Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Childlikeness of Believers, Part 2
Scripture: Matthew 18:10-14
Code: 90-347

The Word of God is an inexhaustible treasure. It yields to us unending riches as we open it up. And let's do that again, the eighteenth chapter of Matthew is our text, the eighteenth chapter of Matthew and we are listening to the instruction of our Lord on the subject of the childlikeness of the believer.

This is such a monumental portion of Scripture that I want to read the opening 14 verses and even though we have already spent one message looking at this, I want to bring it all back to your minds so I want to read from verse 1 down through verse 14, Matthew 18.

"At that time the disciples came to Jesus saying, 'Who then is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?' And He called a child to Himself and set him before them and said, 'Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. And whoever receives one such child in My name, receives Me. 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. Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks, for it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes. And if your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you, for it is better that you enter into life crippled or lame than having two hands or two feet to be cast into the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than having two eyes to be cast into the fiery hell. See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually behold the face of My Father who is in heaven.'"

And then dropping down to verse 12, "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 and search for the one that is straying? And if it turns out that he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray. Thus it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish, or be destroyed."

Now as we learned in the beginning of this study, believers are commonly referred to as children. And this may be the sort of foundation of that. We understand ourselves in the church to be the children of God. Our Lord in this text reminds us that no one enters the Kingdom unless he or she becomes like a little child. Verses 3 and 4 then tell us that we enter the Kingdom like a

child...humble, dependent, weak, ignorant, immature, unaccomplished, needy. That's how we enter the Kingdom. Having entered the Kingdom as children, we remain children. We then are instructed to treat each other like children.

How do you treat children? Verses 5 through 9, you protect them from damaging influences. First of all, in verse 5, you receive each other as though you were receiving Christ. That's the positive side. That is to say you treat other believers the way you treat Christ. How you treat another believer is exactly how you treat Christ. And then on the negative side, you do nothing to cause them to stumble into sin, you'd be better off dead. Then our Lord goes on to say, we expect the world to cause us to stumble. We expect the unregenerate world and its system to produce temptation that has its effect upon us. But it is unacceptable to the Lord that solicitation to evil of any kind would come from fellow believers. Woe to those who cause another believer to stumble. Judgment, condemnation is pronounced on those who solicit other believers to engage in sin directly or indirectly. So whatever it takes to avoid doing that, that's what you should do. Take dramatic action, and He uses the imagery that's very vivid..cut your hand off, cut your foot off, pluck your eye out. Do very, very severe things that's metaphorically speaking, that's an exaggerated way trying to make a point, do whatever it takes, whatever dramatic action you have to take, in order to not lead another believer into sin. This is part of receiving them as you would receive Christ and protecting them as you would protect a child.

This is obvious to all of us. We all understand the parental duty and even the sibling duty and even the extended family duty and even the general duty that all of us have to be protective of children. We all understand that. We understand what a horrible thing it is to abuse children, to harm children, to bring them in their weakness and dependence in the situations that devastate them. Everybody understands that.

Well that's the picture that transitions over into the spiritual realm. We are to receive one another as we would receive children, with love and acceptance and tenderness and kindness and affection and we are to protect each other as we would protect children from what is damaging.

Now when you come to verses 10 to 14 is where we ended last time, and where I want to return for this time, we are instructed here that we are also to care for children, to care for children. It's not just receiving them as we would receive the Lord in a general sense, with love and affection. It's not just protecting them. It is providing for them all that we can. That would be an expression of care, assuming the responsibility we have for the spiritual care of other believers.

After this section comes the section on discipline. We are to discipline one another like children. And then a final section in this chapter, telling us we are to forgive one another like children.

Now we began to look at the section from verses 10 to 14 last time which talks about how we are to make sure that we express care toward those who are fellow children of the Lord. And I want to go back to that because I think it has so many very practical implications. And I want to kind of lay those out for you. I want to give you the practical implications of this instruction and then I want to give you the motivation for it, because both of those things come out of this text. We could call it this, let's talk about the rule which our Lord establishes in verse 10, and the reasons which He unfolds in the remaining part of the section, verses 10 through 14.

So, the rule...verse 10...the rule. “See that you do not despise one of these little one.” And then the reason is triggered by the connective preposition “For,” or you could translate it, “Because,” and then you have the reasons to follow. But first, before the reasons, here's the rule.

