

## Matthew 18

### Matthew 18 v 1-4

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" 2 And He called a child to Himself and set him before them, 3 and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

The first part of this chapter deals with a common problem that has always and no doubt will continue to be a problem to humanity, that of status or position. The question is asked *Who is the greatest in the Kingdom?* The answer is of course Jesus because He is the King of the Kingdom; but the disciples wanted Him to recognise which one of them He considered were the most important. If we are to follow Him, then we have to understand the tremendous cost is involved, that in following Jesus, it is the way of the cross.

### Matthew 20 v 20-28

Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Jesus with her sons, bowing down and making a request of Him. 21 And He said to her, "What do you wish?" She said to Him, "Command that in Your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit one on Your right and one on Your left." 22 But Jesus answered, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?" They said to Him, "We are able." 23 He said to them, "My cup you shall drink; but to sit on My right and on My left, this is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father." 24 And hearing this, the ten became indignant with the two brothers. 25 But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. 26 It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, 27 and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

In this scripture Jesus is asked to give preferential treatment by the mother of James and John. The last few verses of Matthew 20, by contrast, shows Jesus giving up His Kingly rights to establish a kingdom principle.

His illustration brings into focus the main reason why we often fail to enjoy the benefits of the Kingdom, to enter in is to take God at His word, literally, without argument and debate. To be child like in our faith opens us up to the blessings of our Heavenly Father. To be too *adult* may well mean that we are not humble and if we are not we shall not enjoy the benefits of the Kingdom.

### **Acts 20 v 35**

*35 In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"*

It is therefore better to honour others by serving them, than to demand a position in the Church.

### **Matthew 18 v 5-11**

*5 And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me; 6 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. 7 "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! 8 "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. 9 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. 10 "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. 11 For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.*

Regarding stumbling blocks, there are strong words here, but to whom does Jesus address these? It is to two categories of people, Christians and non - Christians, there is no in between! These words are radical and challenging to our behavioural patterns. To Christians especially there is a warning for those who cause others to stumble. When we behave as the world behaves, then we are as bad as those who crucified Jesus and are a stumbling block that hides His life from the world.

Here are some stumbling blocks, but the good news is, we can have them removed!

1. Behaving in a childish way, sulking, being resentful, spiteful with our tongues, back biting, unforgiving, untruthful and not facing issues in our lives. All these attitudes need to be confessed and forgiven by the Lord and if we are unforgiving, then we shall not be forgiven by Him, neither will we grow into maturity.

### **Hebrews 6 v 1-3**

*Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, 2 of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. 3 And this we will do, if God permits.*

2. Dishonesty, pretending that we are something that we are not, labelled *Christian* yet failing to meet the requirements of the Holy Spirit. The Lord knows what we are like, we should therefore be honest to God by being honest with ourselves.

### **Revelation 3 v 1-6**

*"To the angel of the church in Sardis write: He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars, says this: 'I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. 2 Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God. 3 So remember what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. Therefore if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you. 4 But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. 5 He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. 6 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'*

3. Withholding oneself from the Lord and from fellowship, failure to recognise that we are part of the body of Christ and therefore one another. Withholding one's time, gifts and money will become stumbling blocks to our growth.

### **1 Corinthians 7 v 1-5**

*Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman. 2 But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband. 3 The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. 4 The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. 5 Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.*

## **2 Corinthians 8 v 1-15**

Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, 2 that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. 3 For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, 4 begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, 5 and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God. 6 So we urged Titus that as he had previously made a beginning, so he would also complete in you this gracious work as well. 7 But just as you abound in everything, in faith and utterance and knowledge and in all earnestness and in the love we inspired in you, see that you abound in this gracious work also. 8 I am not speaking this as a command, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love also. 9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich. 10 I give my opinion in this matter, for this is to your advantage, who were the first to begin a year ago not only to do this, but also to desire to do it. 11 But now finish doing it also, so that just as there was the readiness to desire it, so there may be also the completion of it by your ability. 12 For if the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. 13 For this is not for the ease of others and for your affliction, but by way of equality - 14 at this present time your abundance being a supply for their need, so that their abundance also may become a supply for your need, that there may be equality; 15 as it is written, "He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little had no lack."

