

Offending the Little Ones (Mat 18:1-14)

I. This study should be both convicting and edifying. The following should be accomplished:

1. Understand what is meant by “offending” and “despising” little children.
2. Learn how to not offend and despise little children.
3. Learn how **Mat 18:8-9** fits with the rest of **Mat 18:1-14**.

II. The reason for Jesus’ discourse.

1. The disciples asked who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven (**Mat 18:1**).
 - A. They had been reasoning among themselves about who should be the greatest (**Luk 9:46**).
 - B. The reasoning (To question (a person); to call (one) to account) quickly turned into a dispute (**Mar 9:34**), and Jesus perceived their thoughts (**Luk 9:47**) and then asked them what they were disputing about (**Mar 9:33**), which in turn lead to their question.
 - C. This was a notion that the disciples were often occupied with (**Luk 22:24-27**), and not only them, but James’ and John’s mother as well (**Mat 20:20-24**).

III. The example of the humility of a little child (v. 2-5).

1. Jesus used a little *believing* child (**Mat 18:6**) as a model for adult Christians to follow (**Mat 18:2-5**).
2. Notice some noble characteristics of these little children under consideration:
 - A. They are convertible (v. 3).
 - i. The verse does explicitly state that these little children were converted, but it can be deduced because:
 1. These little children were believers (**Mat 18:6**).
 2. Children are not born believers, but rather totally depraved (**Rom 5:12; Psa 51:5; Psa 58:3; Gen 8:21**).
 3. These children therefore were turned from a state to sin and unbelief to faith in Jesus, which is to be converted by definition.

Converted – 1. Turned, turned back. 2. That has turned or been brought over to a religious faith or profession, whether from a different religion or from irreligious life.

- ii. Conversion requires teaching (**Psa 51:12-13**), therefore children such as these are teachable (**1Pe 2:2; 2Ti 3:15**).
- iii. Conversion requires repentance (**Act 3:19**), therefore children such as these are penitent.
- iv. Conversion requires faith.

B. They are humble (v. 4).

Humble (v.)- 1. trans. To render humble or meek in spirit; to cause to think more lowly of oneself.

Humble (a.) 1. Having a low estimate of one's importance, worthiness, or merits; marked by the absence of self-assertion or self-exaltation; lowly: the opposite of proud.

- i. As Christians, we are supposed to be humble (**Jam 4:5-10 c/w Luk 18:14**) and prefer one another (**Rom 12:10**), and esteem others better than ourselves like Christ (**Phi 2:3-8 c/w Psa 113:6**).

Prefer - 1. a. trans. To put forward or advance, in status, rank, or fortune; to promote (to a position or office of dignity).

- ii. This is why Jesus left us with the ordinance of footwashing (**Joh 13:12-17**).

C. Believing and obedient children are submissive (**Luk 2:51; Eph 6:1**).

D. They are not as full of malice as adults (generally speaking) (**1Co 14:20**).

Malice 1. Bad quality, badness; chiefly in moral sense, wickedness.

E. As was stated before, the little children who exhibited these characteristics were believers, but not all little children are such (**2Ki 2:23-24**).

3. Jesus exhorts us to be as believing children in conversion, humility, submission, and innocence, but not in:

A. Understanding (**1Co 14:20; 1Co 3:1-2; Heb 5:11-14; 1Co 13:11**).

B. Speech (**1Co 13:11**).

C. Foolishness (**Pro 22:15**).

D. Instability/gullibility (**Eph 4:14**).

IV. The warning about offending and despising little children (v. 6-7, 10).

1. Jesus pronounced a woe on those who offend and despise little children (**Mat 18:6-7,10**).

Woe - 1. a. As an exclamation of grief or lamentation: = Alas! Often in combination with another int., as ah, lo

II. Construed with a dative (or, later, its equivalent), with or without a verb of being or happening, in sentences expressing the incidence of distress, affliction, or grief.

2. In prophetic or denunciatory utterances of the type of OE. *wá biþ þ\m mannum* = affliction or grief shall be the lot of the men; woe be to us = may affliction or distress light upon us; woe is him = cursed is he.

Offend - I. †1. intr. To strike with the feet against something, to stumble.

4. In Biblical use: To be a stumbling-block, or cause spiritual or moral difficulty, to (a person); to shock; to cause to stumble or sin.