It is literally in the Greek “See that you do not,”horate(??), having to do with the eyes, with vision. But metaphorically, another way to translate it would be “Be careful...be careful that you do not think down, kataphroneo, to look down on someone, to think little of someone, to have no regard for someone, to have no respect for someone, to treat them with contempt or disdain, to see them as valueless, worthless, or just essentially to be totally indifferent to them.” The command is you must not be indifferent to the spiritual needs of any other believer, no matter who that believer might be. Be warned, do not ever allow yourself to be indifferent to or contemptuous toward any other believer. That's what is intended by the very specific singular number indicated in verse 10 that you do not despise one of these little ones.

We're not talking about babies. We're not talking about physical babies. We're not talking about actual children. We've already covered that. Go back to verse 3, “You become like children when you enter the Kingdom.” Go back to verse 6, we're talking about these little ones who believe in Me. So it is believers here who are identified as if they are children. And in a real sense we are. We are the offspring of God. We have been born into His family and we are His children.

But it's not just that. We remain needy. We remain weak. We remain dependent. We remain in the position of needing assistance and needing help and needing strength and provision and care from those around us. No one is to look with indifference or disdain on one single believer. Every believer is precious. And the Lord will not have any who belong to Him ignored or treated with unkindness or indifference. We expect the world to treat believers like that, not other believers.

Now remember, I told you last week, this is the first instruction the Lord ever gave to the church. This is the first instruction the Lord ever gave to the church. And it comes, by the way, along time before the Great Commission. Of course, in the end, the goal of the church in the world is to proclaim the gospel and see people saved, right? That's why we're here...that's why we're here. Go into the world proclaiming the gospel, preaching the gospel, baptizing people teaching them all things whatsoever I've commanded you, Jesus says at the end of the gospel of Matthew. And there are other forms of

the Great Commission in the synoptic gospels, Mark and Luke. That is the end of the church in terms of its purpose in the world. That's the goal. But the means to that is a strong mature church, pure. A church that internally is strong because it expresses love and mutual ministry. The Lord desires that we be built up together as believers so that we can have a unified strong testimony to the world. That's why when you go to Ephesians chapter 4 you have a very similar pattern, you have Apostles and prophets, evangelists, teaching pastors who have the responsibility for the edifying or equipping of the saints to do the work of the ministry that the body may be built up. And when the body is built up, then you speak the truth powerfully in love.

The first instruction is for the church to be the church. And when the church is the church, then its foundational testimony undergirds its message. The church that is strong is a church that builds credibility into its message. And we discussed that a little bit last time. The Lord, first of all and foremost, at the starting point, is concerned about how believers treat each other and then gets to how believers treat non-believers. It is again back to the idea that the maturing of the saints is the path to effective evangelism. It is when unbelieving people see the power of Christ exhibited in the lives of believers and in the community of believers that exist in the body of Christ that the testimony of the gospel becomes believable. Again we expect the world to act like the world.

The world, of course, looks down on the lowly, for the most part. Despises the simple minded, the humble, the meek, the weak. The world lifts up and exalts the great, the prominent and demeans the rest. That is not the Lord's way of dealing with His church. And we better get used to dealing with the lowly because that's basically most of us.

First Corinthians tells us in chapter 1, “There are not many mighty, not many noble. God has chosen the lowly and the base and the nobodies and the nothings.” And so the church is primarily made up of these kinds of people. We are called then to express loving care and respect for every person in the church, no matter who they may. May be weak, may be ignorant, may seem to lack giftedness, may be poor, may be uneducated, may be socially deficient, may be helpless, may be dependent. we are to care for all of them. The psalmist said in Psalm 15 that a true worshiper honors all those who fear the Lord.

Now, having said that and we talked a little about that last time, I want to kind of dive in a little deeper and sort out some of the things that might help you give some practical handles to this very general idea. How are we likely to mistreat other believers? How are we likely to do that?

Let me give you a list, okay? So if you want to write it down, here's number one. These are ways of showing disdain to other believers. These are ways of despising other believers, thinking little of them.

Number one, and they're not in any particular order, other than the order that they come to my mind. Number one, by flaunting our liberty...by flaunting our liberty. This is a principle that's laid out in the New Testament very clearly by the Apostle Paul. It is a point that he wants to make again and again. But for at least one illustration of it, let's go to Romans 14 and 15, and I'm going to do this briefly because I have written down about nine of these, so we need to work through. Romans 14:3, “Let not him who eats regard with contempt him who does not eat. And let not him who does not eat judge him who eats, for God has accepted him.”

Now this points up a basic problem that existed in the early church. You had people in the church who came out of a Gentile background, out of a Gentile background let's say that was filled with idolatry. Whenever they went to a pagan feast or festival, they ate the food that was offered to idols. And so eating meat offered to idols was part of their worship. When such a person came converted to Christ, it was a problem for them to eat meat offered to idols because they associated that fully with their idol experience and with their demonic past. And so, they couldn't do it. Their conscience wouldn't let them eat meat offered to idols.

Such a person might come to the house of a believer and because his conscience was pounding him on this issue because of his background, he might say that this is nice meat but where did you get it? Well I bought it down at the temple market cause that's the best prices. Well, then that was meat offered to an idol, a portion of it was burned on the altar to the idol, another portion of it was taken to the temple butcher shop and sold to make money to support the priest and the false religion. And so some very, very sensitive new believer just converted out of that would say, “I'm sorry, I can't eat that. I can't eat that.”

And some Christian might say, “Look, you've got to get used to being free. An idol is nothing, an idol is nothing, you're free to eat. You don't need to restrain yourself. I'm telling you, you need to grow up. I put a lot of money into this, we've gone through a lot of preparation, just sit there and eat and don't make an issue.” And so what you're doing is training that person to violate their conscience. They're going to have a hard time swallowing it, it might even make them sick if it's that serious an issue.

Just to jump quickly, you might have a situation similar to that with a Jew. You might be a Gentile and a new Jewish believer comes to your house and you serve him pork. And he says, “My whole life I've been told I can't eat that.” Yeah, but you're now free in Christ. Rise, Peter, kill and eat. The dietary laws are now gone. They have been eliminated and you might in the name of your freedom want to force that believer to do something that is against that believer's conscience. You don't want to do that.

Chapter 15 of Romans and verse 1 helps us because this is what Paul writes. “We who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves.” It might take

a while for that person to get to the point where they can exercise that freedom. It might be that in another context, a more modern context, somebody comes out of a background of drugs associated with rock and roll so that they have a terrible aversion to drugs and the kind of music that went along with that. You might say, “Hey, music is a neutral issue. Music is just notes assembled in some arithmetic way and it's not moral, etc. etc.” And this person may say, “I'm sorry, I cannot listen to that without it putting me back in the very middle of the life I have been delivered from.”

You may have a person you want to take to a movie or to watch a certain thing on television and this thing which expresses certain immoral behaviors may bring back into that person's mind a recycling of all past temptation. You don't ever flaunt those freedoms that you think are yours in the presence of those who are still weak in the faith. And it gets very practical.

For me it's a simple thing. I don't do anything that I think might be a flaunting of certain liberty. And everybody watches me pretty close, no matter where I am...in elevators, walking down the street, eating in a restaurant, everywhere I go. And I don't ever want to do anything that may be a freedom but some weak brother, some new convert, some person saved out of something in the past would look at that and be deeply offended. It's just a question of restricting liberty so as not to offend.

Now it's somewhat easy to do that if you're trying to impress your Bible teacher. Somewhat easy to do that if you're trying to impress the girl you're trying to date. But that's not the picture here. How about the lowliest person in the fellowship? You have the same responsibility to that person not to flaunt any liberty in the face of that person because you don't think that person is particularly important.

There's a second way in which we might think little of other believers and that is simply not letting them into our little social world...not letting them have any special place. This is illustrated in James where the words of James are unmistakable. Verse 1, chapter 2, “Do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism. If a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes and there also comes a poor man in dirty clothes and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes and say, ‘You sit here in a good place,' and say to the poor man, ‘You stand over there, or sit down at my footstool.' Have you not made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil motives? And by the way, listen, my beloved brethren, did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the Kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? But you have dishonored the poor man.”

I love what he says in verse 7, he says, “Do such people that act that way not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?” And then in verse 9, “If you show partiality, you're committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.” It is not just committing adultery and murder, he says a couple of verses later, it is treating certain people because of their social place in life as beneath you. Don't do that in the body of Christ.

Thirdly, and it follows along in the same flow, another way that we can disdain others in the fellowship is by withholding from those in need...withholding from those in need. You know, in our fallenness we tend to be reciprocal. We do something for somebody with the expectation that they'll do it back. That if we treat them in a certain way, we are likely to be treated in an equal way sometime in the future. That is not the way we are to function in the body of Christ. First John chapter 3 gives us an illustration of that, and by the way, these illustrations that I'm giving you are just representative of other illustrations that are contained in the New Testament. But here's 1 John 3:17, “Whoever has the world's goods and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue but in deed and truth. And what is it that qualifies this person to receive our love? He has...what?...need...need.”

When anybody in need comes across our path, we have a responsibility without respect of persons if the opportunity presents itself and if we have the ability to meet that need to do just that. So we never flaunt our liberty in the face of those we're not trying to impress. We never look down on the poor and the lowly and those who are perceived by us to be a lower social strata. We never withhold what we have from those in need no matter who they are. The only thing that qualifies a person to receive from us is that they have the need....they have a need.

Another thing, there's no place in the body of Christ...I'll condense some of these...for looking with disdain on a Christian who has fallen....on a Christian who has fallen. You know, it's a strong temptation, isn't it, to hear that somebody has fallen into sin and feel self-righteous. “You know, I always wondered about that person. Yeah, that sort of fits. Yeah. I had suspicions about that person, not surprised.” And there's a temptation to gloat a little bit and certainly there's a temptation to take gloating to the level of gossip and pass on this sad demise, usually prefaced by such a statement as, “I don't know if I should say this or not...Oh I hate to say this, but...did you hear about So-and-so?” Then you launch and you feel so self-righteous because it's not you, it's somebody else. And the net effect of that is to give people the idea that you are the superior one.

But in Galatians 6 there's a completely different approach to someone who stumbles, who falls.

“Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, each one looking to himself lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens and thus fulfill the law of Christ which, by the way, is the law of love, for if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.” And that's exactly what you think when you gloat over another believer's fall into sin. You gloat over that because you think you're something better, superior. The truth is, you're nothing and you better look at your own heart carefully lest you too be tempted and end up in the same situation.

So what is the proper response when someone stumbles into sin? You who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, or meekness." The last thing you would want to do would be add pain, inflicting more damage on the person by a destructive reporting of the sin that spreads and can never be recovered.

I can take that a step further. And this is an important thing to say, I think. You can disdain someone, you can treat them in an unholy manner by rejecting them as if they were under the judgment of God. In other words, you can go just beyond the prurient kind of gossip about someone and you can actually become so self-righteous that you actually sort of think that you're lining up with God. "Well, you know, they got exactly what they deserved, living the way they live. This is righteous judgment on God's part." We can do that so easily.

Look at Galatians 4 for a minute. This could be unpacked in more detail. Galatians 4:13, "I beg of you, brethren...verse 12...because as I am I also have become as you are, you have done me no wrong, but you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time and that which was a trial to you in my bodily condition, you did not despise or loathe but you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus Himself."

Now you're moving out of the category of sin with this illustration into the category of trouble in life. Sometimes we can even go to the point where we say, "Oh, you know, someone's got trouble, someone's got an illness, someone's got a disease, things have gone wrong in their life and we can conclude that this may indicate that they are under the judgment of God." Paul's experience in Galatia was that he had come there, he had remained there, he had stayed there and preached there because he couldn't leave because he was ill. His constant illness plagued him. It produced some kind of disfigurement. It was a problem to them. He says that in verse 14, "That which was a trial to you in my bodily condition." It bothered them in some way, but they did not despise him, they did not loathe him, but they received him as if he were an angel of God. They did not yield to any temptation to judge the messenger by his personal struggles. Rather they received him as if he was an angel from God.

In fact, in verse 15, far from considering him under judgment, "Where then is that sense of blessing you had? I bear you witness that if possible you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me." Wow, that's how much you cared. You saw my infirmity. You saw my illness. You saw my sickness. Not as an indication of the judgment of God, but as something which you longed for me to be delivered from, and would you have been capable, you would have given me your own eyes if that would have remedied my situation.

Sometimes it's easy when interacting with people to draw conclusions about their problems being a result of some sin we don't know about. That's Job's friend's theology, right? Sure. That was the theology of the Jews, this man sinned, or else his parents sinned, that's why he's blind. That was the

reigning theology in the Judaism of Paul's day. The Galatians knew better.

