

Matthew 18:10-20

Godly care.

Introduction. This is the 4th major collections of Jesus' teaching in Mt. and is concerned with the relationships among his followers. **Vv. 1-5, focuses on what is true greatness**, using a child as a representative of the 'little ones' (6, i.e. all believers). **Vv. 6-9, focuses on avoiding creating stumbling blocks** that cause believers to sin. Stumbling blocks can be found in other disciples (6-7) and in ourselves (8-9) and sadly will be a reality until the final consummation, the return of the Son of Man (13:40-41).

1. Care for the 'little ones' (10-14) – the parable of the lost sheep.

v. 10. a) 'Little ones' = ordinary believers (perhaps especially those who are vulnerable). The basis of the call for the disciples to care for all believers is the care that God has for them. b). 'angels' (see Dan. 10, 12:1 = heavenly representatives of nations; and Rev. 1:20ff as representatives of churches), = **representatives of all believers**. The 'face of God' - courtly language showing personal access to the king. 'Angels'-symbolise that all believers enjoy constant personal access to God.

Vv. 12-14. The parable of the lost sheep is addressed to the disciples and is to remind them that God cares for all the believers ('little ones'). The teaching is clear that God cares for all believers and does not want any to be lost, all are precious to Him. By implications the disciples are to show a similar care for each other and especially those who are vulnerable.

2. Dealing with sin in the believing community. (15-20). Vv. 15-20 are an illustration of how this care for the 'little ones' is to be practiced.

Vv. 15-17. These verses illustrate how an individual disciple ('you' is singular) should show care to a brother or sister whose sin has put him/her in danger. The pastoral concern is primary, to encourage the 'sinner' to listen and repent. Second step – include others (see Deut. 19). The final step – involve the church. **The aim is not discipline but that the offender should listen.** If the sinner refuses to listen then the sinner is to be treated as 'pagan or a tax collector' (1st C Jewish proverb, note Jesus' attitude to Gentiles, 15:21-28). **The aim – repentance and restoration.**

Vv. 18-20. 'I tell you the truth' emphasises Jesus' authority which he, in some measure, delegates to his disciples. The earlier (16:19) giving of authority to Peter is now given to the disciples as a group. The individual disciple and the church have assurance that they can, and should, declare what is right and what is wrong. 'Binding' and 'loosing' – this **declaration of the church carries the prior approval of heaven** (16:9). This authority must be exercised with great care, (18:1ff and 23:8-13). When two or three meet for prayer, especially for the repentance and restoration of the sinner, Jesus is in their midst ('in my name'). In Mt. Jesus is called **Emmanuel** (1:23), and makes **divine claims** (28:18-20). Prayer is to be conducted in the presence of Jesus, in accord with his name (i.e. his will).

Reflection/Response. How do we confront our own sin? How do we confront the sins of other believers in ways that encourage repentance and restoration?

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