

John Wesley's Explanatory Notes - Matthew 18

by John Wesley

John Wesley's sermon emphasizes the necessity of humility, care for others, and the importance of forgiveness in the Christian community.

Scripture: Matthew 5:29, Matthew 6:14-15, Matthew 10:40, Matthew 16:19, Matthew 18, Matthew 19:14, Mark 9:43, Luke 17:3, Luke 19:10

Topics: "Forgiveness", "Humility"

Description

John Wesley expounds on Matthew 18, emphasizing the necessity of humility and childlike faith to enter the kingdom of heaven. He warns against causing offenses and stresses the importance of addressing wrongs directly and privately, following Christ's prescribed steps for reconciliation. Wesley highlights God's care for the 'little ones' and the severe consequences of failing to forgive others, drawing a parallel between our forgiveness from God and our obligation to forgive others. He concludes with a powerful reminder of the weight of our offenses against God and the importance of genuine forgiveness in our relationships.

Transcript

XVIII. 1. Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? - Which of us shall be thy prime minister? They still dreamed of a temporal kingdom.

Verse 2. And Jesus calling to him a little child - This is supposed to have been the great Ignatius, whom Trajan, the wise, the good Emperor Trajan, condemned to be cast to the wild beasts at Rome! Mark 9:36; Luke 9:47.

Verse 3. Except ye be converted - The first step toward entering into the kingdom of grace, is to become as little children: lowly in heart, knowing yourselves utterly ignorant and helpless, and hanging wholly on your Father who is in heaven, for a supply of all your wants. We may farther assert, (though it is doubtful whether this text implies so much,) except ye be turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God; except ye be entirely, inwardly changed, renewed in the image of God, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of glory. Thus must every man be converted in this life, or he can never enter into life eternal. Ye shall in no wise enter - So far from being great in it. Matthew 19:14. 5, 6. And all who are in this sense little children are unspeakably dear to me. Therefore help them all you can, as if it were myself in person, and see that ye offend them not; that is, that ye turn them not out of the right way, neither hinder them in it. Matthew 10:40; Luke 10:16; John 13:20.

Verse 6. See note ... "Mt 18:5"|. Mark 9:42; Luke 17:1.

Verse 7. Wo to the world because of offences - That is, unspeakable misery will be in the world through them; for it must needs be that offences come - Such is the nature of things, and such the weakness, folly, and wickedness of mankind, that it cannot be but they will come; but wo to that man - That is, miserable is that man, by whom the offence cometh. Offences are, all things whereby any one is turned out of, or hindered in the way of God. 8, 9. If thy hand, foot, eye, cause thee to offend - If the most dear enjoyment, the most beloved and useful person, turn thee out of, or hinder thee in the way Is not this a hard saying? Yes; if thou take counsel with flesh and blood. Matthew 5:29; Mark 9:43.

Verse 9. See note ... "Mt 18:8"|.

Verse 10. See that ye despise not one of these little ones|-As if they were beneath your notice. Be careful to receive and not to offend, the very weakest believer in Christ: for as inconsiderable as some of these may appear to thee, the very angels of God have a peculiar charge over them: even those of the highest order, who continually appear at the throne of the Most High. To behold the face of God seems to signify the waiting near his throne; and to be an allusion to the office of chief ministers in earthly courts, who daily converse with their princes.

Verse 11. Another, and yet a stronger reason for your not despising them is, that I myself came into the world to save them. Luke 19:10.

Verse 12. Luke 15:4.

Verse 14. So it is not the will of your Father - Neither doth my Father despise the least of them. Observe the gradation. The angels, the Son, the Father.

Verse 15. But how can we avoid giving offence to some? or being offended at others! Especially suppose they are quite in the wrong? Suppose they commit a known sin? Our Lord here teaches us how: he lays down a sure method of avoiding all offences. Whosoever closely observes this threefold rule, will seldom offend others, and never be offended himself. If any do any thing amiss, of which thou art an eye or ear witness, thus saith the Lord, If thy brother - Any who is a member of the same religious community: Sin against thee, 1. Go and reprove him alone - If it may be in person; if that cannot so well be done, by thy messenger; or in writing. Observe, our Lord gives no liberty to omit this; or to exchange it for either of the following steps. If this do not succeed, 2. Take with thee one or two more - Men whom he esteems or loves, who may then confirm and enforce what thou sayest; and afterward, if need require, bear witness of what was spoken. If even this does not succeed, then, and not before, 3. Tell it to the elders of the Church - Lay the whole matter open before those who watch over yours and his soul. If all this avail not, have no farther intercourse with him, only such as thou hast with heathens. Can any thing be plainer? Christ does here as expressly command all Christians who see a brother do evil, to take this way, not another, and to take these steps, in this order, as he does to honour their father and mother. But if so, in what land do the Christians live? If we proceed from the private carriage of man to man, to proceedings of a more public nature, in what Christian nation are Church censures conformed to this rule? Is this the form in which ecclesiastical judgments appear, in the popish, or even the Protestant world? Are these the methods used even by those who boast the most loudly of the authority of Christ to confirm their sentences? Let us earnestly pray, that this dishonour to the Christian name may be wiped away, and that common humanity may not, with such solemn mockery, be destroyed in the name of the Lord! Let him be to thee as the heathen - To whom thou still owest earnest good will, and all the offices of humanity. Luke 17:3.

Verse 18. Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth - By excommunication, pronounced in the spirit and power of Christ. Whatsoever ye shall loose - By absolution from that sentence. In the primitive Church, absolution meant no more than a discharge from Church censure. Again I say - And not only your intercession for the penitent, but all your united prayers, shall be heard. How great then is the power of joint prayer! If two of you - Suppose a man and his wife. Matthew 16:19.

Verse 20. Where two or three are gathered together in my name - That is, to worship me. I am in the midst of them - By my Spirit, to quicken their prayers, guide their counsels, and answer their petitions.

Verse 22. Till seventy times seven - That is, as often as there is occasion. A certain number is put for an uncertain.

Verse 23. Therefore - In this respect.

Verse 24. One was brought who owed him ten thousand talents - According to the usual computation, if these were talents of gold, this would amount to seventy-two millions sterling. If they were talents of silver, it must have been four millions, four hundred thousand pounds. Hereby our Lord intimates the vast number and weight of our offences against God, and our utter incapacity of making him any satisfaction.

Verse 25. As he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold - Such was the power which creditors anciently had over their insolvent debtors in several countries.

Verse 30. Went with him before a magistrate, and cast him into prison, protesting he should lie there, till he should pay the whole debt.

Verse 34. His lord delivered him to the tormentors - Imprisonment is a much severer punishment in the eastern countries than in ours. State criminals, especially when condemned to it, are not only confined to a very mean and scanty allowance, but are frequently loaded with clogs or heavy yokes, so that they can neither lie nor sit at ease: and by frequent scourgings and sometimes rackings are brought to an untimely end. Till he should pay all that was due to him - That is, without all hope of release, for this he could never do. How observable is this whole account; as well as the great inference our Lord draws from it: 1. The debtor was freely and fully forgiven; 2. He wilfully and grievously offended; 3. His pardon was retracted, the whole debt required, and the offender delivered to the tormentors for ever. And shall we still say, but when we are once freely and fully forgiven, our pardon can never be retracted? Verily, verily, I say unto you, So likewise will my heavenly Father do to you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

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