

## Matthew 18a

**What question did the disciples ask Jesus (v. 1)?** The disciples asked Jesus a question they had undoubtedly been pondering among themselves: Their self-seeking spirit came up with the question, “*Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?*” The disciples were still anticipating an earthly kingdom and were wondering what cabinet level positions they would have.<sup>1</sup>

**Who did Jesus use as a living object lesson (v. 2)?** A little child.

**What was Jesus’ answer to the disciples’ question (vv. 3-4)?** In response, Jesus took a little child, who had no rights according to the Law, and stood him in their midst. He told the disciples a change in their thinking was necessary. Greatness in the kingdom was not based on great works or words, but on a childlike humility of spirit.<sup>2</sup>

He said that men and women must become as little children to enter the kingdom of heaven, i.e., in order to be a genuine believer a person must abandon all thoughts of personal greatness and take the lowly position of a little child. This begins when they acknowledge their sinfulness and unworthiness and receive Jesus Christ as their only hope.<sup>3</sup>

What Jesus did in setting a child forward—as an example for adults to follow—was shocking in His day. People of the ancient Near East regarded children as inferior to adults. Obviously the standards and values in the kingdom are exactly opposite of those in the world today. Young children have little concern about their personal prestige and position in relation to other people.

**What additional point did Jesus make (v. 5)?** Jesus spoke about welcoming a little child ... in His name. Whoever does so will be rewarded as if he had received the Lord Himself. Whatever is done for any who belong to the kingdom is reckoned as having been done for the Master.

**What was the warning of v. 6?** Jesus gave a stern warning concerning any who might place a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in Him. It would be better for such an offender to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.

It is bad enough to sin against oneself, but to cause a believer to sin is to destroy his innocence, corrupt his mind, and stain his reputation. Better to die a violent death than to trifle with another’s purity!<sup>4</sup>

**What is the warning of v. 7?** Jesus went on to explain that it is inevitable that offenses should arise. The world, the flesh, and the devil are geared to seduce and pervert. But if a person becomes an agent for the forces of evil, his guilt will be great. So the Savior warned men to take drastic action in disciplining themselves rather than to tempt a child of God (v. 8).<sup>5</sup>

**What was Jesus’ remedy for dealing with the basic cause of their sin (vv. 8-9)?** Jesus was not espousing self-mutilation, cutting off one’s hand or foot or gouging out one’s eye (cf. 5:29–30). Doing that would not remove the source of offense, which is the heart (cf. 15:18–19). Jesus was saying one must remove whatever offends. To keep from offending, radical changes are often necessary.<sup>6</sup>

**What is the message of v. 8? If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away:** Some people only keep from sin if it is easy or convenient to do it. Jesus warns us that we must be willing

to *sacrifice* in fighting against sin, that nothing is worse than facing the wrath of a righteous God. It really is better to sacrifice in the battle against sin *now* than to face the punishment of eternity later.

**What is the message of v. 9? If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away:** There are significant problems in taking these words as literal instruction instead of conveying an attitude. The problem is not only from the obvious physical harm that one might bring upon themselves, but more so in the problem that bodily mutilation does not *go far enough* in controlling sin. We need to be transformed from the inside out.

If I cut off my right hand, I can still sin with my left. If my left eye is gouged out, my right eye can still sin – and if all such members are gone, I can still sin in my heart and mind. God calls us to a far more radical transformation than any sort of bodily mutilation can address.

**Why should we not look down on the little ones (v. 10)?** Jesus warned against despising one of His little ones, whether children or any who belong to the kingdom. To emphasize their importance, He added that their angels are constantly in the presence of God, beholding His face. Angels here probably means guardian angels (Hebrews 1:14).<sup>7</sup>

Are there "guardian angels" for children? I like to think there are, because of God's concern for children (e.g., 19:14-15). But I cannot point to a verse that teaches this explicitly. Some believe that "every individual has his own guardian angel." But this too lacks specific scriptural support.<sup>8</sup>

**What is the message of the parable of the lost sheep (vv. 12-14)?** These little ones are also the object of the tender Shepherd's saving ministry. Even if one out of a hundred sheep goes astray, He leaves the ninety-nine and searches for the lost one till He finds it. The Shepherd's joy over finding a straying sheep should teach us to value and respect His little ones.<sup>9</sup>

The shepherd in the story represents God (v. 14). The sheep are those who follow Him, namely, Jesus' disciples (cf. 10:6; 15:24). God has concern for every one of His sheep and seeks to restore those of them that wander away from Him. He has such great concern for the wayward that when they return to Him, He rejoices more than over those who did not wander away. This does not mean that God loves His wayward sheep more than He loves His faithful sheep. It means that when wayward sheep return to Him it gives Him special joy. Since God has such great concern for His disciples who go astray, His disciples should be very careful not to do anything that would cause one of His sheep to go astray.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Louis A. Barbieri Jr., "Matthew," The Bible Knowledge Commentary: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Victor Books, 1985), 61.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> William MacDonald, Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1272.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Louis A. Barbieri Jr., "Matthew," The Bible Knowledge Commentary: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Victor Books, 1985), 62.

<sup>7</sup> William MacDonald, Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1272.

<sup>8</sup> Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Matthew, 2025 Edition (published by Sonic Light), 476.

<sup>9</sup> William MacDonald, Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1273.

<sup>10</sup> Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Matthew, 2025 Edition (published by Sonic Light), 476.