

## Christ's Little Ones - radio

The scripture for our sermon today is found in Matthew 18:1-10. I've entitled this message, "**Christ's Little Ones.**" There are at least four important lessons in this scripture. **First**, the Lord Jesus Christ uses **a little child to depict and illustrate the God-given nature of every believer**. He sat a little child down in the company of His disciples and referred to him as "*one of these little ones who believe me*" (Matt. 18:6). In doing so, our Lord taught that believers are His little ones. **Secondly**, Jesus used a little child to illustrate **the nature of true conversion**. He said, "*Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven*" (Matt. 18:3). **Third**, our Lord used a little child to emphasize that because of **His great love and tender care for every believer**, we **must treat the least believer as one of Christ's own little ones**. "*Whoever receives one such little child, receives me*" (Matt. 18:6), Jesus said. And **finally**, our Lord gave **a most solemn warning to all who attempt to lead astray the very least believer in Christ**. For any who attempt to lead Christ's little ones away from faith in Him to trust another, it would be better that a millstone were tied around his neck and he was cast into the deepest sea. He goes on to say that it would better to mutilate your body than to sever your soul and body in eternal damnation by causing one of Christ's little ones who believe Him to stumble in their faith (Matt. 18:6-10).

Now, in the book of Mark, we are told what took place just before the disciples came to Jesus here in Matthew 18.

*"[Jesus] asked [His disciples], What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way? 34 But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest?"* (Mark 9:33-34).

Before the disciples came into the house where Jesus was, they had been disputing among themselves about which of them was greater. They had argued about who

should be greatest among them. Though Jesus was not with them, He knew what they had been disputing, though they were ashamed to admit it. This helps us understand what God is teaching here in Matt. 18. The Lord frequently teaches truth by first showing what the truth is not. Therefore, against the pride and self-promotion of the disciples, we read in Matthew 18:1-10:

*“1 At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? (from Mark, we know they were arguing which of them were should be the greatest in Christ’s kingdom) 2 And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, 3 And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. 4 Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5 And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me. 6 But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. 7 Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh! 8 Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire. 9 And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire. 10 Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 18:1-10).*

There are four clear lessons in these ten verse that we must not miss

1. The first lessons arises from **Disputing disciples**. The lesson is this: the pride of self-righteousness, envy and a desire for self-promotion is the root of all evil in the world, especially in the church. Proverbs 13:10 says, “*Only by pride cometh contention*” (Prov. 13:10). Mark it down. Where there is contention, the underlying cause is pride, self-righteousness, envy and a lust

for self-promotion (1 John 2:16). Scripture is full of examples that contrast the pride of self-righteousness and self-promotion with God-given humility that lives by faith on Christ. In the book of Esther, for example, Haman wanted the highest position in the kingdom. He hated Mordecai because Mordecai would not bow to him. In self-conceit, Haman thought the king valued him above all others. His high opinion of himself and his lust for preeminence was his downfall. It was Mordecai, not Haman, that the king valued and would honor. The king sentenced Haman to die for his murderous ambition. Nebuchadnezzar is another example of pride. He was driven from men to the open field and ate grass like an ox for seven years because he lifted himself up in pride. He said, “*Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power and for the honor of my majesty*” (Dan. 4:30)? He remained with the beasts of the field until he learned that “*The most High ruleth in the kingdom of men and giveth it to whomsoever He will*” (Dan. 4:32). Another contrasting example of pride and humility in scripture is the Pharisee and Publican. The Pharisee trusted that he was righteous in himself and despised others.

Self-righteousness always has this effect. Whenever I find myself thinking low thoughts of others, it is because I am self-righteous, and have self-conceited high thoughts of myself because I have low thoughts of God. Human pride opposes God’s glory by seeking for itself the glory that belongs to God only. This attempt to rob God’s glory is especially seen in salvation. Men attempt to do something to make what Christ did work for them, to manipulate God into saving them by their works or their attitude. But God alone gets all of the glory in salvation. The Pharisee thanked God for good things he saw in himself. But the Publican knew he was nothing but sin. Therefore, he would not lift up so much as his eyes to heaven. He knew that he was unfit even to take the truth of God into his own wicked heart. So he smote upon his breast where he knew the root of his problem lay, saying, “*God, be merciful to me the sinner!*” The Publican went down to his house justified, but the Pharisee remained under the condemnation of God.