You know, there are actually people today in the Charismatic Movement that think if you're still in a wheel chair, or if you're ill, or if you have cancer, somehow it's because you are living a substandard Christian life. It would be a little hard to endure.

Let me give you another one. And this I think is something that's so very important to say because of what's said later in this chapter in Matthew 18. We can belittle other believers by rejecting them when they confront our sinfulness. Now we're turning to real sinfulness, not imaginary sinfulness because of some physical infirmity. We can reject those who confront our sinfulness.

I will tell you, I have had this experience on many occasions. A person who is a friend, I can think of two men prominent in ministry, well-known, well known. In one case there was a serious immorality which I confronted in love, I think, and in compassion and as a result have never had one further word from that person in years. It was the end of any relationship of any kind. I can think of another prominent person and I personally spoke to him about severe theological misrepresentation, one with whom I communicated on a regular basis with whom I dialogued on a regular basis, with whom I shared ministry, never to have again another word spoken, though I have tried.

If that happens to me and it happens on that personal level, and this wasn't public, this was just personal...I know it can happen and it does happen in your lives as well. We are told if your brother's in sin, go to him, right? Going to get to that down in verse 50. Sometimes that's the end of a relationship. That's it. There will not be any more fellowship. That's the attitude.

We have to be very careful about that. Look at 1 Corinthians 16, I'll give you a brief illustration. “Now if Timothy comes,” verse 10, “see that he's with you without cause to be afraid, for he is doing the Lord's work as I also am. Let no one therefore despise him, but send him on his way in peace so that he may come to me for I expect him with the brethren.”

When Timothy came to Corinth, hey, he had a very harsh message, didn't he? A very strong message. Get your act together, stop sinning here and there. And Paul is saying, “When he comes, don't do anything to cause him to be afraid, he's doing the Lord's work as I am. Do not despise him.” It's easy for someone who's been confronted about their sin to despise the person who confronts them when that person in that confrontation is doing the Lord's work. He's just doing what he's supposed to do.

Let me give you a couple more. Another way that we can disdain other believers that the New Testament gives an illustration of is by looking down on those who are over us because they're young...because they're young. This, I think, I don't experience this anymore, but I sure did when I was young. First Timothy 4:12, Paul instructs Timothy and through Timothy to tell the church, “Let no

one look down on your youthfulness." Sometimes it's easy to belittle those who are young, feeling age gives us certain prerogatives, age gives us certain rights, age is tantamount to maturity. You know the truth, it's not. You can be old and immature and young and very mature. You can be old and carnal and young and spiritual. You can be old and sinful and be young and godly. Age is not the issue. You don't want to get to the point where if somebody is endeavoring to be your instructor, just the fact that they are younger than you is some reason to treat them with disdain or indifference.

That was the battle Timothy was fighting in the church because he was a young man and there were already elders in the church older than Timothy. And people in the congregation older than Timothy and they were treating him purely because he was young with a certain amount of disdain.

One other way, and there would be more in a more complete list. Another way you can belittle a believer, and we talked about this last time in the other context, is by taking advantage of a fellow believer for personal gain. Taking advantage of a fellow believer for personal gain.

First Thessalonians 4:6, "Do not defraud one another." Do not defraud one another. Do not take advantage of other Christians for personal gain. Don't use people.

Now let's go back to Matthew 18 and remind ourselves of what we're talking about in context. We're talking about the fact that we are commanded to be careful not to despise one fellow believer by flaunting our liberty, looking down on them because they're below us, socially, intellectually, economically, by withholding from them what they need when we have what they need, by looking with indifference or with disdain on one who has fallen, by rejecting some as though they were under the judgment of God, by rejecting those who confront our sinfulness, by belittling people because they're young, or by taking advantage of a fellow believer because of some personal gain. These are ways, and there are more, but they're some illustrations of despising one of these little ones. You don't want to do that.

And here are the reasons for the rule, okay? The reasons for, and this is very powerful, "For I say to you that their angels in heaven continually behold the face of My Father who is in heaven."

Why is this important? Reason number one, the relation of believers to angels...the relation to believers to angels. What a marvelous phrase, "their angels," possessive, the angels that belong to believers.

