 6: But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.
 - a) Let's jump ahead to Verse 10 for a second. It ties together with Verse 6:
 - i) "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." (Matt. 18:10, NIV).
 - ii) God is perfect. A perfect God loves everyone perfectly and judges everyone perfectly. Since a little child doesn't have the abilities to defend themselves against (spiritual) attacks, God cares more about them in the sense they don't have the ability to help themselves. This is about a perfect God helping those who can't help themselves.
 - b) Remember that Jesus is speaking to disciples, not to non-believers. With that in mind, how do we cause these "little ones" to sin?
 - i) Jesus is teaching of our responsibilities as believers to the next generation.
 - ii) Kids watch what we do far more than what we say.
 - a) If we teach the importance of prayer, going to church and bible reading, yet don't do it ourselves, they remember that far more than anything you make them do as children.
 - b) If kids watch us sin and we don't tell them "I messed up, will you forgive me?" They recognize hypocrisy and won't take God seriously.
 - c) At the same time, we need to look at other Christians and realize, they are not the model for us to follow, Jesus is. People mess up. We'll deal with that later in this chapter.
 - d) Here, we are talking about little children. We as Christians are giving the responsibility of being role models and teaching the next generation how to grow in their maturity as believers.
 - c) Let's talk about the "large millstone around the neck and thrown in the sea".
 - i) Sounds like a mafia killing doesn't it. ☺
 - ii) Jesus is using an illustration here. God is not calling upon us to go drown false-believers in the ocean.
 - iii) Jesus is talking about how seriously to take the issue of helping young children to grow in their faith. The topic is our responsibility to children and not how to punish those who fail to do so.

- d) Another idea to get across here is that one can take the idea of “children” as being spiritual-children and not just physical-age-children.
 - i) When people first commit their lives to Christ, no matter what the age, they are often nicknamed “baby Christians”. It has nothing to do with how old they are; it is about their maturity level as a Christian.
 - ii) Personally, I love to be around “baby Christians”. They have no idea if they are “pre-trib or post trib”. They have no idea if the gift of tongues is for “today” or just the early apostles. They have no idea whether or not dancing is appropriate for a Christian. They have no idea where they stand on the “pre-destiny versus free-will” debate. All they know is that Jesus is God and loves them very much. They are happy to be forgiven and happy to be saved.
 - a) All churches need to have baby Christians around. That energy level of those who first learn to love God is contagious and keeps us veteran Christians in proper focus.
 - iii) My whole point here is that when Jesus is teaching on the importance of not letting “one of these little ones stumble in sin”, you can take that application to not only refer to young children, but also young in the faith. Jesus is teaching to help them mature in their beliefs and not cause them to go down the wrong path.
- 7. Verse 7, first sentence: “Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin!”
 - a) You never read anywhere in the bible once that you get saved, and no bad things ever happen to you again.
 - b) In fact, just the opposite is true. The bible teaches that Christians are persecuted for their faith. Satan does not want you to be a good witness for Jesus. Satan’s time on earth is fixed based on a certain-number of people becoming Christians. Nobody knows that exact number. Therefore, the longer Satan can prevent new people from becoming Christians, the longer time he has. By persecuting Christians, he tries to make them in effective witnesses for Jesus.
 - i) Among Satan’s methods for preventing additional believers is to either tempt or persecute existing believers so that they don’t become good witnesses for Jesus.
 - ii) Which leads us back to Verse 7. Jesus says, “Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin!”
 - iii) Jesus is not condemning children or believers, he is condemning the world.
 - iv) The “world” refers to non-believers.
 - a) I would expand that to say that their interest in things other than God is what causes them to sin.
 - b) Sin is described as “missing the mark”. A great lesson to learn in life is “without God, we can’t”. We can’t live life to please God without getting God involved in the process in the first place.
- 8. Verse 7, second sentence: Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come!
 - a) Let me paraphrase this, “You can’t go to court and say, “Your honor, it is not my fault that I robbed that bank. The devil made me do it and I couldn’t help myself”.
 - i) Is Satan behind sin? Of course. Does that mean we’re not accountable? No!
 - ii) This is why Jesus says in effect, “Woe to the person through sins come!”
 - iii) God still holds you accountable when you give in to sin’s temptation.
- 9. Verse 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.⁹ And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.