Another example is found in the 3rd epistle of the apostle John. John said, “*I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence*

among them, receiveth us not" (3 John 1:9). This love for preeminence in the church of God is prominent throughout churches today. The catholic church is a hierarchy of men who love preeminence. And you will recall that the devil is the premier example of pride. What is his pride? He wanted God's glory! He thought in his heart "*I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High*" (Isa. 14:14). And for that thought, he will be eternally cast into hell. Hell was made for the devil and his angels. Then too, remember the garden of Eden. It was to thoughts of pride and self-promotion that the devil tempted Eve. He told her in Gen. 3:5 that if she and Adam ate the fruit that God told them not to eat, they would, "Be as gods, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:5).

In all of these, we see by contrast how greatly the disciples did err in their hearts when they argued about who should be greatest among them. Let you and I take this lesson to ourselves! **We must be saved by grace alone, or we will never see the kingdom of heaven!** Because God will not give His glory to another (Isa. 42:8; 48:11)! Negatively, from the disciple's dispute, we learn that pride is the most destructive force in the church and in our own salvation. But positively, Christ uses their pride to teach us that our salvation is by God's grace alone, by His work, and not for anything in us! Therefore, every sinner humbled by the grace of God runs for refuge and draws comfort from this clearly stated truth in 1 Cor. 1:30-31: "Of Him (of God the Father) are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption, that according as it is written, He that glorieth, let Him glory in the Lord" (1 Cor. 1:30-31). In my own short life, the thing I have come to fear most in myself is the proud thought of self-righteousness! I fear when I am tempted to find assurance before God by something I do or I say. And I fear when I am tempted to distinguish myself among men by the same thing. Oh, how I hate this evil tendency in me!! **We must be converted!** We must be made as little children, or we will not enter the kingdom of heaven!

Pride causes strife and contention (Prov. 13:10). Pride sows division (1 Cor.

3). Pride separates brethren. Pride puts one man above another. Pride in man's heart causes him to think he has a righteousness of his own making! This deception is agreeable to our sinful, natural self. On the one hand, pride sets men looking for, and trying to establish, their own righteousness by their own will, by their own works, by their knowledge, by their experiences or by something -- anything from themselves. On the other hand, pride leaves guilty, weak sinners in hopeless despair, because **if God requires anything from me -- a sinner -- other than what He provided in Christ, I cannot be saved!** If I think God requires something from me, I will spend my time looking within, rather than looking outward and upward to Christ! An honest sinner agrees with God: he can produce nothing that God requires! I need a saving Substitute to answer every examination of me, answer it in my place, and then I need my Substitute to plead Himself for me! Unless all I am before God is what I am in Christ, I cannot enter heaven!

Self-promotion is the cause why many in the church are offended and stumble. "Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another" (Gal. 5:14). Sinners stumble when they try to make themselves acceptable to God by their religious duties, by ceremonies, by emotional experiences, by their dedication, by their giving or their commitment or their service. Sinners stumble when they are told God left something for them to do, something small or great that depends on them. But everyone taught of God knows this: I cannot come up with one thing God will accept! **As long as I am not fully persuaded that God has provided all things for me in Christ, that He accepts from Christ all that He requires from me, I cannot and will not worship God in true joy and peace** (Rom. 15:13)!

The apostle Paul told the Corinthians, "*Let no man glory in men*" (1 Cor. 3:21). He told the Galatians, "*If I pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ*" (Gal. 1:10). When men try to persuade men to honor them, they cause others to stumble. When men exalt themselves in the church, they

teach others to trust themselves. This is a most deadly doctrine! It is idolatry. Psalm 115:1 says, “Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake” (Ps. 115:1). And then the Psalmist describes the gods of unbelievers. He says, “*Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands*” (Ps. 115:4). Trusting our good works is worshipping idols. Idols are the work of men's hands. When we trust what we are, what we do, or anything about ourselves, we worship an idol, the religious works of our own hands, idols of our own making!

