

Kingdom Kids 2

Matthew 18:5-9

The context of this chapter is our relationships as God's children. We are Kingdom kids. We belong to God's eternal family, "**the household of faith**" (Gal.6:10). When Jesus began this teaching because His disciples were full of selfish pride and wanted to know which of them would be the greatest in the kingdom. So Jesus answers them by calling "**a little child to Him.**" I imagine this toddler sitting on Jesus' lap as He explained what it means to be a kingdom kid.

A. First, Jesus taught that only if we are "**converted** [changed] **and become as little children**" will we "**enter the kingdom**" and become adopted into God's family.

B. Second, only those who humble themselves as a little child would be great in the Kingdom.

C. Third, because God's kids are so important to Him, Jesus taught about the danger of causing them to stumble into sin. And that is what we are going to look at today.

I. Be Careful Not to Cause Others to Sin (vv.5-9).

A 104 year-old woman was being interviewed by a Christian reporter. The reporter asked, Is it easier or more difficult to live the Christian life the older you get. The lady thought for a second and said, "Well, there is less peer pressure!"

If you have been a Christian for a short time or a long time, what is one of the toughest things you face each and every day? -- Getting out into the world. It is easy for a person to live for Jesus when we are sitting in the church because the environment is safe for us. Once we step out of these doors to go to our homes, jobs and other activities it gets tough because the world is pulling at us.

There is a lot of pressure on Christians to conform to the world. The world and people in the world are always trying to pull us away from God. It is bad enough that the world would try to cause us to stumble, but even worse is when it comes from another "Christian."

I don't want to be a stumbling block to one of God's kids. I don't want to be the cause of another Christian falling into sin. And here's why:

First,

A. Kingdom Kids Are So Important to God (v.5).

1. This "**little child**" in Jesus' lap is an illustration of the child of God, the believer. Notice how special Christians are to Jesus. He is saying that whenever we receive one of these little ones in His name, we are receiving Jesus Himself!

The word "**receive**" comes from a word which means to deliberately and readily take something or someone to oneself. The term was often used of welcoming honored guests and meeting their needs with special attention and kindness. Jesus' primary point here is that the way a person, believer or unbeliever, treats

Christians is the way he treats Jesus Christ. When anyone welcomes with an open heart a Christian as an honored guest and friend, he welcomes Christ as his guest and friend. When he treats any Christian with tenderness and kindness, he treats Christ in the same way.

Have you ever noticed how quick young children are to receive each other? If we are like a "**little child**" in our humility, we will quickly receive others. And by doing so we are receiving Jesus. Do you see how special Kingdom Kids are to God?

You don't want to be a stumbling block to other Christians because we are so important to God.

Jesus said this in Luke 10, "**He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me.**" (Luke 10:16 NKJV)

Second, I don't want to cause others to stumble because:

B. The Stakes are High (vv.6-7).

Jesus is speaking of moral and spiritual stumbling, that is, of sinning. The verb "**to stumble**" literally means "*to cause to fall.*" So Jesus is speaking of enticing, trapping, or influencing a believer in any way that leads him into sin or in any way makes it easier for him to sin. A person who is responsible for causing a Christian to sin commits an offense against Christ Himself as well as against the Christian. When you mess with a Christian you are messing with Jesus.

Can you imagine how you would feel toward the person who got your child hooked on drugs or alcohol? How would you feel if your child died as a result of the addiction? Would you look too kindly toward the person who started it? What about the young man who defiled your daughter. Who took her purity away from her just to gratify himself?

Jesus said it would be "**better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were drowned in the depth of the sea.**" The type of "**millstone**" to which Jesus referred was the large stone that required a donkey or ox to turn. It usually weighed several hundred pounds.

Imagine the shock that came over the disciples when they heard this. In their dispute over whom was the "**greatest**" they had just caused each other to sin or stumble by inciting envy, jealousy and anger.

In verse 10 Jesus says, "**Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven.**" When we harm other believers in this way we are really "despising" them or showing contempt for them.

How can we despise other believers or cause others to sin or stumble? Here's some ways:

1. *When we TEMPT THEM BY OUR UNGODLY EXAMPLE.* Misery loves company. Eve tempted Adam. Aaron caused national Israel to sin by molding and worshiping a golden calf. What we do is just as important as what we say. I shudder to think about how I've harmed other believers and offended God in this way.

Imagine those who have said, "**My pastor [SS teacher, deacon, etc.] does or says...**" Rather, we ought to lead a righteous example. Paul said to Timothy, "**Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.**" (1 Timothy 4:12).

2. *When we FAIL TO ENCOURAGE.* Sometimes we withhold our spiritual insights and experiences with the Lord rather than share them with someone who needs them. Heb.10:24,25 says, "**And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.**"

3. *When we FLAUNT OUR FREEDOM.* Jesus came to make us "**free indeed.**" Some of you have come from a legalistic background and it is wonderful to learn your freedom in Christ. However, once we find our freedom there is a subtle temptation to become spiritually arrogant and look down or "**despise**" more legalistic Christians. Paul warned that we could cause our weaker brothers to sin in this way. 1 Pet.2:16 says, "**Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God.**"

4. *When we PLAY FAVORITES.* In just about any church people who are well-dressed and nicely groomed will receive a much warmer welcome than someone dressed poorly and not so clean. Too many believers are driven by appearances. "**My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism.**" (James 2:1 NIV).

