

**Second Baptist Church of Doylestown**  
**Bible Study Notes**  
**10-18-23**

**Matthew 18**

**The Greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven – Verse 1**

**<sup>1</sup> At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”**

**18:1** The disciples were often concerned about the question of greatness. They seem to ask this question thinking that Jesus has already chosen one of them as greatest or as if they wanted Jesus to decide among them.

**Jesus Sets A Child As An Example Of Humility – Verses 2-4**

**<sup>2</sup> He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. <sup>3</sup> And he said: “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup> Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>5</sup> And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.**

**18:2-4** Jesus used a child to help his self-centered disciples get the point. We are not to be childish (like the disciples, arguing over petty issues) but childlike, with humble and sincere hearts. In what areas of your life do you tend to struggle with childishness? In what ways are you making progress with childlikeness?

**18:3-4** The disciples had become so preoccupied with the organization of Jesus' earthly kingdom that they had lost sight of its divine purpose. Instead of seeking a place of service, they sought positions of advantage. It is easy to lose our eternal perspective and compete for promotions or status in the church. It is difficult, but healthy, to identify with “children”—weak and dependent people with no status or influence.

**Woe To The One Who Causes One Of These To Stumble – Verses 5-6**

**<sup>6</sup> “If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.**

**18:6** Children are trusting by nature. Because they trust adults, they are easily led to faith in Christ. God holds parents and other adults accountable for how they influence these little ones. Jesus warned that anyone who turns little children away from faith in him will receive severe punishment.

**Take No Part In Offending Others – Verses 7-9**

**<sup>7</sup> Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to stumble! Such things must come, but woe to the person through whom they come! <sup>8</sup> If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, 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. <sup>9</sup> And if your eye causes**

**you to stumble, 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.**

**18:7** Jesus warned the disciples about two ways to cause others to sin: tempting them (18:7-9) and neglecting or demeaning them (18:10-14). As leaders, we are to help young people or new believers avoid anything or anyone that could cause them to stumble in their faith and lead them to sin. We must never take lightly the spiritual education and protection of those young in age or young in the faith.

**18:8-9** We must remove stumbling blocks that cause us to sin. This does not mean to cut off a part of the body. For the church it means that any person, program, or teaching that threatens the spiritual growth of the body must be removed. For the individual, any relationship, practice, or activity that leads to sin should be stopped. Jesus says it would be better to go to heaven with one hand than to hell with both. Sin, of course, affects more than our hands; it affects our minds and hearts.

### **Our Responsibility To Guard God's Little Ones – Verses 10-11**

<sup>10-11</sup> **“See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.**

**18:10** Do not despise one of these little ones: Because God's mind and eye is always on His little ones, we do well to treat them with love and respect. God protects the humble. Their angels: This is often taken as a reference to “guardian angels.” We certainly do have angels watching over us and ministering to us Hebrew 1:14, but there is no need to limit it to only one specific “guardian angel.”

### **Disciples Must Share Jesus' Heart And Care For Individuals – Verses 12-14**

<sup>12</sup> **“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? <sup>13</sup> And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. <sup>14</sup> In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish.**

**18:12-14** Just as a shepherd is concerned enough about one lost sheep to go search the hills for it, so God is concerned about every human being he has created (he is “not wanting anyone to perish,” 2 Peter 3:9). If you come in contact with children in your neighborhood who need Christ, steer them toward him by your example, your words, and your acts of kindness.

### **Dealing With Sin in the Church – Verses 15-17**

<sup>15</sup> **“If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. <sup>16</sup> But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. <sup>17</sup> If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.**

**18:15-17** These are Jesus' guidelines for dealing with those who sin against us. They were meant for (1) Christians, not unbelievers, (2) sins committed against you and not others, and (3) conflict resolution in the context of the church, not the community at large. Jesus' words are not a license for a frontal attack on every person who hurts or slights us. They are not a license to start a

destructive gossip campaign or to call for a church trial. They are designed to reconcile those who disagree so that all Christians can live in harmony.

**15:17** When someone wrongs us, we often do the opposite of what Jesus recommends. We turn away in hatred or resentment, seek revenge, or engage in gossip. By contrast, we should go to that person first, as difficult as that may be. Then we should forgive that person as often as he or she needs it (18:21-22). This will create a much better chance of restoring the relationship.

### **The Power And Blessing In Fellowship That Is Denied The Unrepentant – Verses 18-20**

**18** “Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. **19** “Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. **20** For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”

**18:18** This binding and loosing refers to the decisions of the church in conflicts. Among believers, there should need to be no court of appeals beyond the church. Ideally, the church’s decisions should be God-guided and based on discernment of his Word. Believers have the responsibility, therefore, to bring their problems to the church, and the church has the responsibility to use God’s guidance in seeking to resolve conflicts. Handling problems God’s way will have an impact now and for eternity.

**18:19-20** Jesus looked ahead to a new day when he would be present with his followers not in body, but through his Holy Spirit. In the body of believers (the church), the sincere agreement of two people in prayer is more powerful than the superficial agreement of thousands, because Christ’s Holy Spirit is with them. Two or more believers, filled with the Holy Spirit, will pray according to God’s will, not their own; thus, their requests will be granted.

### **Peter’s Question About Forgiveness And Jesus’ Answer – Verses 21-22**

**21** Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?” **22** Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

**18:22** The rabbis taught that people should forgive those who offend them—but only three times. Peter, trying to be especially generous, asked Jesus if seven (the “perfect” number) was enough times to forgive someone. But Jesus answered, “Seventy-seven times,” meaning that we shouldn’t even keep track of how many times we forgive someone. We should always forgive those who are truly repentant, no matter how many times they ask.

### **The Debt Of The First Servant – Verses 23-27**

**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 bags of gold 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. **26** “At this 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.

**18:23-24** The king in this parable expected his servants to be faithful and honorable in the way they conducted his business. Therefore, one day he examined their work and would settle accounts with

them. Commentators list the modern value of 10,000 talents as anywhere between \$12 million and \$1 billion USD. The figure clearly represents an unpayable debt.

**18:24-25** His master commanded that he be sold: Of course, the man was not able to pay. Therefore the master commanded to sell the debtor, his family, and all he had. This would not satisfy the debt; slaves at their top price were sold at a talent each (and usually sold for much less). Yet it would bring some measure of justice.

**18:26-27** The master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt: The master showed mercy prompted by compassion, forgiving a debt that obviously could never be repaid — despite whatever promises the servant made.

### **The Forgiven Servant Refuses To Forgive – Verses 28-30**

**28** “**But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. 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 it back.’** **30** “**But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt.**

**18:30** In Bible times, serious consequences awaited those who could not pay their debts. A person lending money could seize the borrower who couldn't pay and force him or his family to work until the debt was paid. The debtor could also be thrown into prison, or his family could be sold into slavery to help pay off the debt. It was hoped that the debtor, while in prison, would sell off his landholdings or that relatives would pay the debt. If not, the debtor could remain in prison for life.

### **The Judgment Of The Unforgiving Servant – Verses 31-34**

**31** **When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged 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?’** **34** **In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.**

**18:31** When his fellow servants saw what had been done: There is no mention in the parable of the first servant's conscience bothering him about his conduct. It was his fellow servants that recognized the wrong that was done. “Others could see the evil of his conduct if he could not.” Sometimes we are painfully and to our embarrassment blind to our own sinful, fleshly conduct.

**18:32-34** You wicked servant... delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him: When the master heard of this, he was understandably angry. It was just wrong for a man who has been forgiven so much to then be so unforgiving. He then gave the first servant what he deserved — justice instead of mercy.

### **Genuine Forgiveness, From The Heart, Is Required Of All Who Have Been Forgiven – V. 35**

**35** “**This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.**”

**18:35** The principle is clear. God has forgiven such a great debt, that any debt owed to us is absolutely insignificant in comparison. No man can possibly offend me to the extent that my sins

have offended God. This principle must be applied in the little things done to us, but also to the great things done unto us.

**18:35** It is also important to understand that a distinction can and should be made between forgiveness and reconciliation. True reconciliation of relationship can only happen when both parties are agreeable to it, and this may require repentance on one or both of the parties in the conflict. Yet forgiveness can be one-sided.

**18:35** Because God has forgiven all our sins, we should not withhold forgiveness from others. As we realize how completely Christ has forgiven us, it should produce an attitude of forgiveness toward others. When we don't forgive others, we are setting ourselves above Christ's law of love.