2. The second lesson Jesus gave in Matt. 18 arises from the trusting humility of a little child. Through this child, Christ teaches His disciples and us a lesson of incalculable importance. The lesson is this: unless we are converted and become as little children, we will not enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 18:3)! We are born of God only once. Regeneration is a one-time event. But conversion is not a one-time event. It is an ongoing occurrence in our lives. Jesus told Peter that satan desired have him and sift him as wheat. He then said, “*But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren*” (Luke 22:32). Peter was a saved man, yet after he denied the Lord, he needed to be converted. Conversion is the work of God. Matt. 18:3 says, “*You must be converted*,” not, “*You must convert yourselves*.” Because conversion is the work of God, and because we need to be constantly converted, Israel cried to the LORD in Psalm 80, “Turn us again” (Ps. 80:3). Through the prophet Jeremiah, God said that Israel would say, “Turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the LORD my God. Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh” (Jer. 31:18-19). To rise we must sink. To look up, we must be bowed down. This is what conversion is. Jesus said to “*Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house*” (Luke 19:5). Proverbs 15:33 says, “*Before honor is humility*.” (Prov. 15:33; 18:12). Christ taught humility through the example of a little child. And He taught humility by Himself as an example. He said, “*I am meek and lowly of heart*” (Matt. 11:28-30). Nowhere is Christ’s humility seen more than in His own incarnation and life as a servant and His

obedience unto the death of the cross (Php. 2:5-8).

Jesus said we must be converted and become as a little child, or we cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. **The characteristic that our Lord requires and provides is the humble trusting of a child.** Let us take careful note of this. A child trusts his mother and father, not for what he finds in himself, but for what he finds in them. A child believes what his parents tell him. A child believes his parent will faithfully love and provide and care and comfort him whenever he cries, because from infancy, they have always done so. A child is persuaded that his parents will never leave him, because from infancy his parents have answered his every cry. A child does not consider his own wisdom. He believes his mother and father are all wise. A child does not limit his parent's ability to care for him by his own ability to care for himself. A child does not measure his parent's ability and strength by his own ability and strength at all. A child knows that his parents provide for him in all things without his contribution. A child spends his time in carefree play, oblivious to all that his parents do to provide for him. Our great God and Savior tells us in Psalm 81, "*open your mouth wide and I will fill it*" (Ps. 81:10). Just as baby birds in a nest constantly open their mouths and their parents give them food, so we are to come to God by faith in Christ, waiting and expecting Him to feed us on Christ! Little children know they are ignorant. They know they are weak. They are content to live in total dependence on mom and dad. From infancy, they grow up believing and trusting their parents for comfort and all things. It is only as we grow older, do we lose our trust in our parents, because we begin to trust ourselves more than them. Haven't you found this to be true in teenagers and even pre-teens? How often do young people think they know more than their parents? It is usually not until much later in life, perhaps not until we are 30 or 40 years old that we come to realize that our parents know a lot more than we do! In the same way, we must come to God, trusting Christ as all of our wisdom, all of our strength, all of our righteousness. The prophet Jeremiah wrote, "*Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in*

his riches (righteousness): *But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD*" (Jer. 9:23-24).

Faith glories in Christ! Therefore, we see that **the strength of a child's faith is the strength of the object of his faith**. The object of a child's faith is his mom and dad. Because a child believes his mother and father, his strength and wisdom is the strength and wisdom of his parents. A child never considers "his faith" or "his trusting" as a basis for his life at all. He never thinks "his believing" is the reason for his parent's love or the reason why his parents provide and care for him! Now, this is the trusting humility of every child of God! God first brings us down. He shows us that we are not what we imagined at all. We are positively wicked. We are ignorant of how we are accepted by God, how we walk with Him. We are ignorant of what to answer Him in our conscience and in judgment. We are without strength against our sin and unbelief. We have no potential in ourselves. We are unprofitable. And we are utterly unable to save ourselves! It is then that God gives us a sight of Christ and Him crucified. He persuades us that Christ is everything in our salvation. He enables us to look away from ourselves to Him alone! This faith is the evidence that we are the sons of God, that we have been born of His Spirit! God births us as His sons when He makes the Gospel shine in our heart and gives us faith in Christ (2 Cor. 4:6; John 3:13-15). "*Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever...the word which by the gospel is preached unto you*" (1 Pet. 1:23,25). When God shines the light of His gospel in our hearts, we are then persuaded that all God requires of us, He finds in Christ! This faith is not only the faith we have when we first believe, but it is the faith that grows as we cry out of the guilt and corruption of our sin. The Lord mercifully answers our cries time and time again from the Gospel. It always come back to this: look to Christ! In looking, we find joy and peace in believing, because **the Gospel teaches us that God Himself looks to Christ for His people!** Time and time again we are

