

# OpenTheo

## Matthew 18:1 - 18:5 (Part 2)



### Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg discusses Matthew 18:1-5 in his sermon, emphasizing the importance of treating children with care and respect. He argues that neglecting or rejecting children is akin to rejecting Jesus himself, as small children are viewed as God's children. Gregg challenges the notion that having warm feelings towards children is enough, stating that taking care of them is an essential responsibility. He concludes by emphasizing that causing children to sin is a grave sin and should be avoided at all costs.

### Transcript

Today we're continuing our examination of some of these verses in Matthew 18. The passage began at verse 1, where it says, Now, we read these verses and commented on them last time, but Jesus used this opportunity to say more things about children. And it's very instructive to us to note the things that Jesus said about children, because they definitely fly in the face of much of what our culture thinks about children.

On the one hand, there is an almost irresponsible idolatry of children on the part of some in our society. There is a sense in which some feel that the self-esteem of children must be preserved at all costs, and that if a child is scolded or disciplined or corrected or deprived of anything, that that may be, depending on the interpreter, it may be interpreted as abuse of a child. And in some cases, there are problems where government agencies actually intrude to find that child a home that is better for his self-esteem or safer for him.

Now, no doubt there is such a thing as criminal acts against children. I will not deny this. But the problem with our society is some have sort of idolized children and made them little gods in a sense that they can never be displeased.

If they are displeased, if they cannot be disciplined, they cannot be deprived of anything, then there is some kind of an abuse going on. And what's so amazing is many times the people who are at the forefront of promoting this mentality are people who don't have many children of their own. Some of them are not even married or they're married and they've chosen not to have children, but they're very eager to tell you what you should

do with your children and what you should give to your children and how your children should be raised.

It's amazing how people think themselves experts on this by having maybe some education on early childhood development or something like that. But the real expertise about children, of course, comes from those who really raise children. And when you do raise children, you find out they're not little gods.

In some respects, they're little monsters. Now, I don't say that with any disrespect for children. I love children.

I truly do. But they are human and human beings are fallen and that is not a popular view in our society. But little children are little sinners.

They are little sinners whose sins have not really blossomed into full-blown atrocities in most cases. Although in our own day, certainly we have many indicators that we need to adjust our thinking about this because there are some genuine full-blown atrocities that are being done by amazingly young children. Murders being committed by preteens and so forth.

We hear about them more and more. So we begin to see that the philosophy that little children are little deities to be pampered and to be coddled and to be humored at all costs, this is not bearing the kind of fruit that one would think if they were truly little deities. Little children, just like big people, have a very devilish streak in them.

This does not manifest in most children at the earliest ages, but it eventually does before they get very old. And this idea of idolizing children and saying we should never displease them, never discipline them, this is sentimentality run amok. And it is not good for children, it is not good for society, it is certainly not good for anyone who is interested in knowing what's true.

Now there's of course an opposite direction people can go, and that can be the devaluation of children. Many times people feel that children in the home are simply a liability. In fact, they are often the same people who are deifying children in the abstract.

You know, the rights of the child, the year of the child, these concepts are often promoted, as I say, by people who don't have many children. And if you choose to have a lot of children, they will criticize you for that, because in fact they don't value children. Children are in the abstract something that they feel some kind of warm feelings about, but really put some children in their home and ask these people to make the sacrifices of parenting, and many of them will have nothing to do with it.

And they'll criticize you if you choose to do it yourself. In this case, we see in some cases in the same parties, the double wrong attitude towards children, the idolatry of children in the abstract, and the actual rejection of children as real guests in the home or real

participants in the home. They don't want them in their home.

Many people see children as a financial liability, and they never realize, of course, that children do grow up into being big people, and a long time before they're full grown, they can be tremendously valuable contributors to the family. But the point is, children, even if they are a financial liability, the Bible indicates they have great value. Their value is not that of deities.

Their value is that of people, and people are a mixed blessing. On the one hand, most people in their lifetime produce more than they consume, and therefore the net result of their existence is prosperity to society and to themselves. And therefore, when people say, well, if you have a lot of children, we'll use up the world's resources, that simply has no basis in truth.

It is demonstrable that where there are more people, there is more food produced, and each person produces more than he consumes. So the net result is prosperity to the planet when there are more people, if they are productive people. And there's every reason to believe that most people can be.

Some, of course, are born with handicaps that make it hard for them to produce as much as they consume, but at the same time, that is not an argument against them being born. The point is, people are valuable because they are in the image of God, but you have to have caution about people because they are fallen, and they are sinful, and they can do great harm. And because of that, little people, little children, need to be welcomed as a valuable treasure of little things in the image of God with tremendous potential to bring blessing and to bring honor to God and blessing to man.

But they also have to be treated as little persons who are fallen and who need to be guided, and time needs to be given to their cultivation. They need to be trained. And this is a sacrifice, and you only make sacrifices for things you value.

