

**Text:** Matthew 18:6-11

**Title:** Offenses and Woes

**Truth:** A key factor in our future judgment is how we treat other Christians and how we handle sin in our own lives.

**Date/Location:** Wednesday May 10, 2022 at FBC

## Introduction

Matthew 18:6-11 "But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. <sup>7</sup> "Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!

<sup>8</sup> "If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast *it* from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire. <sup>9</sup> "And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast *it* from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire.

<sup>10</sup> "Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven. <sup>11</sup> "For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.

## I. Offenses Toward Christ's Believers, v. 6-7

- A. People who come to believe in Christ are like little children in the sense of their faith, humility, and dependency on their Father—God. They are not concerned about who is the greatest. Rather, they are glad to have a relationship with their Father.
- B. The end of the previous paragraph, verse 5, alerts us to what is coming next. Note: "Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me." In verses 1-5, Jesus is speaking of literal children, and using their dependency and humble state to illustrate a likeness with people of any age who are converted. In our previous message, I explained that in verse 5, I do not believe Jesus

is suddenly switching definitions from children-as-representing-believers to just “believers.” So he is still talking generally about children-in-age representing children-in-likeness. People who kindly receive and care for a little child-in-age or little children-in-likeness, like the child Jesus placed in their midst or like the converted believer, are demonstrating godly character and are demonstrating that they too have received Jesus Christ in humility—if indeed they have. The believers-are-like-children idea is still here. The nuance of receptivity toward little ones—including believers in Christ—is important.

I grant that this can be confusing. Is Jesus talking about literal children or child-like-believers? Well, both in my view, with a focus then on the receiver’s character. If you receive either children or child-like-believers, *in the name of Christ*, you are demonstrating receptivity toward Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup> But I can certainly see the argument in favor of verse 5 referring *only* to child-like-believers. As far as I understand, the final analysis about this verse has to do with the recipient, his or her attitude, and how he is related to Christ.

In any case, the Lord is about to make it precisely clear who he is talking about in verse 6.

- C. Contrasted with the nice treatment of children in verse 5 is verse 6: people who, instead of treating little ones well, treat them poorly. And now the Lord specifies that He is talking about little ones “who believe in me.” So He restricts the metaphor to those who are believers—not little children-in-age at this point. The application of this verse to harming little children is often noted, because of their relative helplessness and innocence. And sometimes that becomes a person’s main understanding of the verse. That point is a good illustration, but it is not the meaning. The meaning is that those who cause a believer to sin are in big trouble with God.

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<sup>1</sup> Note: I am not saying that being nice and donating to Feed the Children turns you into a Christian regardless of whether you acknowledge Christ or not. If you profess to be a follower of Jesus, and are living out the faith of Christ that you profess, thus treating little ones and believers with care in the name of Christ, that is good evidence of your salvation.

Such “causing to sin” could happen in a myriad of ways, by putting believers into impossible situations where they cannot operate in good conscience no matter which “choice” they make. Maybe a violator somehow entices or seduces a Christian into immorality. Maybe a teacher has it out for Christians and (this does happen) specifically desires to ruin their faith.

- D. Those who do such things are going to receive a severe punishment from God. The idea of “better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck” shows how severe the punishment will be because *that* is a very unpleasant end—and a very certain end with no escape. The millstone was so large that a beast of burden had to be attached to it to turn it. This may seem to be imaginary only, but it was a cruel type of punishment that was sometimes done by those in the ancient world. People are so depraved that they become keen to invent new and horrifying ways to kill their opponents. That is sick. But how bad all that is, the Lord is saying that for a sin-causing offender, it will be *worse*.
- E. Then our Lord proclaims something like an OT prophet would say: Woe! This is an expression of extreme displeasure in God toward offense-causers and indicates a coming disaster for them. It is forward looking in the sense of bringing catastrophe.
- F. Paradoxically, despite the Lord’s displeasure at these situations, they are inevitable. They “must come” but it is woe to that man who brings them. The Lord Himself had to be crucified, but woe to that man who betrayed him (Matt 26:24 // Mark 14:21 // Luke 22:22). We may not like the fact that bad things must happen, but God has arranged (ordained) that they will happen. We must deal with it in the best way possible.
- G. I just heard an interview in which a former Seal explained how the Navy Seals training program includes punishment to the unit of men who have done nothing wrong. That is designed to test their mental resilience and to teach them that when bad things happen, you have to “get over it” and move ahead. That seems to be a wise training approach to deal with real life garbage that will come to the Seals. We would have to say that God is far wiser than Seal trainers, and knows what is best for His people and His world and

His glory and everything else. It seems reasonable, if not pleasing, that He has included bad things in the world in order to train His people up in the way they should go.

