

(Matt. 18:1) – One of the greatest sins with which we as sinful human beings are plagued is the sin of pride and self-righteousness. Before we are born again and converted to faith in Christ and repentance of dead works by the Holy Spirit, this sin keeps us in the deception of unbelief. After we are born again and converted to faith in Christ and repentance of dead works by the Holy Spirit, we are still afflicted with this problem in our warfare of the Spirit against the flesh. The remedy for this sin is God-given humility wherein we are convinced by the Holy Spirit of our utter sinfulness and inability to earn or deserve the least of God’s favors and blessings. The psalmist wrote, *“If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?”* (Psalm 130:3). As sinners saved by God’s grace based totally upon Christ’s righteousness imputed to us, we need to be made aware continually that we are what we are by God’s grace, and our salvation, every part of it, is never conditioned on our works. The disciples of Christ showed that they needed to learn this lesson by the question they asked Him – *“WHO IS THE GREATEST IN THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN?”*

The disciples still believed that Christ had come to lead Israel out of captivity and back to the glory days of the past. They had not yet seen the spirituality of the kingdom of Christ. Being so enamored by the prospects of an earthly empire, they approached the Lord asking who among them would have the highest position in that earthly kingdom. This question is the product of natural, sinful thinking. By nature, we all believe we can be or do something to enhance our position in the kingdom of heaven. We think in terms of human merit, and this is opposed to the Gospel of God’s grace in Christ which shows that we are all sinners who deserve God’s wrath. If we are saved, it is all of grace through Christ, and we are all equally saved, equally accepted of God in the righteousness of Christ (Gal. 3:26-29). There is no one sinner saved by grace who is above another, and Christ is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven!

(Matt. 18:2-4) – Christ brought a *“LITTLE CHILD, AND SET HIM IN THE MIDST OF THEM.”* He used this child to teach the reality of true conversion, that change of mind that takes place when the Holy Spirit uses the Gospel to show us the reality of our sin and depravity. Hereby we are given the gift of Godly humility as we are shown that we are as totally dependent upon the goodness, power, and grace of God to save, preserve, and bring us to glory as a little child is totally dependent upon its parents for physical life and health. As fallen in Adam and born into a state of spiritual death and depravity, we are totally dependent upon God to justify us and give us spiritual life from the dead, bringing us in conversion to faith in Christ and repentance of dead works and idolatry (John 1:12-13; 3:3-7).

When the Lord said, *“WHOSOEVER THEREFORE SHALL HUMBLE HIMSELF AS THIS LITTLE CHILD,”* He was not implying that conversion is something we do of our own goodness or so-called “free-will.” Neither salvation nor the new birth is brought about by our own goodness, power, or will. Conversion is not something we do. It is

something God does for us as the Spirit imparts the life of Christ within us (Rom. 8:10). When this happens, we do humble ourselves before God and submit to Christ as the Lord our righteousness. *“THE SAME IS GREATEST IN THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN”* – This describes ALL sinners saved by grace as they are equally saved and blessed of God in Christ. From the time of our conversion, we continue to turn from self to the Lord Jesus Christ as our all in salvation. It is a life-long struggle for every believer against the remaining power of the flesh. But it is a struggle that has already been won by our Savior (Rom. 7:14-25).

(Matt. 18:5-6) – As believers, we are to be diligent to receive into our fellowship all who believe in Christ as evidenced by their confession of the truth of how God saves sinners by His grace (cp. 2 John 9-11 and 3 John 5-12). To receive them as brethren is to receive Christ Himself. To reject them is to reject Christ, and this is serious business.

(Matt. 18:7) – The word *“OFFENCES”* refers to heresies that cause believers to stumble in the walk of faith and in their fellowship with other brethren. These offences must come as they are actually within the purpose and plan of God to reveal His true children from false professors (1 Cor. 11:19). This does not excuse the one *“BY WHOM THE OFFENCE COMETH!”* One cannot say, *“I will cause offence because it is God’s plan,”* as if that would excuse him. Only God can overrule evil for good. We are to follow God’s revealed will by way of commandment to glorify Him in Christ and express our love for our brethren.

(Matt. 18:8-9) – This is not teaching self-mutilation. Christ is saying that, as believers and followers of Him, we are to sever ties with everything and everyone that would hinder us from entering the kingdom of heaven. The hand, the foot, and the eye are used here metaphorically to represent our strongest earthly desires and our dearest earthly possessions. All are to be denied and renounced rather than that we, by indulging ourselves, offend our brothers and sisters in Christ. Rather than gratifying ourselves, let each submit to the other, each esteeming the other better than himself (Php. 2:1-3). What redeemed sinner would not count it his great honor to sacrifice his dearest possession, or surrender his most ardent desire to Christ? That is the great privilege and high honor afforded us, every time we have opportunity to serve the interests of another believer, either by receiving him, or by taking care not to offend him. God’s true children are not condemned. Christ took the whole of God’s wrath for them as their Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer. Christ is not threatening His true children with hell-fire, but He is showing how those who love not the brethren do not love Him, and *“if any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha”* (1 Cor. 16:22).