And I suspect that when we see families where neither parent stays home to raise their children, or families that just decide not to have children, no matter how much they may protest that they love children, they may love children in the abstract, but they don't love any particular children very much, it seems to me. If a person farms out their children, lets somebody else raise them, so that I can go out and have a double income in my home, you can protest how much you love your children because you have warm feelings toward them. In fact, absence makes the heart grow fonder.

But the fondness of a heart that is absent isn't helping the children all that much. It's much better to have children so near that you sometimes become weary of them, but at least you're there for them and you're helping them day by day. The Bible, of course, instructs parents to do this.

In Deuteronomy 6, it says that the Jews were supposed to train their children all the day long. When they rise and when they walk in the way and when they sit down and when they go to bed, they're supposed to be talking to their children about the things of God and training their minds. But no one would do this if they don't value children as little important things, little important people that are made in the image of God with tremendous potential.

And yet we know that every child has potential for both good and for harm. For immense good, if trained properly and if they choose the right way, but for immense harm if their training is neglected and if they choose the wrong way. Now, Jesus had a number of things to say about children and quite a few of them are right in this context.

After the verse about needing to be humble like a little child, He says in verse 5, this is Matthew 18, 5, Then a little further down the same passage in verse 10, He says, Now, despise means lightly value one of these little ones. Now, we're going to stop right there because those are several statements Jesus made about children in this context. The context, of course, was first of all the disciples argued among themselves as to who was the greatest.

And Jesus says, well, the greatest is the one you at least suspect. The person in the home who's most likely to be overlooked or whose contributions are not likely to be valued. The little child, the one who is more of a liability on the family's finances than an asset.

The one who is a consumer always and never a producer. That little child who is totally dependent on the generosity of the parents. That little child in some respects is the kind of person that all of us must become again.

Now, not in the sense that we become social parasites, but in the sense that we are totally dependent on God. And we cannot in any sense attribute anything to ourselves that is good, that is accomplished. We don't see ourselves as significant or major contributors to God's well-being.

It is rather the other way around. God is the one who makes all the contributions to our well-being. And until we have that shift, that conversion of our thoughts, we really aren't fit to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Now, having spoken about children in this way, Jesus has a few other things to say about them. He says in verse 5, whoever receives one little child like this in my name receives me. In other words, if you are of a mind to overlook or to neglect or to reject children, Jesus says in a sense you are rejecting me.

Now, why is that? I believe, and not all Christians do believe this. There are some theologies that take a very different view than this. But I believe that all children, very

small children, are God's children.

Now, this is not to deny the true doctrine that they are born with an inclination to sin. I believe that we are born with a sinful nature. And this sinful nature expresses itself in sinful behavior.

And that sinful behavior sets us against God and ultimately condemns every man who commits sin, which is everybody. But at the same time, I believe there is a stage in life early on where the child is not aware of good and evil. The reason I say that is because in Isaiah chapter 7 it specifically mentions a baby that would be born.

And it says before the child has the knowledge to reject the evil and to choose the good, then these two kings will be taken from you. He's talking about the child at a young age would reach the ability to choose good and to reject evil. At a very early age, I don't think children have that intrinsic moral accountability.

They may indeed be sinners. They may indeed be behaving in a way that is not acceptable in the sight of God. But their total ignorance of right and wrong, as it were, grants them an immunity from the punishment that would normally come upon them.

Now, this is different than the theology of many. Many people believe that all children are born lost, going to hell. And if they happen to die before they accept Christ, well, then they must go to hell because they're born lost.

I don't find this taught in Scripture. Jesus said on another occasion, this is after the passage we're looking at, it's in chapter 19. Jesus said, do not forbid the little children to come to me because of such is the kingdom of heaven.

He said that the little children were those that the kingdom of heaven really belonged to. The kingdom of heaven is made up of these little children. He certainly seemed to be saying that these little children belong to the kingdom.

Now, even here, Jesus said, if you receive a little child in my name, you're receiving me. Now, there was a time, there's a time later on in Matthew 25 when Jesus said that in as much as you did it to the least of these, my brethren, you did it to me. And in as much as you did it not to the least of these, my brethren, you did it not to me.

What he's talking about, of course, is his brethren who are Christians. And what you have done to Christians or failed to do to them is done or failed to be done to Jesus because he is so identified with Christians. They are his body.

They are part of him. And what you cannot do something to Christians, but you have done it to him. In fact, he specifically says what you have done to the least of these, my brethren.

Now, he could very well be meaning the least important or the youngest of these, his brethren. But it's the same kind of thought here. If you've received one of these children, you've received me.

It seems to be placing a child in the same status with God as a Christian is. Even though the child may not have had the wisdom or the maturity to become a Christian, that child Jesus identifies with it like he identifies with members of his own body. So that to receive the child is to receive Jesus himself.

Furthermore, in verse 10, he says this, 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. Now, it sounds to me like Jesus is saying that the children have guardian angels.

And he's just talking about children generically. Children have guardian angels. Their angels behold the father on a daily basis.

Now, think about this for just a moment. In Hebrews chapter 1 and verse 14, we are told that angels are ministering spirits who are sent forth to minister to those who are the heirs of salvation. That is to say, the ministry of angels is a ministry to the saved.

The ministry of angels is a ministry to those who belong to God. And yet, Jesus tells us that children have guardian angels, as it were, or ministering angels. Does that not place children in the class of the saved? It seems like it does if angels' ministry is to those who are the heirs of salvation.

Now, in other words, Hebrews 1.14 would indicate that angels do not minister to the lost. They are ministering to those who are the heirs of salvation. So if angels' ministries are not to those who are lost, and yet small children have angels that minister to them, that would seem to mean that God does not classify small children in the category of the lost.

So here we have a number of things that Jesus said of such, meaning of children, is the kingdom of heaven in Matthew chapter 19. And in this chapter, he said to receive one of these children in my name is to receive me. And these children have guardian angels, just like all Christians do.

Do these statements not suggest that little children are, by virtue of being, in fact, very little children? They belong to God. They belong to the kingdom of heaven. They have the privileges that Christians have.

Now, someone might say, well, Steve, if that's true of all little children, then what about when these children grow up? Would they all be saved then? Well, I mean, everyone has to search the scriptures for themselves, but I believe that the Bible indicates that the majority of adults are not saved. And if these people were saved when they were little children because God included them in his kingdom, and then later in life they are

enemies of God and die in that state and go to hell, what happened in the meantime? Well, we have statements of scripture to indicate how a person falls out of favor with God and how every child eventually does so. You see, it says in Romans 118 that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness of men who suppress the truth in their unrighteousness.

A little child is not yet suppressing the truth out of a choice to be unrighteous, but all people eventually do. All people who reach a certain maturity have certain light and certain truth that is exposed to them, and they don't like it because there is sin in their heart. They choose to suppress that truth.

They do not choose to live in total honesty about their relationship with God and their failings with God. Jesus said this in John chapter 3. He said, the world is condemned already, and this is the condemnation, that light has come into the world and men loved the darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. Did you notice what Jesus said? This is why the world is condemned.

This is why people are condemned, because the light has come to them and they have chosen to love the darkness. That is where condemnation comes in. When you have light and you reject light.

When you have truth and you suppress truth. This is when God's wrath comes upon a person. This is when a person is condemned, according to Jesus, according to Paul.

It seems to me like they ought to have some authority to speak on the matter, even if it differs from our theology. What that tells me is this. Little children who are too young at age to have really suppressed truth or rejected light.

In fact, they have had very little light. Maybe they have no light at all on these matters. They are not perfect beings.

They are sinners. They fall short of the glory of God. But because they are not knowledgeable of this in any sense.

They have no development of their moral sensitivities until a certain age. I don't know what that age is. But the Bible acknowledges that such an age is reached by a young child.

Then, they are not held accountable. And therefore, they belong to God until such a time as they reject light. Sadly, everybody eventually does this in some way or another.

Eventually, once we know what sin is, we still commit it. And then we bring condemnation on ourselves because light has come to us but we have loved darkness instead. It is at that point, of course, that we are no longer on God's side.

We are now enemies of God. And the only way to be saved after that point is to repent of our sins and to come to God on the merits of what Christ has done to us. But, while I'm sure many listening would disagree with what I'm saying about young children, it seems to me like Jesus is teaching these things in, well, I don't know, it seems like no uncertain terms.

To receive a child is to receive, as it were, Christ. Now, that doesn't mean that, in the sense that we talk about receiving Christ and being saved, it just means that if there is a child that comes to you and you receive that child, it is as if Jesus had come to you and you show hospitality and acceptance of him. Now, this should have some ramifications on people in their whole approach to having children and raising children because there are some people who have children but, in essence, they reject them.

They send them off for others to raise. They spend no time with them. They do not accept the responsibility that comes with children.

They don't want the children to cramp their style. They don't want to have their lifestyle or their standard of living impinged upon by the coming of children. You might as well say you don't want your standard of living impinged upon by the coming of Jesus to your home because Jesus said, if you receive a child, you receive me.

There are those who say, we don't want children at all. Now, see, there's not only people who have had children and basically live as if they haven't had them and let those children interfere almost not at all with their life. That is a great sin.

But there are those who go further and say, we don't want to have any children at all. And while it is the case that God sometimes closes the womb and does not grant children to people who would be glad to have them, there are other people whom God would give children to but they will not receive them. Because they despise little ones.

They lightly esteem them. They consider little ones to be a liability, not a blessing. And in this, they certainly disagree with God.

Because in Psalm 127, it says that children are like arrows in the hands of a mighty man and blessed is the man who's got a quiver full of them. Do you agree with God or disagree with God on this? Do you think it's a blessing to have a lot of children or more of a blessing to be relatively free from children? Well, you obviously will make your choice and you probably already have. But just know this, that if you do not receive and embrace and value and even desire that God might bless you with such children, it seems to me you don't agree with God.

And that is a position that Christians ought never place themselves in. We'll talk more about this next time.