

For These Little Ones

This article on Matthew 18:10–17 is edited from the Ligonier Ministries

In today's passage, Jesus taught his disciples on how the children of the kingdom must treat one another. Matthew 18:10 records His warning that we not "despise one of these little ones." Given from context in chapter 18 thus far emphasizing our need for humility (vv. 1–9), Christ is telling us that we must not become puffed up with self-pride and look down on other Christians. Despising another believer means to treat him with disrespect, refusing to receive him as our equal in God's eyes (see v. 5).

Dr. John MacArthur gives a fine summary of what we are to learn from verses 10–14, namely, that to treat "any fellow believer with contempt is extremely serious since God and the holy angels are so concerned for their well-being" (The MacArthur Bible Commentary, p. 1,157). First of all, the angels in heaven dwell continually before our Creator, beholding His face (Matt. 18:10), which probably means in this context that they are attentive to the Father's will and always ready to obey His commands. Should He release them, these angels will move at His order to minister to His children (Heb. 1:14). Fear of reprisal from these creatures should be enough to make any of us treat our fellow Christians well.

Secondly, and far more significant, God's "care extends itself to every particular member of the flock, even the lowest" (Matthew Henry). He shepherds His people, working to keep errant believers from finally perishing (Matt. 18:12–14). Since we are called to imitate God (Eph. 5:1), thus to some degree we all must minister to one another. Of course, the pastors and elders of the church are the primary shepherds of the Lord's flock (1 Peter 5:1–5). Nevertheless, we must still bear the burdens of one another (Gal. 6:2) and love wandering brothers and sisters back into the fold. Oftentimes, we will not reach out to others who are stuck in sin or who have harmed us because we think they are beyond redemption. Such an attitude portrays an arrogance that believes we who live holy lives are more deserving of God's love than others. Such an attitude is not the mark of our Father's humble children, who alone will inherit the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 18:1–4).

God is not willing that any of His own should perish (Matt. 18:14), and so He shepherds us, using His staff to discipline us if that is what is necessary to keep us in the fold. One way in which the Lord exercises this shepherding is through the love of Christians one for another. We must all grieve when we see brothers or sisters stumble and do all that we can to rescue them. Especially if you are a church leader, do not abandon your sheep.