## II. Offenses Toward Yourself, v. 8-9

- A. We have seen the idea before that if your hand or foot causes an offense to you, you should cut it off. See Matthew 5:29-30. In other words, if you sin, break the law of God, etc. then you need to do something about that. Do you remember what this means?
- B. What is *cannot* mean is that by self-mutilation you will solve your sin problem. Cutting off body parts does not change the heart of a person. Cutting off a hand or foot or gouging out an eye does not circumscribe the heart!
- C. What it does mean is that you deal with sin “with extreme prejudice.” You handle sin in your life with drastic measures, whatever it reasonably takes to remove the sin, cut off the opportunity, refocus your attention toward holy things, etc.
- D. Why do you do this? Because allowing sin to fester in your life means that you are not going to enter eternal life. Believers do not live like that. The penalty for sin not under the blood of Christ is so severe that it would be better to go to heaven missing an eye, hand, and foot, than to go to Hell with all your parts. Again, hypothetically. The only way you really go to heaven is by repenting of sin and trusting the Savior, which trust—when genuine—has built into it the right kind of repentance.

## III. Despising Christians, v. 10-11

- A. The Lord then warns about one sort of sin that needs to be “cut off” which is despising other believers. Not only doing something to them, but thinking and acting *toward* them is an issue we need to watch. Do you look down on or scorn other Christian people because of whatever reason? Do you hold someone in contempt or have an aversion to someone? Do you think of *all* Christians with contempt? Do you treat some in an unkind way or a way that lacks graciousness?

- B. Do not do that! They are children of the Heavenly Father. They will stand before Him as judge and give an account of themselves. And so will you.
- C. The text recording Jesus’s words does not jump to future judgment like I did. What Jesus says instead is “because their angels always see the face of My Father in Heaven.”
- D. The motivation for not looking down on other believers is that there are angels who look out for God’s people. It is too much on the basis of this text to derive a full-blown doctrine of individually-assigned guardian angels for each person. But...there is something here. Read Hebrews 1:14.
- E. Angels plural are watching out for believers plural. Angels serve generally—not specifically as far as we are told in Scripture. Angels exist to serve God and God’s people. The phrase “seeing the face of My Father who is in heaven” means that they are intently awaiting the Lord’s any command to help a Christian. They stand at the immediate ready to intervene if God commands so. Thus you should not despise others, for an angel may come to help that person, and that means he might have to put you in your place. I am not sure how *that* works, but I do not care to find out by experience either.
- F. The angels’ attentiveness is an example for us. Are we as attentive to God’s word as the angels are? Are we ready to obey at the least indication of the Lord to use us as His servants?
- G. Thank the Lord for this. He never leaves us nor forsakes us. If he withholds the help of an angel, it is in accordance with His good and wise plan. If He wants to send help, He can do so in an instant. Even Jesus Himself said that He hypothetically had access to a myriad of angels to help him, but He could not do that and fulfill the Scriptures that He must die for sinners—Matthew 26:53-54.

## Conclusion

Verse 11 is found elsewhere in Scripture (Luke 19:10), but in some manuscripts it is not present at this location. No matter, for we know it is true. It’s placement here can be justified because it fits with verse 12 and following. We could easily imagine how it

parallels the angelic help. Here is how: if God sees one lost and He wants to save that one, He will see to it by seeking that lost one, even to sending an angel to guide.

Now note, please, that when I say the above, I am NOT suggesting that an angel comes to help the person in a visible fashion. He may come through another person; he may do some things unseen or behind the scenes. We simply do not know. But it seems clear to me that the vast majority of angelic ministry is unseen. Some was seen in “Bible times” but verifiable occurrences of it today are not found.

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