Despise - 1. trans. To look down upon; to view with contempt; to think scornfully or slightly of.

2. A person that offends (is a stumbling block to) a little child is worthy to be drowned in the sea with a millstone (v.6).
 - A. The casting of a millstone into the sea is symbolic of God's severe judgment (**Rev 18:21**).

Millstone - 1. One of a pair of circular stones (the upper of which rotates upon the lower or 'nether'), used for grinding corn in a mill.

- B. Think of teachers in public schools causing little children to stumble by casting doubt on their belief in God and creation by teaching macro evolution.
- C. Think of Catholic priests who sodomized little altar boys.
- D. Think of seminary professors who destroy the faith of young people by casting doubt on the inspiration and inerrancy of the scriptures.

V. The practical example of offending little children (v. 8-9).

1. Verses 8-9 at first glance seem to be out of context with the theme of imitating the faith of little children and not offending them, but notice how these verses are linked to Jesus' woe to those who offend children by the word *wherefore*.

Wherefore - 5. Introducing a clause expressing a consequence or inference from what has just been stated: On which account; for which reason; which being the case; and therefore. (Now always "wherefore.")

- A. The offences in verse 7 are offences toward little ones (**Mat 18:6-7 c/w Luk 17:1-2**).
- B. Therefore v.8-9 give practical examples of how to avoid offending little children.
2. Jesus said that if thy hand or thy foot offend *thee* cut them off and cast them from thee (v.8).
 - A. This is obviously not supposed to be taken literally, for it would be contrary to other scripture (**Col 2:23**).
 - i. We all will live with the flesh during this life and even the best of Christians cannot avoid it (**Rom 7:14-20**).
 - ii. In a spiritual sense we are to *mortify* our *members* (our flesh and its lusts) which are upon earth (**Col 3:5-10 c/w Rom 8:13 c/w Rom 6:12-13 c/w Gal 5:24**).

Mortify - 1. trans. To deprive of life; to kill, put to death. (In first quot. absol.) Also, to make as if dead; to render insensible. Obs.

Member - 1. a. A part or organ of the body; chiefly, a limb or other separable portion (as opposed to the trunk)

Limb - 1. Any organ or part of the body.

- iii. Along with hands, feet, and eyes, we should also mortify another wicked member of our bodies: the tongue (**Jam 3:5-10**).
 - iv. Jesus is using an illustration to show the importance of ridding our lives of sin. In the flesh, nothing in this life is more important to us than our hands, feet, and eyes, and yet those things are not as important as living a life free of offence toward God and ourselves.
- B. Notice how Jesus said “if thy hand or thy foot offend *thee*”.
- i. Jesus didn’t say “if thy hand or thy foot offend *one of these little ones*”.
 - ii. But notice how this instruction is linked to offending little ones with the word *wherefore*, and also that Jesus continues the thought into verse 10.
 - iii. If our members on the earth (fleshly hands, feet, and eyes representing sin such as *fornication, covetousness, anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication, and lying* (**Col 3:5-9**) offend *us*, would they not be offending little children who look up to us and whom we teach to not do these things (**Rom 2:19-24**)?
 - iv. Therefore, if we live in sin and offend our own spirits, we are offending the little ones and a sore punishment awaits us.

VI. God’s love and interest in believing children (**v. 11-14**).

- 1. Jesus loves and is very interested in the wellbeing of his little children (**v.10-14**).
 - A. Little children that believe in Jesus have angels in heaven that are looking out for them (**v. 10**).
 - B. Jesus came to save His lost sheep which are in this context little believing children (**v. 11**).
 - C. Jesus cares so much about His little believers that, just as a shepherd would, Jesus would go and seek and save one of His lost children and rejoice when He found him (**v. 12-14**).
 - D. It is not the Father’s will that even *one* of his little children should perish (**v. 14**).
 - i. Remember, we can cause weak brethren to perish by flaunting our liberties in front of them (**1Co 8:9-13 c/w Rom 14:1-3, 15, 21-23**).
 - ii. How much more so by living a sinful hypocritical life?
 - E. This is not just for the parents of little children, but for all of us because we are all examples and role models for the children of our church.
 - F. “Take heed that ye despise not these little ones...” (**Mat 18:10**).