

Do not despise the family of God
Matthew 18:10-14

Introduction

One of the most heart-wrenching stories that people hear from time to time, is that of a son or daughter leaving the comfort of their home and family out of rebellion against their parents. Fed up with living “under the rules” of Mom and Dad, they strike out on their own, foolishly believing that life will be far better without the care and love of their parents (which they interpret as “cramping their style”).

The grief caused by this defection from home for the Mom and Dad is pitiful and painful to watch. The parents lose hours of sleep, wondering and waiting for their child to return. Their hearts are ceaselessly broken with anguish, questioning where they went wrong. And if they are *Christian* parents, their crying out to God for the safe return of their child is a never-ending petition they bring before the throne of grace. All in all, it is one of the saddest circumstances that could befall any family.

But what would we think if the same scenario were played out but with a completely different reaction on the part of the parents? Instead of the parents being racked with grief and full of compassion for their wayward child, they exhibited nothing but contempt. Their attitude toward the rebellious son or daughter was one of “good riddance.” In other words, they were glad to be rid of this child. And rather than praying for the child’s safe return, they hoped he or she would come under some horrible cruel end. They didn’t pray for God’s mercy but His judgment to fall on their son or daughter. In short, they despised their child.

Now I imagine that for most of us here today, we would be more appalled at the parents than we would at the rebellious son or daughter. And our dismay and offence at the parents would simply be at how *unnatural* their reaction is toward their wayward child. Where is the love, care, concern, and compassion for this son or daughter? This is what we should rightfully expect to see in Mom and Dad. But instead, we see the unthinkable: two parents wishing the destruction of their runaway child rather than his or her restoration.

Now the reason I paint this disturbing picture for you, is because of where we’re heading this morning in our study of **Matthew 18**. You see, as upset as it would make us to observe parents who have nothing but malevolent feelings for a wayward child; it should equally alarm us if we saw the same kind of contempt within the Church. In fact, there is nothing more unnatural for the family of God than to see fellow Christians who despise each other. Yet, with great sadness, we must admit that even among believers in Christ who are to be known most of all for their love of each other (cf. John 13:34-35); the presence of contemptuous feelings can blanket a congregation of those who profess to follow Jesus Christ.

And the reality of such contempt was present among the first disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ - which is where we find them here in the context of **Matthew 18**. If you remember, this chapter begins with the disciples bringing a question to Jesus over who would be the “greatest” in the kingdom of heaven. But this inquiry (according to Mark 9:34) was in fact an argument that had been brewing for some time between the disciples. Thus, when they brought this question to Jesus, they did so under the presence of division, pride, and envy toward one another.

Our Lord therefore, knowing the hearts of all men (John 2:25), answered their question by way of a sermon which rebuked the sin of His disciples on the one hand; and on the other hand, Jesus’ sermon unpacked for His followers how they should always treat one another as the family of God. In fact, the great theme of **Matthew 18** as a whole, focuses on “Community Life in the Kingdom of God.”

Now so far in our study of **Matthew 18**, we have seen how one enters God’s Kingdom and the way in which the members of the Kingdom are to care for one another. In the first place, regarding entry in the Kingdom, Jesus teaches us in verses 3-4, that we must be supernaturally converted which is manifested by the humility of a child. In other words, if we would belong to God’s kingdom, there must be a divine change take place in our lives whereby we turn away from our sinful life by turning to Jesus Christ as our new life.

But the most significant feature of this conversion to Christ is the possession of *child-like humility*. This is what Jesus refers to in verse 4 when He declares: “Whoever humbles himself like this child (that is, the literal child he used to illustrate his point) is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” And the child-like humility that every true believer in Christ must possess, is the affirmation of their own insignificance as a sinner and their utter dependence on Jesus alone to save them. So then, to begin His sermon on community life in the Kingdom of

God, Jesus calls us to examine ourselves to see if we even belong to His Kingdom. And the fundamental feature of being in God's Kingdom is "child-like" humility in His people.

In the second place, from Kingdom-entry, Jesus then goes on to expound about Kingdom-caring. This was our study last week from verses 5-9. In this passage, our Lord continues to rebuke the pride in His disciples, while at the same time, teaching them what it means to truly care for the family of God. And this caring is demonstrated in two ways: first, by the understanding that the way we treat our fellow Christians is the way we are treating Christ Himself. Jesus said in verse 5: "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me."

Secondly, we also manifest a true caring spirit for God's family by protecting each other from falling into sin. In fact, this is the greatest form of care we can exhibit to fellow Christians. But how do we do this? *First of all, we protect fellow Christians from sinning by affirming the serious dread of acting as a tempter to sin*. This affirmation is understood by realizing on the one hand, that we would be better off to die a horrible death than to tempt a fellow Christian to sin (v. 6b); and then on the other hand, to realize that when we do act as a tempter we are acting no differently than the ungodly world (v. 7).

Second of all, we protect fellow Christians from sinning by doing whatever is necessary to forsake the source of any sin in our own lives. This is what Jesus meant by His metaphorical language of cutting off hands or feet and tearing out our eyes, if they caused us to sin (vv. 8-9). The hand, foot, and eye represents anything in our life that would be the source of temptation. It might be people, places, or things - but whatever it is, its got to go. And this radical call for a permanent breach with sinful temptation in the context of **Matthew 18**, is understood as the preventive measure we use to protect other Christians from sinning. If we don't want to lead others into sin, then we must be doing whatever it takes to keep ourselves from sinning first.

Now this morning, as we return to **Matthew 18**, we are looking at verses **10-14** - where our Lord Jesus is continuing to preach on this theme of *caring* for the family of God. But in these verses, the focus of caring for God's family is anchored in a command that as fellow Christians we must **not despise** each other. That is to say, in the Church of Jesus Christ, there must never be the presence of *contempt* among its members. We are a family and as a family we must have compassion for one another as opposed to holding each other in contempt.

Now to unpack this principle, I want us to consider two major points from **Matthew 18:10-14**. (1) The warning against contempt for fellow Christians (2) The reason we must not despise fellow Christians. To begin with then, let's consider first:

I. THE WARNING AGAINST CONTEMPT FOR FELLOW CHRISTIANS.

Look with me at the opening words of verse **10**: "**See that you do not despise one of these little ones.**" Now here again I believe it is important to remind ourselves that when Jesus refers to the "**little ones**" He is not speaking of a literal physical child. Rather He is speaking in figurative language to describe those who savingly believe in Him (v. 6). In short, the **little ones** are Christians. They are believers in Jesus Christ.

Now in reference to these "**little ones**" our Lord declares: "**See that you do not despise one of these little ones.**" The verb translated "**see**" is used here as a present active imperative. This verb therefore is a command and it is an action which Christ calls us to carry out on a constant, persistent basis. Specifically, we are being warned by Christ to always be on the lookout with ourselves that we **do not despise one of these little ones**.

The term **despise** comes from the Greek word *kataphroneo*, which means literally "to think down on." Used in the context of **Matthew 18:10**, Jesus is commanding His disciples (and thus His Church as a whole) not to look down on each other as inferior and therefore unworthy of holding our consideration, compassion, or care in any way. To **despise** then is to hold someone in contempt. It is to disdain them and treat them as simply worthless.

Now were the disciples in this historic context guilty of looking down on one another? Were they guilty of disdainful attitudes? Yes they were. Remember, these men were feuding with each other over who would be the greatest in the Kingdom. Not only were they causing each other to sin (v. 6), but they were also holding each other in contempt! They were looking down their noses, as it were, at their fellow disciple - believing in their own sinful hearts that they were in fact better than the other.

You can imagine the thoughts going on in their minds: "Well, I know I'm better than Peter. I'm not always sticking my foot in my mouth like him. And I certainly know that I'm better than Matthew. He was nothing but a wicked tax collector and robbed his own countrymen - the thief! And of course I'm better than

James and John. They're nothing but a bunch a hot heads. They lose their temper over the least little thing. Yea, I'm better than all these men. I should be the greatest in the kingdom." Needless to say, beloved, what we have recorded here in **Matthew 18** was not a good day for the disciples. This was not one of their "shining" moments.

But here again, as I mentioned in the first study of this chapter, before we dare look down our noses at these disciples we need to check ourselves. We need to humble ourselves. And we need to realize that the same sins these men were guilty of are the same sins which reside in our own hearts. The warning of **Matthew 18:10** is applied as much to us as the Church of Jesus Christ today as it was to those first disciples in their day. "**See that you do not despise one of these little ones.**" We too must be on constant guard against this sin of despising our fellow Christians. We must at all costs keep our hearts from holding a fellow Christian in contempt.

But of course, affirming this admonition, only raises the question as to how we *can* be guilty of this sin. What are some ways in which we would **despise** each other as believers in Christ? **John MacArthur**, in his exposition of **Matthew 18:10**, gives *seven* different examples as to how Christians can **despise** one another. I'm going to repeat these examples for us because I believe they would help us in recognizing where we in fact could fall into this sin.

First, *we can despise one another by flaunting our liberty before weaker believers, causing them to go against their consciences or to overreact and fall into deeper legalism.* Remember what the apostle Paul warned to the more mature Christian who understood his liberty in Christ better than his weaker brother: "Let not him who eats regard with contempt him who does not eat" (Rom.14:3). While we may be free in our consciences to do those things which are not sinful, yet for another Christian, he may be consider it sinful because of the weakness of his conscience. Our response then to such a Christian is not to make fun of them or ridicule them for what they are not free to do. What's more, we must not brandish our freedom before them in such a way that we would provoke them to go against their conscience. To do such things is to **despise** them rather than caring for them.

Second, *we can despise one another when we show partiality.* James 2:1 commands us to never hold faith in our Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism. God loves and cares for His children equally and so must we. Third, *we can hold fellow believers in contempt by refusing to help them when it is in our power to do so.* Both James 2:15-16 and I John 3:17-18 speak powerfully to this point. Fourth, *we can despise our fellow Christians by ridiculing their physical appearance or making light of their physical handicap.* The Corinthian church did this with Paul the apostle (2 Cor.10:10). On this point, MacArthur noted: "To mock another person because of physical, mental, or cultural deficiencies not only is contemptible in men's sight but in God's."

Fifth, *we can despise each other as Christians when we are indifferent to or judgmental of a fellow believer who spiritually stumbles.* Regarding this matter, I will quote MacArthur at length:

When a brother or sister falls into sin, especially if the sin is public and well known, there is a temptation to write them off, saying in effect, if not in words, "He knew better and he made his choice. Let him live with the consequences. Until he changes, I'll stay at arm's length." But Paul's counsel is otherwise. "Brethren," he wrote the Galatians, "even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal.6:1-2). Christ's way for His followers is that they humbly help a sinning brother, realizing that they, too, could fall into the same or equally bad sin and that it is only by God's grace if they do not.

Sixth, *as Christians we can hold one another in contempt by resenting a fellow Christian who confronts our sinfulness.* How many times has a Christian despised another Christian because their sin was exposed and corrected by the faithful loving care of that believer? On this point, let me issue my own warning: it is the wicked character of a "scoffer" (Prov.9:7-8a) who despises correction and even hates the one who corrects him. We must therefore not allow our hearts to be tempted and taken by the spirit of the scoffer when a fellow Christian corrects us. Proverbs 9:8 says: "reprove a *wise man*, and he will *love* you." This should be the aim of every Christian when corrected by another Christian: "God give me the grace to be a 'wise man' - humbly receiving the correction and loving the one who loved me enough to correct me."

Finally, as one last point, MacArthur mentions how *believers can despise other believers by taking advantage of them for personal gain.* In all of these examples, it should be very clear and sobering that we as

Christians can treat each other in ways that exhibit a complete absence of love and care for the Body of Christ. This is why we should all take with great seriousness the warning of our Lord Jesus Christ: **“See that you do not despise one of these little ones.”** The very fact that Christ would issue forth such a warning is proof enough that all of us are susceptible at any time to this grave sin.

But from considering this warning against having contempt for our fellow Christians, let us now move to our next major point which centers on:

II. THE REASON WE MUST NOT DESPISE OUR FELLOW BELIEVERS.

Looking at the rest of verse **10**, and then on to verses **11-14**, our Lord proclaims: **“For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven. What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.”**

What reason does Christ put forth that should guard us all from the sin of despising our fellow Christians? Why must we not look down on a fellow believer, as if we are superior to them? The fundamental answer to this question, based on **Matthew 18:10-14**, is *God’s own special concern for all His children*. In other words, we have no right to ever **despise** a fellow Christian because of the divine care which God Himself shows to every one of His people.

To say this another way: no matter how immature, disobedient, faithful, unknown or well-known, ignorant or theologically advanced a Christian may be - God loves all His children equally and thus cares for them with an equal, enduring compassion. So then, when it comes to how we treat each other in the Church, a never-ending, indiscriminate care for one another’s spiritual well-fare should mark us all. We should care for one another in that manner that God cares for us. This is why we do not have the right to **despise** each other as the Family of God.

By how does God care for us? In what way does our Lord show His concern for all His children? To answer this question, Jesus unpacks God’s care for His people in two ways: first, *there is the fact of angels attending the care of God’s people*. Look at what our Lord says in the latter half of verse **10**: **“For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven.”** Now I need to say from the start, that this statement is NOT teaching the superstitious idea that we each have our own personal “guardian angel” assigned to us. This has been a popular concept which has been handed down to us from ancient Jewish tradition, but it is nowhere supported in God’s Word.

Rather, what the Bible teaches concerning the relationship between Christians and angels is that *they* [the **angels**] are “all *ministering spirits* sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation” (Heb.1:14). In other words, God has appointed His **angels** to serve all those who will “inherit salvation.” The **angels** of God are appointed to minister to His Church. They serve us, believers in Christ, by attending to our needs. And these “needs” can vary from protecting us from temporal dangers to delivering us from temporal dangers (see 2 Kings 6:15-17; Dan.6:21-22). And even at our death, God’s angels will be there as a “convoy” to give us a safe passage (Luke 16:22). Describing such a glorious moment, **A.W. Pink** (1886-1952) wrote:

To our natural feelings, a death-bed scene is often a most painful and distressing experience. There we behold a helpless creature, emaciated by disease, convulsed with pain, panting for breath; his countenance pallid, his lips quivering, his brow bedewed with a cold sweat. But were not the spiritual world hidden from us by a veil of God’s appointing we should also see there the glorious inhabitants of Heaven surrounding the bed, waiting for God’s summons, to convey that soul from earth, through the territory of Satan, up to the Father’s House. There they are, ready to perform their last office in ministering for those who shall be heirs of salvation.

Now what is important to notice in our text (here in **Matthew 18:10**) is that, first of all, Jesus refers to the **angels** as *their angels* - that is, these **angels** belong to Christians in a collective sense but not an individualized sense. But second of all, these **angels** are **in heaven always [seeing] the face of [God] the Father who is in heaven**. The point of these words is to emphasize the fact that the **angels** are always living in the very presence of God, where they wait attentively and eagerly for the Lord’s commands to serve His people.

Now beloved, think about how awesome and comforting this is: that God loves and cares for us so much, that He has ordained the very hosts of heaven to live for our service at His command. This is just one incredible example of how much God prizes us as His children, and why it is so wicked that we should **despise** each other whose very needs are attended by the **angels** themselves.

But not only is God's care for His people shown by His commissioning the **angels** in their behalf. The second example Jesus gives as to how His **Father** cares for all His **little ones**, is *by preserving them from a final eternal ruin*. This is the great point Jesus makes here in verses **11-14** by His parable of the lost sheep. In verse **14**, Christ crystallizes the central theme of this parable by declaring: "**So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.**" In other words, God's care for all His children is an omnipotent, sovereign care, whereby He will keep every believer in Christ from falling away and perishing for eternity. This is God's eternal promise: none of His **little ones** shall **perish**.

