

03-15 Lesson: Matthew 18 — Humility, Protecting Little Ones, Church Discipline, and Limitless Forgiveness

Date Time: 2026-03-15 10:22:07

Location: First Baptist Church Tallassee

Instructor: Sid Edwards

Summary

This lesson, delivered on 2026-03-15, examines Matthew Chapter 18, presenting the Transfiguration as the fulfillment of Jesus' promise that some disciples would witness the King in His royal splendor, then addressing themes of true greatness through humility, safeguarding "little ones," confronting sin and stumbling blocks, guardian angels, the parable of the lost sheep, church discipline, corporate prayer, and limitless forgiveness exemplified by the parable of the unforgiving servant. The instructor stresses that humility precedes glory, warns against causing children or fellow believers to stumble, details the biblical process for church discipline, underscores the authority of binding and loosing in alignment with God's Word, and teaches that forgiveness must be heartfelt and without limits, contrasting an immense forgiven debt with petty unforgiveness. Contemporary applications include concerns about the humanistic influence of modern education on children and a church's use of teacher contracts to uphold doctrinal and moral standards.

Knowledge Points

1. Transfiguration and Royal Splendor (Matthew 17)

- Transfiguration as fulfillment of "seeing the King"
 - Jesus' statement at the end of Matthew 16 that some disciples would see the King come in glory is interpreted as referring to the Transfiguration.
 - Six days later, Peter, James, and John saw Jesus as He will appear at the second coming—His royal splendor rather than a political or millennial kingdom display.
 - "His royal splendor" is presented as a better translation than a literal "coming of the kingdom," emphasizing a vision of glory.

- Misunderstanding of the Kingdom
 - Despite witnessing Jesus' glory, the disciples remained concerned with earthly status, arguing about who would be greatest in heaven and expecting a political kingdom.
 - Peter, feeling favored due to experiences (walking on water, keys of the kingdom, miracle of tax payment via fish), assumed primacy, prompting Jesus to teach on true greatness.

2. Greatness through Humility (Matthew 18:1-5)

- Object lesson with a child
 - Jesus answers the greatness question by placing a small, rights-less, defenseless, guileless child among them to exemplify humility.
 - Teaching: "Unless you change and become like a child, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven... whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest."
 - Humility entails honest self-knowledge of sinfulness and need for God, accepting oneself to serve with God-given gifts for His glory, and thinking less of oneself than one naturally tends to.
- Biblical examples and contrasts
 - Moses (Exodus 3): Initially argued he lacked qualifications and courage; candid self-assessment and reluctance reflect humility before God's empowerment.
 - Rich fool (Luke 12): Built bigger barns in self-sufficiency and died that night; illustrates pride and the folly of self-glory.

3. Protecting Little Ones and Avoiding Stumbling Blocks (Matthew 18:5-10)

- Receiving and protecting children (and believers)
 - "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me"; harming or causing "little ones" who believe to sin invites severe judgment (millstone and drowning imagery).
 - Expanded application: Fellow believers are also God's "children"; discouraging or causing them to stumble is gravely serious.
- Stumbling blocks warning (v.7)
 - Stumbling is inevitable in a fallen world, but woe to the person through whom it comes.

- Jesus as the rejected cornerstone: Many Jews sought a militant messiah and stumbled over Jesus' meekness and humility; the temple cornerstone analogy shows rejection of what appears ordinary yet is foundational.
- Drastic measures against sin (vv.8–9)
 - Metaphorical commands to cut off hand/foot or pluck out eye signify taking immediate, drastic action against sin in conduct (hands), places (feet), and desires/perception (eyes/mind).
 - Counsel: Deal with sin today—face, confess, and forsake it (repentance as a 180-degree turn). Do not let sin fester.
- Angels and the dignity of children (v.10)
 - “Their angels... continually see the face of my Father” affirms angelic guardianship over children; speculation raised that children’s “imaginary friends” might be guardian angels (no proof, but concept noted).
 - Theological inference: Many believe infants/young children who die go immediately to God; David’s statement in 2 Samuel 12 expresses confidence in reunion (“I will go to where he is”).

4. The Lost Sheep and the Value of Each Life (Matthew 18:12–14)

- Parable of the hundred sheep
 - The shepherd leaves ninety-nine to seek one lost; he rejoices more over the found one than over the ninety-nine that did not stray.
 - It is not God’s will for any “little ones” to perish—applied both to children and to believers.
- Two interpretive emphases
 - Confirmation of care for children: God wills that none perish spiritually; desire that children be raised in godly homes, believe early, and live lives of service.
 - Universal value of repentant sinners: Heaven rejoices over one repentant sinner as over ninety-nine already saved; all lives are sacred and celebrated equally upon conversion.
- Shepherd care implication
 - Pursuit of the lost does not mean abandoning the ninety-nine; angelic beings watch over the flock while the Shepherd seeks the stray.

5. Contemporary Concerns for Children’s Formation

- Dr. J. Vernon McGee's 1967 critique
 - Statement: Schools use children as "guinea pigs" for humanistic philosophies; young people pay a high price in contemporary classrooms.
 - Application: The situation has worsened over the last 59 years, increasing exposure to and tolerance of concerning teachings—heightening the need to guard children's spiritual formation.

