

# A Study of the Christ

## Text

	<b>Matthew</b>	<b>Mark</b>	<b>Luke</b>	<b>John</b>
Disciples argue about greatness	18:1-6	9:33-37	9:46-48	
John's zeal without understanding		9:38-42	9:49-50	
Warnings about stumbling blocks	18:7-11	9:43-50		
Parable of the lost sheep	18:12-14			
Instructions on church discipline	18:15-20			
Peter's question about forgiveness	18:21-35			

## Overriding Principles

- True greatness is found in the unpretentious attitude of a child.
- False teachers are subject to the wrath of God.
- God has a strong emotional tie to His children!
- Both repentance and forgiveness are to be respected by God's people.

## Key Verses

- "Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:4).
- "... but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it is better for him that a heavy millstone be hung around his neck, and that he be drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matt. 18:6).
- "What do you think? If any man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go search for the one that is straying? And if it turns out that he finds it, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray" (Matt. 18:12-13).
- "And if your brother sin, go and reprove him between you and him alone, if he listens to you, you have won your brother (Matt. 18:15).
- Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven" (Matt. 18:21-22).

## Points of History, Culture, Words, and Grammar

### Rivalry among the Disciples

- The disciples had been arguing about which of them was the greatest (**Lk. 9:46**); they inquired concerning Jesus' standard of greatness (**Matt. 18:1**); but when He asked them what they had been discussing, they were embarrassed and would not speak (**Mk. 9:33-34**). It is best not to have a hidden agenda with the Christ—it isn't hidden to Him.
- The culture Jesus lived in was very conscious of status, class, and rank; Jesus would have none of it (**Matt. 18:1-5**).
- A small child is commonly most uninterested in rank. They do not think in terms of "who is the greatest?" Small children are often eager to serve. As they age they tend to want to be served. Let us never "grow" out of the eager, humble attitude of a child.
- Humility is the key to greatness (**Matt. 18:4**; cf. Lk. 18:9-14; Matt. 20:20-28).
- People with humble, childlike attitudes are to be received and appreciated. To fail to do so is to fail to receive Jesus and the Father (**Lk. 9:48**).

### Warnings against Stumbling Blocks

- People who work for Christ in the truth of His word are not stumbling blocks, even if they are not in our immediate group. A sectarian spirit must not accompany zeal for the truth (**Mk. 9:38-40**). A sectarian spirit causes "little ones" to stumble (**Mk. 9:42**).
- **Mark 9:40**, "For he who is not against us is for us," may seem somewhat at odds with Matthew 12:30, "He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters." They are just two ways of viewing support of the Lord's cause. Those that do not oppose are also those that support. Clearly the non-opposition context of **Mark 9:40** is that of service (**Mk. 9:38-39**).
- Even a cup of water given to a follower of Jesus will not go unrewarded. The oriental mind connected the servant with the master—to honor the servant is to honor the master (cf. Matt. 25:31-40).
- "Reward" in **Mark 9:41** is best understood as representing God's approval. The thought is that one who honors a follower of Christ will not fail to have that action approved by the Father. What God approves, we should not oppose.

- God's anger is particularly fierce toward those who cause Christians to stumble— i.e. fall from grace (**Matt. 18:6-8**; cf. Gal. 5:4; 1:6-9).
- All who hold false ideas are not viewed in the same way. Those who lead astray are held in contempt; those who are led astray are viewed with a profound sadness.
- On the personal level, if we have something that threatens to cause us to stumble, we must be willing to do whatever it takes to correct the problem (**Mk. 9:43-50**).
- Hell is real (**Mk. 9:48**)!
- Persecution will test every Christian; it will reveal the heart. No doubt an association is found in **Mark 9:49** with the salt Leviticus 2:13 that was a symbol of covenant in Jewish grain offerings (cf. II Tim. 3:12; Matt. 5:13).
- Those once saved, can be lost (**Mk. 9:50**).
- The angels that are associated with the "little ones" can be explained by understanding that angels are ministering servants to the saved (cf. Heb. 1:14). In God's providential care, the way God operates in our age, angels play a part. How they do this, I do not know. That they do this, I do know!
- As angry as God is when His children fall away, He is equally elated when they return. We must share the Father's concern and compassion; we must seek to restore the fallen. (**Matt. 18:12-14**). Some, however, are intent on leaving, we can only hope and pray that their hearts will change (cf. Lk. 15:11-32).

### **Repentance and Forgiveness**

- When sin of such a nature as to cause us to lose a brother is committed, we are to try to win our brother back (**Matt. 18:15**). This naturally follows the proactive admonition of **Matthew 18:12-14** which the contextual nature of the offense.
- Privacy is to be respected as long as it is practical (**Matt. 18:15**).
- Because of the tragedy of being lost, we are not to give up easily on a brother whose soul is in jeopardy. Witnesses are to be brought in to confirm the problem and encourage repentance. (**Matt. 18:16**). These witnesses must either know of the sin, or have the fact of the sin proved to them. A person cannot be judged on the basis of only one person's accusation (Deut. 19:15).
- If this does not work, the congregation is included that their admonition might turn the heart of the offender back to God (**Matt. 18:17**; cf. I Cor. 5:1-8; II Cor. 2:1-11; 7:8-16).
- If this fails, the unrepentant brother or sister is no longer to enjoy the fellowship that is given to faithful brethren. Jews did not share religious fellowship with tax

collectors (traitors) or Gentiles, nor did they deal with them as though they were acceptable to God (**Matt. 18:17**). Wisdom must be used in such matters. We must keep sight of the purpose of all this—to restore the lost.

- **Matthew 18:18**, when properly translated, establishes that when we conduct God's business in His way, He supports our actions: "... whatever you shall bind on earth *shall have been bound* in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth, *shall have been loosed* in heaven." The Creator, not the creation, makes the rules.
- It is also important to note that **Matthew 18:20** is within the context of discipline, not God's general presence with believers. A single Christian worshipping on the Lord's Day need have no fear that God is elsewhere!
- Peter was no doubt thinking that he was very liberal in his suggestion that seven might be the limit of forgiving a brother who sinned against him. The Rabbis taught that three was the limit. Needless to say, Peter's "generous" standard didn't come close to God's merciful provisions (**Matt. 18:21-22**).
- To reinforce the truth about forgiveness, Jesus used a parable (**Matthew 18:23-35**). God forgives great debts in His merciful outreach; men are more apt to hold sin against their brethren.
- And yet, we must remember that repentance is to precede forgiveness (Lk. 17:3; 23:34 and Acts 2:36-38).
- In the parable, the amount forgiven was about ten million dollars, the amount refused forgiveness was about eighteen dollars (**Matt. 18:24, 28**).
- The consequences of an unforgiving heart are personally disastrous (**Matt. 18:33-35**; cf. Matt. 6:12, 14-15)!

## Application to the Church

- Humility must reign among us.
- Service to others must be seen as the way of greatness.
- God cares deeply for His children.
- We dare not be a stumbling block to each other by selfish actions and words.
- Yet, truth cannot be compromised; sin must be faced and sinners must repent.
- Forgiveness brings a sweet savor to the throne room of the Father.
- The unforgiving heart will be punished.
- Lost brethren are to be aggressively sought to the extent that they will allow.

## Who is Jesus?

- He, the King of kings and Lord of lords, demonstrated greatness through humble service.
- He passionately cares about issues that deal with salvation.
- He shows both the goodness and the severity of God as He displays both mercy on the repentant and judgment on the false teachers.
- He wants His church working together in humble service to the cause for which He went to the cross.