In fact, God's preserving care is so strong and committed to the keeping of His saints, that even if one believer strays from Christ and falls into a season of terrible sin and backsliding - God will not leave His child there to **perish**. Like the faithful and loving shepherd in Jesus' parable, God will leave, as it were, the **ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray**. What a beautiful picture this is God's love and compassion for all His people. Even for the one believer who strays! God will seek him out and bring him back. Not one single believer in Christ will be finally lost. Remember what our Lord promised on this very matter in John 10:27-29,

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

Now we have to ask: what is the application for us in relation to this truth of God's preserving care for all His people? Why would Jesus tell the parable of the lost sheep as a point of God's commitment to keep all His **little ones** from perishing, as it relates to the Church not despising each other? The application is this, beloved: *even if a fellow believer falls away from the Church into sin, we have no right to despise him for his fall but instead, we should go after him and restore him back to God's family*. This is how far and wide our care for one another should extend!

We must not have the sinful, ungodly attitude of "good riddance." No! If it is not **the will** of our **Father who is in heaven** that one of His **little ones should perish**, then it should never be our will! Our will and desire for the Christian who has fallen away must be to do whatever is within the means God has given us, to win them back. We must be like the shepherd who leaves **the ninety-nine to go in search of the one who went astray**. This is how we care for the Body of Christ. But understand this: such caring that would be shown in a recovery mission is not just the job of the pastor. This recovery mission is the responsibility and calling of the entire church. We're all in this together.

Yet, I must quickly admit, that even if we go after the professing Christian who went astray - there is no guarantee we can them back! In fact, it is highly possible that they have left the church because they were never truly part of the church to begin with. In other words, they weren't saved. Their fall into open sin and defection from the church and the Christian faith was due to the sobering reality that they never knew Christ. But nevertheless, no matter where such a person may prove to be spiritually, our initial calling and responsibility by God is to go after them and seek their recovery.

Conclusion

Now in concluding our study this morning from **Matthew 18:10-14**, there are two central lessons I want us to draw from this passage:

1. Christians can despise each other. As shameful and ugly as it is, we must recognize in ourselves the sinful propensity to look down on one another and think less of each other. I know for many of us, we don't want to face up to the reality of residual sin. But beloved, God's Word is clear: every Christian has an inward conflict with remaining sin (Rom.7:14-25; Gal.5:17). Therefore, we must affirm, on the one hand, the capacity in ourselves to despise each other; and on the other hand, we must do whatever it takes to overcome such a wicked temptation.

2. We are never more like Christ than when we exert ourselves to aid, comfort, and restore fellow Christians who may be cast down or fallen into sin. If we would conquer the sin of despising each other, then we must give ourselves to the care of one another. And what this means within the context of the Church, is going out of our way to lift up the down cast, and to reprove and recover those who have gone astray. But to do this, we have to repent of our pride, selfishness, and contempt that we may have toward fellow Christians. Furthermore, we have to humble ourselves and recognize that God's loving care for me is the same compassion He has for all His children. None of us are the "top sheep", as it were.

Moreover, we have to get out of our little "comfort zones." We have to get close enough with fellow Christians to know where they are spiritually and seek the wisdom of God in how we may best help them. For many of us, we want to stay insulated in our little private worlds where we can't be bothered or upset by the problems of other people. When we come and gather with the rest of the Church, we intentionally keep ourselves at a distance from conversation that may lead beyond the weather, work, or who won the latest football game.

But beloved, we need to understand: God has not called us to be superficial. We're not called to have shallow relationships. We're not strangers nor are we to be a mere acquaintance. We are a family. God's family. And we are to care for one another in the same manner that Jesus cares for us. This takes sacrifice, selflessness, humility, patience, kindness, wisdom and the willingness to be inconvenienced.

So may God give us the grace for greater sanctification in how we care for each other! Killing our contempt. Putting on compassion. Amen.