6. Church Discipline: Process and Purpose (Matthew 18:15–20)

- Purpose and posture
 - Aim: Restore straying believers, maintain purity and obedience, and avoid the leavening effect of tolerated sin.
 - Approach: Not as policemen but as physicians—loving, discreet, non-gossip resolution; sin should be no more public than necessary (Jerry Vines).
- Stepwise biblical process
 - Step 1: Private confrontation—inform and discuss; some may be unaware their conduct offends.
 - Step 2: Bring one or two witnesses—Deuteronomy 19:15 principle; confirm matters before two or three witnesses.
 - Step 3: Tell it to the church—if refusal persists, escalate publicly; drastic but aimed at reconciliation and communal health.
- Binding and loosing authority
 - Principle: Heaven's standards govern earth; what is permitted/forbidden in God's Word is permitted/forbidden on earth.
 - Connection to Peter's confession: Church authority derives from alignment with Scripture; the gates of hell will not prevail against a church built on true confession.
- Consequence of refusal
 - Treat as a Gentile or tax collector—social and religious exclusion in that context; comparison includes Samaritans as despised "half-breeds," though Jesus showed Samaritans could do good (Good Samaritan).
 - Amish analogy: "Shunning" denotes turning away from unrepentant members who abandon the community's standards.
- Corporate prayer (vv.19–20)
 - Promise: If two agree in prayer, the Father acts; where two or three gather in Jesus' name, He is present.

- Contrast with Jewish synagogue tradition requiring ten men; Jesus affirms the efficacy of smaller gatherings.

7. Forgiveness Without Limits (Matthew 18:21–35)

- Peter's question and Jesus' answer
 - Rabbis: Forgive three times; Peter proposes up to seven (framed as forty-nine times in the lecture).
 - Jesus: "Seventy-seven times" (or seventy times seven—unlimited forgiveness); true love (1 Corinthians 13:5) keeps no record of wrongs.
- Parable of the unforgiving servant
 - Massive debt forgiven: One slave owed ten thousand talents; the lecture equates this to approximately \$6.2 billion at yesterday's gold price. The master forgives fully—no conditions or repayment plan—depicting God's grace to repentant sinners.
 - Petty debt unforgiven: The forgiven slave throttles a fellow slave over one hundred denarii (about \$5,000), refuses mercy, and imprisons him despite the same plea for patience.
 - Justice and warning: Fellow slaves report; the master condemns the wickedness of unforgiveness; he hands the offender to torturers until full repayment (the impossible \$6.2 billion). Jesus warns: The heavenly Father will do likewise if you do not forgive from the heart.
- Nature and necessity of forgiveness
 - Forgiveness is a heart matter—commanded in Colossians 3:13 ("just as the Lord forgave you, you must do also").
 - Signs of regeneration: A Christian who cannot forgive has forgotten Christ's forgiveness toward them.
 - Jerry Vines' metaphor: Forgiveness unlocks resentment's door, releases hate's handcuffs, and breaks bitterness's chains; unforgiveness breeds resentment, bitterness, and hatred, consuming the heart unless repented of.
- Practical reminder
 - Quoted poem (via Trey): "To live above with the saints we love will be glory; to live below with the saints we know—that is another story." Used to encourage persistent forgiveness in real communal life.

8. Practical Church Application: Contracts and Conduct

- Teacher contracts for discipline and integrity
 - Before the Matthew series began (January), Bible fellowship teachers and assistants at First Baptist Church were asked to sign contracts committing to doctrinally sound teaching, supporting church ministries (including financial faithfulness), regular attendance, and moral conduct befitting a child of God.
 - Rationale: Public representatives of God must maintain exemplary personal conduct since others watch; step one in implementing church discipline and accountability.
 - Confidentiality regarding who signed is maintained; this underscores seriousness and privacy in keeping with Matthew 18 principles.

Questions

- [Insert Question/Confusion]

Assignments

- [] 1. Reflect personally on areas where pride may overshadow humility; identify one concrete practice to cultivate childlike humility for God's glory.
- [] 2. Examine your conduct for potential "stumbling blocks" to children or fellow believers; take immediate, specific action to remove one identified stumbling behavior or habit.
- [] 3. If aware of a brother/sister in persistent sin, initiate Step 1 of Matthew 18:15—private, loving conversation aimed at restoration.
- [] 4. Organize or join a small corporate prayer gathering (two or three) to intercede for a person or issue of grave concern.
- [] 5. Review church or ministry commitments (doctrinal, attendance, support, moral conduct) and, if applicable, reaffirm in writing your adherence to these standards.
- [] 6. Practice intentional forgiveness toward someone who has repeated offenses against you; keep no record and forgive "from the heart."
- [] 7. Meditate on Colossians 3:13 and 1 Corinthians 13:5; journal how Christ's forgiveness informs your willingness to forgive others.
- [] 8. Parents and educators: assess children's exposure to humanistic philosophies; implement one strategy to counteract with biblical truth in home or classroom.