

## —J.C. Ryle *Expository Thoughts on Matthew* || Matthew 18:1-20—

### I. Introduction:

- A. Ch 18 begins immediately following the episode with fish and the coin in its mouth. Right away Christ teaches the disciples a difficult lesson about pride. We will discuss pride and how it is a barrier to true conversion, we'll discuss the very real existence of hell, and then we'll dive into the portion of this chapter that deals with church discipline.

### II. Matthew 18: 1-14 Ryle gives us 4 lessons to consider about this passage:

#### A. *The necessity of conversion, and of conversion manifested by a childlike humility.*

1. The disciples are feeling pretty good about themselves. They are the chosen 12. They are the inner circle. Still, they have the audacity to suppose that they might be the greatest in heaven.
2. This is a common theme in the gospels, see Mark 9:33-36, Luke 9:46-47, Luke 22:24. Pride was a serious problem for those closest to Christ and it remains a serious problem for all of us.
3. There is nothing more necessary than conversion. *Without conversion, there is no salvation. We all need an entire change of nature; of ourselves we have neither faith, nor fear, nor love towards God.*
4. *It is true of all ranks, classes, and orders of mankind; all are born to sin and children of wrath, and all, without exception, need to be born again and made new creatures.* Sin is the great equalizer among mankind.
5. We need to be converted. This conversion happens when our hearts are regenerated in a moment in time by the holy spirit, and we respond in faith and repentance to the spirit's call.
6. Christ's lesson to the prideful disciples isn't limited to the generic need for conversion, but he takes it to the next level, that we must become like a child. The moment we think we have any eternal value in ourselves, the moment we become independent, this is unbecoming of a Christian.
7. *If we have really received the Holy Spirit, we shall show it by a meek and childlike spirit. Like children, we shall think humbly of our own strength and wisdom, and be very dependent on our Father in heaven. Like children we shall not seek the great things of this world.*

#### B. Lesson 2: *The great sin of putting stumbling blocks in the way of believers.*

1. It is bad enough to commit sin. It is even worse to be the cause of another believer committing sin. So what does this look like and how do we prevent this from happening?
  - a) First, we can directly cause someone to sin by causing them to violate their conscience.
  - b) Second, we do this is whenever we do anything to keep someone back from Christ.
  - c) Third, we discourage others growing in their faith by living an example beneath our calling.
2. *It is not enough to try and do good in this world, are we sure that we are doing no harm?* We may not be persecuting other Christians, but are we injuring them spiritually by our example?
3. *It is awful to think of the amount of harm that can be done by one inconsistent professor of religion. He gives a handle to the infidel; he supplies the worldly man with an excuse for remaining undecided; he checks the enquirer after salvation; he discourages the saints. He is, in short, living a sermon on behalf of the devil.*

#### C. Lesson 3: *The reality of future punishment after death.*

1. *There is a place of unspeakable misery in the world to come, to which all who die impenitent and unbelieving, must ultimately be consigned.* Let us not be swayed by new thinking on doctrine. *Let none of these reasonings move us, however plausible they may sound. Let us stand fast in the old paths.*

#### D. Lesson 4: *The value that God sets on the least and lowest of believers.*

1. That it is not the will of the Father that any of these should perish, is meant to be a comfort and an encouragement to all Christians.
2. Christ cares for every soul committed to his charge. The weakest is as dear to him as the strongest.

III. Matthew 18:15-20 Three observations on the church and the value of church discipline.

- A. *Let us notice how admirable are the rules laid down by our Lord for the healing of differences among brethren.*
1. Christ knows better than anyone that we are sinners and that his church is made up of sinners. He did not give us these steps as a contingency plan or emergency recourse. He gave us these rules because he knew we would need them, that the church would need them, that without them, the church would suffer greatly.
  2. So what is so admirable about the process?
    - a) Simplicity
    - b) Expressed purpose
    - c) Precise language
    - d) Perseverance
    - e) Least effective dose
    - f) Witnesses
  3. This process was built by Christ, for the church, and his compassion for his people is clear, as is his hatred of sin. We would do well to emulate both of those aspects.
- B. *Let us observe what a clear argument we have in these verses for the exercise of discipline in a Christian congregation.*
1. What we have here is not a mere recommendation or suggestion. “Tell it to the church” is a command. There are a few details that logically follow.
    - a) The church as a whole needs to take sin seriously. Tolerance and accommodation for unrepentant sin is unbecoming of a true church.
    - b) The church is to be fully invested in the repentance and restoration of the sinning brother. *Christ intends that every congregation of professing Christians be cognizant of the moral conduct of its members, either by the action of the whole body collectively, or of the heads and elders to whom its authority may be delegated.*
    - c) The church must be diligent enough to exclude and excommunicate the unrepentant. That neither popularity, nor office, nor amount of financial support impinge on the duty of maintaining the purity of the church.
    - d) That Christ hereby delegates his authority to the church. This passage is often misunderstood, and must not be taken out of the context of this section. The church has no power in a civil court, or temporal punishment like a jail sentence. But it does have the delegated authority to judge the impenitent and remove them, and the promise is clear that the judgment and punishment determined by the church will be upheld in the court of heaven. See WCF 30 (.3)
- C. *Let us observe what gracious encouragement Christ holds out to those who meet together in his name.*
1. This is evidence of the divinity of Christ, for only God can be in more than one place at a time.
  2. It is a tremendous comfort that this gives to all who meet, whether for public worship, prayer meetings, bible readings, etc, that the King of Kings is present; Christ himself attends.
  3. It is also a rebuke to all those who neglect the public worship of God. They turn their backs on the society of the Lord of Lords, and they miss the opportunity to meet with Christ himself.
  4. Do not be one to whom Christ inquires, why didn’t you meet with me on the Lord’s day, and give a response of other more important things to do!
  5. We would do well to echo the psalmist, that a day in your courts is worth a thousand elsewhere. And we would do best to live it.