Please let me say what this does not mean. It does not mean that every child has his or her personal guardian angel. Nowhere in the Bible does it say that. First of all, it's not talking about children. It's talking about believers. There's nothing in the Bible that says every little child has a personal guardian angel. There's nothing in the Bible that says every believer has his or her personal guardian angel. Nowhere in the Scripture is the term "guardian angel" ever used.

All this says is that believers have their angels, that there are angels who are the unique protectors of believers. Angels assigned to them. By the way, the guardian angel idea comes from Judaism. The beautiful apocryphal story of Tobit indicated that there was a guardian angel for every individual. And there is even reference to that idea in Acts 15...or Acts 12 verse 15, but it doesn't affirm the truth of it, it just indicates that that's what the Jews believed. This is not teaching that.

All it is saying is that there are angels in heaven who have as their responsibility the care of believers. This is consistent with Hebrews 1:14, that believers are ministered to by the angels. They are there in heaven, it says, always beholding the face of My Father who is in heaven. That is to say they have constant access, they dwell continually in the presence of God.

By the way, this is reminiscent of a custom in eastern courts where men who are highly respected servants of the king were said to stand before the king and to see his face. And you see that in 1 Kings 10:18 and 2 Kings 25:19. So this was a common idea, that in the presence of a great monarch and a great sovereign, there were men who stood in his presence and looked into his face in order to hear his words at a moment's notice to pick up the concern or expression on his face.

So these angels that belong to the care of believers enjoy the marvelous privilege of all the holy angels of being in the presence of God in fellowship with Him, waiting to be dispatched at His discretion to do whatever it is that he would want them to do. They're all in the divine presence waiting to do the work on behalf of the saints to which God sends them.

Now if you were to sort of spread out around Scripture and pick out all of the areas in which angels do their work on behalf of believers, here's what you would come up with. First, they watch. First Corinthians 4:9, they watch the Apostles. Ephesians 3:9 and 10, they watch the church, they marvel at the church. They look for women to be subject to men. First Corinthians 11 says that the angels are concerned about that and they're watching the submission of women to men in the church. They watch the preachers, 1 Timothy 5:21. They will watch believers being rewarded, Matthew 16:27. They're watching. They're watchful with regard to the church.

Second thing, they're seen guiding. They're seen guiding and you see several illustrations of this in the book of Acts chapter 8, chapter 10, chapter 11. You see them in the Bible providing, providing for Hagar in Genesis 21, providing for Israel in Psalm 78, providing for Elijah in 1 Kings 19, and other occasions. You see them in Psalm 91 protecting the people of God. You see them delivering people such as in Acts chapter 5, Acts chapter 12. You see them dispatching answers to prayer in Daniel 9, Daniel 10 and even in Acts 12. You even see them attending to the death of the saints, Luke 16, Jude 9. They're seen in the Scripture in these ways involved in the lives of the people of God. We're cared for by angels. And for the sake of the desires of the holy angels given them by God to care for us, we need to be faithful to keep the rule and care for one another because this is what the angels

desire to see in the church.

Verse 11 is disputed in that sense that the statement in verse 11, “For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost,” doesn't appear in the oldest manuscr5ipts. It is a statement that is in the Scripture, you will recognize it from Luke 19:10. But in most of the early manuscripts, it wasn't in this location and so that's why it's put in brackets. And it is put here just to be safe, but most evidence would be that it belongs in Luke 19:10 and not here. So it would go to verse 12 and here is a statement that also adds a further reason...”What do you think? If any man has a hundred sheep and one of them has gone astray, does he not lead the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one that is straying?”

Now we move from the relationship of believers to angels to the relationship of believers to the Lord...to the Lord. And here we find that the Lord is seen like a shepherd. And who is in view here but God the Father because it is the angels who are looking in the face of the Father who is in heaven. And the Father is concerned about every single believer. And so here is a simple way to illustrate that. If a man has a hundred sheep and loses one, he leaves the ninety-nine, he goes to find the one. Another very simple parable that our Lord gave. And all it's trying to say is that as far as God is concerned, every single one of His sheep is very precious to Him.