 - a) Well now, that doesn’t sound very pleasant. ☺
 - b) If you get a sense of déjà vu’ reading these verses, it is because they are almost identical to those taught in the “Sermon on the Mount” in Matthew 5:29-30.

- c) Is Jesus being literal? The answer is no. Let me get back to a previous illustration:
 - i) “Your honor, I didn’t mean to rob that bank, it was my arm’s fault. My arm grabbed that gun and dragged me into that bank. My arm forced me to rob the bank, so I am innocent.” ☺
 - a) Or try this one, “Your honor, I didn’t mean to get drunk last night. My arm forced me to drink while the other hand opened my mouth.” ☺
 - ii) My point is sin doesn’t originate in your arm or your eyes. It originates in your heart. Do you really think you could not sin by plucking out your eye or cutting off an arm or a leg? Of course not. Therefore, Jesus is using an illustration by saying in effect, “if your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off”.
 - iii) Jesus is teaching you how seriously to take sin.
 - iv) Jesus is teaching you how seriously to take eternity in hell.
 - v) Life without a body part is better than to commit that sin in the first place.
 - vi) Jesus is not saying, “Well, you’ve sinned now. Better cut off that hand so you won’t do it again”. God does not want us to harm our bodies; God wants us to take sin seriously. He wants us to avoid it, and when we do fall, to confess it.
10. Verse 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.
- a) Verse 10 states that “these little ones” always see the face of my Father in heaven.
 - i) Does this mean prayers of little children somehow, get priority?
 - ii) Does this mean that prayers of adults can somehow “delayed”?
 - iii) Does this verse support the idea of everybody having a “guardian angel”, especially for little children?
 - iv) I’ll try to tackle some of these ideas over the next few paragraphs.
 - b) First of all, you get the impression in the bible that God cares deeply about those who cannot defend themselves. Here is a sample verse:
 - i) “Do not take advantage of a widow or an orphan. If you do and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear their cry. My anger will be aroused, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives will become widows and your children fatherless. (Exodus 22:22-24, NIV).
 - a) John’s very loose translation: Don’t mess with the less fortunate!
 - ii) God is perfect. A perfect God is going to help more those who can’t help themselves. A perfect God is going to defend the less fortunate.
 - iii) We can all think of examples of children being murdered or a poor widow being robbed. What we have to remember is that we worship a fair and just God. Just because we don’t see the punishment doesn’t mean it isn’t going to happen.
 - iv) The question for our time here on earth is not what is God going to do about, but what are we doing about it. Jesus is teaching in these verses to take care of these “little ones”. The concept is we, as Christians need to give special care to those who are less fortunate. We are to care about the things God cares about. If God cares greatly for those who cannot defend themselves, so should we.
 - c) Now let’s talk about the idea of “guardian angels”.
 - i) Many Christians do use this verse as support of the idea of guardian angels.
 - ii) If you read through your entire bible, you will not find a verse that teaches the idea of “one person, one angel”. I’m not saying that isn’t the rule. I am saying that the bible never states or implies that ratio.
 - iii) One can easily interpret this verse as being “a group of angels” is assigned to children, and that group of angels gets God’s priority over others.

- iv) Angels are messengers dispatched from God to do his will.
 - a) There is a strange comment by Paul in 1st Corinthians that says we as believers are going to judge angels in heaven. (Ref: 1st Cor. 6:3).
 - (1) Just how and why we are to judge angels is not stated.
 - (2) My speculation is that angels are dispensed to watch over us and guard us. Somehow, we are to judge their performance.
 - b) Another common view is that the “fallen” angels who choose to follow Satan will be judged. Somehow we are judges for that trial.
 - c) Again, we don’t exactly know what it means. It is all speculation.
 - d) Last, let’s talk about children getting “priority prayer time with God”.
 - i) First of all, if you think that God only has time for children’s prayer and we as adults have to “wait in line until their done”; your concept of God is too small. ☺
 - ii) God is all-powerful. A perfect God has the time and power to hear all the prayers that call to him. There is no waiting time for prayer lists.
 - a) God does not answer prayer like a butcher shop with numbers on the wall. “Now serving number 87. Next please! ☺
 - iii) My view of this verse has to do with how God wants to train and mature us.
 - a) Children don’t understand theological issues. Children don’t understand how God wants to train them and mature them.
 - b) God works with us on our level. If we are at the maturity level of a little child, God works on that level. If we are adults and have been Christians for a while, God wants to mature us more and grow in our faith.
 - c) As adults, God often delays answers to prayers as to test our faith. God often delays answers to prayers as God desires full submission. I have seen God do his best work when we have exhausted every other option and God, and God alone can get the credit for answered prayer.
 - d) I take the view that this is what Jesus meant by the idea of children’s angels “always see their father in heaven”. Jesus was teaching the concept that children’s prayers get answered more readily as God is working to protect them and teach them on their level.
 - (1) God is also telling the disciples about children getting priority as an application to us adults to protect them and train them properly.
11. Verse 11: For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost. (NKJV)
- a) This verse is not in the NIV translations and other English bibles, other than footnotes.
 - b) The King James Version (and the New King James) relies on different Greek manuscripts than other translations such as the New International Version (NIV) or the New American Standard Version (NASB).
 - c) In Luke’s account of this story, this verse is included (Luke 19:10) in the NIV version.
 - i) This reminds me to warn you about the “King-James-Only” people.
 - a) There are some legalistic Christians out there who believe any version of the bible other than the King James is of Satan.
 - b) They will point out how the NIV omits this verse and say, “Aha! You see, the NIV people are trying to deny the fact that Jesus is coming to save the lost” by omitting this verse.
 - ii) If the NIV people are so “anti-Jesus”, why does the NIV include Luke 19:10?
 - a) If the NIV is “satanic”, why didn’t the NIV delete Luke 19:10 as well.
 - b) The answer is the NIV is not anti-Christian. It is simply the case that not all early manuscripts of Matthew include this verse.
 - c) I’m not here to argue over the best version of the bible. My simple point here is to watch out for the claims of the King-James only people.

- d) If this verse is part of the original text, terrific. It fits in with what is taught in the bible.
 - i) If this verse is not part of Matthew, it is still taught in Luke.
 - e) As to meaning of Verse 11, it ties in well with Verse 12. It should be read in that context.
12. Verse 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? ¹³ And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. ¹⁴ In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.
- a) Jesus opens this next story with, "What do you think?"
 - i) This means he wanted his disciples to think about this story.
 - b) I read a commentary by John MacArthur that illustrates these verses very well. He said in effect, "If you have a number of children, and one of them gets sick, you don't stop loving the other children. But because the one is sick you need to focus your time and energy on the one who is sick. When that child gets well, you rejoice over the healing. It doesn't mean you don't stop loving the other children or are not happy for the other children's health, it is simply that the needs of that one child at that moment outweigh the needs of the other children."
 - c) The key verse is Verse 14. This is Jesus' summary point that says "that God the father is not willing that any of these little ones be lost".
 - i) Is Jesus referring to the little children in the room or all believers?
 - a) I believe this illustration could be read either way.
 - b) God looks at all of us as his loving children and he cares for all of us.
 - c) Any one of us could be that one wandering sheep at any moment in our lives. Therefore he "puts aside" the other sheep to help us in that moment.
 - ii) The application for us is to look at all believers and desire to help them grow. If "one of the hundred" walks away, we are not to say, "oh well, better go focus on the other 99". We are to care for all who have committed their lives to God.
 - iii) This story is to be read in balance with the next story about judging Christian sinners who won't repent. There is a place for forgiveness and there is a place for judgment. The point in this story is to not ignore the one who is wandering away. We pray for them, we try to help them, but at the same time, we have to acknowledge free will the same way God does.
 - d) I have to admit when I was thinking about this story that if I had 100 sheep to watch, and one wandered away, I would have a tough time noticing." It is hard to tell 99 sheep from 100 sheep. Yet God does. Somehow, instinctively, the "Good Shepherd" knew that one of his sheep is walked away. It is time to let the 99 hold tight for a moment while God focuses on that lost sheep.
13. Verse 15: "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. ¹⁶ But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' ¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.
- a) We now move on to the 4th story in this chapter. Jesus is switching topics.
 - b) Let's summarize these verses in a couple of thoughts:
 - i) First we have a case of a "brother" (i.e., fellow-believer) sinning against you.
 - ii) Notice there is no mention of that "brother" asking for forgiveness at this point.
 - iii) Jesus first course of action is to go to person yourself.
 - a) Notice the first course of action is not to tell everybody in church about it.
 - b) Notice the first course of action is not to go to your pastor or an elder.
 - c) It is to go to the person directly and confront them.

- d) I will personally add that if you go to them humbly and tell them how you are hurt, they are more likely to not be defensive and be remorseful.
