

## Matthew 18: Kingdom Unity

### Attention

1. Who was the greatest of the apostles? Peter? John? Paul? Who deserves to be singled out above the rest?
    - a. It is hard to rearrange our thinking and priorities when we become disciples of Christ.
    - b. All our lives we are taught to look out for number one, to be selfish to survive and thrive in this world.
  2. You cannot have unity and harmony when a spirit of selfish ambition and internal competition prevails.
    - a. The kingdom of Christ is not about earthly priorities; it is spiritual in its nature, focus, and aspirations.
    - b. If we want to be citizens of that kingdom, we must learn to value kingdom unity instead of personal glory.
- [Proposition] *Unity in God's kingdom is based on a selfless concern for others, not power and greatness.*

### I. Humility (1-5)

#### A. *The Passion for Greatness (1)*

1. This was not the only time the disciples discussed greatness in the coming kingdom.
  - a) These men expected an earthly kingdom, and they expected earthly honors to go with it.
  - b) As the Lord's chosen apostles, they anticipated positions of greatness in His administration.
2. On this occasion the disciples openly asked Jesus, "Who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"
  - a) Everyone dreams of greatness at times: riches, power, and prominence.
  - b) But the desire for greatness is contrary to the spirit of Christ's kingdom.

#### B. *The Path to Glory (2-5)*

1. On other occasions, Jesus emphasized that greatness in the kingdom consists of selfless service.
  - a) Here Jesus highlights the unity and harmony that would characterize His kingdom.
  - b) The kingdom is not about individual excellence but congregational unity in glorifying God.
2. It is not, "Who is great in the kingdom;" the question is, "Who will be allowed in the kingdom?"
  - a) Jesus used a child to illustrate; you must be converted; kingdom citizens are child-like.
  - b) Jesus did not say be *childish*; He identified the desirable quality: *humility*. **4-5**
3. Children are not a pattern for the greatness that interested the disciples.
  - a) Great men have more important things to do and to pursue than to interact with children.
  - b) Jesus said, "Be converted; become like a child; be humble; receive children in My name."
4. The kingdom is not for those who seek greatness; it is for those who do not think of themselves.
  - a) Selflessness, not selfishness, is the basis for dealing with others; service, not superiority.
  - b) We must release our desires for greatness and be happy to live in the Father's house.

### II. Love (6-20)

#### A. *Love for Others' Souls (6-7, 10-14)*

1. Jesus appears to make a play on words, referring to *little ones* in two senses.
  - a) It is evident that at first that Jesus has literal children in mind when He sets one before them.
  - b) But Jesus goes on to describe the *little ones* who believe in Him, i.e. the converted.
2. We should be stepping stones for our fellow believers, not stumbling blocks to their faith.
  - a) The *offenses* mentioned in the text describe actions that cause others to sin, not hurt feelings.
  - b) Stumbling blocks are inevitable, but we should fear ever becoming one to a brother!
3. The Father loves these *little ones* (both children and believers) and angels watch over them.
  - a) Callous disregard for the conscience of a brother is neither humble nor loving. **1Co. 8:7-13**
  - b) God is working to get souls to Heaven. Are we in cooperation or conflict with His purpose?

#### B. *Love for Our Salvation (8-9)*

1. How much do you want to be saved? Is it most important in your life? Will you pay any price?
  - a) Jesus warned of stumbling blocks and the eternal loss they can cause both parties involved.
  - b) Not only must we beware of becoming a stumbling block, we should shun them in our lives.
2. What do these verses tell us about Hell and its horror? Better to be maimed than to go there.
  - a) Obviously, our body parts are not the source of sin, but would we cut them off if they were?
  - b) No sacrifice is too great when it comes to salvation; nothing is worth going to Hell for.

### C. *Love for Offending Saints (15-20)*

1. We must love others as they are loved by God, and sometimes that love must be tough.
  - a) This is not a petty misunderstanding or hurt feelings; this is a brother *sinning* against you.
  - b) When sin comes between brothers it must be dealt with; it cannot be ignored.
2. Notice what Jesus did not say:
  - a) He did not say ignore the sin your brother committed; it endangers his soul.
  - b) He did not say broadcast the sin your brother committed; He said talk to him alone.
  - c) He did not say treat your brother as a heathen if he repents; He said do so if he won't repent.
3. This is the second time Jesus referred to the *church* (16:18); here it refers to a local assembly.
  - a) First, restoration of an erring brother should be sought privately between the parties.
    - (1) If he repents, you have gained your brother; no one else needs to know.
    - (2) This is about salvation, not superiority; love him like God loves him.
  - b) Second, if he won't repent, take two or three witnesses and try again to reach him.
    - (1) Perhaps the combined influence of a small group can persuade him.
    - (2) Regardless, these men will be witnesses to the sincere effort being made to save.
  - c) Third, if he still will not repent, inform the church of the situation.
    - (1) This assumes the church will unite in prayer and outreach, not sigh in resignation.
    - (2) This scenario involves a man still in the assembly; he needs to be identified.
  - d) Fourth, if he is still unwilling to repent, the church is to withdraw from him.
    - (1) Fellowship cannot be extended to such a one; the members must love but shun him.
    - (2) The purpose of this discipline is to rebuke the brother and to protect the church.
4. Such discipline must not be undertaken lightly; it should reflect God's decision in Heaven. **18**
  - a) There is great power in the church's united action; therefore, there is grave responsibility. **19**
  - b) Christ is present when disciples join together in His will. Are we united in Christ's purpose?
5. This passage describes a process for dealing with sin between two individuals.
  - a) If the sin is public knowledge, action would generally be swifter in dealing with it. (1Co. 5)
  - b) This passage demonstrates that even matters of private sin may escalate to public discipline.

### III. Forgiveness (21-35)

#### A. *The Principle (21-22)*

1. The foregoing discussion elicited a question from Peter; how generous should forgiveness be?
  - a) Peter probably thought he was being very generous, but the Lord went far beyond him.
  - b) Love doesn't keep count of wrongs; the point is not 490 sins, the point is keep forgiving.
2. Does this principle of forgiveness apply to sins regardless of repentance or on the basis of it?
  - a) The context teaches we are to forgive those who repent. **15; Lk. 17:3-4; Co. 3:13; Ro. 15:7**
  - b) But we also are to pursue God's heart. He longs to forgive, long before repentance.

#### B. *The Parable (23-35)*

1. This parable is one of the most frightening in the NT; it challenges us to examine our own hearts.
  - a) The parable does not require much explanation; the concepts it represents are plain.
  - b) "Once saved, always saved" commentators strongly deny it deals with eternal salvation. **35**
2. We must love others as we are loved by God; we must show mercy as we received mercy.
  - a) The parable demonstrates how a hard, unforgiving heart appears to our Heavenly Father.
  - b) Am I like this wicked man, forgiven so much but with no mercy for one who offended me?
3. We have greatly offended God by our sins; we owe God a debt we can never repay on our own.
  - a) We do not have the ability to work off our debt by good works or personal merit.
  - b) The only hope we have is to be forgiven; those who receive mercy must also show mercy.

### Action

1. What are the essential principles for unity and harmony in Christ's kingdom? Humility, Love, Forgiveness
2. Are these qualities present in my own life? Do I seek greatness for myself, or the glory and approval of God?