

Notes for Matthew -Chapter 18 (Page 1 of 6)

Introduction - "Conduct": Chapter 18 focuses on what God expects of us in our conduct.

1. The first story focuses on what conduct is required to be "great" in heaven. (Verses 1-6)
 - a. 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.
 - b. God wants us to have that same attitude toward Him.
2. The second story focuses on our conduct on the avoidance of sin. (Verses 6-10)
 - a. Jesus teaches that the world is full of stumbling blocks that cause problems in our relationship with God. This little section is full of graphic illustrations to show just how seriously God wants us to consider the danger of sin.
3. The third story is about how God cares for all believers. Therefore, our conduct is important on how we treat all other believers. (Verses 11-14)
 - a. The 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.
4. The fourth story is about our conduct in church. (Verses 15-20)
 - a. Sin is not to be tolerated in the church. This is not about being perfect; but it is realizing the sin is wrong and confessing it. Jesus is teaching the conduct is not to be tolerated.
5. The final story about our conduct is on the topic of forgiveness. (Verses 21-35)
 - a. 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.
6. 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. The key is the sinning-person (that's you and me!) is willing to ask forgiveness. 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.

Vs. 1: At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

1. Let's start with the expression, "at that time". It connects to the previous chapter's events.
 - a. 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.
 - b. 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.
 - c. In the final verses of the last chapter, the topic was "denying yourself to follow Jesus".
 - d. It is understandable to know what it takes to be great in heaven. Their focus was on the right place (heaven), but their hearts where in the wrong place (on themselves).

Verses 2-4: 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.

1. Where Jesus was talking to his disciples, there were women and children present.
2. Most people think that to be great in heaven is to do lots of things for God.
3. Jesus taught the exact opposite: To be great is to be childlike.
 - a. To be childlike is to be totally dependant upon other people. Children don't worry about the mortgage, or having food on the table. They are utterly dependant upon their parents.
 - b. To be great in heaven is to be fully dependant upon God, like a child is upon a parent.

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Verses 2-4 (cont.)

4. A "child-like" prayer: "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".
5. 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.
6. Does this mean that whoever is the most "child-like" is #1 in heaven?
 - a. 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 (maturity) as believers.
 - b. To be "great" as a Christian is to fully depend upon God for every aspect of our lives.
7. What Jesus is trying to teach here is about humility.
 - a. Humility is to not think about your own needs. It is about putting others before yourself.

Verse 5: "And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me."

1. This is a good verse to place on the wall of a children's Sunday school room.
2. 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.
3. Statistically, most people who commit their lives to serving Jesus do so as teenagers.
 - a. What does that say about the importance of teaching our youth?
4. Notice the words "like this" in Verse 5. Whoever welcomes a little child "like this" welcomes Jesus. What does Jesus mean by "like this"?
 - a. It is about our full dependence upon God.
 - b. 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.

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."

1. Let's jump ahead to Verse 10 for a second. It ties together with Verse 6:
 - a. "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." (Matthew 18:10, NIV).
2. Since a little child doesn't have the ability to defend themselves against (spiritual) attacks, God cares more about them since they don't have the ability to help themselves.
3. Jesus is speaking to believers (disciples). Therefore, how do we cause these "little ones" to sin?
 - a. Jesus is teaching of our responsibilities as believers to the next generation.
 - b. Kids watch what we do far more than what we say. This is about being a role-model.
4. Let's talk about the "large millstone around the neck and thrown in the sea".
 - a. Sounds like a mafia killing doesn't it. ☺
 - b. God is not calling upon us to go drown false-believers in the ocean.
 - c. Jesus is giving an illustration about how seriously to take the issue of helping young children to grow in their faith.
5. Another idea to get across here is that one can take the idea of "children" as referring to their "spiritual age", not just their physical age. "Baby Christians" can be any age.

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Verse 7, first sentence: "Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin!"

1. Jesus is not condemning children or believers, he is condemning the world (non-believers).
2. You never read anywhere in the bible once that you get saved, life is "wonderful and perfect."
 - a. "In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2nd Timothy 3:12, NIV)
3. The bible teaches that Christians are persecuted for their faith. 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.

Verse 7, second sentence: "Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come!"

1. 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".
2. Is Satan behind sin? Of course. Does that mean we're not accountable? No!
3. This is why Jesus says in effect, "Woe to the person through sins come!"

Verses 8-9: 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.

1. Is Jesus being literal? The answer is no. Let me get back to a previous illustration:
 - a. "Your honor, I didn't 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'm innocent." ☺
2. 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 you hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off". Jesus does not want you to cut body parts!
3. Jesus is teaching you how seriously to take sin and how serious is eternal damnation.

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."

1. God cares deeply about those who cannot defend themselves. Here is a sample verse:
 - a. "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).
2. 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.
3. The question for us is not what is God going to do about, but what are we doing about it. Jesus is teaching 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.
4. Now let's talk about the idea of "guardian angels".
 - a. In the bible, you will not find a verse that teaches the idea of "one person, one angel". It is possible, it is just not known. 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.
 - b. There is a comment by Paul in 1st Corinthians that says we as believers are going to judge angels in heaven! (Ref: 1st Cor. 6:3). How and why we're to judge angels is not stated.
 - c. My speculation is that angels are dispensed to watch over us and guard us.
 1. Somehow, someday we will judge their performance.

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Verse 10 (cont.)

5. Last, let's talk about children getting "priority prayer time"
 - a. 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! ☺
 - b. My view of this verse has to do with how God wants to train and mature us. Children don't understand theological issues. God works with us on our level. If we are at the maturity level of a little child, God works on that level. As we are mature in our dependence upon God, He often delays answers to prayers as to test our faith.
 - c. Another view is God is telling the disciples about children getting priority as an application to us adults to protect them and train them properly.

Verse 11: For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost. (NKJV)

1. This verse is not in the NIV translations and some other English bibles, other than footnotes.
2. The King James Version (and the New King James) relies on different Greek manuscripts than other translations such as the New International Version (NIV).
3. In Luke's account of this story, this verse is included (Luke 19:10) in the NIV version.
4. If this verse is part of the original Matthew text, terrific. It fits in with what is taught in the bible.
5. As to meaning of Verse 11, it ties in well with Verse 12. It should be read in that context.

Verses 12-14: "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.

1. Jesus says, "What do you think?" Jesus wanted his disciples to think about this story.
2. "If you have a number of children, and one of them gets sick, you don't stop loving the other children. 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." (John MacArthur)
3. The key verse is Verse 14. This is Jesus' summary point that says, "God the father is not willing that any of these little ones be lost".
 - a. Is Jesus referring to the little children in the room or all believers? (Answer: Either way!)
 - b. God looks at all of us as his loving children and he cares for all of us.
4. I have to admit 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.

Verses 15-17: "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."

1. Jesus lays out a "4-step" plan if a "brother" (i.e., fellow-believer) sinning against you.
 - a. Notice this plan does not ask you to fix a problem between two other people.
 - b. God does not call us to go around and be the "sin police".
2. Jesus says the 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. 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.

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Verses 15-17 (cont.): Jesus' "4-step" plan for confronting sin in the church.

3. If that didn't work, Jesus says the second course of action is to take 2-3 witnesses along.
 - a. This principal is first taught in Deuteronomy 17:6. It is the idea that by "two or three witnesses a thing shall be established".
 - b. 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.
 - c. Further, sometimes the guilty person may have some reason for not confronting you alone. There are times when a 2nd or 3rd person helps.
4. If that didn't work, Jesus says the third course of action is to tell it to "the church".
5. 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 him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. 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.
6. You can still pray for the ex-communicated, but they're not part of that church until they repent.

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."

1. This verse is not about life-in heaven. It is about the "here and now". God has given the church the authority to decide who should and who should not be part of a Christian fellowship.
2. "What about the person who we kick out, and then they go to the church down the street?"
 - a. The answer is, "That is now the problem of the church down the street."
 - b. 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.)

Vs. 20: "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."

1. This verse 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. ☺
2. The purpose of prayer is to get God's will accomplished, not ours.
3. Third, let's read this verse in context of the surrounding verses.
 - a. Jesus just gave a small discourse on how to deal with a sinner in the church.
 - b. Now he gives this line about prayer by two or more, "it will be done".
 - c. I believe 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.

Verses 21-22: 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.

1. 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 for forgiveness.
2. The majority opinion of the Jewish rabbi's of that day is you forgive 2-3 times, but that's about it. One can make an argument based on the book of Amos that 2-3 times are about it. It is not a good case, but you can make that case. Besides, who am I to contradict Jesus! ☺
3. The last part of Verse 22, where it says 77 times, can also be translated "70 times 7" or 490 times.
4. Jesus is not saying, "Ok, you are now up to 487. Three more times and you're history." ☺

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Verses 21-22: (cont.) How do we forgive someone who keeps “messing up”?

5. Let's start with the assumption that they are sincere in their desire to do better.
 - a. What God desires of us more than anything is a relationship with Him.
 - b. Anger, resentment and pride block that relationship.
6. 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 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.

Verses 23-25: “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.

1. The first thing to notice is the phrase, “The kingdom of heaven”.
 - a. That phrase, as used by Jesus, usually refers to the Christian life here-on-earth.
 - b. My point is that this section is not about our rewards in heaven based on forgiveness.
 - c. It is about what God expects from us, now, as Christians.
2. Remember this text is based on Peter's question: “How many times shall I forgive my brother?”
3. A talent is a monetary term that is roughly a day's wage.
 - a. If you figure what you earn in about 30 years, that is the amount we have here.
 - b. It was an outrageous sum designed to make a point.

Verses 26-27: “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.”

1. 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.
 - a. Either way, you are describing God the Father.

Verses 28-30: “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.’”

1. To summarize, the same guy who was forgiven of 10,000 denarii won't forgive someone who owes him 100 denarii. Jesus whole point through this illustration is about ingratitude.

Verses 31-33: When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened. 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?’”

1. You can hear the other servants saying, “Hey, the master forgave this guy all that debt and now that guy won't forgive someone else. Why should I respect this guy?”
2. 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.

Verses 34-35: 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.”

1. If someone won't forgive another who asks for forgiveness, this is a “sign” of a non-believer.
2. Another interpretation is to realize the “internal hell” one has when they hold a grudge in anger.