5. *When we FAIL TO HELP OTHERS IN NEED.* Paul chastised the Corinthian church because those who had much, refused to share with those who had little. 1 John 3:17-18 says, "**But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.**"

6. *When we MOCK THEIR APPEARANCE.* Some of the Corinthians mocked Paul's appearance. He chides them for their pettiness. "**'For his letters,' they say, 'are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible'**" (2 Cor.10:10). In Gal.4:14, Paul commends the Galatians for their grace, "**And my trial which was in my flesh you did not despise or reject, but you received me.**" Just because people look or act different doesn't mean we are free to "**despise**" them. Remember, they are God's kids.

7. *When we WRITE THEM OFF AS HOPELESS.* When a Christian stumbles and falls into sin, it is easy to give up on them. Have you ever said, "*He knew better and now he's getting what he deserves*"? Gal 6:1-2 says, "**Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.**"

Remember any of us could fall at any time.

8. *When we RESENT A BELIEVER WHO CONFRONTS US.* When we sin, either deliberately or unconsciously and a brother lovingly confronts us, it is easy to strike back at them. We all need loving reproof and correction from time to

time. When that happens, be thankful that someone else cares. Paul told Titus, **"Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you"** (Tit. 2:15).

9. *When we TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THEM.* In 1 Thess.4:6 Paul warns that **"no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother... because the Lord is the avenger..."** We are to love one another, serve one another, pray for one another, help one another, encourage one another but never, never take advantage of one another.

As parents you and I would do anything to protect our children. We would give our lives for theirs. We set boundaries around them. We keep a watchful eye on their friends. If we sinful people have this commitment to our children, how much more devotion does our perfect Heavenly Father feel for His children?

Sin is so very serious. Look at the language Jesus uses to show how radically we need to deal with sin (verses 8-9):

"If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire."

Now we know that no part of our physical bodies cause us to sin. The Bible is clear that sin comes from the heart. Besides, if we were to amputate a physical limb or pluck out physically one of our eyes, even such an extreme act would not keep us from sinning.

These verses are very similar to statements Jesus made during the Sermon on the Mount in 5:29-30 in teaching how to deal with lust. Jesus used symbolic language to make a concrete point, *we should do whatever necessary to remove sin from our lives and to keep from causing others to sin.*

Nothing is so valuable, so important, and so necessary that it should keep us from pursuing a life of obedience to Christ. This is a call for drastic action against sin.

Finally I don't want to cause others to sin because when I do I am displaying the exact opposite of God's attitude. What is God's attitude toward believers who fall into sin?

C. God Seeks to Restore Those Who Have Strayed (vv.11-14).

1. Look at verse 11. Now some of your modern translations will have this verse in a footnote. That's because some of the oldest manuscripts of the NT don't have v.11 in them. However, its truth is not omitted. Lk.19:10 says, **"For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."**

2. This is Jesus' mission statement. Every genuine believer is one with Christ. Look back to v.5, **"Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me."** To the 70 that Jesus sent out to preach, Jesus said in Lk.10:16, **"He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who**

rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me." Therefore to "**despise**" any genuine Christian is to "**despise**" part of Christ's body and to despise the Lord Himself.

3. Next Jesus shares *The Parable of the Lost Sheep*. A shepherd has "**a hundred sheep**" and "**one of them goes astray**." The gentle shepherd "**leaves the ninety-nine**" and goes "**to the mountains to see the one that is straying**." When he finds the lost sheep he "**rejoices more... than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray**."

4. Jesus used this same parable in Lk.15 to teach God's concern for lost unbelievers. Here, however, it pictures one of God's kids who has strayed from the flock. Jesus pursues him, treats his wounds and brings him back to fold.

5. The beauty of this image is that it does not matter which one of us strays, the Lord Jesus is equally concerned about each of us!

6. Even when we are foolish, strong-willed and rebellious, God's love for us is not diminished. He does not wait for us to return on our own but diligently pursues us!

Remember several years ago when little Jessica fell down the well shaft in Midland, Texas? For several hours, the whole world focused on her rescue. Everyone rejoiced when she was saved. Was she more important than any other toddler? No, but her need was great.

7. If the Lord Jesus goes to such lengths and has such compassion for each of God's "**little ones**," who are we to "**despise**" them or write them off?

Jesus says it is not "**the will of your Father... that one of these little ones should perish**." "**Perish**" comes from a Greek word that can be used in two ways. It can mean total destroyed or non-permanent ruin or loss.

For one believer to cause another believer to "**perish**" or be destroyed spiritually is to absolutely violate the will of our "**Father who is in heaven**."

A few years ago, an angry man rushed through a museum in Amsterdam until he reached Rembrandt's famous painting *Nightwatch*. He took out a knife and slashed it repeatedly before he could be stopped. A short time later, a distraught, hostile man slipped into St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome with a hammer and began to smash one of Michelangelo's beautiful sculptures. Two cherished works of art were severely damaged. What did officials do? Throw them out and forget about them? Absolutely not! Using the best experts, who worked with the utmost care and precision, they made every effort to restore the treasures.

By His sovereign grace, God restores even the most ruined lives. That's the heart of God, seeking and saving those who are lost. Should that be the heart of His Kingdom Kids as well?