I mean, you can't imagine coming to the dinner table, to put it in my own context as a father, and looking across at Patricia and saying, “Hey, one of the kids is missing. Where is this child? Where is this child?” And having her say, “I don't know, we've got three more, why worry about it?” What are you talking about? If one of them isn't there, you call...Hey, where are you? And if they don't answer you, you start looking around the house, and then you go outside. If you can't find them, you start calling the neighbors. You're not going to go any further until you know where that child is because each is precious, no matter how many you have.

And so it is with God. That's why you have the use of one here. “Do not despise one of these little ones, and if one of them goes astray, the Father is like a shepherd, concerned to leave the ninety-nine on the mountain and go and search for the one that is straying. And if He finds it, He rejoices over it, more than the ninety-nine which haven't gone astray because it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones be devastated.” That's the Greek term. Not that they're going to lose their salvation, but enter into devastating sin. Certainly in Judea it was easy for sheep to stray. The land is hilly and rugged, the pasture is very scarce. Sheep could easily stray into a ravine, a gully, some precipice, a ledge, dangerous, easily lost. Shepherds in the land of Israel then became tracking experts. They would be able easily to identify with this. It's not easy to find these sheep, they can get themselves into some very precarious predicaments, even if you can spot them, getting to them and getting them out of that situation is not simple. This isn't some flat land.

So the shepherd would leave all the sheep to find the one that had gone astray. We then care for each other like children, do the degree that we pursue each other back from danger, back from sin. And please notice a few things about this care. It is individual care. The Father leaves the ninety and nine to get the one. It is heartfelt care because when the Father finds the one, He rejoices over it. It is implied then that it is forgiving care. The emphasis here on restoration, recovery which implies forgiveness. And the Father's joy is great. He rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which had not gone astray. That passage right there, that statement alone could launch into a great message on forgiveness. God, you would think, would have a restrained joy, I mean, He would have the consummate joy over the people who didn't wander away but here it says He has the greatest joy over those who wandered away and are recovered. This is because God delights in forgiveness. This is not license to sin, this is simply the extent of God's grace.

Archbishop Trent wrote long ago, “It is as when the mother concentrates for the moment all her affection on her sick child, seeming to a bystander to love none but that child only. And actually rejoices at the recovery of that one more than the uninterrupted health of all the others.” Or to use Augustine's beautiful words, “What then takes place in the soul when it is more delighted at finding or recovering the thing it loves than if it had never lost it?” This is the love of God, this is His heart to recover. Arneau(??), the commentator said, “If it didn't please Him to get me back, my pleasure would be small. The longing of Christ to get the wanderer into His arms again for the satisfaction of His own soul, for His own joy is the sweetest ingredient in the cup of a returning penitence joy.”

It's an amazing thing. When you help a sinner recover, when you turn a sinner from his ways, as James 5 puts it, when you restore someone back, when the sinner is found and recovered, the sinner's great joy must be because of the Father's great joy. This is the greatness of God's grace. Why does He pursue us? Because He does not want us to be devastated. He stays after His own. He does not want us, of course, to lose our salvation, and He will not let that happen. Nor does He want us to be devastated. And so, He comes after us.

How we care for one another is important to the Lord. It is the foundation of life in the church and it is the foundation of our effective testimony. We are to be careful in this regard because it is a concern of the angels and they are concerned because the Father into whole face they look is concerned.

We enter the Kingdom like children. Now that we're in the Kingdom, we receive one another as we would receive children with love and tenderness and kindness knowing that how we receive each other is how we receive Christ. We protect each other like we would protect children from what could damage and harm them. We care for one another. We pursue one another when they wander away because this is the heart of God and this is the responsibility of the holy angels.

This is a high calling in the life of the church and there's more. In a couple of weeks we'll come back to this and find out about how we are to confront one another in sin and then to forgive one another.

Again, Lord, we come to you at the end of this lesson and look at Your Word and ask only, Lord, that You would help us because in our flesh and in our weakness it's so hard to live like this, it's so hard to rise above our weakness and our propensity toward the things that violate these commands. Help us, Lord, give us the grace to so live that we might receive one another as though we're receiving You that we might protect each other from sin, we might care for each other, that we might pursue each other because this is Your loving desire. May we manifest that love in the way we treat one another. May You be honored in Your church, in the life of Your church, in the body as it ministers mutually to one another. Thank You for this and grant us grace for this responsibility, in Christ's name. Amen.

Available online at: http://www.gty.org
COPYRIGHT (C) 2015 Grace to You
You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright).