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Peters Fish, Children (Part 2)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

In "Peters Fish, Children (Part 2)" by Steve Gregg, the importance of children in the ministry is discussed through the teachings of Jesus. According to Gregg, having leadership without children or having leadership over children can lead to problems in raising a family or managing a household. Jesus also emphasized the need to become like a little child in order to enter the kingdom of heaven. Gregg argues that we should not disregard children and instead recognize and honor their importance in the Christian faith.

Transcript

...to correspond to the five books of the Law of Moses. This is only a guess and we can't be sure of whether or not this is why Matthew has done it. But that Matthew has done it is indisputable.

And that's the case here in chapter 18 also. This is the fourth of the five. The only one remaining after chapter 18 will be the Olivet Discourse.

And here we have material that has parallels in a variety of places in the other Gospels. In fact, some of the material has even parallels in other parts of Matthew. You'll see, for example, in verses 8 and 9 of chapter 18, about if your hand or foot caused you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you.

If your eye caused you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you. That parallels what Jesus is recorded to have said back in Matthew 5 in the Sermon on the Mount. So Matthew not only has collected the sayings into topics, but he sometimes used the same sayings in more than one place.

Now I'm not saying that Jesus couldn't have said the same thing twice. In fact, it's a good chance he did. Any good teacher knows that especially oral teaching, which is not read with the eyes, is not retained well without repetition.

And therefore, probably a lot of the things Jesus said, he said many times. But Matthew obviously was selective in what he did record, and yet some sayings of Jesus he put in

two places. Some of the sayings of Jesus that are in the missionary discourse of Matthew 10 are also in Matthew's version of the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24.

Likewise, some of the sayings here in this discourse in Matthew 18 are found in Matthew chapter 5 in the Sermon on the Mount as well. Though not a lot of it. Other parallels in this chapter are parallels to thoughts in Matthew chapter 20 and in Matthew chapter 23, as well as places like Mark chapter 9 and a number of places in Luke.

I'll draw attention to those other places as often as we run into the occasion to do so. But Matthew 18 is a discourse, the entire chapter is. That is apparently, like several others in Matthew, a topical grouping of things that Jesus said, perhaps not all on the same occasion.

Some of it will be repetitious of what we've said before, and some of it will be found in other parts of the other Gospels, and we will not need to comment in depth about them. The material that we must take in this session is up through verse 14. And so in verse one, it says, At that time, the disciples came to Jesus saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child to him and set him in the midst of them and said, Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become his little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

Therefore, whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever receives one little child like this in my name receives me. Now, this is more or less parallel to Mark chapter 9. It's a little different in Mark 9, though, in a number of ways that are of interest.

The most important is the way that we find by comparing Matthew and Mark. We find that Matthew compresses the story, as he has in a few other occasions. When I've talked about one of the Gospel writers compressing a story, what I mean is that they shorten the way they tell it.

They leave out some details and just cut to the chase. We saw, for example, there's a story in Luke about the centurion who sent some of the elders of the synagogue to go to Jesus on behalf of his six servants. Matthew tells the story as if a centurion asked Jesus this, and Jesus said that, and so forth.

And you get the impression, reading Matthew's version in Matthew 8, that the conversation is directly between the centurion and Jesus. Whereas Luke decompresses the story and tells us that there was a little more detail than that. There's nothing dishonest or wrong about the way Matthew does it.

He simply shortens it. He simply gives the gist of a thing and doesn't give as much detail. But in Mark 9, verse 33, it says, Then he came to Capernaum, which we read already in Matthew 17.

It was at that point that the tax gatherers from the temple came to Peter. But Mark leaves that story out about the temple tax. And when he was in the house, he asked them, What was it you disputed among yourselves on the road? But they kept silent, for on the road they'd been disputing among themselves who would be the greatest.

And I guess they knew that wouldn't go down well with Jesus. They were still carnal, but they didn't want Jesus to know it. So some of them have been having a little argument about that as they trailed behind him, what they thought was beyond earshot from Jesus as they walked along the road.

When there's as many as twelve walking on a narrow road, they wouldn't probably all walk side by side. They'd probably walk in small groups, you know, in something almost like single file, only in little clusters. And apparently some of them were far enough behind Jesus on the road to feel that they could indulge in a little bit of one-upsmanship, and a little bit of arrogant speculation, as to which of them really deserved more honors in the kingdom of God.

But it's clear that they did not want Jesus to hear them. They must have known that this would go against his teaching and his whole spirit, but they still wondered. They couldn't help but wonder whether, you know, one or another would really have the prior place.

And when Jesus raised the question, he says, What were you talking about back there? They were embarrassed. They wouldn't speak. They were kind of ashamed, because it says they've been talking among themselves about who is the greatest.

And Mark says, And he sat down and called the twelve and said to them, If anyone desires to be first, he should become the last of all and servant of all. Then he took a little child and set him in the midst of them. And when he had taken him in his arms, he said to them, Whoever receives one of these little children in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives not me, but him who sent me.

Now, the way that Matthew compresses this is he just cuts to Jesus' teaching on the subject by saying, well, the disciples came to Jesus saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? When they came to him in the house, this question had been on their minds. Whether they posed it verbally or not is not clear in Mark. Matthew makes it sound like they just asked him outright.

It's possible that they did ask him outright and that Mark simply fails to mention it. That Jesus just said, What were you talking about? And they wouldn't speak initially. But then they finally, someone finally spoke and said, Well, who's the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? In any case, the question came out.

And it was on the minds of the disciples. And Jesus took it on himself to confront it and to do so with a little child. Now, we're not sure whose house he was in, that there was a

little child present.

Some have thought he might have been in, well, Peter's house is the likely place because in Capernaum, this seems to have been Jesus' regular headquarters. We know that he had first gone in there after his first synagogue preaching there and had found Peter's mother-in-law sick there. We're told that it was also Peter and Andrew's house.

These two brothers who were fishermen apparently ran a family business out of that one house. And that house is almost certainly the house that Jesus is most frequently found in, in Capernaum and probably in this case. Now, if there was a little child there, we have to ask ourselves, is it because a great multitude was with him, which included some children, and Jesus just grabbed one of the children in the crowd? We're not told there was a multitude on this occasion.

Now, on a previous occasion, you remember he was in that house, and it was so crowded with multitudes that people wishing to get to him had to go up on the roof and break the roof open to lower a man to Jesus. But we have the impression that no such multitudes were flocking to him at this point. And it's not likely that the child was just some neighbor kid who was there in the crowd.

But it was probably a child who lived in the house. Which means, if we would suggest it was Peter or Andrew's house, that it was probably either Peter's child or Andrew's. We don't know whether Andrew was married at this time, but we do know twice in the Bible it says that Peter was married.

Of course, Paul mentions that in 1 Corinthians 9. He mentions in 1 Corinthians 9 that Peter was a married man, and at that time, that is when 1 Corinthians was written, which was some 20 years after this point, probably Peter's children were grown, and Peter now was on the road with his wife. He took a wife about with him, but he didn't take children with him, we're told. We're not told that he didn't take children, but it doesn't say that he did.

We're just told this in 1 Corinthians 9, in verse 5, Do we have not the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles, the brothers of our Lord and Cephas? So, the other apostles took wives with them, but we're not told whether or not they took children. Perhaps it's to be assumed that if they had children, they took them too. But it's also possible that they didn't travel until their children were grown and raised.

Again, 1 Corinthians was written a couple decades after the time that Jesus stayed in Peter's house. And this child, by the time 1 Corinthians was written, would have been a grown man. Assuming it was a boy, a child.

We know that Peter was married back in the days of the Gospels, because it was his mother-in-law who was sick when Jesus first entered that house. So, Peter was married,

may have had children. If he didn't have children, it was one of those flukes where his wife was barren or something.

It would certainly be the exception. Most people who were married had children. So, I think it's not an unfair inference that this is one of Peter's children.

But, Peter, I've mentioned this before, I think one of the reasons the apostles didn't leave Jerusalem quickly, after Jesus ascended, and when he said, Go into all the world and preach the Gospel, the apostles didn't. They stayed in Jerusalem for years afterwards. But later they went out into all the world, at least tradition tells it.

I think maybe it's because they had to wait until their children were raised. That they knew there was a commission for them to fulfill, but they already had a commission given them by God, and that's in the Scriptures, to raise their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. And I think too many people have put mission work and other ministry work ahead of their obligation to raise their children.

And according to the qualifications for elders that Paul gives, those children can later disqualify their parents from ministry if the children are not in order, if the children are not believers. And it seems like the first priority is therefore for a man who would be in ministry to be the right kind of manager of his own household. Paul said if he doesn't manage his own household well, how can he manage the Church of God? In 1 Timothy chapter 3, suggesting that a man's child raising and management of his family and his household are prerequisites for his qualifying for positions of leadership.

And while it's true that the apostles were in leadership from the moment Jesus ascended, yet they may not have traveled because of their obligations at home. Peter may have had children. We're not told anywhere that he did, but this presence of this child in the house ready at hand might suggest that it was a family member, and since it was probably the house of Peter, it was either one of Peter's or Andrew's sons in all likelihood.

And he was a little child at that time. And therefore Peter might have had to stay in the area and not travel extensively until his children were grown. And then legend has it, or not just legend, but strong church tradition, that all the apostles at a later date did travel throughout the world and preach the gospel, but in the book of Acts for the first few decades they didn't.

And we don't know why. I'm only guessing. Having been in leadership without children, and having been in leadership with children, I can understand very much the logistics, the problems of really doing a good job of raising your family and also doing a good job of taking on a lot of responsibility for the church or something else.

It's not easy, and I personally think it's not a bad idea for churches to choose as elders

men whose children are grown. Not only because the men are then freer, freed up from family obligations, but because they have also shown what they can do. You can look at the outcome of their children and you can decide whether they're the type of persons, whether their children are the type of persons you want the members of the church to turn out to be under the leadership of such people.

And so the raising of the family is the proving ground for the minister. And of course, once the minister's children are grown, then he's got almost as much liberty as he had when he was a single man to travel and do things like that. I'm reading between the lines, and I may not be reading correctly, but I suppose, and I've felt this for a little while now, that probably the reason the apostles didn't travel immediately after Jesus ascended was because they had family obligations.

Peter apparently had children. Now, Jesus called one of these little children in the house to him in the midst of them, and he sat him on his lap and said, Assuredly, I say to you, we're back in Matthew, unless you are converted and become as little children, you'll by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Now, entering the kingdom of heaven is one of the prevailing themes in Jesus' teaching.

Of course, he talked about the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven a lot. Not in every case talking about the means of entry. Sometimes he talked about the nature of the kingdom.

He told parables about the kingdom and so forth. But on a number of occasions, he talked about qualifications for entering the kingdom of heaven, or the kingdom of God. To the disciples after the rich young ruler departed, he said, How hardly shall a man who has riches enter the kingdom of heaven.

Why would that be? Well, he also said almost immediately afterwards, How hardly shall those who trust in riches enter the kingdom of heaven. One of the reasons that a person with riches might have trouble entering the kingdom of heaven is because that person would tend to trust in his riches. People who have money do tend to trust in them, rather than in God.

And therefore, it would be hard for them. But there's another thing, too. People with riches are very seldom humble.

In a world that values people on their net worth in dollars, it's easy for a man who's got a lot of money and who's continually treated with deference by those who know that he has a lot of money to begin to feel pretty cocky, to begin to feel pretty self-secure. And therefore, to be very much unlike a child. A child is very dependent.

A child can't even go out and earn his own food. Can't put a roof over his own head. He's completely dependent on the gratis gifts of the parent, on the generosity of the parent.

And so, to become like a child, in one sense, means to come to a place where you realize that you're dependent for everything. A rich man is not likely to feel that quite as acutely as others are. And therefore, it's harder for him to enter, because you have to be like a child to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Another thing is that Jesus said to Nicodemus, in John chapter 3, that unless a man is born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. Same kind of idea. He can't get in, except this way.

He's got to be born again. And Jesus went on to talk about the spiritual birth. Now, it follows logically that if you are born, you are a child.

If you've just been born. Just like in the natural birth. When you're first born into this world, you are an infant, and then a child, and then an adolescent, and then an adult.

And so also, when it comes to spiritual birth, there are some who are spiritual infants. Paul said that the Corinthians were like that. He said, I couldn't give you solid food.

I had to give you milk. Because you were babes. That's in 1 Corinthians 3, verses 1 and 2. He said, to those who are mature, I give something else.

But to you, I could only give milk. Then John talks about the different levels of spiritual maturity, I guess we'd have to say. In 1 John, chapter 2, I believe it is.

1 John chapter 2, verses 12 through 14. John says, I write to you little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His namesake. I write to you fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning.

I write to you young men, because you have overcome the wicked one. I write to you little children, because you have known the Father. I have written unto you fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning.

I have written to you young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one. Most commentators seem to think that he's not talking to people who are physically children, or physically young men, or physically fathers. But rather those who in the church are spiritually infants, spiritually in their youth, and spiritually have become like fathers to the congregation.

Now whether that's his meaning or not, I guess could be disputed from the actual wording of the passage. But it would seem to acknowledge that there are different stages after rebirth that you go through just like after your first birth. And so Peter, in 1 Peter, right after he says, you've been born again, not with corruptible seed, but with incorruptible seed, he goes on to say, as newborn babes desire the sincere milk of the word that you may grow thereby.

This is 1 Peter 1.23, and followed by chapter 2, verse 2, which is only a couple of verses later. So after speaking of being born again, in 1 Peter 1.23, he says that as newborn babes, 1 Peter 2.2, newborn babes desire the milk of the word. So the idea is when you're born again, you become a baby.

Just like when you're born the first time you did, you're a spiritual baby. And so Jesus said, if you don't become like a little child, if you don't go back and become young again, he called this being born again. When he talked to Nicodemus, he said, you can't enter the kingdom of heaven.

And if anyone doesn't come that way, then they will not enter the kingdom. Now he also called this being converted in verse 3, Matthew 18.3. Surely I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children. Being converted and becoming as little children are either synonymous terms, or else one is the result of the other.

That when you're converted, you're born again, and you become thereby a little child again, even though you've been an adult, physically speaking. Conversion is a word that we use frequently in evangelical circles. I've heard it all my life, though I must confess I never really thought too much about its meaning.

To me it was just another term for getting saved, getting converted, and that's what it is. But again, it was just like a synonym that didn't have any particular meaning to me, except it talked about someone getting saved. The word converted, of course, is not a religious word.

The word convert means to change. You convert from AC to DC, or from 220 to 110 power, or whatever. There's all kinds of conversions that are made.

You convert from metric to whatever the other standard system is, or whatever. Conversion just means making a change, changing from one thing to another. And so, of course, he says you need to be changed and become like children.

That change, of course, is what we do call conversion. He used that word. But it is the change of being born again.

It is the change that comes as a result of repentance, changing your mind about your sin, repenting from your sins, changing the focus of your faith to God. And when you do that, you become, in many respects, like a little child again. First of all, you become inexperienced in the realm you've just been born into.

When a child is born the first time, he comes into the world without any experience. He has everything to learn. And at infancy, and in the very early years, the child knows that.

Eventually, children begin to feel like they know it all. But they still have a great deal to learn, even when they're at that stage. But a very small child knows that they don't know

anything.

And that's clear that they know, because they're always asking questions. What is that? Why is that? Who is that? They're information gatherers. They're hungry for knowledge.

Because they're inexperienced. So also, when a person is born again, they become, in that sense, like a little child. Because they don't know anything about the spiritual realm.

Now, some of them might have been very spiritual before becoming Christians. They might have been into the New Age, or into some other spiritual thing, or even into demonism. Many of them may feel like they have had lots of experience in the spiritual world, but really, such people should renounce anything they ever thought about the spiritual realm once they've been born again.

Say, well, they were in darkness then, and anything you learn while you're in the dark is not likely to be the truth. Every Christian will do himself a favor. If he comes to the Christian life thinking of himself as one who has everything to learn, being teachable, nothing will cause a person to grow more than to receive with meekness and teachable fitness the implanted Word, as James says, and to be taught everything from God.

And to acknowledge, you know, I'm new at this. I have no experience in this. A lot of times, people who have passed in the occult... I'm thinking of a particular female writer right now who was interviewed on the radio not long ago.

She was deeply involved in the occult before her conversion, and then she got saved, and she wrote a book of her testimony. And now, since then, she's written quite a few other Christian books about the spiritual realm, exposing it, and so forth. And I just caught a little part of the interview of her, but it sounded like she represents herself as an expert on the spiritual realm.

Now, maybe she is. Maybe in the years that she's become a Christian, she's just studied that out so much that she knows more about it than most theologians do. But I had the impression, and I've gotten this from other people too sometimes with this kind of past, that people who are converted out of witchcraft or out of magic or out of Satanism or something, they come into the Christian life often with a sense of arrogance that they know a lot about what's going on in the spiritual realm, and they have a lot to reveal to us Christians that don't know those kinds of things.

We had a lady in Bandon. She had been a massage therapist and deeply into the New Age movement there, and she was always telling us things. She just got saved through our ministry, and almost from her infancy in the Lord, she was trying to clue us in as to the nature of the spiritual realm.

Now, it doesn't hurt to have an informant from the other side telling us what they know and what they've seen, but the problem is that people often feel that their experience in

the world, whether it's their common sense, things they've learned, their business sense, their spiritual experiences, that somehow this gives them an edge on other people in the Church who haven't had those experiences. Really, nothing makes anyone mature in the Lord faster than experience with God. And experience takes years.

It takes time, just like it does in real life. You pick up a little here, a little there, line upon line, precept upon precept. And so, in one sense, a person who is born again into the spiritual life is a newcomer without experience, has everything to learn, and might as well acknowledge it.

And that requires humility, especially if the person is an adult who's been esteemed as a knowledgeable person in the realm they were in before. They may be an expert, even, in some field, and yet now they have to say, I don't know a thing. Teach me.

What's this mean? What's that mean? Why is this done? And so forth. Just like a little child. That's a humble state of mind.

In verse 4 here, Jesus said, Therefore, whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Now, I haven't always noticed humility in children. In fact, I must say there was a time when I wondered why Jesus had used a child as an example of humility.

I remember before I had children of my own, I very seldom saw children that I thought were humble. In fact, I have to say that humility is not the leading trait that I find in my own children as often as it should be. Pride is part of human nature, and it doesn't take very long for a human being, even in childhood, to develop a great deal of it.

But there are some areas in which children are forced to be humble. Again, they're too weak to do a lot of things that need to be done. They need help.

They need a jar opened, or a box opened, or a shoe tied, or something that they can't do for themselves. They need information that they don't know how to get for themselves, so they ask their parents. They can't fend for themselves.

They can't support themselves. And although they may, because of the depth of their human nature being corrupt, they may try to grab every bit of arrogance they can for themselves and take pride in what little achievements they have, they're still forced on a daily basis back to acknowledge their dependency. And that's a humbling thing.

But they live with it. They've always known their dependency. They've never been any other way.

It's harder for adults who have gotten past the state of childhood and have learned to take care of themselves and are rugged individualists. Guys like Jacob, you know, who had money and power and high birth and wits and physical strength. I mean, people, you

know, they've gotten past that neediness that they sensed in childhood and they've developed a sense of being able to handle things for themselves.

And for that person to come to a place where he becomes like a child again and acknowledges his total dependency on God, his total impotence to do one good thing, to change one bad habit, to develop one spiritual trait, and his total dependence on the grace of God to earn one bit of merit, his inability in this area is a humbling thing. And that is the very thing that keeps many people from ever becoming Christians. I must confess, I've never been able to relate to people like this.

People who are old, bitter on their deathbeds, and you talk to them about God and they still refuse. They don't want anything to do with the gospel. You think, what in the world could prevent them now? What do they have to lose? They're going to die tomorrow.

You know, what do they have to lose? And what they have to lose is their sense of self-salvation, their sense of pride, their sense of self-determination. They don't want to acknowledge that they need a handout from God. Children have no desire to deny that they need a handout.

My kids are asking me for handouts all the time. And therefore, a child is, in these respects, a good choice of illustrations of humility, because a child is dependent. A child is inexperienced.

A child needs parenting. A child needs help, needs information. That child is, as I say in a word, dependent.

And that's enough justification to say that you have to become like that to enter the kingdom of heaven. If you're rich, you'll have a hard time entering the kingdom of heaven, Jesus said. Because you don't feel dependent.

You feel money answers all things, Solomon said in Ecclesiastes. And certainly the man who's got a lot of money can certainly feel that way. The man who's got millions of dollars can pay his way out of any situation, he thinks.

Until he stands before a judge who doesn't take bribes, which he will on the day of judgment. But he doesn't feel like he needs God most of the time. And by the way, that is something that's acknowledged many times in the Scripture.

One of the places is in Proverbs chapter 30. In Proverbs chapter 30, verses 7 through 9, Agur, the writer of this proverb, said two things, I request of you. This is Proverbs 30, verses 7, 8 and 9. Two things I request of you, deprive me not before I die.

Remove falsehood and lies far from me, give me neither poverty nor riches. Feed me with the food you prescribe for me, lest I be full and deny you. And say, who is the Lord? Or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.

Now, he doesn't want poverty or riches. Now by the way, this guy's attitude is not right. A lot of people read this and say, now here's a good balance.

He's not too greedy, doesn't want to be rich. And he's not, of course, doesn't want to be poor. No one wants that.

He just wants to have what he needs. And, you know, that's a good balance attitude. I've heard preachers teach that Agur's got a good attitude here.

I think he's admitting a spiritual weakness that one needn't have. The Apostle Paul said, I have learned how to be abased and how to abound. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

I've learned to be content in whatever state I'm in. In Philippians 4 he said that. So, I mean, here Agur couldn't be abased or else he might steal.

He couldn't control his cravings if he lacked something to keep himself from stealing. He couldn't control his pride and his self-sufficiency if he became too rich. Paul could be rich, he could be poor, he could be either one.

And it wouldn't lead him into sin. That's a place of spiritual strength. But if a man is weak, it's good that he knows it.

And Agur certainly knew it. He said, if I was full, and that compares with being rich in the previous verse, I might deny you and say, who is the Lord? Every time I say, why do I need God? Why should I obey Him? I got money now. That's what Pharaoh said when Moses came to him.

Moses said, who is Jehovah? I mean, Pharaoh said, who is Jehovah? I should obey Him and let the people go. Pharaoh was a man of power and influence and wealth. Why should he listen to Jehovah? Too often people, although they don't say it quite in those rebellious tones, they have the same attitude secretly in their hearts when they see themselves as strong, rich, and powerful.

They need God for it. So the person who is going to enter the kingdom has to see himself as needy. See himself as coming to a point that is very much like that of a child coming to the world and be born again.

Verse 5, Jesus says, whoever receives one little child like this in my name, receives me. Now, at this point, that's the only point of resemblance, I think, in this passage with Mark 9. We saw Mark 9. In Mark 9, we read in verse 36 that Jesus took the child in His arms. But the only thing it records of Him saying about the child is in Mark 9, 37, which bypasses all the things we've seen so far in Matthew 18 and just comes right to verse 5 of Matthew 18.

Matthew 18, 5 says, whoever receives one little child like this in my name, receives me. Mark amplifies that statement in Mark 9, 37. Whoever receives one of these little children in my name, receives me.

And whoever receives me, receives not me, but him who sent me. It's a minor detail, but I point it out because it reflects on our ability to understand other passages sometimes. We have here in the second part of Mark 9, 37 another case of the Hebraism called a limited negative.

Not this, but that really means not only this, but also that. I say that because you need to be aware of those cases, because there are sometimes when you'd be led astray if you don't know this thing. But when He says at the end of verse 37, whoever receives me, receives not me, obviously means receives not only me, but also him that sent me.

But He says it as if you're not receiving Him at all. But that's, of course, not how He means it. You're receiving Him, but with Him you're receiving God Himself.

That is also paralleled in John 13, 20, which is stated only a little differently. In John 13, 20, Jesus said, whoever receives him that I send, receives me. And whoever receives me, receives him that sent me.

So it's the same thought, only him that I send is in the place of a little child who believes in me in this particular case. Okay, now, back in Matthew 18, having made this comment about receiving a little child, Matthew has put some things here that do not immediately follow in Mark, although Mark does bring it up a little later in Mark chapter 9, and that is the problem of causing offenses. This also has a parallel in the beginning of Luke 17, Matthew 18, verses 6 through 9. But whoever causes one of these little ones who believes in me to sin, or to offend, the Greek actually says, or to be offended, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown, drowned into the depths of the sea.

Woe to the world because of offenses, for offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offenses come, or the offense comes. Now this parallels the first two verses of Luke 17. You can see that it's the same thought in slightly different words in Luke 17, 1 and 2. Then he said to the disciples, it's impossible that no offenses should come, in other words, it's inevitable that some will.

But woe to him through whom they do come. It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, and then they should offend one of these little ones. Now, Jesus apparently didn't really say this on the same occasion as his other comments about taking a child on his lap, but because Matthew has recorded Jesus taking a child on his lap and making a comment about one of these little ones, he goes ahead and gives some other things that Jesus said elsewhere about little ones.

And one thing he says is to offend one of them is a grievous thing, and actually he doesn't say that those who offend them will have a millstone put around their neck and be thrown into the sea. He said that it would be better for them if that did happen than what really will happen. If having a large millstone which was pulled by a donkey to grind grain, a millstone would be several feet in diameter and made of solid rock, to have a necklace made out of one of those and be thrown into the sea would be comparable to the Mafia's threat of putting you in concrete slippers and throwing you off a pier.

I mean, it's the same kind of a threat, sort of a Mafioso kind of a statement here. You're going to be thrown into the water with a millstone necklace on, and you may give yourself how many odds you want to survive in that situation. They're better than coming out unscathed from what you're going to get if you cause one of these little ones to stumble or to offend.

Now, the word offend or stumble or cause to sin, these are all different ways of translating the same word. The Greek word skandalizo means, well, it's like our word scandal in English, to scandalize. And if you scandalize someone these days, it would be something like our modern word to offend.

To cause them to be scandalized would be to offend them. But most lexicons give us the first meaning of this word, to cause to stumble. Now, it's not at all clear what is meant by cause to stumble.

Obviously, that's a metaphor. Stumble, it doesn't really mean if you stick out your foot and someone trips over it and they fall down, that you should be better off casting the sea with a millstone around your neck. He's talking about something that has to do with interrupting their Christian walk.

Again, walking is a metaphor, and stumbling is a metaphor that goes along with it. To do something to cause their walk to be impeded, their walk with Christ. Now, he says it particularly of these little ones who believe in me.

Probably because they're more vulnerable to being deceived and so forth. And it is the case that there have been many children who have made some kind of commitment to Christ, and their parents or some other adult or some other children or teenagers have so mocked them and made their life miserable for it that they kind of just stopped following the Lord. And we could say that those people caused them to stumble.

I don't think, however, children are the only ones vulnerable. I believe that anybody who perpetrates deception of a sort on any Christian that causes Christians to fall away from the Lord or to stumble in their walk with God is in a similar kind of a danger. I think of the Jesus Seminar and books I've read by people like those people.

Liberals who spend their whole time trying to debunk the Bible, trying to debunk the

Gospels, trying to explain all the Gospel stories in ways that would make them not true and would remove any kind of specialness from Jesus. Obviously, the problem here is, although most people who really know the Lord are not led astray by these people, but these people represent their views as the assured findings of theologians and scientists and so forth, which is not the case. Of course, they're not really given a scientifically shown thing at all.

They're just given an opinion like anyone else's opinion. It's just their unbelief. It's their unbelieving opinion.

The trouble is the faked authority with which they make their pronouncements has often intimidated Christians and really inhibited them in their faith in Christ and in walking with God. And I think people who've been involved in that kind of thing really ought to take heed to this warning because they'd be better off drowned in the ocean than facing the judge of souls whose concern is for every one of his believers and having caused him to stumble. Jesus said, Woe to the world because of stumbling blocks or offenses, in verse 7. The whole world is going to suffer judgment because of its resistance to Christians and because of the way it tries to trip them up and stumble them.

For offenses must inevitably come, but woe to him by whom the offense comes. You cannot avoid stumbling blocks. That doesn't mean you have to stumble on them.

There will be people who try to offend you, and you don't have to be offended. If you look at the parallel in Luke 17, it's not quite the same in Matthew, but in Luke 17, after it says these words that we've just been talking about, it's a bad deal to stumble someone or to cast a stumbling block before them. Notice Jesus' next words to his disciples in Luke 17, 3, Take heed to yourselves.

If your brother sins against you, rebuke him. If he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times a day and seven times a day returns to you saying, I repent, you shall forgive him.

If your brother does something that might stumble you, be careful. Don't stumble. Take heed to yourselves.

Don't only take heed to whether you're causing someone else to stumble, but take heed that you don't be offended, that you don't nurture a grudge, or you don't get scandalized. If someone does something that might offend you, talk to them about it. Confront them about it.

And forgive them. And that way you'll avoid being offended yourself. You don't have to be offended, even if somebody does something offensive.

But, you know, the main warning here is not to do anything that would offend or stumble somebody else. Well, we're going to have to quit here pretty quick. Let me just say this

about the rest of the section we're supposed to take here.

Matthew 18, 8 and 9, I pointed out, have their parallels in the Sermon on the Mount. We've talked about the plugging out the eye and the cutting off the hand. No doubt some things do bear repeating.

However, I just end up saying the same things I said when we were on those passages before. So I won't comment further on them here. Verse 10, 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. There's the only passage in the Bible that seems to teach that there are guardian angels over individuals. It talks about children having angels that stand before God.

And that apparently intercede or represent them or do something. In some sense, interface between God and children. Now, this is perhaps one reason for believing that children, infants, are saved if they die in childbirth.

Why? Well, because it says in Hebrews 1.14. In Hebrews 1.14 it says that the angels are ministering spirits sent to minister to those who are the heirs of salvation. In other words, those who have salvation have, as part of the package of salvation, attendant angels. Now, there is no suggestion that adult unbelievers have guardian angels.

Christians apparently do. Because it says in Psalm 34. Verse 7, I think it is.

It says the angel of the Lord encamps around them that fear him and delivers him. There are special guardian angels that encamp around the believer, the one who fears God, and delivers that person. Is it verse 8? Thank you.

Oh, I'm sorry. No, Psalm 34, I think it's verse 7. Might as well take a look. Psalm 34, is it verse 7? Okay, I'll take your word for it.

Also, there is a similar statement in Psalm 91. In verses 11 and following, he says, especially 11 and 12. For he shall give his angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways.

They shall bear you up in their hands, lest you dash your foot against a stone. This is to the person who is said in verse 9. Because you have made the Lord who is my refuge, even the most high, your habitation. Because you are a Christian.

Because you are a believer. Because you trust in the Lord. He gives his angels charge over you to protect you.

The angel of the Lord encamps around you. There is no such promise to unbelievers, but there is that promise generally to children. Be careful that you don't disregard these little

ones.

They are more important than you think. The word despise in Jesus' comment in Matthew 18.10. Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones. Despise means to hold in contempt in the sense of not regarding them as valuable.

Disregarding them. Not giving them the honor that is due to them. Don't despise them.

Why? Well, there is a side to them that you may not be taking into consideration. In Matthew 19, Jesus said, of such is the kingdom of heaven. When he spoke about little children.

But here he said, these have guardian angels. Now, if guardian angels are promised throughout the Old Testament, Scripture and the New, to be ministers to the believers, to those who fear God, to those who have made God their habitation, to those who are the heirs of salvation, and not to unbelievers. Yet children, all children, have these guardian angels.

Then we cannot be absolutely certain, but it would be not an unfair inference, that all children are heirs of salvation or they are saved during their childhood. Some of which, however, later in choosing not to become Christians, at some point unknown to us, usually spoken of as the age of accountability, at that point, they cease to have angels unless they are believers. I don't want to read too much between the lines, but I'm trying to put the material together in such a way as fits all the facts, and it seems like that would do so.

Finally, Jesus, in Matthew 18, verses 11 through 14. We won't come onto it now because it's the parable of the lost sheep. It comes up along with two twin parables in Luke chapter 15.

We'll treat them on another occasion. The parable of the lost sheep, the parable of the lost coin, and the well-known parable of the prodigal son. All three of them are parables about things that get lost and get found again, and how heaven rejoices over it.

So also here, he gives one of those parables, but we'll talk about the details on another occasion when we treat the context in which it was given. Namely, I'll read it, but I won't comment on it. For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.

What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying? And if he should find it, assuredly I say to you, he rejoices more over that sheep than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray. Even so, it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish. So he still seems to be talking about little ones, like children at this point.

But this is all put together in one place by Matthew because it's all about children. He talks about something else beginning at verse 15, and we'll take that next time. But the topical affinity of all these passages that are taken from different points in Jesus' ministry is that they all have to do with what he said about children.

You should be humble like a child. You shouldn't stumble a child. You should not disregard a child.

It's not God's will that any one of them should perish. And that means that he must have atoned for them all and not just for the elect among them. All right? It's not his will that any of them should perish.

All right, we'll stop there and we'll go on through that chapter next time.