comforted with the Gospel of Christ, because time and time again we are brought to know that in Christ, we have received double for all our sins (Isa. 40), that we have been perfected forever by His one offering, that we have been clothed in His righteousness. By God's grace we come to know that we have no righteousness and can never produce any. As the Psalmist said, "*I will make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only*" (Ps. 71:16)!

Now, consider what Jesus told His disciples. A little child sits in their midst. They had been arguing over who would be greatest. Jesus said, "*Unless you are converted and become as a little child, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.*" When God gives us faith to see that Christ is all, that we are complete before God in Him, that all we have or will ever have, we have only in Him, then we lose all need to elevate ourselves compared to others. Having Christ, we have all things! **This truth, believed in the heart, is the faith of all of Christ's little ones!**

3. The third lesson in Matthew 18 is what Christ thinks of His little ones. His people, His "little ones," are dear to Him! We must therefore think about the least believer, pray for the least believer, and act towards the least believer, and in short, **receive the least and weakest believer as one of Christ's own little ones.** Jesus said, "*Whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me*" (Matt. 18:5). The lesson is clear. What we think and say and do to the least believer, we think and say and do to Christ Himself! We must see, by faith, that the least believer is a dearly beloved child of God. When we realize that in ourselves we are the chief of sinners, and when we realize how Christ loves and watches over His people, then we will treat others better than ourselves (Php. 2:3-8).
  - a. God the Father set His eternal love on those He gave Christ to save. He called them by His Spirit to life and faith in Christ (Rom. 8:28-33; 1 John 3:1-2)! If God so loved your believing brother and sister, how much ought you and I to love them? If God gave His only begotten Son for that believing one, forgave that little one an incalculable debt of sin, for Christ's sake alone, and received that little one with Christ

- when He raised Him from the dead, how much ought we to love, to highly esteem and to forgive the very least believer for Christ's sake!
- b. Christ loved and served His Father for His people. He took their very nature into union with His divine nature. In fact, He took **them** into union with Himself. He obligated Himself for all that God required of them. He answered all for them. He bore their sin as His own. He suffered their punishment in His death. He rose and rules over all and intercedes to save them to the uttermost (Rom. 8:34; Acts 20:28)! So great is this love and so close is this union that they are members of His body and His bones (Eph. 5:23-32)! Therefore He says, "*Whoever receives one such little child in my name, receives me.*"
  - c. If "*The Spirit of God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved)*" (Eph. 2:4-5), then do not grieve the Spirit of God with bitterness toward your brother and sister in Christ! Rather, "*be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you*" (Eph. 4:32)!
  - d. Angels serve Christ and His little ones. They are "*ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation*" (Heb. 1:14). If those noble, mighty servants of God so watch over these little ones, how much more ought we, in love, to consider the needs of our believing brothers and sisters?
4. Finally, our Lord warns all that **Severe judgment will come on all who attempt to turn the weakest believer from faith in Christ**. He said, "*whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea*" (Matt. 18:6)! To have a millstone around your neck and be cast into the deepest sea describes everlasting punishment! Beware of causing one of Christ's little ones to stumble! Our Lord corrects His disciples for their pride and self-righteousness and envy and self-promotion. These were things that absorbed their thoughts and occupied

their arguments. But Christ warns them and us. It would be better to go through life mutilated in body than to suffer the everlasting punishment of hell fire for causing the least believer to turn from Christ to another Gospel (Gal. 1:7-8)! If you believe that God saves you because you accepted Jesus, because you made a decision, or because of works you have done, you are trusting an idol! God does all in salvation, or He does nothing at all! He gives faith that looks to Christ alone, and finds in Christ covering for all my sins and a perfect righteousness. That same faith comes to God by the blood of Christ, trusting God to receive me for His sake alone! Anything else robs God of His glory and causes men to trust something other than Christ. May God deliver me and you from our self-righteous pride and enable us to trust and glorify Christ alone!