 - iv) If that didn't work, Jesus second course of action is to take 2-3 witnesses along.
 - a) This principal is first taught in Deuteronomy 17:6
 - b) It is the idea that by "two or three witnesses a thing shall be established".
 - c) This verse is quoted and used many times within the bible itself.
 - d) This verse is not about ganging up on the sinning person.
 - e) If it does come to the point of "going public" in church, it is best to have 2-3 people be witnesses so it is not one person's word against the other.
 - f) Further, sometimes the guilty person may have some reason for not confronting you alone. There are times when a 2nd or 3rd person helps.
 - v) If that didn't work, Jesus third course of action is to tell it to "the church".
 - a) I'm fascinated by the fact that when Jesus said this, there was no "church".
 - (1) In the disciples' minds, it meant their local Jewish synagogue.
 - b) This is an action that the church lacks today. Sometimes, public acknowledgement within the church of the person sinning is a necessary step.
 - vi) Finally, we are to ex-communicate them from the church.
 - a) It is not just to warn others in the church about this sin, but it is also to protect the church. It can be like removing a cancerous sore from the body.
 - b) Verse 17 says they are to "treat (them) him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.
 - (1) This does not mean we are to hate tax collectors. (I'm still working on this one myself. ☺) It means we are treat them the same way the religious Jews treated pagans and tax collectors.
 - (2) Jesus wants all to be saved. It still means to pray to them.
 - (3) They are no longer part of the body of believers until they repent.
 - c) It is a rare occurrence when a church ex-communicates someone for a sin. As tough as this can be, it is often the best thing for the sinning person and for the church.
 - c) There is a false "Christian" concept that goes: "We should just love & forgive everybody"
 - i) I have yet to find one place in the bible where we should forgive somebody who doesn't ask for forgiveness. This is a false concept.
 - ii) The balance of course, has to do with anger in our heart. There has to be forgiveness in the sense of we can't carry around that anger. It blocks our relationship with God.
 - iii) With that said, these last set of verses teach about how we are to judge fellow believers. God expects us to hold other Christians to a higher standard than we do non-believers. We are Gods' witnesses to the world. If we don't act any better than non-Christians, why would anyone else want to follow Jesus?
14. Verse 18: "I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.
- a) It is good that Verse 18 follows the last set of verses. It helps to explain the meaning.
 - b) This verse is identical to one in Matthew 16:19. I discussed it in detail in Matthew 16.
 - i) To summarize, this verse is not about life-in heaven. It is about life here on earth.
 - ii) God has given the church the authority to decide who should and who should not be part of a Christian fellowship.
 - c) This verse comes right after the whole section about how to judge a sinning Christian to show that God has given us the authority to decide who is, and who is not part of a Christian church.

- d) The question is, "What about the person who we kick out, and then they go to the church down the street?"
 - i) The answer is, "That is now the problem of the church down the street."
 - a) We as individual Christians have a responsibility to our own church, and we let God judge other fellowships. There are exceptions (e.g., if a person steals, or does violence, we do have a moral duty to warn others, etc.)
15. Verse 19: "Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."
- a) First of all, let's talk about what this verse does not mean:
 - i) It does not mean that if two people, in perfect harmony, pray for new Mercedes for each person, that Jesus is there asking what color and model they want. ☺
 - ii) The purpose of prayer is to get God's will accomplished, not ours.
 - b) Second, God encourages group prayer as well as individual prayer.
 - i) This verse does not mean if you pray by yourself, your prayer is ignored.
 - ii) God rewards group prayer to encourage Christians to interact with each other.
 - c) Third, let's read this verse in context of the surrounding verses.
 - i) Jesus just gave a small discourse on how to deal with a sinner in the church.
 - ii) Now he gives this line about prayer by two or more, "it will be done".
 - iii) Consider the possibility that Jesus is still talking about how to deal with sinners within the church. For two or more to come together and pray about it is Jesus' way of helping ease the situation or helping restore that church group.
 - d) In summary, Jesus is teaching about how group prayer is helpful in dealing with the situation of sin within the church.
 - i) The broader application is that when 2-3 pray in any situation, Jesus is there to listen to that prayer. The answer depends upon God's will, and not ours.
16. Verse 21: Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" ²² Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.
- a) Jesus just spent the last bunch of verses dealing with a person who has not asked for forgiveness. Now Peter asks the natural question about those who have asked.
 - b) The majority opinion of the Jewish rabbi's of that time taught that you forgive 2-3 times, but that's about it. One can make a scriptural argument based on the book of Amos that two or three times are about it. It is not a good case, but you can make that case.
 - i) I'm not going to get into that argument here, because, well, it is wrong. ☺
 - ii) Besides if Jesus says it is wrong, who am I to argue? ☺
 - c) The last part of Verse 22, where it says 77 times, can also be translated seventy-times seven. You can read Jesus answer as either being "77" or "490".
 - i) Either way, the answer is not meant to be a mathematical number.
 - ii) Jesus is not saying for example, "Ok, you are now up to 487. Three more times and you're history." ☺
 - a) The point is that we are not to keep track of how many times a person asks for forgiveness.
 - d) Now comes the tough part, how do we keep forgiving a person who keeps messing up?
 - i) Let's start with the assumption that the sinning-person is sincere in their desire to change every time they ask for forgiveness.
 - ii) Why should we trust a person who messes up so often?
 - iii) Let's start by saying we don't do it for their sake, we do it for our sake.
 - iv) What God desires of us more than anything is a relationship with Him.
 - a) Anger, resentment and pride block that relationship.
 - v) We need to forgive others so that anger isn't sitting around inside of us.

- vi) Further, God wants us to be a good witness to the world.
 - a) The world expects us to be resentful and vengeful.
 - b) God wants you to use His love and His power to remove that anger.
 - c) God wants us to take that hurt and that anger, and lay it at the feet of the cross so we can have an unblocked relationship with God the Father.
 - d) We'll discuss this further in the next set of verses.
17. Verse 23: "Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. ²⁵ Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.
- a) From Verse 23 to the end of the chapter is all one illustration.
 - b) If you are not familiar with this illustration, it may help to read to the end of the chapter at this point.
 - c) The first thing to notice is the phrase "the kingdom of heaven".
 - i) That phrase, as used by Jesus, usually refers to the Christian life here-on-earth.
 - ii) There are times it refers to the next life, but it usually refers to the "here and now".
 - iii) My point is that this section is not about our rewards in heaven based on forgiveness. It is about what God expects from us, now, as Christians.
 - iv) Remember that this illustration is based on Peter asking the question, "How many times shall I forgive my brother. It has to do with forgiveness of someone who asks for forgiveness.
 - d) As to the story itself, there was a man who owed the king 10,000 "talents".
 - i) A talent is a monetary term that is roughly a day's wage.
 - ii) If you figure what you earn in about 30 years, that is the amount we have here.
 - iii) The point is not the exact dollar figure, but it was an outrageous sum more than the average person can relate to in a single transaction.
 - e) When I think of someone "owing" that kind of money, I figure they have to be, say the #2 man in power. I can imagine the head-tax collector for all of Rome maybe owing that kind of money. The point is that this person was given tremendous responsibility.
 - f) I'm also speculating that selling everything they have would not be nearly enough to pay off the debt. In that time era, even wives and children were sold off to pay for debt.
18. Verse 26: "The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' ²⁷ The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.
- a) It is hard for me to imagine canceling that type of debt. If someone owed me millions, I would have a real tough time saying, "OK John, don't worry about it, let it go."
 - b) The only way I can imagine someone saying to forget that kind of debt would be a person where money has no meaning, or they are so rich that "millions" is forgivable.
 - c) Either way, you are describing God the Father.
 - i) God owns all and is responsible for all.
 - ii) The guy owing the 10,000 "talents" could never pay it back through selling what he has and working it off the rest of his life.
 - iii) Now stop and think about the fact that God is perfect.
 - a) This perfect God can read our thoughts. He knows not only all the sins we have committed but also those we thought of committing in our hearts.
 - b) If I look back on my life, I'm sure my sin is greater than the 10,000 "talents". The good news is God forgave that sin. All God asks in return is we have the same attitude towards others who have sinned against us and ask us for forgiveness.

19. Verse 28: "But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded. ²⁹ "His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.' ³⁰ "But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt.
- a) To summarize, the same guy who was forgiven of 10,000 denarii won't forgive someone who owes him 100 denarii.
 - b) Jesus whole point through this illustration is about ingratitude.
 - c) There is a saying in the business world that if you are going to consult somebody, it is better that the consultant charge a fee rather than give free advice. For some reason, people respect advice more when they have to pay for it, than when they get it for free. It is the idea that, "This advice didn't cost me anything, why should I take it seriously".
 - i) I have to admit that concept comes to mind when I read about this guy who refuses to forgive the one who owes him 100 denarii. I have seen too many people refuse to learn from things that are free and not change their ways.
 - ii) My point here is that the world gets great blessings from God. They get wonderful lives. They give God some "lip service" and maybe once or twice a year they go to church to relive their guilt. But they don't change their lifestyle. I have seen people acknowledge Jesus as forgiveness of their sins, but then they refuse to turnaround and change their lifestyle based on that forgiveness.
20. Verse 31: When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened.
- a) A reason God wants us to have a forgiving attitude toward others is that we are his witnesses to the world.
 - i) If you are hypocritical in that you call yourself a Christian but your behavior is no better or worse than non-Christians around you, believe me the world notices.
 - ii) You can hear the other servants saying, "Hey, the master forgave this guy all that debt and now he won't forgive. Why should I respect this guy?"
 - a) God cares about his reputation. Because he does he expects us to be his witnesses to other people.
 - b) "But if you fail to do this, you will be sinning against the LORD; and you may be sure that your sin will find you out." (Numbers 32:21 NIV).
 - c) I'm reading this verse in Numbers a little out of context, but I believe the idea behind this verse applies here. It is that God cares too much about us and too much about his reputation to not let us forgive others.
21. Verse 32: "Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. ³³ Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?'
- a) We are accountable to God. Just as God as forgiven all of our sins, he expects us to have that same attitude toward others when they ask for forgiveness.
 - i) Yes people hurt us. Yes that pain is real. The point is God wants us to turn that pain over to Him and for us to accept the forgiveness when others sin against us.
 - b) In a sense, this illustration is based on the verse "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors". (Matthew 6:11 NIV).
22. Verse 34: In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. ³⁵ "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."
- a) Notice this whole section says nothing about forgiving others who don't ask for forgiveness. In fact, the previous section dealt with how to treat a Christian who does sin and won't repent. The final act was to ex-communicate them from the church.

- b) Some people read this last verse on the Father and think, “Oh no, God is going to send me to hell because I refuse to forgive that one person.
 - i) Remember that the only unforgivable sin as stated by Jesus is to reject Jesus as God. That is “blasphemy of the Holy Spirit”. (See Matthew 12:31).
 - a) If you can think of a person you need to forgive (again, who has asked for it, you must forgive them. If they are no longer alive, it is ok to confess that sin to God and know that particular sin is forgiven.
 - c) I can see how Roman Catholics can read this verse and consider the idea that a “purgatory” must exist. They could read this verse and see how we have to go to purgatory to suffer for the sins we didn’t forgive others.
 - i) I don’t believe in purgatory because there is no hint of it anywhere in the Bible.
 - d) One can read this verse one of two ways:
 - i) If someone won’t forgive another who asks for forgiveness, this is a “sign” of a non-believer.
 - a) If you say you are a Christian, but don’t change your behavior, I would argue that you are not a disciple of Christ.
 - b) I’ve always taken the attitude that Christianity is about “putting your money where your mouth is”. It is not just saying I believe in Jesus, but putting it into action.
 - c) Therefore, one can read this verse and argue it’s about eternal hell because you are not a follower of Jesus based on your unforgiving heart.
 - ii) The other way to read this verse is to realize the “internal hell” one goes through when they hold a grudge in anger. That anger does physical harm as well as spiritual harm because we refuse to forgive.
 - e) I believe the only aspect of forgiveness of someone who doesn’t ask for it is to do so in the sense that it blocks our relationship with God. We can’t let that anger get in the way of our prayer life and our relationship with other Christians.
 - a) For example, if someone has stolen money from me, I need to forgive him or her in my heart so I can have peace with God. At the same time I still need to report it to the police as society demands justice for crimes.
 - f) Speaking of forgiving, I’m running way long so please forgive me. It’s a requirement. ☺
23. Let’s pray: Father, you have forgiven us of so much. We fail to recognize that, especially when others have hurt us. You said if we have the faith of a mustard seed, we could move mountains. We ask that you increase our faith so we can forgive those who have hurt us. We desire an open and peaceful relationship with you, and we can’t do that if anger and pain is blocking that relationship. We turn that over to you, so that you may be glorified in all we do. For we ask this in Jesus name, Amen.