## **Matthew 18 v 12-14**

12 "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? 13 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. 14 So it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish.

God's heart is towards those who fall away, He celebrates when the Prodigal Son comes back to Him.

## **Matthew 18 v 15-17**

15 "If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. 16 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. 17 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.

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\*SCF- Stevenage Christian Fellowship where Dennis Marshall was Pastor

Regarding discipline in the church, the objective is to return your brother or sister to the flock, not just to put them right! This is an area that is often not followed. If someone sins against you or offends you we should go to that person and talk it through kindly with them, alone.

### **Ephesians 4 v 17-32**

*17 So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, 18 being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; 19 and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. 20 But you did not learn Christ in this way, 21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, 22 that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, 23 and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. 25 Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. 26 Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and do not give the devil an opportunity. 28 He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need. 29 Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. 30 Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.*

What we often do is to say nothing and brood over it, perhaps mentioning it to someone else rather than taking it up with the wrongdoer, the steps are quite clear:

1. Go to your brother or sister.
2. If the person will not receive you, then take someone else along with you.
3. If the person still does not accept you and your grievance then it should be taken to the Church through the leaders.
4. The final refusal of the offender to listen and to consider the charge would then mean that the person would be treated as an unbeliever.

### **Matthew 18 v 18 to 20**

*18 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. 19 "Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. 20 For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst."*

The binding and loosing aspect of this portion of scripture is to show that the Church must bind up the unrepentant sinner and is given the authority to do so, in the same way the repentant sinner may be loosed from that which binds them; the principle of binding or loosing is indicative of the backing that heaven will give to the Church authority, it assumes that Christ-like justice has or is being sought in prayerful fashion. This authority is given to those two or three who may gather in His name about any issue. The promise is that out of the law of agreement, whatever we may ask, in His name, it shall be done. Ask for wisdom, ask for solutions and it shall be given. The Holy Spirit will at all times examine our minds, hearts and motives.

### **Matthew 18 v 21 to 32**

*21 Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" 22 Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. 23 "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. 24 When he had begun to settle them, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. 25 But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made. 26 So the slave fell to the ground and prostrated himself before him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you everything.' 27 And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt. 28 But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.' 29 So his fellow slave fell to the ground and began to plead with him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.' 30 But he was unwilling and went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed. 31 So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. 32 Then summoning him, his lord said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me.*

The importance of forgiveness and the impotence of the unforgiving heart are worlds apart. Forgiveness is eternal grace and mercy, both gifts from God for our use! No forgiveness equals no relationship with God equals no solution. Jesus tells us this in the Lord's Prayer.

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### **Matthew 6 v 9-15**

9 "Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. 10 'Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. 11 'Give us this day our daily bread. 12 'And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13 'And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.' 14 For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.

We have no excuse not to forgive each other, our friends and our antagonists alike. We are to be imitators of God.

### **Ephesians 5 v 1-2**

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; 2 and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma. When things don't work out then we have a court that has the authority to judge issues, it is the Church. This is why we as Christians should never take one another to court.

### **1 Corinthians 6 v 1-8**

Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous and not before the saints? 2 Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? If the world is judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts? 3 Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more matters of this life? 4 So if you have law courts dealing with matters of this life, do you appoint them as judges who are of no account in the church? 5 I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not among you one wise man who will be able to decide between his brethren, 6 but brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers? 7 Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? 8 On the contrary, you yourselves wrong and defraud. You do this even to your brethren.

The Lord must always have the last word, as well as the first word!

### **Matthew 6 v 33-35**

33 Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?' 34 And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. 35 My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart."