

## Matthew 17b-18 Final Lessons in Galilee

### Overview

The section introduced by the second announcement is divided geographically. 17:22-18:35 takes place “while they abode in Galilee” (17:22), while in 19:1, Jesus “departed from Galilee, and came into the coasts of Judaea beyond Jordan.” This movement continues the Lord’s southward trajectory that began in Caesarea Philippi, where Peter made his confession (Figure 1, chart).

The two sections differ not only geographically, but also in content (Figure 2, chart). The first half consists of private instruction to the disciples about their relation to two different social groups: the Jewish temple, and the emerging church. Both of these interchanges are based on the principle of avoiding offense to others. The second section, in ch. 19-20a, involves public interactions, but focuses on the three individual weaknesses identified in the parable of the sower, emphasized in the Lord’s temptation, and summarized by 1 John 2:16.

Like the Sermon on the Mount (which it sometimes quotes), this section focuses on life in the kingdom. After the first passion prediction, the Lord tells us to choose between serving ourselves and him. This teaching tells us how to live once we have made that choice.

### 17:22-23, Second Prediction of his Passion

**22** And while they abode in Galilee, Jesus said unto them, The Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men: **23** And they

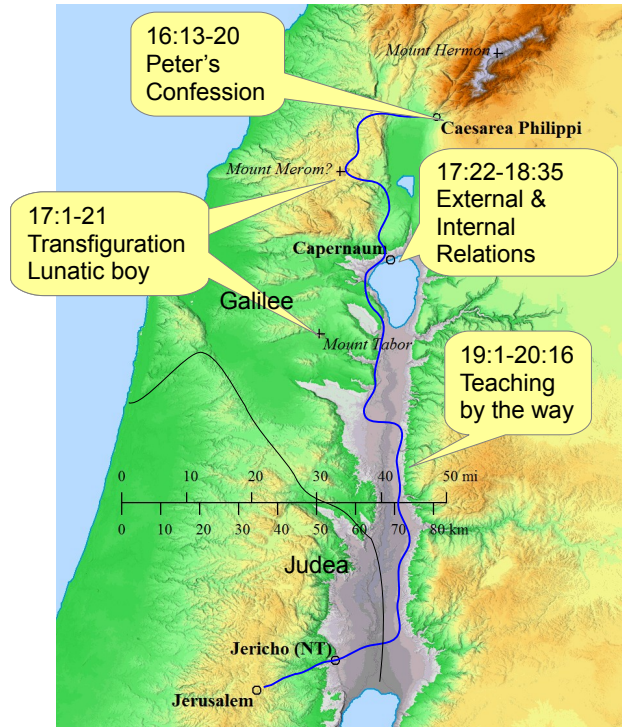


Figure 1: The Journey to Jerusalem

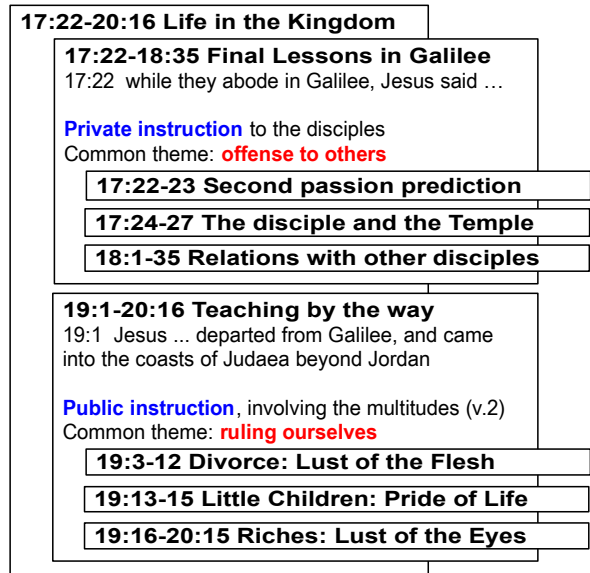


Figure 2: Structure of the Second Passion Prediction Section

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16:21-22	17:22-23	20:17-20	26:1-2
21 From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples,	22 And <b>while they abode in Galilee</b> , Jesus said unto them,	17 And Jesus <b>going up to Jerusalem</b> took the twelve disciples apart in the way, and said unto them,	1 And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said unto his disciples,
how that he must go unto <b>Jerusalem</b> ,		18 Behold, we go up to <b>Jerusalem</b> ;	2 Ye know that after two days is the feast of the passover,
and suffer many things of the <b>elders and chief priests and scribes</b> ,	The Son of man shall be <b>betrayed</b> into the hands of men:	and the Son of man shall be <b>betrayed</b> unto <b>the chief priests and unto the scribes</b> , and they shall condemn him to death, 19 And shall <b>deliver</b> him to the Gentiles	and the Son of man is <b>betrayed</b>
and be <b>killed</b> ,	23 And they shall <b>kill</b> him,	to mock, and to scourge, and to <b>crucify</b> him:	to be <b>crucified</b> .
and be <b>raised</b> again the third day.	and the third day he shall be <b>raised</b> again.	and the third day he shall <b>rise</b> again.	
22 Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, ...	And they were exceeding sorry.	20 Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, ...	(Anointing in the house of Simon the Leper)

Table 1: Prophecies of the Lord's Passion

**shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again.**--When we compared the four instances of the passion prediction, we noticed that starting with this one, they all mention that our Lord is “betrayed” (Table 1, chart) This rendering of the Greek verb παραδίδωμι shows that the translators understand our Lord to be referring to Judas, and this reference is correct as far as it goes. Three times Matthew describes Judas as “the one who betrayed him” (10:4; 26:25; 27:3). But there is another layer of meaning in this verb that deserves our attention.<sup>1</sup>

In the epistles, Paul often uses this verb to describe the deliberate sacrifice of our Lord, whether his voluntary offering of himself, or the work of the Father (chart):

Gal 2:19 the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and **gave himself** for me.

Rom 4:25 Who **was delivered** for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.

Rom 8:32 He that spared not his own Son, but **delivered him up** for us all, how shall he

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to the detailed study by Edwin A. Abbott, *Paradosis, or “In the Night in which he was (?) Betrayed”* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1904), available at <https://archive.org/details/paradosisorinnig00abbo>. Abbott is surely correct in recognizing the importance of Isaiah 53:6, 12 (LXX) in understanding this term, and seeing more in it than just the perfidy of Judas. However, he goes too far in denying completely any reference to what Judas did. Also, while Abbott conveniently uses the related noun, παραδοσις, to refer to the sacrificial work of Christ, the noun is nowhere used in this sense in the NT, but always refers to a body of tradition.

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not with him also freely give us all things?

Eph 5:2 And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath **given himself** for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.

Eph 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and **gave himself** for it;

Only once does Paul use the word in a way that might suggest he has Judas in mind:

1Co 11:23 For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the *same* night in which he was betrayed took bread:

But given the persistence with which Paul uses the verb of the sacrificial offering of our Lord, we could just as well translate, “the same night in which he was delivered up,” that is, for our sins. Surely this is at least as important to Paul as memorializing Judas.

This possibility becomes a certainty when we realize that the LXX translator of Isaiah 53 uses the verb three times:

Isa 53:6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath **laid** on him the iniquity of us all. (LXX “The Lord delivered him up for our sins”)

Isa 53:12 Therefore will I divide him *a portion* with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath **poured out** his soul unto death: (LXX: “his soul was delivered to death”)  
and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and **made intercession** for the transgressors. (LXX: “was delivered because of their iniquities”)

The syntax of the third use is exactly the same that Paul uses in Rom 4:25, “delivered for our offenses.”

So when Paul thinks of our Lord being “delivered,” his focus is on what the Father and the Son did to procure our salvation, not on the treachery of Judas. Perhaps we should rethink our Lord’s announcement as well. When he says that he is to be “delivered,” does he simply anticipate the sin of Judas? Or is he also thinking of the very purposeful transaction anticipated in Isaiah 53?

It is a longstanding principle in Scripture that God turns the actions of wicked men to his own purposes. Recall the words of Joseph to his brothers(chart),

Gen 50:20 But as for you, ye thought evil against me; *but* **God meant it unto good**, to bring to pass, as *it is* this day, to save much people alive.

Asaph recognized that God used the Assyrian invasion<sup>2</sup> as an occasion to get praise to himself:

Psa 76:10 Surely the wrath of man shall **praise thee**: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.

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<sup>2</sup> Following Hengstenberg’s analysis

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Our Lord himself taught this principle:

Mat 26:23 And he answered and said, He that dippeth *his* hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me. 24 The Son of man goeth **as it is written of him**: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born.

Peter preached it at Pentecost:

Act 2:23 Him, being delivered<sup>3</sup> **by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God**, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:

And when Peter and John were rebuked by the council, the church prayed,

Act 4:27 For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, 28 For to do **whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before** to be done.

So when our Lord tells his disciples that he must be “delivered up,” Judas is only part of what he has in mind. When we recognize the vocabulary from Isa 53:6, 12, we realize that he is beginning to reveal to them, not only the fact of his coming death, but its redemptive purpose.

**And they were exceeding sorry.**--There is some progress here from what we saw with Peter. Reflecting no doubt the sentiments of the others, he outright rejected the notion that the Lord would be treated in this way. Now they are grieved at the announcement, but appear to recognize that the Lord is determined.

## 17:24-27, The Tribute Question

**24 And when they were come to Capernaum, they that received tribute money came to Peter, and said, Doth not your master pay tribute?**--Matthew, the tax collector, is quite precise about money. “Tribute” is literally διδραχμα, the double drachma, which is extensively mentioned in Jewish literature as the amount of the annual temple tax, and it is widely agreed that the tribute in question is this levy, not a civil tax. The Lord will address the issue of civil taxes later, in 22:15ff. There he makes clear that the coin used for paying the Roman poll tax is not the (δι)δραχμα but a different coin, the δηναριον.<sup>4</sup> (It’s worth noting that Matthew is the most precise of any of the evangelists on the different coins, something we would expect from a man whose profession involved the collection of customs fees.)

The Jews based this tax on OT examples. For example (chart),

Exo 30:11 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, 12 When thou takest the sum of the children of Israel after their number, then shall they give every man a ransom for his soul

<sup>3</sup> Εκδοτος, sharing the διδωμι morpheme with παραδιδωμι, but with a different prepositional prefix

<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, the drachma (4.3g) and the denarius (3.9g) were worth about the same (Wikipedia), so the burden imposed on the people by the religious hierarchy was nearly twice that imposed by Rome!

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unto the LORD, when thou numberest them; that there be no plague among them, when *thou* numberest them. 13 This they shall give, every one that passeth among them that are numbered, half a shekel after the shekel of the sanctuary: (a shekel *is* twenty gerahs:) an half shekel *shall be* the offering of the LORD.

But this appears to be a one-time levy associated with a census, not an annual fee. In the time of Nehemiah, an annual tax was instituted, involving about a didrachma in value.<sup>5</sup>

Neh 10:32 Also we made ordinances for us, to charge ourselves yearly with the third part of a shekel for the service of the house of our God; 33 For the shewbread, and for the continual meat offering, and for the continual burnt offering, of the sabbaths, of the new moons, for the set feasts, and for the holy *things*, and for the sin offerings to make an atonement for Israel, and *for* all the work of the house of our God.

**25 He saith, Yes.**--Peter has no question about this. He assumes that the Lord will pay, probably because he did in previous years.

It's interesting to reconstruct the chronology (Figure 3, chart). The tax was collected each year on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Adar (Gill), one month before passover. That would have been just before the feeding of the 5000 in ch. 14. But something has happened since then. The disciples have recognized Jesus as the Son of God (14:33), Peter has confessed him thus before the other disciples (16:16), and (with James and John) has heard God himself make this declaration (17:5). The Lord now reinforces that realization, using the temple tax as a teaching opportunity.

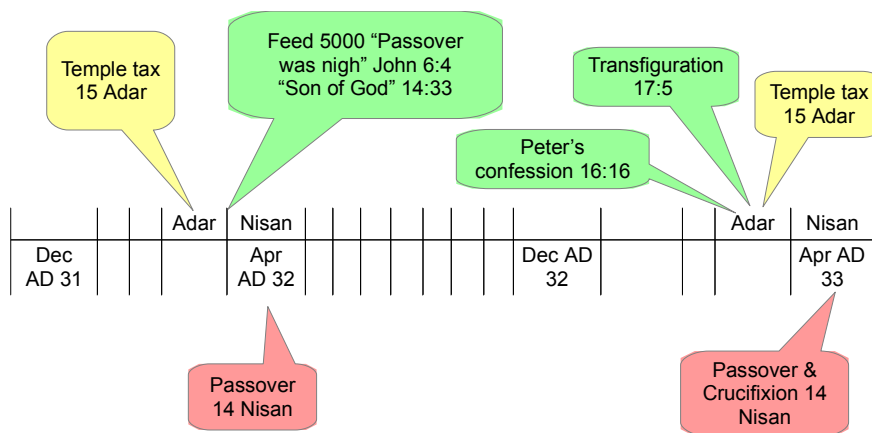


Figure 3: Chronology of the Temple Tax. All three public declarations of Jesus as Son of God have happened since the last time the tax was due.

**And when he was come into the house, Jesus prevented him,**--The Lord, not Peter, initiates the discussion. Peter has not grasped the significance of the Lord's position as Son of God. (Similarly, we often do not fully appreciate the implications of the doctrines that we accept.)

**saying, What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children [υιοσ sons], or of strangers?**--The Lord makes his point with a

5 The New Bible Dictionary (Weights and Measures) cites evidence from inscribed shekel weights to support the average weight of a shekel as 11.4g. So the didrachma would be much more than a half (Exodus) or third (Nehemiah) of a shekel that the biblical precedents suggest. Porter in ISBE claims that the shekel was between 14 and 16 grams. The Wikipedia article cites weights from 7 to 17g.

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little parable. He is speaking not of children (παιδιον, μικρος, as in the next section), but of sons of legal age, in the relationship that Peter has just declared the Lord to hold to the Father. He imagines a situation in which a king has mature sons sharing his rule.

**26 Peter saith unto him, Of strangers. Jesus saith unto him, Then are the children [sons] free.**--One would not expect a king to impose taxes on his sons as he does on his other subjects.

The relevance of this parable to the temple tax is that the temple is regularly described as “God’s house.” In the OT, the phrase “house of God” (128x) or “house of the Lord” (213x) consistently and repeatedly refers to the sanctuary, mostly to the tabernacle, Solomon’s temple, or Ezra’s rebuilt temple. When he cleanses the temple, the Lord describes it as God’s house:

Mat 21:13 And said unto them, It is written, **My house** shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves. (cf. John 2:16 “my Father’s house”).

Now that Peter understands that the Lord Jesus is the Son of God, he should realize that Jesus is free from any financial obligation to support the temple, which is his Father’s house.

**27 Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them,**--“Offend” σκανδαλιζω means to cause to sin. The offense in view is apparently the same one that the Lord seeks to avoid by his commands to the disciples (16:20) and to the three (17:9) not to declare his place as the Son of God. Claiming an exemption on the basis that he is God’s son would stimulate nationalistic emotions in the people, leading them into sinful rebellion and thwarting the Lord’s sacrificial work. So the Lord resolves to pay the fee.

The reference to an offense links this episode to the next. Both involve the restraint of our individual rights out to avoid leading other people to sin. This important principle is the final focus of our Lord with the disciples before leaving Galilee, and it continues to be an important principle through the rest of the NT (chart):

Rom 14:21 *It is* good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor *any thing* whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.

1Co 8:13 Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.

In ch. 18, the principle is applied to those within the community of disciples, but here it is extended to those who are not disciples, to the multitudes and the religious leaders. It is a good principle for us to keep in mind in general.

**go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money;**--Matthew is again precise: the coin in question is the stater, which is worth four drachmas, twice the amount of the tax.

**that take, and give unto them for me and thee.**--The Lord provides not just for his own payment of the fee, but for Peter’s as well.

## 18:1-35, Life in the Church

This is the fourth of the Lord’s five discourses, marked with similar conclusions (Table 2, chart). We’ve already seen the Sermon on the Mount (ch. 5-7), the missionary discourse (ch. 10), and the parables (ch. 13). The fifth is the Olivet discourse (ch. 24-25).

This discourse has three parts (Figure 4, chart). First we have the disciples’ question and the Lord’s answer. Then he amplifies his answer twice, each time ending with a parable. The two categories amplifications reflect two objects of judgment that he has already described:

Mat 13:41 The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that **offend**, and them which **do iniquity**;

If the Lord is going to exclude these two categories from his kingdom, we must take care not to fall into them ourselves. So vv. 5-14 warn us not to offend others, and vv. 15-35 tell us how to deal with those who do iniquity.

### 1-4, Answering the Question

**18:1 At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who [then] is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?--** “Then” reflects the Greek

particle *απα*, which indicates a connection with what has gone before. The disciples have noticed the special role being assumed by Peter. He goes up to the mount of transfiguration; the collectors of the temple tax single him out as the Lord’s representative; the Lord pays the tax for him, but not for the others. The disciples want clarification on where he, and they, stand. This is the first glimpse of a rivalry that will become more intense as we draw closer to the end.

The Lord’s answer divides their question into two parts.

## 2 The Little Child

**2 And Jesus called a little child παιδιον unto him, and set him in the midst of them,--**

5-7, Sermon on the Mount	7:28-29 <b>And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings</b> , the people were astonished at his doctrine: 29 For he taught them as <i>one</i> having authority, and not as the scribes.
10, Missionary Discourse	11:1 <b>And it came to pass, when Jesus had made an end of commanding</b> his twelve disciples, he departed thence to teach and to preach in their cities.
13, Parables	13:53-54 <b>And it came to pass, that when Jesus had finished these parables</b> , he departed thence. 54 And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue
18, Life in the Body	19:1 <b>And it came to pass, that when Jesus had finished these sayings</b> , he departed from Galilee, and came into the coasts of Judaea beyond Jordan;
24-25, Olivet Discourse	26:1-2 <b>And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished all these sayings</b> , he said unto his disciples, 2 Ye know that after two days is <i>the feast of the passover</i> , and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified.

Table 2: Conclusions of the Lord's Five Discourses

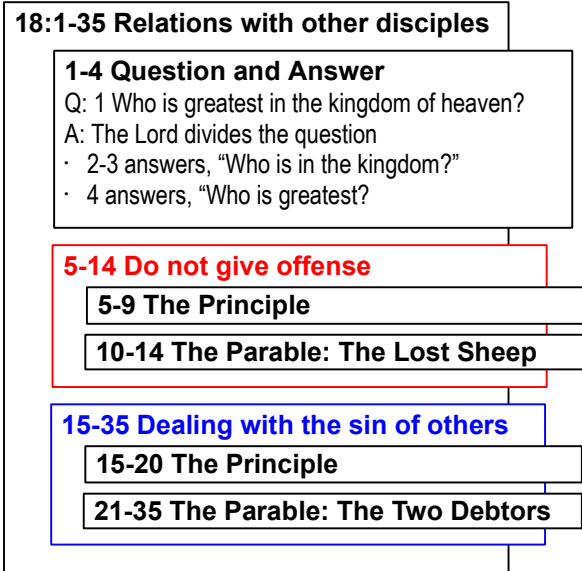


Figure 4: The Structure of ch. 18

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Throughout this section, we read of “little children” (παιδιον vv. 2, 3, 4, 5) and “little ones” (μικρος vv. 6, 10, 14) (chart). The first word is often simply translated “child,” and is frequently used of a youth who is capable of understanding:

Mat 11:16 But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto **children** sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows, 17 And saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented.

This child is capable of being called and responding. The point of the word, and of the lesson that the Lord is teaching, is not immaturity, but the social standing of the child. The disciples are focused on greatness. The Lord draws their attention to those who are of low social position.

In addition to παιδιον (“little child” in our version), the Lord also speaks of μικρος (translated “little one,” vv. 6, 10, 14). Again, these are not infants, for they are said to believe (v. 6). The point is their insignificance in the eyes of others; compare the use of the adjective in 13:32 to describe the mustard seed.

The Lord has already instructed the disciples in the meaning of the “little children” or the “little ones,” in the missionary discourse in ch. 10 (Table 3, chart). We saw a progression in that passage from “you” (the twelve) to “prophet” (gifted teachers) to “a righteous man” (a mature believer) to “little ones” (just because they are disciples). So “little ones” is the most generic label for a disciple, without regard for level of maturity or spiritual gift.

“Receive”	“Reward”
40 He that <b>receiveth you</b> receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.	
41 He that <b>receiveth a prophet</b> in the name <b>of a prophet</b>	shall receive <b>a prophet's reward</b> ;
and he that <b>receiveth a righteous man</b> in the name of <b>a righteous man</b>	shall receive <b>a righteous man's reward</b> .
42 And whosoever shall <b>give to drink</b> unto one of these <b>little ones</b> a cup of cold water only in the name of <b>a disciple</b> ,	verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his <b>reward</b> .

*Table 3: Types of Believers in 10:40-42*

With his object lesson in place, he divides their question: how does one get “in” the kingdom, and who is “greatest” in the kingdom?

### 3, How does one enter the kingdom?

**3 ... ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.**--The idiom of “entering the kingdom” is one of our Lord’s favorite expressions, and is particularly relevant when so much attention is focused on immigration. The idiom appears in all four gospels and in the book of Acts.

To enter the kingdom is to enter into life. Mark 9:43-48 gives an expanded version of what we will see in vv. 8-9. Note the parallels (Table 4, chart). And in ch. 19 (chart), the Lord responds to someone who asks

Mat 19:16 Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may **have eternal life**?



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He responds by reminding him of the commandments, and in his case telling him to sell his goods and give to the poor. When the man declines, the Lord tells the disciples,

Mat 19:23 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly **enter into the kingdom of heaven**. 24 And again I say unto

you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to **enter into the kingdom of God**.

43 And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off:	45 And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off:	47 And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out:
it is better for thee to <b>enter into life</b> maimed,	it is better for thee to <b>enter halt into life</b> ,	it is better for thee to <b>enter into the kingdom of God</b> with one eye,
than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched:	than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched:	than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire:
44 Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.	46 Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.	48 Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.

Table 4: Enter the kingdom = enter into life

To “enter the kingdom” is to enter into life—not just the physical life we enjoy now, but eternal life. The notion is closely related to that of “inheriting the kingdom,” which describes what happens at the last judgment, and is the opposite of entering into hell:

Mat 25:34 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, **inherit the kingdom** prepared for you from the foundation of the world: ... 41 Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:

So: how can one enter into the kingdom? What does it mean to become a legal immigrant? As with political immigration, it requires a change in our attitude and our allegiance.

**3 And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.**--The verb “be converted” is simply “to turn.” We need to change direction. The verb is passive, indicating that this is something that is done to us.

The outcome of this turning is that we become as little children. Our Lord’s words remind us of another verse about entering the kingdom (chart):

Jn. 3:5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot **enter into the kingdom of God**.

True conversion, like physical birth, does not initially produce a mature adult. It produces a little child. We start the Christian life as children, and the attitude of pride and ambition that the disciples show in their question is inconsistent with the experience of a true conversion.

Life starts with birth, but it does not end there, and our Lord’s language about entering the

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kingdom reflects this truth. He has already told the disciples,

Mat 5:20 For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case **enter into the kingdom of heaven**.

When the young man in ch. 19 asks how to enter into life, the Lord tells him to keep the commandments. True life produces godliness. We do not earn salvation, but if we are truly born again, our lives will show the sanctifying work of the Spirit.

### **4, Who is greatest among those who are in the kingdom?**

**4 Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.**--After explaining how to enter the kingdom, the Lord finally answers their question. True citizens of the kingdom focus, not on being the greatest, but on humbling themselves. This principle appears throughout the NT. The Lord emphasizes it repeatedly in these last chapters of Matthew. John records (chart) how the Lord washed the disciples' feet:

Joh 13:13 Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for *so* I am. 14 If I then, *your* Lord and Master, have washed your feet; **ye also ought to wash one another's feet**. 15 For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. 16 Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. 17 If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.

And Paul tells the Philippians,

Phi 2:5 **Let this mind be in you**, which was also in Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: 7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: 8 And being found in fashion as a man, **he humbled himself**, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

So the Lord's response to the disciples' question is first to be sure they are in the kingdom, and then to seek, not to be greatest, but to be the most humble. Now he lays down two principles for those who resolve to live in this way: do not give offense, and if someone offends you, respond in a measured way. In both cases, he illustrates the principle with a parable.

### **5-14, Do not give offense**

He outlines the basic principle in vv. 5-10, then illustrates it with a parable in 11-14.

### **5-9, Principle: receive, and do not offend, the little ones.**

**5 And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me.**--He reminds them of what he has already told them, in the missionary discourse (Table 3, chart):

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Mat 10:40 He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.

The little ones, along with the righteous man and the prophet, were the examples he gave of those who represent him. There, the focus was on how others would treat them as they moved around preaching the gospel. Now, the focus is on how they are to treat the little children within the assembly. (*But see notes—here επι ονομα, but there εις ονομα--7/1/16*)

**6 But whoso shall offend σκανδαλιζω one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. 7 Woe unto the world because of offences σκανδαλον! for it must needs be that offences σκανδαλον come; but woe to that man by whom the offence σκανδαλον cometh!**--The verb “offend” σκανδαλιζω (cognate to English “scandalize”) and corresponding noun “offense” σκανδαλον (cognate to “scandal”) appear 45x in the NT, and 19 of them, more than 40%, are in Matthew. Matthew also uses the word more densely than other books, about once in a thousand words. This chapter has six instances, more than any other, and four of them are in these two verses.

The terms appear 13x in Rom-Rev, and it is likely that later writers are drawing on our Lord’s teaching in this chapter. The use they make of his teaching may help us understand just what kind of action he has in mind. Consider three passages (chart).

Rom 14:13 Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an **occasion to fall** in *his* brother's way. ... 20 For meat **destroy** not the work of God. All things indeed *are* pure; but *it is* evil for that man who eateth with offence [προσκομμα]. 21 *It is* good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor *any thing* whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is **offended**, or is made weak. 22 Hast thou faith? have *it* to thyself before God. Happy *is* he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth. 23 And he that doubteth is **dammned** if he eat, because *he eateth* not of faith: for whatsoever *is* not of faith is sin.

The situation here (as in the other examples we will consider) deals with whether a believer may eat food that has been previously offered to an idol, an action that the culture would consider worshiping the idol. Consider a young believer who has just made the difficult choice to reject idol worship and receive the Lord Jesus:

1Th 1:9 ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God;

A more mature believer, or one from a Jewish background who has never been involved in idol worship, may not associate eating such food with worship. But if the mature believer exercises that freedom, it will encourage the young believer to return to idol worship. Such a return would amount to renouncing his faith in Christ, leading him to be destroyed (Rom 14:20) and condemned (v. 23).

Some may protest that if he is truly saved, he cannot be lost. But from a pastoral position, we can never know absolutely whether another person is truly saved in the first place. The governing

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principle is the same that God declared to Samuel:

1Sa 16:7 man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.

The Lord knows who has truly received Christ, but the only evidence of eternal salvation that we can see is obedience to the Lord:

1Jo 2:3 And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.

Throughout the NT, someone who professes Christ is received as a brother, but someone who demonstrates clear and willful disobedience to the Lord is to be put out of the church as evidently not a brother.

Paul repeats the same principle to the Corinthians (chart):

1Co 8:10 For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; 11 And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother **perish** **απολλυμι** [Matt 18:14], for whom Christ died? 12 But when **ye sin** so **against** [Matt 18:15] the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. 13 Wherefore, if meat **make** my brother **to offend** [offend my brother], I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I **make** my brother **to offend** [offend my brother].

The translations of our verb in v. 13 are interesting. The verb is exactly the same as in Matt 18:6, but there the translators render it “offend,” here “make to offend.” The point is that the offense in view is not simply displeasing another believer. It is doing something that might lead them into disobedience to the Lord. We offend another person when we cause them to offend the Lord.

As in Romans,

- the issue is eating meat offered to an idol;
- the risk is that a weak brother might be tempted to participate in the idol worship;
- such worship would lead to the weaker brother perishing (using the same word **απολλυμι** that the Lord will use in 18:14 to describe the potential disaster that motivates this instruction).

We find a final example in the Revelation, in our Lord’s message to the church at Pergamum,

Rev 2:14 But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a **stumblingblock** **σκανδαλον** before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.

Again, the problem of meat offered to idols is central, but the Lord adds the issue of sexual impurity.

So what does it mean to offend another believer? It is to do something that might embolden him to violate his conscience, and so abandon his faith.

We should note that offense generated by clear teaching of the Scriptures, rather than by actions

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in which we assert our rights, is often unavoidable, and is not condemned (chart):

Mat 11:6 And blessed is *he*, whosoever shall not be **offended** in me.

Mat 15:12 Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were **offended**, after they heard this saying?

Mat 26:31 Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be **offended** because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad.

Mar 6:3 Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were **offended** at him.

Joh 6:60 Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard *this*, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it? 61 When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this **offend** you?

1Co 1:23 But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a **stumblingblock**, and unto the Greeks foolishness;

Gal 5:11 And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? then is the **offence** of the cross ceased.

1Pe 2:7 Unto you therefore which believe *he is* precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, 8 And a stone of **stumbling**, and a rock of offence, *even to them* which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.

**8 Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend σκανδαλιζω thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire. 9 And if thine eye offend σκανδαλιζω thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire.**--At this point the Lord recalls his words earlier from the Sermon on the Mount, in the contrast on adultery (Table 5, chart). Why does he remind them of this earlier teaching at this point?

The connection is difficult.<sup>6</sup> I think he may want the disciples to remember what he said about offense in his earlier teaching, as a way to reinforce to them how serious a matter it is to lead someone else into sin. We might paraphrase:

Do not offend the little ones in the church. Such offense is a serious matter. Recall how I taught you earlier that if your bodily members lead you personally into sin, you should sacrifice them. That's how seriously you should take offense in the church.

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<sup>6</sup> See discussion in the notes.

**10-14 Parable: the wayward sheep**

Now the Lord motivates his teaching about the importance of the little ones with a parable about a shepherd and a sheep. Our Lord actually gave two parables about a shepherd and his sheep, one here, and the other in Luke 15, in very different settings, and (I believe) conveying different messages. This should not surprise us: in ch. 13, we saw two parables about the sower, one emphasizing the different soils, and another two different kinds of seed.

Let’s begin by distinguishing the two parables, then examine this one in more detail.

Matthew 18	Matthew 5
<b>Hand and Foot</b>	
8 Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee,	30 And if thy right hand offend thee,
cut them off, and cast them from thee:	cut it off, and cast it from thee:
it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed,	for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish,
rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire.	and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.
<b>Eye</b>	
9 And if thine eye offend thee,	29 And if thy right eye offend thee,
pluck it out, and cast it from thee:	pluck it out, and cast it from thee:
it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye,	for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish,
rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire.	and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.

*Table 5: Recalling the Sermon on the Mount*

**Two Parables**

Table 6 (chart) summarizes some of the differences between the two instances of the parable.

- Matthew 18 is addressed to the disciples; Luke 15 is addressed to a group consisting of publicans, sinners, scribes, and Pharisees, where the religious leaders are criticizing him for associating with sinners.
- The population under consideration here (the flock) is the “little ones,” who are presumed to be in the kingdom. In Luke 15, it consists of interested sinners and antagonistic religious leaders.
- We are assured that not one of the little ones will perish, but there is no such assurance in Luke 15.
- The wandering sheep here has gone “astray,” but in Luke 15, it is “lost,” the very state that 18:14 assures us will not happen to a little one.

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- The 99 are characterized differently. Here they “went not astray”; in Luke 15, they “need no repentance.” We’ll see that these are very different.
- In Luke, he leaves the 99 “in the wilderness,” which is certainly a risky action.<sup>7</sup> The reference to the mountains in Matthew is ambiguous, but allows the interpretation of the AV, that it is where he went to seek the wayward sheep, not where he left the flock (which would ordinarily be in their fold).
- And when he finds the wayward sheep, in Luke, he returns not to the wilderness where he left the others, but “home.” The presumption in Matthew is that he brings it back to the others.
- Finally, in Luke, it is assumed that he finds the sheep, but in Matthew that outcome is in doubt.

These contrasts suggest that the two parables describe very different processes. Luke describes the work of the evangelist. The flock is the mass of humanity, self-righteous but in the wilderness, and he pursues one who is clearly lost, bringing it not back to the wayward flock, but to his heavenly home. Matthew describes the work of the pastor, confronted with a flock of little ones who have professed faith but in whom the Holy Spirit has not yet produced the promised “righteousness of the law” (Rom 8:4). Some “go astray,” and the shepherd must seek them in the mountains where they have strayed. As we shall see, the outcome is not certain. But if the wayward professor is restored to the flock, there is

	Matthew 18	Luke 15
Audience	1 At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus	1 Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. 2 And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.
Population under discussion	Little ones ... those in the kingdom	Publicans, sinners, scribes, Pharisees
Father's motive	14 Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish [be lost]	(not stated)
State of the wandering sheep	Astray v. 12	Lost v. 4
State of the 99	13 went not astray	7 need no repentance
Role of the wilderness	12 he ... goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray	4 leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness
Where he brings the sheep	Not stated	6 and when he cometh home, he calleth together <i>his</i> friends and neighbours,
Certainty of the outcome	13 If so be that he find it...	5 When he hath found it...

*Table 6: Two parables of the wayward sheep*

7 E. F. F. Bishop, “The Parable of the Lost or Wandering Sheep. Mt 18:10–14; Luke 15:3–7,” *ATR* 44 (1962) 44–57.

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great rejoicing.

**Matthew's Version**

The parable in Matthew is a chiasm (Table 7, chart).<sup>8</sup> Some chiasms have an even number of elements, the same in each panel, but this chiasm has an unbalanced center member, which in such cases is in focus. Let's work our way in from the edges to the center.

10 Take heed that ye despise not <b>one of these little ones</b> ; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of <b>my Father which is in heaven</b> . <sup>11</sup> For the Son of man is come to save that which was <b>lost</b> .	14 Even so it is not the will of <b>your Father which is in heaven</b> , that <b>one of these little ones</b> should <b>perish [be lost]</b> .
12 How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be <b>gone astray</b> ,	which <b>went not astray</b> .
doth he not leave the <b>ninety and nine</b> ,	than of the <b>ninety and nine</b>
and <b>goeth</b> into the mountains, and <b>seeketh</b> ζητεω that which is gone astray?	
13 And if so be that he <b>find</b> it, verily I say unto you, he <b>rejoiceth</b> more of that <i>sheep</i> ,	

Table 7: Chiasmic structure of the wandering little one

**The Frame: 10-11, 14 (chart)**

He begins in vv. 10-11, and ends in v. 14, reminding us of the people in focus, the Father who watches over them, and the motive for what is happening.

10 Take heed that ye despise not <b>one of these little ones</b> ; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of <b>my Father which is in heaven</b> . <sup>11</sup> For the Son of man is come to save that which was <b>lost</b> .	14 Even so it is not the will of <b>your Father which is in heaven</b> , that <b>one of these little ones</b> should <b>perish [be lost]</b> .
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The frame of the parable makes clear that the *subject* of the parable is the “little ones” or “little children” who have been our focus throughout. As we have seen, the reference is not to physical age, but to those who have been born again, the most general description of the disciples who make up the church. They form the flock from which one wanders away. We have already been warned not to stimulate such departure by offending them, and now we will learn of the effort that we should invest to bring them back. We must avoid the tendency of the world to “despise” novices for the errors they are constantly making. It is all too easy for us to fall into the error of the Pharisees, and look down our noses self-righteously at the “little ones,” those who are not prominent in the assembly, those who are immature and struggling with the triple challenge of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. We have an example of the attitude against which he is warning in the parable of the publican and the pharisee at prayer:

Luk 18:11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men *are*, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.

<sup>8</sup> The analysis follows John Nolland, *NIGTC on Matthew*, p. 740, who in turn builds on Gaechter, *Die literarische Kunst im Matthäus-Evangelium* (SBS 7. Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1965), 50-51.



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This is exactly the wrong attitude for us to have, for the frame also emphasizes the interest taken in the entire process by the *Father who is in heaven*. The matter of little ones who go astray is not just a bookkeeping detail for the church secretary. It is a matter of deep concern to the heavenly Father.

It is interesting that in v. 10 our Lord calls him, “my Father,” while in v. 14, he is “your Father.” The distinction between these two is always important in Matthew.<sup>9</sup> Never does the Lord stand with the disciples and refer to “our father” (not even in the Lord’s prayer, which is instruction on how the disciples are to pray, not a prayer that he prays with them).

In v. 10, “my Father” reminds the disciples of the Lord’s authority over them. It is he who introduces them to the Father, who will redeem them and intercede for them. How dare the disciples look down on those whom the Savior has taken into his special care, and to whom he has assigned guardian angels.

The reference to angels here is consistent with what we read later in Hebrews,

Heb 1:14 Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?

It is common to assume that the angels here are particularly responsible for little children,<sup>10</sup> but remember that “little ones” here is a generic reference to the disciples. While the disciples may include believing children, the Lord is assuring us that all believers, irrespective of their maturity, enjoy an angelic escort and the endorsement of the Lord Jesus before the Father.

Why then does the Lord change from “my Father” to “your Father” in v. 14? Elsewhere in Matthew, when the Lord invokes “your Father,” it is often to exhort them to imitate the standards of the family into which they have been included. For example,

5:44 But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; 45 **That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven:** for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

5:48 Be ye therefore perfect, **even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.**

If it is not our Father’s will that one of the little ones should perish, we as his children should have that same attitude.

The third emphasis of the outer frame of the chiasm is on the state of being *lost*, which both our Lord and the Father are concerned to avoid.

Our Lord reminds us in v. 10 of the purpose of his coming, to save the lost.<sup>11</sup> He has brought

9 See notes for a summary of the instances of the two expressions, and a discussion of the ways in which they differ.

10 Our son, his mother, and his grandmother all slept in an antique crib, which had molded images of angels on the end panels, reflecting the common understanding of this verse as referring to physical infants.

11 The critical text omits this verse, treating it as a harmonizing insertion from the story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19:10. But a) there’s nothing in the context to stimulate such a harmonization; b) if it were inserted, surely the

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these little ones out of their lost condition into the fellowship of believers (v. 6). So caring for them is of the utmost importance.<sup>12</sup>

The *Father's* will in v. 14 is that none of them should be lost in the future. Those who are truly his “little ones,” whom the Lord Jesus has saved, will persevere, whatever difficulties they may encounter along the way.

This verse is likely the basis for Peter’s teaching,

2Pe 3:8 But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day *is* with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 9 The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing<sup>13</sup> that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

Both texts teach that it is not the Father’s will that any should perish. The way Peter states this truth has led some to deemphasize the Father’s sovereignty in salvation, but when we recognize the link between the passages, the Lord’s teaching in Matthew brings Peter into perspective. Our Lord says that it is not the Father’s will that any of the *little ones* should perish, and he has already defined them as those “which believe in me” (v. 6). Peter has a similar focus in mind. In vv. 3-5, he has been discussing the scoffers, who doubt the promise of the Lord’s return because it has been delayed:

2Pe 3:3 there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, 4 And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as *they were* from the beginning of the creation. 5 For this **they** willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: 6 Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: 7 But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

Then he turns from the “they” of v. 5 to the “beloved” of v. 8 and the “us” of v. 9, from the scorners to the “little ones,” and it is with them in mind that he says, echoing our Lord’s words in the parallel, “the Lord ... is not willing that any should perish.”

### Going Astray, 12a, 13c (chart)

12 How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be <b>gone astray</b> ,	which <b>went not astray</b> .
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verb “seek” ζητεω, which is the focus of the parable, would have come along with it; and c) it completes the chiasm.

12 The omission of ζητεω here, compared with Luke 19:10, is telling. The seeking in Matthew 18 (unlike that in Luke 15) is not seeking the *lost*, but rather the *wayward*. The reference to their lost condition here is that from which he has already saved them.

13 The verbs differ in the two places: θελω in Matt 18:14, βουλομαι in 2 Pet 3:9.

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In this parable, the difference between the 99 and the one is whether or not they have “gone astray.” Contrast the version in Luke, where the one is “lost” and the 99 “need no repentance” (v. 7). The two verbs have very different implications.

The NT regularly uses “lost” ἀπολλομι as the opposite of “saved.” It describes those who are alienated from God and who have no place in the kingdom of God. This is the word that the Lord used in his warning to the disciples,

Mat 16:25 For whosoever will save his life shall **lose** it: and whosoever will **lose** his life for my sake shall find it.

The epistles frequently use it to speak of the condition of the unsaved:

Rom. 2:12 For as many as have sinned without law shall also **perish** without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law;

1 Cor. 1:18 For the preaching of the cross is to them that **perish** foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.

2 Cor. 2:15 For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that **perish**:

2 Cor. 4:3 But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are **lost**:

Unlike “lost,” the verb “go astray” πλαναω is commonly used of believers, particularly of immature ones. For example, James exhorts his readers, whom he calls “brethren,”

Jas. 1:16 Do not **err**, my beloved brethren.

Jas. 5:19 Brethren, if any of you do **err** from the truth, and one convert him;

In the first part of the chapter, we learned about offense, doing something that would lead an immature believer to fall into sin. “Going astray” can result from such offense. The connection between the parable and the principle in vv. 5-9 is that the sheep who has gone astray is a little one who has been offended. Our attitude toward offense should be that of the shepherd, willing to inconvenience ourselves in order to deliver a sheep from going astray, from falling into sin.

So the state of the one sheep in the two cases is very different. In Luke, the sheep is lost, unsaved, and the Lord rescues it. In Matthew, the sheep has gone astray, which is serious, but not inconsistent with being a believer, especially an immature one.

### The Ninety and Nine, 12b, 13b (chart)

doth he not leave the <b>ninety and nine</b> ,	than of the <b>ninety and nine</b>
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Who are these 99 whom the Lord leaves?

In Matthew 18, the 99 simply “went not astray.” They are more mature believers who have learned to walk in the Spirit. Recall Paul’s description of the spiritual believer:

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1Co 2:15 But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man.

In Luke 15:17, the Lord says of the 99 that they “need no repentance.” This is a striking thing to say to a community of sinners and religious leaders, particularly from one whose message to all was “Repent.” It sounds rather like the Lord’s response to a previous similar criticism, where “the righteous” is speaking of the self-righteous:

Mat 9:11 And when the Pharisees saw *it*, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners? 12 But when Jesus heard *that*, he said unto them, **They that be whole** need not a physician, but they that are sick. 13 But go ye and learn what *that* meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call **the righteous**, but sinners to repentance.

Those who “need no repentance” in Luke 15:7, like “the righteous” in Matt 9:11, are the Pharisees and scribes who are complaining about the Lord’s association with “publicans and sinners.” The Lord’s statement in both cases is sarcastic, or perhaps better, taking their point of view. “There is none righteous” (Rom 3:10), and “all” are called to repent (Acts 13:24; 17:30; 26:20). But the religious leaders see themselves as righteous and needing no repentance.

### The Focus, 12c-13a (chart)

**12 ...and goeth into the mountains,**<sup>14</sup>--Contrast the role of the wilderness in Luke. There, he “leave[s] the ninety and nine in the wilderness” (v. 4). This action is unusual for a real shepherd.<sup>15</sup> But it describes the flock whom the Lord has in view in Luke, consisting of publicans, sinners, scribes, and Pharisees. They are all in the wilderness, apart from the Lord, and when the Lord finds the lost sheep, he brings it, not back to the flock in the wilderness, but home.

Here, we are not told where the shepherd leaves the flock, but we presume that it is in a safe location, and “the mountains,” the place of danger, is where the sheep has wandered astray.

**and seeketh ζητεῖω that which is gone astray.**--Retrieving a wayward sheep is not a straightforward process. You can’t lay down a twelve-point plan with milestones. It requires patience, diligence, attentiveness, but above all, a love for what one is seeking—otherwise the shepherd would give up.

**13 And if so be that he find it,**--At first glance, the contrast with Luke is surprising. There, the Lord assumes that the shepherd finds the sheep (v. 5 “when he hath found it”). Here, there is some doubt about the outcome.

This uncertainty reflects the contrast between what the Lord knows about us, and what we can

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<sup>14</sup> I follow the MT here, which omits the conjunction before πορευθεῖς, thus allowing ἐπι τὰ ὄρη to be associated with the following clause rather than the preceding one. Cf. Bishop’s article, cited in note 7, which argues that this association is the only one that makes sense. It also aligns better with the parable in Ezekiel 34 (v. 6), which identifies the mountains as the place where the sheep go astray (discussed below).

<sup>15</sup> As Bishop (cited in note 7) points out.

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know about each other, as we discussed in vv. 6-7. When one whom we recognize as a brother goes astray, there are two possible cases. If the brother is a genuine believer, but just immature, the shepherd’s search will be successful, and he will return with the sheep. But the Lord has already warned his disciples of “false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves” (7:15). When such a person falls into sin, there is no certainty that they will repent. John will later write of some who leave the assembly,

1Jo 2:19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would *no doubt* have continued with us: but *they went out*, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.

**verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep**--Note how this finishes off all of vv. 5-14, the principle as well as the parable. Rather than offending the little ones and carelessly pushing them into sin, we are to rejoice in their recovery from sin.

### Relation to Ezekiel 34

All of vv. 5-14 (the warning not to offend in 5-9, and the parable in 10-14) rests on Ezekiel’s

	Ezekiel 34	Matthew 18
Addressed to those who are to care for the flock	2 Son of man, prophesy against the <b>shepherds</b> of Israel,	1 At the same time came the <b>disciples</b> unto Jesus
Abuse by shepherds causes the sheep to go astray	4 The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up <i>that which was</i> broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them. 5 And they were <b>scattered</b> , because <i>there is</i> no shepherd: and they became meat to all the beasts of the field, when they were scattered.	6 But whoso shall <b>offend</b> one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and <i>that</i> he were drowned in the depth of the sea. 7 Woe unto the world because of <b>offences!</b> for it must needs be that <b>offences</b> come; but woe to that man by whom the <b>offence</b> cometh!
Sheep are scattered on the mountains	6 My sheep wandered through all the <b>mountains</b> , and upon every high hill:	12 How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the <b>mountains</b> , ...
Need to seek those that are lost or have gone astray	4 neither have ye <b>sought</b> that which was lost; 8 neither did my shepherds <b>search</b> for my flock 12 As a shepherd <b>seeketh</b> out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep <i>that are</i> scattered; so will I <b>seek</b> out my sheep, ... 16 I will <b>seek</b> that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, ...	... and <b>seeketh</b> that which is gone astray?

*Table 8: Ezekiel 34 as a Pattern for Matthew 18*

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parable of the shepherds and the sheep in ch. 34 (Table 8, chart). Reviewing that parable will help us see the connections between them. Note the points of contact:

- In both cases, the Lord is speaking to those who are responsible for the care of his people, the “shepherds of Israel” in Ezekiel, the disciples in Matthew.<sup>16</sup>
- In Ezekiel, the sheep have been scattered because of the abusive behavior of the shepherds. Similarly, in Matthew, the danger is that haughty or selfish behavior on the part of older disciples might offend some of the little ones and cause them to “go astray.”
- “The mountains” is where the sheep are scattered in Ezekiel, and that is where the shepherd goes to seek the wayward sheep in Matthew.<sup>17</sup>
- Ezekiel repeatedly emphasizes the shepherd’s work in “seeking” (ζητεω, εκζητεω) his wayward sheep, which is the verb that the Lord chooses to describe the pastoral task in view here.

Note in particular how Ezekiel’s parable emphasizes the relation between the teaching on offense (pushing somebody into sin) and the parable (recovering somebody out of sin). The haughty attitude of the disciple in their question in v. 1 leads to the kind of behavior that scatters the flock, that is, that leads young believers into sin.<sup>18</sup>

### **15-35, How to deal with the sin of others**

In a fellowship where everyone is immature, there are bound to be offenses. We have just been commanded to receive one another, and not despise them. How then are we to deal with the offenses that will naturally arise? Once again the Lord follows exposition with a parable that illustrates his points.

### **15-20, Principle: forgive one another**

**15 Moreover if**—The Greek expression εαν δε marks a contrast with an alternative, much like our “on the other hand,” and is most commonly used after an initial “if.”<sup>19</sup> For example, it appears three more times in vv. 16-17, giving alternatives to “if he shall hear thee” in 15b. We

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16 Ezekiel 34 also lies behind the version of the parable in Luke 15, where “shepherds of Israel” points to the Pharisees and scribes.

17 Later, Ezekiel also records (34:13, 14) that after regathering the flock, the Lord will “feed them upon the mountains.” But it is one thing for the sheep to graze in the mountains under the shepherd’s personal supervision, and quite another for him to abandon them in the mountains.

18 It is important to keep in mind that “offense,” as the apostles expound the Lord’s teaching, consists in doing something that would “destroy the work of God” (Rom 14:20) and cause a weak brother to perish (1 Cor 8:11). This is the “scattering” that we are to avoid, and that haughty behavior can generate. Neither Ezekiel 34 nor Matthew 18 reflects the physical departure of people from a fellowship for other reasons (as in John 6:66 and 1 John 2:19).

19 This compound appears 10x in Matt, and the other nine all have this close adversative meaning. It is surprising that many translators neglect the δε entirely, and that BAGD doesn’t discuss it as a distinct idiom.

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might render here, “If on the other hand thy brother shall trespass against thee.” But that means that we must identify the alternative with which this trespass is being compared.

Meyer appears to have caught the point:

The connection with what precedes is as follows: “*Despise* not one of the μικροί (vv. 10–14); if, however, one *offends against* thee, then proceed thus.”<sup>20</sup>

So far, the discussion has focused on the responsibility of the more mature believers not to offend the little ones by insisting on their Christian liberties. A little one might be led into sin by such an example. But how should a more mature believer respond in the presence of such an offense?

The evidence for this connection is seen in the introduction of the problem:

**if thy brother shall trespass against thee**,--Paul in 1 Cor 8:12 uses the same expression ἀμαρτανῶ εἰς to describe the giving of offense as “sinning against” a weaker brother (chart).

1Co 8:9 But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a **stumblingblock** to them that are weak. ... 12 But when ye **sin so against the brethren**, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. 13 Wherefore, if meat make my brother to **offend**, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to **offend**.

For Paul, “sinning against the brethren” is the same as “offending.” He may well have this passage with its twofold emphasis in mind as he writes.

“Against thee”<sup>21</sup> and the singular pronouns throughout this paragraph are an important clue to what is in view here. The paragraph is focused on issues that arise between two individuals in the church, not in the first instance with the broader issue of church discipline. However, recall what constitutes “offense” in the NT: it often occurs when one person exercises a liberty that draws other believers into sin. So disagreements like this frequently arise when one believer views the conduct of another as sinful, and the process of resolution is how the church settles what conduct is acceptable and what is not.

The Lord’s instruction to those who receive offense has two parts. First, he outlines the *process* they should follow. Then he describes the *power* under which they operate.

### **15b-17, The Process**

The remedy to this problem is to start small, on a person-to-person basis, but to take advantage of the larger fellowship if you reach a stalemate. Starting small avoids antagonizing the other person, whose transgression may have been accidental and unintentional. Bringing in other

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20 Meyer, H.A.W. (1884). *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Gospel of Matthew*. (W. Stewart, Ed., P. Christie, Trans.) (Vol. 2, p. 10). Edinburgh: T&T Clark.

21 εἰς σε is questioned by the critical text. It is omitted in  $\aleph$  and B, but the omission does not appear again until the 10<sup>th</sup> century, and in all only in six mss, while our reading is not only very much the majority, but appears from the 4<sup>th</sup> century on.

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believers helps you not to over-react: if others don't support you, you need to adjust your expectations, while if they do support you, it reinforces to the person who has sinned against you the gravity of what is going on.

**go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.**--Don't start by attacking him publicly. Have a one-on-one discussion with him. He may not have realized the impact of his actions, and might be very willing to adjust his conduct for the sake of others in the assembly. Or you may learn some mitigating circumstance that explains his conduct.

**16 But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.**--The "two or three" is grounded in the OT (chart):

Deu 17:6 At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death; *but* at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death.

Deu 19:15 One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established.

If the two of you can't resolve the issue personally, you are not to "agree to disagree." That kind of suppressed difference can fester and block the effectiveness of the church. Bring others into the discussion. They will help insure that you are understanding the other person correctly, and also that that person is understanding the impact of their actions on you.

**17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church:**--Sometimes a discussion in a small group will resolve the issue. But if not, again, it must not be allowed to fester, and the matter is to be brought before the assembly. Just as Deuteronomy 17 suggests the "two or three witnesses" in v. 16, it also lies behind the escalation envisioned in this verse:

Deu 17:8 If there arise a matter too hard for thee in judgment, between blood and blood, between plea and plea, and between stroke and stroke, *being* matters of controversy within thy gates: then shalt thou arise, and get thee up into the place which the LORD thy God shall choose; 9 And thou shalt come unto the priests the Levites, and unto the judge that shall be in those days, and enquire; and they shall shew thee the sentence of judgment:

Here, "the church" takes the place of the company of priests in Israel.

This is the second mention of the "church" in Matthew; the first was to Peter at the time of his confession (chart),

Mat 16:18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

In English, the word "church" usually refers to a building, but the Greek term means an assembly



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of people. It appears widely in the OT<sup>22</sup> as the dedicated and dominant translation of the Hebrew word *קָהָל*, which refers to the congregation in its official status as representatives of the nation.<sup>23</sup> The Lord is promising to build such a congregation of people.

It is worthwhile understanding the relation between the *ἐκκλησία* in the OT and in the NT (Table 9). To do this, we need to understand that the NT concept can also be expressed by the word “body,” which has no parallel in this sense in the OT (chart):

	Usual translation	How entered?	When started?
OT	Congregation (Strong 6951, not 5712)	Physical birth	Exodus (1st reference Ex 12:6)
NT	Church	Spiritual birth	Pentecost

Table 9: *ἐκκλησία* in the OT and the NT

Eph 1:22 And hath put all *things* under his feet, and gave him *to be* the head over all *things* to the **church**,<sup>23</sup> Which is his **body**,

Col 1:18 And he is the head of the **body**, the **church**:

Col 1:24 Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his **body's** sake, which is the **church**:

One became a member of the OT church, *קָהָל יִשְׂרָאֵל*, by physical birth, or exceptionally by conversion. By contrast, one cannot be born physically into the church of Jesus Christ. It requires a birth, but a very different kind of birth. The Lord has described how one enters this congregation in v. 3 of this chapter:

Mat 18:3 Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Elsewhere he describes this transformation to Nicodemus as being “born again,” “born of the Spirit.”

Joh 3:3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. ... 5 ... Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

We know that God poured out his Spirit on his people in Acts 2, on the day of Pentecost. It is by the work of that Spirit that we are formed into the body of Christ, the church:

1Co 12:13 For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether *we be* Jews or Gentiles, whether *we be* bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

So it is important to remember that “the church” in the NT is something new and qualitatively distinct from the institution described by the same word in the OT. In both cases, it is the assembly of the people of God, but in the OT it is based on physical birth, while the NT church depends on the gift of the Spirit, which was poured out on the day of Pentecost.

<sup>22</sup> 77x, 70 as translation of *קָהָל*

<sup>23</sup> See notes for contrast with *συναγωγή*, which usually translates *קָהָל*. Lev 4:13 illustrates the difference.

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**but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.**--If the church agrees that the conduct is inappropriate, and the individual still will not repent, the individual who brought the case is to treat him as an unbeliever.

It sounds as though he is talking about excommunication, but then wouldn't the pronoun in the last clause be plural? And if not excommunication, what does this mean? The church is involved, but the command is to the individual.

We know from the NT that believers are to hold one another accountable to the standards set by the church (chart):

Rom 16:17 Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and **offences** contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.

Note Paul's reference to "offences" *σκανδαλα*, probably in reference to the Lord's teaching here.

2Th 3:14 And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed.

The Lord's formula of individual enforcement of standards set by the group avoids several errors.

- It avoids overlooking sin in the lives of others. We are each responsible for the conduct of others.
- It avoids premature strife among believers. The treatment "as an heathen man and a publican" comes only after all efforts at reconciliation have been exhausted. We don't start off rejecting someone whose conduct is out of line, but first try to restore them.
- It avoids disagreements among rival personal standards. Shunning is only authorized when the church agrees that the behavior in question is unacceptable. Note the reference to the external standard in Rom 16:17, "the doctrine which ye have learned," and 2 Thes 3:14, "our word by this epistle."

One commentator (France) puts it very well:

In a formally constituted church with an appointed leadership it is easy for the "ordinary" disciple to hide behind that authority structure and to leave it all to the official leaders, appealing to Cain's question "Am I my brother's keeper?" with the comfortable assumption that the answer must be No. But this passage asserts that the answer is Yes. In a community of "little ones," each must be concerned about and take responsibility for the spiritual welfare of the other.

### **18-20, The Power**

The big challenge in this section is relating it to the immediately preceding and following context, both of which deal with tensions among believers. As traditionally understood, these verses do not connect well with the context.

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Dealing with dissension in the assembly is never pleasant. It reminds us of “the law of sin which is in my members” (Rom 7:23). To encourage us in dealing with these issues, the Lord reminds us in these three verses that God works among his people to bring them into harmony.<sup>24</sup> It is his power going before them that enables them to resolve their differences and live in harmony, and they should pursue their dealings with one another confident in his direction.

The first verse deals with the verdict rendered by the church in v. 17. The second broadens the assurance of divine provision to include any conflict among believers, while the third extends it still further to every aspect of our life together. In all three cases, we read first of what men do, then of what heaven, God, or the Lord Jesus does (Table 10, chart).

18 Whatsoever <b>ye</b> shall bind on earth	and whatsoever <b>ye</b> shall loose on earth	19 if two of <b>you</b> shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask,	20 For where <b>two or three</b> are gathered together in my name,
shall be bound in <b>heaven:</b>	shall be loosed in <b>heaven.</b>	it shall be done for them of <b>my Father</b> which is in heaven.	there am I in the midst of them.

*Table 10: Repetitive structure of 18:18-20*

### 18, God’s Direction in Discipline

**18 Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.**--What he said to Peter in 16:19, he now says to all of the disciples.

Mat 16:19 whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Let’s repeat what we observed about this saying there.

Three things in this verse deserve comment: the *semantics* of binding and loosing, the *tense* of the verbs, and those to whom it is *addressed*.

*Semantically*, “binding” and “loosing” were common idioms among the Jews to describe specifying conduct that was or was not acceptable.<sup>25</sup> We can show the point within the Bible itself, and in fact, within Matthew. To loose is to permit conduct, to tell what is permitted (chart):

Mat 5:19 Whosoever therefore shall **break [loose]** one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven:

Conversely, to bind is to restrict conduct, to define what is forbidden:

Mat 23:3 All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, *that* observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. 4 For they **bind**<sup>26</sup> heavy burdens and

<sup>24</sup> Though I differ at several points, my analysis of this section has been stimulated by Paul. D. Larson, *A New Interpretation of Matthew 18:18-20: Reconciliation and the Repentance Discourse*. University of Edinburgh, 2013, <https://www.era.lib.ed.ac.uk/handle/1842/1062>, who cites other recent literature.

<sup>25</sup> See Gill for references.

<sup>26</sup> In this case, the Greek verb differs; it is δεσμευω, not δεω. But semantically, it expresses a closely related idea.

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grievous to be borne, and lay *them* on men's shoulders; but they *themselves* will not move them with one of their fingers.

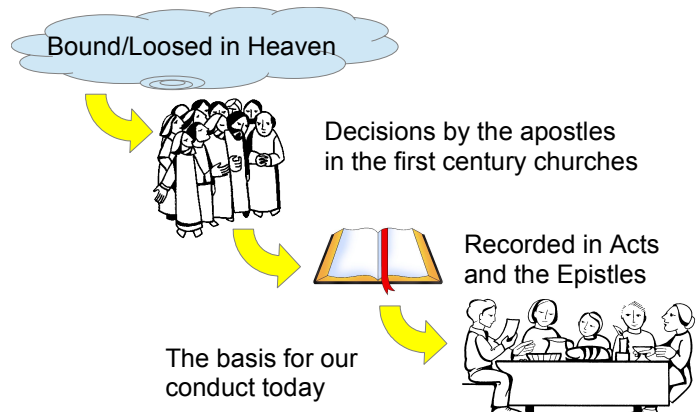
So the focus is on explaining to God's people what is and is not permitted. Think of Peter, in Acts 10, receiving the vision declaring all meats clean and by extension allowing fellowship between Jews and Gentiles.

In our present context, the church has been called upon to decide whether the conduct of one brother, who has offended another, is indeed out of line. The authority originally given to Peter is here extended to all the apostles, and much of the NT, which they wrote, spells out how believers are to live in the light of the teaching of the Lord Jesus.

Now we turn to the unusual *tense* of the Greek verbs. They are not simple futures, but future perfects, "shall have been." The simple future would suggest that Peter and the other disciples have the power to make something permitted or forbidden. But the future perfect shows that they are binding things that have already been bound in heaven, and loosing things that heaven has already loosed. Their authority is not to create new rules, but (like the steward in 13:52) to grant access to the contents of the heavenly storehouse. The order in v. 18, based on the Greek verbs, is clearly "heaven first." I will suggest that the same order appears in the next two verses as well.

Finally, consider those to whom the Lord *addresses* the promise. In 16:19, it is Peter. Our discussion there showed that though he is the most prominent of the disciples, he is not in any sense over them, and what is said of him is also said of them. This verse is an instance of this relationship: he is given the authority to discern heaven's will in binding and loosing, and now the others are as well. But how does their authority affect us? Is it still the case that the church can formulate moral guidelines that confidently reflect heaven's decisions?

We should never restrict God's ability to guide his people directly. However, the main application of this verse is in assuring us that the apostles, when they wrote the very practical instruction contained in the epistles concerning how the church should function, enjoyed special insight concerning heaven's will. This promise assures them that in resolving issues in the early church, they are not "on their own." And it assures us that as we look to the NT Scriptures for guidance, we are not just reading ad-hoc solutions to first century problems, but decisions made on the basis of what has been decided in heaven (Figure 5, chart).



*Figure 5: Establishing Standards of Conduct* (images: [http://www.stpius5.org/\\_wizardimages/12\\_apostles.gif](http://www.stpius5.org/_wizardimages/12_apostles.gif); <https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/736x/d2/9d/a7/d29da76927af980edaa1a636ecadc9a1.jpg>; <http://catacombchurches.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/Theology-around-dinner-table.jpg>)

So v. 18 establishes the authority of the church to resolve what conduct will be accepted within

the fellowship, based on the revelation that God has promised to give through the apostles.

### 19, God's Direction in Disputes

**19 Again I say unto you,**--This verse is almost uniformly understood as a promise concerning prayer: if believers agree about what they will ask, the Father will give it to them.

There are promises about prayer in the NT, but the conditions are different (chart).

Joh 15:7 If ye **abide in me**, and **my words abide in you**, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

Joh 15:16 Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that **whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you**. (also 14:13, 14; 16:23, 24)

Here the conditions are that we are abiding in him and controlled by his word, and that we ask in his name, which is to say, according to his interests. These conditions are understandable. But it is difficult to reconcile them with a promise based simply on the agreement of two people in the church, who may not be abiding in the Lord, may not have his word abiding in them, and may not be asking in his name. How can our mere agreement compel the Father to act?

Let's consider another possibility.

**That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask,**--Three words in this clause invite our attention.

First, "agree" συμφωνεω is a very slender basis on which to build a promise of answered prayer. It is a very general word, commonly used in Greek of business agreements, or of the result of negotiations. For example,

Mat 20:2 And when he had **agreed** with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard.

Second, "thing" πραγμα is another general word. "Thing" is not a bad translation, but given the preceding context, it is interesting that it is used elsewhere in reference to a disagreement:

1Co 6:1 Dare any of you, having a **matter** against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints?

We will see that 1 Cor 5-6 draws directly on this passage, and 6:1 may be a reference to this verse. In this case, the two people are not involved in a prayer meeting, but in a dispute of some sort.

Third, "ask" αιτεω is commonly used to describe demands that people make of each other (eight of the 13 instances in Matthew):

Mat 5:42 Give to him that **asketh** thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.

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Mat 14:7 Whereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatsoever she would **ask**.

Mat 27:20 But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should **ask** Barabbas, and destroy Jesus.

Mat 27:58 He went to Pilate, and **begged** the body of Jesus.

Matthew does use the word five out of thirteen times in reference to prayer, but never in the grammatical form that we see here and in 14:7 and 27:20, and in general (16x) he uses a different word (προσευχομαι) for prayer.

It seems better to understand v. 19, like v. 18, to describe tension in the assembly, which is the situation in view in 15-17. In this case, the first half of the verse describes a happy outcome: two people who have been making demands on each other over some difference have come to agreement. They have settled their argument.

In v. 18, the church was able to resolve what conduct would be considered acceptable because heaven had settled it first. We can understand the second half of this verse in the same way, not as the *result* of their agreement, but as *evidence* for it.

**it shall be done for them of from my Father which is in heaven.**--The word “done” is not in the Greek. The statement is that their agreement comes from the Father. When two people, naturally sinful and selfish, are able to agree with each other, it is because the Father has brought them into agreement. His intervention does not result from their agreement; like heaven’s binding and loosing in v. 18, it lies behind it, and their agreement is the evidence that he is working in them.<sup>27</sup>

### 20, God’s Direction in Corporate Life

**20 For**—The Lord introduces the third statement in this series as an explanation of the other two. How can the church be sure of heaven’s guidance when they resolve issues of conduct, or of the Father’s intervention to bring disagreeing parties into agreement? It is because of the role of the Son of God, who is always working in any encounter of his people.

**where two or three are gathered together in my name,**--Now he considers, not one person sinning against another, or two people making reciprocal demands over some issue, but any circumstance where multiple believers gather<sup>28</sup> “in my name.” The passage is not discussing any gathering of people, but those that are motivated by the shared faith of those who assemble.

We should devote some attention to the expression “in the name” that appears here. The English expression obscures the distinction between three different Greek expressions that translate different Hebrew expressions in the LXX (see note), and all three appear in Matthew (Figure 6,

27 The only Greek grammar that I can find that discusses the semantics of the conditional clause is Wallace, who on 683 distinguishes the evidence-inference category, which is what is in play here. He cites Rom 8:17 and 1 Cor 15:44 as examples, but these are not very clear.

28 Larson wants συναγομαι to mean “be reconciled,” a meaning indeed given in BDAG, but with no antecedents in biblical Greek. In biblical usage, the word uniformly describes an assembly of people.

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chart).<sup>29</sup> If we are overly literal to emphasize the point, we can distinguish “in the name,” “into the name,” and “upon the name” (chart).

The expression “in the name” εν το ονομα is by far the most common, appearing 40x. Apart from two instances of “into” in 1 Cor 1, speaking of baptism, every instance of “in the name [of the Lord Jesus] in Paul uses this expression. This is also the preposition that our Lord uses in John when he speaks of praying “in my name.”

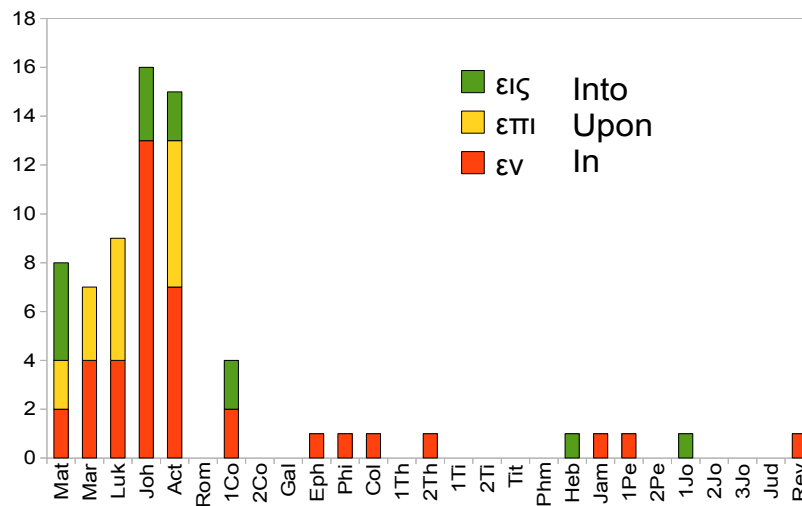


Figure 6: Prepositions for "In [the name]..."

Matthew uses this expression twice, in 21:9 and 23:9, both times quoting Psa 118:26, “blessed is he who cometh in the name of the Lord.” To do something “in the name of the Lord” is to act in his authority and power. When the Lord comes “in the name of the Lord,” he is coming with the Lord’s full authority

The other two expressions, “into” and “upon,” appear about equally often (15x and 16x, respectively).

“Upon” appears only in the synoptic gospels and Acts. It is associated mostly with speaking and preaching, and means that people mention the name explicitly. In Matthew, it refers to people who invoke the name. False prophets will claim the name as their own:

24:5 For many shall come **in my name**, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.

Christians claim access to the community because they bear the name of Christ:

18:5 And whoso shall receive one such little child **in my name** receiveth me.

The preposition used here is “into” εἰς. Where “in” ἐν indicates authority and “upon” ἐπι indicates the actual use of the name, “into” indicates the purpose of the action. The phrase “into the name” [of the Lord Jesus] appears 16 times in the NT. Five of these times it refers to baptism, which symbolizes our identification with the Lord and thus our entry into his body.

28:19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them **in the name** of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

Compare Paul’s description of the baptism of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12, and recall that “name” often represents the person in Scripture:

<sup>29</sup> In addition, the NT uses the expression δια ονομα, but our version never translates that “in the name.”

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1Co 12:13 For by one Spirit are we all baptized into εἰς one body, whether *we be* Jews or Gentiles, whether *we be* bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

Four times, all in John, it describes our faith, “believing into the name of Jesus,” as the means by which we enter into him.

This appears to be the sense in which the word is used here. When we gather “into his name,” we are gathering for the purpose of expressing our unity as his body. We may gather for other purposes: to watch our children at an athletic event, or to share a musical concert together, or to trade our goods in a market. But the gathering he has in mind here is one whose *purpose* is to express our identity as a local manifestation of the body of Christ, to “show forth the Lord’s death until he come” (1 Cor 11:26).<sup>30</sup>

**there am I in the midst of them.**--In the past, we have discussed this verse, and asked how it is that our gathering brings the Lord Jesus into our midst. Isn’t he always with his people? But we have seen in the previous two verses that the divine action precedes and is the cause for the human action, and that makes excellent sense here as well.

Indeed, the Lord is always with his people, and it is that presence that enables them to gather for his sake. This chapter thus emphasizes a theme with which Matthew both begins and ends. At the start, our Lord is introduced to us as Immanuel, “God with us.” At the end of the book, he promises the disciples, “I am with you always” (28:20). And throughout our lives as believers, particularly when we come together, we can trust him to be with us and to lead us in love and harmony together.

### **Some New Testament Echoes of Matthew 18**

Throughout our study of Matthew, we have been tracking places in the NT that refer to our Lord’s teaching as Matthew records it. Matthew 18 contains his most focused teaching on life in the church, and so we are not surprised to find several echoes of it in later Scripture. We will consider four: the need to correct an offending brother in 1 Corinthians 5-6, the need to restore such a one when he repents in 2 Corinthians 2, the authority that Paul invokes to define appropriate conduct in the church, and more general statements about dealing with those who cause schism in Titus 3.

#### **1 Corinthians 5-6, Correcting Error**

Paul appears to refer to this teaching in his instructions concerning unacceptable conduct in the church in 1 Corinthians 5. He begins by describing the behavior in view:

1Co 5:1 It is reported commonly *that there is* fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his

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<sup>30</sup> The use of this preposition in 10:41-42 is puzzling, and needs further consideration, but the general meaning of purpose attested in the OT fits very well with verbs of belief and baptizing, and makes good sense in this passage.



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father's wife.

Surely such conduct qualifies as an offense, likely to lead others into sin. In fact, chapters 6 and 7 go on to indicate that fornication is a widespread problem in Corinth. It is first in the list of sins against which he warns them:

1Co 6:9 Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither **fornicators**, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, 10 Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.

He goes on to urge them directly to avoid fornication:

1 Cor 6:13 Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats: but God shall destroy both it and them. Now the body *is* not for **fornication**, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body. 14 And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power. 15 Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make *them* the members of an harlot? God forbid. 16 What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. 17 But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit. 18 Flee **fornication**.

In the next chapter, he warns them against their suggestion that they ought to avoid marriage:

1Co 7:1 Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: *It is* good for a man not to touch a woman. 2 Nevertheless, *to avoid fornication*, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband.

So the conduct of this man poses a risk to the church, but contrary to the requirement in Matt 18:15, nobody has spoken up against it.

1 Cor 5:2 And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you.

Paul goes on to describe how they should have handled the situation. Notice the echoes of Matthew 18.

1 Cor 5:3 For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, *concerning* him that hath so done this deed,

Paul presents his opinion in the matter, exercising the authority that the Lord gave the disciples in Matt 18:18 to discern heaven's standards of conduct.

1 Cor 5:4 In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Here he exhorts the entire assembly to "gather together" (18:20) to consider the man's behavior, which ought to have been brought before the assembly according to 18:17.<sup>31</sup> Paul envisions what

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<sup>31</sup> The preposition here is *ev*, not *et*; Paul is describing the authority under which he makes his recommendation, not the basis for the gathering of the church.

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the outcome of such a gathering should be:

1 Cor 5:5 To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

To deliver someone to Satan is probably a reference to excommunication, as the sequel shows:<sup>32</sup>

1Co 5:9 I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: 10 Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. 11 But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. 12 For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? 13 But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.

He enjoins upon them the conduct that the Lord commands in 18:17: when someone refuses correction from the church as a whole, the individuals in the church are to exclude him.

Paul calls this process, “delivering unto Satan.” The NT envisions the world as under Satan’s control. Three times, our Lord describes him as the prince, or ruler *αρχων*, of this world *κοσμος* (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). The church is an island of light in this sea of satanic darkness:

1Jo 5:19 we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.

When the church excludes someone from fellowship, they are delivering him to Satan. Paul indicates that the consequence may be physical illness (“the destruction of the flesh”). Not all sickness comes from personal sin (John 9:1-3), but personal sin can very definitely lead to sickness. Later in this very epistle, Paul will report the results of inadequate attention to church discipline:

1Co 11:29 For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning *διακρινω* the Lord's body. 30 For this cause many *are* weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. 31 For if we would judge *διακρινω* ourselves, we should not be judged. 32 But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.

James also reports the possible link between sin and sickness, and

Jam 5:14 Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: 15 And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. 16 Confess *your* faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed.

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32 The expression appears one other place in the Greek Bible, 1Ti 1:19. The error of Hymenaeus, according to 2 Tim 2:16-20, is denying the physical resurrection, teaching a “realized eschatology,” which Paul fears may “overthrow the faith of some.” Thus the issue at hand is offense, leading other believers to deny their faith.

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Note the intervention of “the elders of the church.” We are apparently dealing with a case with possible spiritual implications. In such cases, God may send physical illness to lead wayward saints to repent of their sin and be restored to the Lord and to his people.

In Matt 18:18-20, the Lord’s instruction goes beyond the individual offender to consider any case of disagreement between two believers (v. 19), and in 1 Corinthians, Paul similarly expands his scope from the individual fornicator to believers who go to court with one another.

1Co 6:1 Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints?

“Matter” *πραγμα* is the word our Lord uses in 18:19 to describe the issue over which two people were making demands, and concerning which the Father enables them to come into agreement. Based on the Lord’s teaching, Paul encourages the believers to trust in God’s ability to lead his people to overcome their disagreements. He goes on to encourage them that the church has the authority to decide such matters, as anticipated in 18:17:

1Co 6:2 Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? 3 Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life? 4 If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church.

## 2 Cor 2, Restoring the Penitent

Let’s not forget that the disciplinary action envisioned in Matt 18:15-20 comes after the exhortation to seek the wayward sheep in vv. 10-14. The objective of discipline is not getting rid of bad people from the church, but of recovering a brother or sister who is wandering spiritually. Concerning the fornicator, Paul expressed hope “that the spirit may be saved” (1 Cor 5:5).

Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, with its rebuke concerning the fornicator, during his extended stay in Ephesus (in modern Turkey), in response to a letter from the Corinthians (in Greece) that has not been preserved. Since then, it is clear from other texts that there has been some interchange between him and them (perhaps including a letter from him that has not been preserved). Later, as he makes his way from Ephesus back to Corinth, he sends 2 Corinthians to prepare for his return visit. He wants to be sure that the issues about which he scolded them have been resolved.

2Co 2:1 But I determined this with myself, that I would not come again to you in heaviness. 2 For if I make you sorry, who is he then that maketh me glad, but the same which is made sorry by me? 3 And I wrote this same unto you, lest, when I came, I should have sorrow from them of whom I ought to rejoice; having confidence in you all, that my joy is *the joy* of you all. 4 For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you.

He mentions one particular individual, the main cause of this unpleasantness, who was

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apparently disciplined by the church, and who has repented:

2 Cor 2:5 But if any have caused grief, he hath not grieved me, but in part: that I may not overcharge you all. 6 Sufficient to such a man *is* this punishment, which *was inflicted* of many. 7 So that contrariwise ye *ought* rather to forgive *him*, and comfort *him*, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. 8 Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm *your* love toward him. 9 For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things. 10 To whom ye forgive any thing, I *forgive* also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave *it*, for your sakes *forgave I it* in the person of Christ; 11 Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.

Apparently, the Corinthians heeded Paul's advice, based as it was on our Lord's teaching, and excluded the man. He repented, and now he exhorts them to have the attitude of the shepherd, restoring the man to their fellowship and their love.

### Paul's Authority to Issue Divine Commandments

In 1 Cor 5 that Paul, in the name (on the authority) of the Lord Jesus, renders a decision about the conduct of the fornicator. His authority as an apostle to discern heaven's rules of conduct is derived directly from Matt 18:18. As we have seen, God promised this ability to Peter and the other disciples.

1 Corinthians 5 is not the only place where he claims divine authority for very practical injunctions that he gives to the churches. Note in each of these cases that the issues at hand do not deal with abstract theology, but with how people should conduct themselves.

After Galatians (written at the end of the first missionary journey), the Thessalonian epistles (written during the second journey) are the earliest of Paul's letters. Note how he backs up his practical instruction with the claim that he is giving divine revelation:

1Th 2:10 Ye *are* witnesses, and God *also*, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe: 11 As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father *doth* his children, 12 That ye would **walk worthy of God**, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory. 13 For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received *it* not *as* the word of men, but **as it is in truth, the word of God**, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.

1Th 4:1 Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort *you* by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us **how ye ought to walk and to please God**, *so* ye would abound more and more. 2 **For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus.**

2Th 3:6 **Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ**, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that **walketh disorderly**, and not after the

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tradition which he received of us.

During the third journey, he writes to Corinth and to Rome. 1 Corinthians is rich in practical exhortations. In particular, ch. 14 contains detailed rules for how believers should conduct open meetings. Paul anticipates that some may object to his instructions, and blocks any opposition with these words:

1Co 14:37 If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that **the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.**

Paul is conscious that he is the channel for divine revelation. It is interesting that he makes these claims, not for the rich theology that he reveals, but for practical principles of conduct, which is the domain for which the Lord promised divine guidance to the apostles in Matt 18:18.

### When Separation is Necessary

While Matthew 18 urges restoration of the wayward, the shepherd is not certain of finding the sheep: “if so be that he find it,” 18:13. Sometimes the one who wanders away may not repent, and in that case people in the church are to treat him “as an heathen man and a publican” (18:17). 1 Corinthians 5 is one example of Paul’s application of this principle, and we see it elsewhere as well. He instructs the Thessalonians,

2Th 3:6 **Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,** that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that **walketh disorderly**, and not after the tradition which he received of us.

He writes later to the Romans,

Rom 16:17 Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and **avoid them.**

In 1 Timothy, Paul says something similar about someone who insists on teaching things that are contrary to the words of the Lord Jesus. Note that Paul’s emphasis here is not on doctrinal error but on practical issues. He has just been instructing different classes of people (single women, elders in the church, masters and servants) on the conduct that is expected of them. Then he anticipates disagreement with these principles.

1Ti 6:3 If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, *even* the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; 4 He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, 5 Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: **from such withdraw** thyself.

Paul’s instruction to Titus also shows a knowledge of the Lord’s teaching in this chapter.

Tit 3:10 A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition **reject**; 11 Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself.

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Paul speaks of “a man that is an heretic.” We are accustomed to understand this word as describing someone who is in doctrinal error, but the word actually means someone who promotes division among the believers, as in Rom 16:17.

In both Romans 16 and Titus 3, the person causing schism is to be excluded from the church, according to Matt 18:17. But note the condition in Tit 3:10, “after the first and second admonition.” Paul anticipates a process of multiple rebukes, just as the Lord sets forth in Matt 18:15-17. Again, Paul appears to be following the Lord’s teaching. The first and second admonition would be the personal challenge and the interview with one or two more, while the rejection is the action in view of the review of the case by the church.

Throughout these examples from the epistles, we see how the Lord’s instruction, preserved only in Matthew, guides the conduct of the early church.

### **21-35, Parable: the two debtors**

Like the earlier portion of the chapter that warns against giving offense, the latter portion, telling how to behave when someone sins against us, also ends with a parable (Figure 4, chart).

**21 Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?--**Peter repeats the Lord’s expression, “sin against,” from v. 15. The Lord has outlined a process calculated to lead to the restoration of such a person, but Peter anticipates that some people may need to be restored again, and again, and again... Surely there needs to be some limit, some point after which we recognize that a person is incorrigible.

Peter no doubt thinks he is generous in suggesting seven-fold forgiveness (chart). Seven in the Bible conveys a sense of completeness and the arrival of peace. Seven days in the week bring us to Sabbath rest, seven years in the sabbatical cycle culminate in the sabbatical year when the land rests, and seven sabbatical cycles end in the Jubilee when all debts are forgiven.<sup>33</sup>

**22 Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.--**To catch the full meaning of the Lord’s words, we need to recognize that his expression, “seventy times seven,” exactly echoes the LXX of Gen 4:24, the words of Lamech.

Gen 4:23 And Lamech said unto his wives, Adah and Zillah, Hear my voice; ye wives of Lamech, hearken unto my speech: for I have slain a man to my wounding, and a young man to my hurt. 24 If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech **seventy and sevenfold.**

Lamech delights in vengeance. The Lord alludes directly to his words: the Greek expression

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<sup>33</sup> He may also be responding to a Jewish tradition that forgiveness is not to be repeated more than three times: R. Jose b. R. Jehudah said: When a man sins the first time he is pardoned; the second time, he is pardoned; the third time, he is pardoned; the fourth time, he is not pardoned, as it is written [Amos ii. 6]: "Thus hath said the Lord, For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, will I not turn away their punishment." And it is written [Job xxxiii. 29]: "Lo, all these things doth God two or three times with man." Talmud Bab. Yoma ch. 3, v. 3 p. 137 in Rodkinson

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εβδομηκοντακίς επτα appears only in our text and in the LXX of Gen 4:24.<sup>34</sup> He condemns Lamech's vengeful attitude. His people's mercy should match Lamech's revenge.

The parable illustrates why believers should have this merciful attitude.

**23 Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants.**--“Take account” συναίρω λογον is a technical term for a financial accounting. He was conducting an audit of his books. Given the amount of money in view, the “servants” are likely governors responsible for large provincial budgets and taxes.

Our Lord provides the interpretation in v. 35. The king represents our heavenly Father. We are the servants. With those comparisons in mind, we can work through the parable.

**24 And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him,**--During the course of the audit, the auditors find something suspicious, and call it to the king's attention. The debtor does not come of his own accord, but is discovered.<sup>35</sup> There is someone whose job is to bring our transgressions before the Lord, an official heavenly accuser, or district attorney. His name in both Hebrew and Greek means “accuser”: Satan (שָׂטָן, literally “the Satan”), the devil (διαβολος). We see him acting thus in accusing Job before the Lord (chart),

Job 1:9 Then **Satan** answered the LORD, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? ... 11 But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face.

And the Revelation confirms his accusatory role, along with the solution:

Rev 12:9 And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the **Devil**, and **Satan**, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. 10 And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the **accuser** ο κατηγορος of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. 11 And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.

**which owed him ten thousand talents.**--The talent was 30-40 kg.<sup>36</sup> The denarius (v. 28) was about 4 g, and was the standard daily wage (Matt 20:2). So the talent was worth 7500 denarii or more, or on the order of 25 years' wages, a lifetime of service, and ten thousand talents would represent a quarter-million years' wages (Figure 7, chart). The Lord chooses this sum to indicate an impossibly large debt. We might paraphrase, “He owed the king a gazillion dollars.”

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34 Grammatically, the Greek expression means 70 x 7. Most recent commentators understand it as “seventy and seven,” following the Hebrew in Gen 4:24, שבעים ושבעה, but LXX omits the conjunction that would make that clear. Robinson (p. 673) notes “ ‘seventy times seven’ ... follows literally the Greek words,” and Alford notes, “Seventy times seven, not ‘seven and seventy times,’ is the rendering.” The LXX is not known for its detailed alignment with MT, whether because it is following a different text or because of a defective command of the Hebrew idiom by the translators. In any case, the Lord's point is not to set a limit that we are to track, but to give a very large number that precludes detailed counting, and in the process to draw a contrast with Lamech.

35 Trench draws attention to our natural tendency (Rom 2:5) to “treasure up wrath against the day of wrath.”

36 Wikipedia is the most convenient source on these ancient measures.

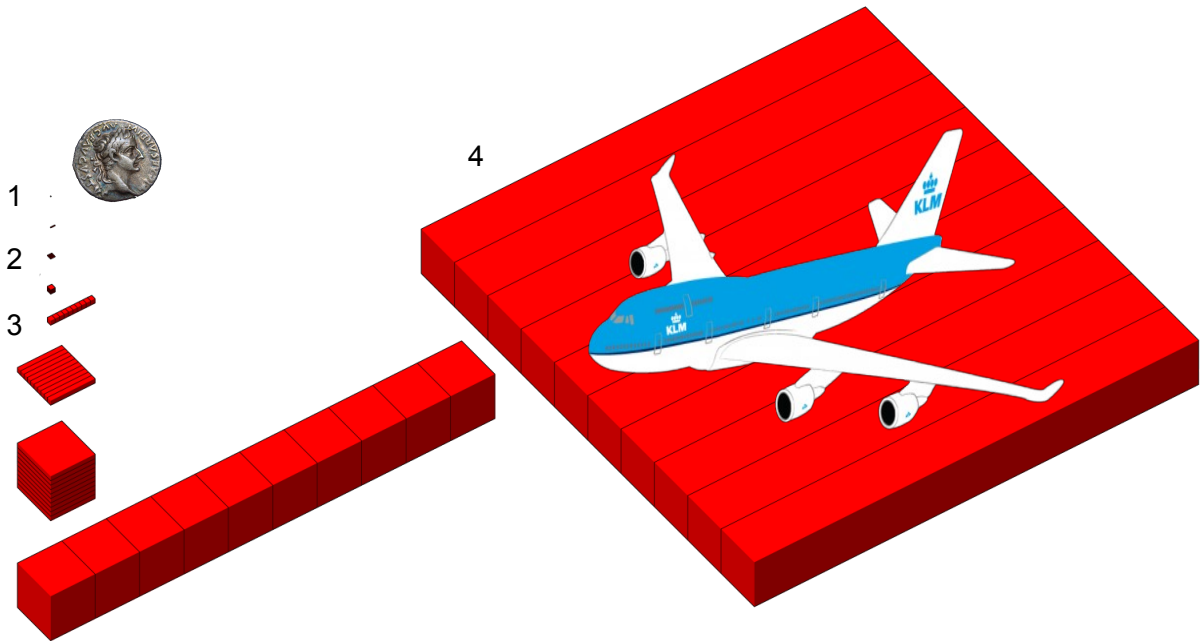


Figure 7: Visualizing 10,000 talents. 1: Pence (v. 28) = denarius, ~4g, one dime (a day's wages). 2: The second servant's debt: 100 denarii, , about one pound, 4 months' wages. 3: Talent: 30-40 kg, 60-80 pounds, 25 years' wages. 4: Ten thousand talents, the first servant's debt: about a million pounds, 747 at takeoff , 100 million denarii, 10,000 people working for a lifetime. Images: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Emperor\\_Tiberius\\_Denarius\\_-\\_Tribute\\_Penny.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Emperor_Tiberius_Denarius_-_Tribute_Penny.jpg), <http://www.airfranceklm.com/en/fleet/long-courrier/boeing-747-400-0>, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Visualisation\\_1\\_billion.svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Visualisation_1_billion.svg)

**25 But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.**--The first step in our salvation is to become aware of our need—the offense that we have given to God in violating his law, and the severe and certain judgment that awaits us.

**26 The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him,**--This is the only place in the NT where προσκυνεω is addressed to a man rather than a divine character, but the king is plainly an image for God. Recall our discussion on 8:2, when the leper worshipped the Lord Jesus.

**saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.**--Given the magnitude of the debt, this promise is clearly unrealistic. But once the sinner recognizes his sin before a holy God, what can he do? Even a perfect life from this point on cannot make up for past failings.

**27 Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.**--This is the only hope for a lost sinner. We cannot hope to satisfy God's demands. We depend on his compassion toward us, like the shepherd seeking the lost sheep in Luke 15.

**28 But the same servant went out,**--Trench points out,



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It is because we ‘go out’ of the presence of our God, because we do not *abide* there, that we are ever in danger of acting as this servant.

Joh 15:4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

This servant shows the attitude of some who think that “getting saved” is a form of insurance, to be taken care of expeditiously and then neglected in our subsequent life. Such a person is not truly saved, and is likely to behave as we see this servant behaving in the next verse.

At this point, it is helpful to compare the wording of the two engagements (Table 11, chart).

**and found one of his fellowservants,**--Notice how aggressive the ungrateful servant is. The first servant was brought by an accuser, but now he himself serves as השטן, the Satan, in pursuing his fellow-servant. If we harbor a vengeful attitude, we are behaving, not like the Lord Jesus into whose image the Lord seeks to bring us, but like Satan.

**which owed him an hundred pence:**--By the computation above, this is no more than 1/75 of a talent, or nearly a millionth of the earlier debt. This point is perhaps the main focus of the parable: in the worst of cases, the offense we receive from others is minuscule compared with the offense for which God has forgiven us.

**and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest.--**

The servant is more violent than the king. The king simply issues a command to recover what was his due (and, as we learn in v. 27, imprisoned the man), but the servant commits physical violence.

**29 And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.--**The petition is the same in the two cases, with one exception: the first servant “worships”

<p>24 <b>one was brought unto him,</b> which owed him <b>ten thousand talents.</b></p> <p>25 But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.</p>	<p>28 But the same servant went out, and <b>found</b> one of his fellowservants, which owed him <b>an hundred pence:</b> and he laid hands on him, and <b>took him by the throat,</b> saying, Pay me that thou owest.</p>
<p>26 The servant therefore fell down, and <b>worshipped</b> him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.</p>	<p>29 And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and <b>besought</b> him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.</p>
<p>27 Then the lord of that servant was <b>moved with compassion,</b> and <b>loosed</b> him, and forgave him the debt.</p>	<p>30 And he <b>would not:</b> but went and <b>cast him into prison,</b> till he should pay the debt.</p>

Table 11: The Two Servants

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προσκυνεω the king, while the second merely beseeches his creditor. This change reinforces our conclusion that προσκυνεω is reserved for deity or for characters who represent deity, and is not just a gesture of respect. Note also the title “Lord,” which the second servant does not use.

**30 And he would not:**--“Would” is not a simple statement of the future, but actually the verb “to wish” θελω. We would say, “He didn’t want to.” His emotional state is in direct contrast with the compassion shown by the king.

**but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.**--The king apparently was holding the first servant in custody, for he loosed him, but the servant now sends his fellow-servant into the very fate from which he has been delivered.

**31 So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry,**--There are two lessons for us in the response of the fellowservants.

First, an unforgiving attitude on the part of one person in the body can bring sorrow to others, not just to the parties who are directly contending with one another. Hebrews warns us of the potential impact on “many” brought about by a “personal issue” (chart):

Heb 12:14 Follow peace with all *men*, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: 15 Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble *you*, and thereby many be defiled;

Second, contrast their response with that of the Lord in v. 34. Trench: “They were *sorry*; their lord was wroth” οργιζω. It is not our place to be angry with those who have fallen.<sup>37</sup>

The wisdom literature is full of warnings against anger and wrath. Here is one (chart):

Psa 37:8 Cease from **anger**, and forsake **wrath**: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil.

The epistles pick up this instruction:

Rom 12:19 Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but *rather* give place unto [God’s] wrath οργη: for it is written, Vengeance *is* mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

Note the reference to God’s wrath. Our anger only gets in the way. God is the only one who is justified in being angry; we should get out of his way and let him do his work.

2Co 12:20 For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and *that* I shall be found unto you such as ye would not: lest *there be* debates, envyings, **wraths** θυμος, strifes,

Gal 5:19 Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are *these*; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, 20 Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, **wrath** θυμος, strife, seditions, heresies, 21 Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told *you* in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

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<sup>37</sup> The following notes on anger are taken from our earlier study on Matt 5:22.

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Eph 4:31 Let all bitterness, and **wrath** θυμος, and **anger** οργη, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice:

Col 3:8 But now ye also put off all these; **anger** οργη, **wrath** θυμος, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth.

1Ti 2:8 I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without **wrath** οργη and doubting.

Anger is a prerogative of deity. It is appropriate only for someone who has a right to expect something from the world. We have no such right. We are sinful rebels who deserve only death. Everything good that happens to us is undeserved, an example of God's grace, and invites our gratitude and worship. Bad things should stimulate a sense of our unworthiness and provide heighten our gratitude for the good things, not lead us to indignation.

**and came and told unto their lord all that was done.**--The appropriate response to a situation like this, where we become aware of tension among other believers, is to call on our Father.

**32 Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: 33 Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?**--Here is the heart of the lesson for Peter and for us. In our dealings with one another, we must always remember the tremendous debt of sin that God has forgiven us. The magnitude of his forgiveness should make it impossible for us to have an unforgiving attitude toward other believers.

**34 And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.**--The outcome for the first servant is now worse than it would have been if the king had held him to his debt in the first place. Then, the punishment in view was simply being sold into slavery. Here, it is positive torment.

**35 So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.**--The Lord's teaching here is consistent with what we saw in the Sermon on the Mount (chart):

Mat 5:7 Blessed *are* the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

Mat 6:12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. ... 14 For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: 15 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Some people are confused by our Lord's words here. Scofield comments on this verse,<sup>38</sup>

This is legal ground. Cf. Ephesians 4:32 which is grace. Under law forgiveness is conditioned upon a like spirit in us; under grace we are forgiven for Christ's sake, and exhorted to forgive because we have been forgiven.

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38 Again, I draw on my earlier observations on the Sermon on the Mount. Clearly, the two addresses are closely related.

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The verse he cites is

Eph 4:32 And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

At first glance, there does seem to be a tension between asking for forgiveness motivated by our forgiveness of others, and forgiving others as God has forgiven us. In Ephesians, God's forgiveness comes first, while in Matthew, we claim to have forgiven others at the moment we come seeking God's forgiveness.<sup>39</sup> But Eph 4:32 exactly follows Matt 18:33, suggesting that Paul has it in mind! This teaching is not restricted to the gospels. We find it in the rest of the NT as well. James in particular emphasizes our need to show mercy to others:

Jam 2:13 For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.

Jam 5:9 Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door.

The key to this apparent tension is not a dispensational distinction between law and grace, but the relation between life and fruit that our Lord taught in the Sermon on the Mount:

Mat 7:16 Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? 17 Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither *can* a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. 19 Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. 20 Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

New life in Christ will produce fruit. In particular, if we really appreciate the mercy that God has showed to us, we will be eager to extend that mercy to others. If we refuse to do so, we show that our profession is superficial, that we have not really received the forgiveness that God has offered us, and that we are still in our sins.

### **Summary of Matthew 18**

The local church is a haven of peace in the midst of a sinful world, an island of the kingdom of God in the midst of Satan's broad domain. This chapter has instructed us on the main principles we need to follow in the church. The disciples are thinking in terms of an authority structure, which the Lord rejects. Instead, he focuses on our loving support for one another. We are to avoid offending the "little children," anything that might lead young believers into sin. And when someone sins against us, we are not to harbor a grudge, but to deal patiently and persistently with the issue—hopefully to resolve it, but if not, to separate from those who insist on living in rebellion against the Lord.

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<sup>39</sup> I follow the MT in reading the present, as also does Tholuck. Metzger's committee was divided, though the majority preferred the aorist. Regardless of the reading, Carmignac cites 6:14-15; 18:35; 5:23-24 in support of the priority of forgiving others over asking for forgiveness ourselves.

## Notes

### **Offense σκανδαλον, σκανδαλιζω in Matthew**

Together, the words appear 19x. Case analysis:

1. Our members may offend us, 5:29, 30; 18:8, 9; and in this case we are to reject them.
2. We must be careful not to offend secular government 17:27 or other believers ch. 18
3. But some are offended at Christ (11:6; 15:12), and this is culpable.

The second and third cases appear throughout the NT, and it is likely that these instances are inspired by our Lord's teaching.

### **Words for "child" in the NT**

There are four main word families:

βρεφος is an infant, either unborn (Luke 1:41), newly born (2:12), or nursing (1 Pet 2:2). Luke is the only gospel to use this term.

τεκνον and the diminutive τεκνιον derive from the verb τικτω "to bear, beget," and emphasize the family relation with the parents.

Παις can mean either "child" or "servant," emphasizing the lower social status of the person described. The diminutives παιδιον, παιδισκα, παιδαριον are more often used of children.

Υιος refers to the legal privileges of sonship. It is the only one of the three that implies anything about age, and that only because legal sonship presumes that one has reached the age recognized in the society.

Only βρεφος corresponds to our sense of "infant." The other families, even in their diminutive forms, are regularly used throughout the NT of individuals capable of belief and responsible action.

### **Chronology of the Temple Tax**

This was collected annually on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Adar (Gill), the last month of the year, one month before Passover. So this event would have occurred just one month before the Lord's passion, and the previous payment would have been a year previous.

Can we date the three declarations of the Lord as Son of God (14:33; 16:16; 17:5)? The last two are certainly since the previous Adar. 14:33 follows the feeding of the 5000, which John dates:

Joh 6:4 And the passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh.

It is likely that by the time he fed the 5000, he had already paid the temple tax. So all three

declarations would take place in the intervening year, explaining 1) Peter's assumption that the Lord would pay again, 2) the occasion for the Lord's correction to him, and 3) the fact that he goes ahead and pays the tax.

### ***Entering the Kingdom***

18:3 is an instance of one of our Lord's favorite expressions, the notion of entering into the kingdom of heaven (or of God). The only instance of "entering a kingdom" in the LXX is Dan 11:6, 9, of the movements of the King of the South back and forth between the territory of the King of the North and his own territory. While in general βασιλεια reflects rule rather than realm, in this idiom it may say more about the realm.

Matthew's instances cover all the incidents that are in the other synoptics. Here are Matthew's references, as well as one each in John and Acts, showing that the idiom persists in the church:

Matt. 5:20 For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case **enter into the kingdom of heaven**.

Matt. 7:21 Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall **enter into the kingdom of heaven**; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

Matt. 18:3 And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not **enter into the kingdom of heaven**.

Matt. 19:23 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly **enter into the kingdom of heaven**.

Matt. 19:24 And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to **enter into the kingdom of God**.

Matt. 23:13 But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the **kingdom of heaven** against men: for ye neither **go in yourselves**, neither suffer ye them that are entering to **go in**.

Jn. 3:5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot **enter into the kingdom of God**. (cf. Joh 3:3 Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.)

Acts 14:22 Confirming the souls of the disciples, *and* exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation **enter into the kingdom of God**.

With a different movement verb (προαγω),

Mat 21:31 Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots **go into the kingdom of God before** you.

Compare the notion of inheriting the kingdom:

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Mat 25:34 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

The alternative is:

Mat 25:41 Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:

Clearly, to inherit the kingdom is to enter into the blessings of the age to come.

Beasley-Murray (pp 174-175) notes that in Mark 9:43-48 (a longer version of Matt 18:8-9), to enter into the kingdom (v. 47) is parallel to entering into life (vv. 43, 45). He also notes that the saying about entering the kingdom in Matt 19:23-24 is in connection with a question about gaining eternal life (v. 16).

### ***The Rhetorical Connection of 18:8-9 with the Context***

It is difficult to understand just how these two verses fit in with the context, which both before and after is concerned with the “little ones.”

Does the Lord anticipate the body imagery of 1 Cor 12? Frances notes this interpretation, which goes back to Origen, p. 683 note 14, but rejects it, based on the singular verbs and the parallel with 5:29ff. But he does not explain how the passage fits together—he sees us returning to the little ones in v. 10, without explaining why the Lord left that topic.

Nolland sees this as a reference to ch. 5, much as I do. Carson also sees a recollection of ch. 5, but with different emphasis than I do: we need to deal with pride as harshly as with adultery (the subject in ch. 5).

Luz recognizes the rhetorical discontinuity (p. 436): “It is as if there were two different melodies in our chapter that are not in harmony. We will need to explore further how they relate to each other.” He mentions Origen’s church-as-body interpretation, but suggests that the exhortation in these vv may be to the “little ones” to guard against incoming offenses.

### ***The Parable of the Shepherd in Matthew and Luke***

The Lord gave this parable on two occasions, in different contexts, and with different meanings.<sup>40</sup> Luke gives a similar parable in a different context. When did the Lord give the parable in Luke? This discourse appears to take place in Capernaum (17:24), before the Lord and his disciples began their final journey to Jerusalem (19:1). Luke 9:51 appears to mark the start of

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40 There is surprisingly little literature comparing the two. <http://www.circleofhope.net/jonnyrashid/parable-of-the-lost-sheep-comparison/>; E. F. F. Bishop, “The Parable of the Lost or Wandering Sheep. Mt 18:10–14; Luke 15:3–7,” *ATR* 44 (1962) 44–57. [http://wesley.nnu.edu/fileadmin/imported\\_site/biblical\\_studies/parables/Mt18\\_12-14.htm](http://wesley.nnu.edu/fileadmin/imported_site/biblical_studies/parables/Mt18_12-14.htm) ; <http://www.neverthirsty.org/bible-studies/life-of-christ-ministry-in-galilee-late-a-d-32/setting-of-the-parable/>

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his journey to Jerusalem, and we find him in Samaria in the next verse. In this case, Luke 15 is given during the trip, and thus after the instance of the parable in Matthew.

Matthew 18	Luke 15	Observations
1 At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who [then] is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? ...	1 Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. 2 And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.	Different questioners (disciples vs. Pharisees and scribes) and subjects (those in the kingdom vs. interested sinners)
	3 And he spake this parable unto them, saying,	
10 Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.		
11 For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost απολλυμι <i>perfect active ptc</i>		
12 How think ye? if a man have γινομαι τινη ανθρωπω an hundred sheep,	4 What man of you, having εχω an hundred sheep,	The sheep are subject in Matthew, but object in Luke.
and one of them be gone astray πλαναω, doth he not leave the ninety and nine,	if he lose one απολλυμι of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine	Only in Matthew does the sheep “go astray,” which presumes that it was originally in the right way and that it is to blame. In Luke, the focus is entirely on the status of the sheep as lost, not on how it got there. The difference is consistent with the distinction between a wayward believer in Matthew, but a lost person in Luke.
	in the wilderness ερημος,	In Luke, the “righteous” (v. 7) is the Lord’s tongue-in-cheek description of the Pharisees, but they are in fact in the wilderness.
and goeth into the mountains,		επι τα ορη could refer to where he left them, as in Luke. But see Bishop for argument that the AV is correct. <sup>41</sup>

41 Modern translations insist on connecting the adverbial phrase in Matthew to where he leaves the flock, as the corresponding phrase is connected in Luke. This decision is probably motivated by the widely accepted notion that both versions of the parable come from a common sayings source, Q, shared by Matthew and Luke. If we



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Matthew 18	Luke 15	Observations
and seeketh that which is gone astray πλαναω?	and go after that which is lost απολλυμι <i>perf active ptc</i> , until he find it?	
13 And if so be that he find it,	5 And when he hath found <i>it</i> ,	Matthew expresses uncertainty that the sheep will be found; Luke assumes that it will be.
	he layeth <i>it</i> on his shoulders,	
verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that <i>sheep</i> ,	rejoicing.	
	6 And when he cometh home, he calleth together <i>his</i> friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. 7 I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth,	He and the lost sheep are now home. What happened to the 99? Are they still in the wilderness? Luke mentions the group celebration; Matthew does not.
than of the ninety and nine which went not astray.	more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.	Compare Luke's description with Luke 13:1-5. He has already made the case that everybody needs to repent. He probably uses the term here in an ironic or sarcastic tone, as in 5:32.
14 Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish απολλυμι.		

**The Father in Heaven**

In 18:1, 14 the Lord refers to “my/your father which is in heaven.” But sometimes he just refers to “my father” or “your father.” What function does the added phrase play? And what difference in emphasis is there with “your father” vs. “my father? (We leave out the singular “our Father” in 6:9.) We start by laying out the evidence in a table:

	Your Father	My Father
“In heaven”	5:16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify <b>your Father which is in heaven.</b> <i>The Father of the ones whose works are seen</i>	7:21 Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of <b>my Father which is in heaven.</b> <i>Contrast between “me” and “my Father.” The Lord defers his authority to his</i>

hold to Matthean priority and recognize the two versions as independent, there is no reason to interpret one through the lens of the other.

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	Your Father	My Father
	<p>5:44 But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; 45 That ye may be the children of <b>your Father which is in heaven</b>: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. <i>You must be kind to evil people, because that is how your Father is, and you should resemble him</i></p> <p>5:48 Be ye therefore perfect, even as <b>your Father which is in heaven</b> is perfect.</p> <p>6:1 Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of <b>your Father which is in heaven</b>.</p> <p>7:11 If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall <b>your Father which is in heaven</b> give good things to them that ask him? <i>Comparison of you as earthly fathers with your heavenly father</i></p> <p>18:14 Even so it is not the will of <b>your Father which is in heaven</b>, that one of these little ones should perish.</p> <p>23:9 And call no <i>man</i> your father upon the earth: for one is <b>your Father, which is in heaven</b>. <i>Needed to make the contrast with "your father upon the earth"</i></p>	<p><i>Father.</i></p> <p>10:32 Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before <b>my Father which is in heaven</b>. 33 But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before <b>my Father which is in heaven</b>. <i>The Lord's endorsement only makes sense to his Father.</i></p> <p>12:50 For whosoever shall do the will of <b>my Father which is in heaven</b>, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother. <i>Our familial relation to the Lord Jesus depends on our relation to his Father</i></p> <p>16:17 And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but <b>my Father which is in heaven</b>. <i>Echoes Peter's recognition of him as "son of God," which</i></p> <p>18:10 Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of <b>my Father which is in heaven</b>.</p> <p>18:19 Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of <b>my Father which is in heaven</b>. <i>Suggests that the key to the answered prayer is his intercession; cf. prayer "in my name," Jn. 14:13, 14; 15:16; 16:23, 24, 26</i></p>
"heavenly"	<p>6:14 For if ye forgive men their trespasses, <b>your heavenly Father</b> will also forgive you:</p> <p>6:26 Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet <b>your heavenly Father</b> feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?</p> <p>6:32 (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.</p>	<p>15:13 But he answered and said, Every plant, which <b>my heavenly Father</b> hath not planted, shall be rooted up.</p> <p>18:35 So likewise shall <b>my heavenly Father</b> do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.</p>
No ref. to heaven	<p>6:8 Be not ye therefore like unto them: for <b>your Father</b> knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him. <i>He will care for them because he is their Father</i></p> <p>6:15 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will <b>your Father</b> forgive your trespasses.</p> <p>10:20 For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of <b>your Father</b> which speaketh in you. <i>Contrast between "you" and "your Father"</i></p> <p>10:29 Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without <b>your Father</b>. <i>Emphasis is on his care for them: he who is God of the sparrows is their Father</i></p>	<p>11:27 All things are delivered unto me of <b>my Father</b>: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and <i>he</i> to whomsoever the Son will reveal <i>him</i>. <i>Deals with what the Father has delivered to the Son</i></p> <p>20:23 And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but <i>it shall be given to them</i> for whom it is prepared of <b>my Father</b>. <i>cf. 7:21; 25:34; references to the coming kingdom</i></p> <p>24:36 But of that day and hour knoweth no <i>man</i>, no, not the angels of heaven, but <b>my Father</b> only. <i>References to</i></p>

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	Your Father	My Father
		<p><i>the kingdom</i></p> <p>25:34 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of <b>my Father</b>, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: <i>As in 7:21, the kingdom is Christ's, and it is God as his Father who governs access.</i></p> <p>26:39 And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O <b>my Father</b>, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou <i>wilt.</i> <i>As in the "your" passages, when a believer, whether the Lord or a disciple, needs the Father's attention, it is appropriate to claim him as one's own.</i></p> <p>26:42 He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O <b>my Father</b>, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.</p> <p>26:53 Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to <b>my Father</b>, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?</p>

With “your,” the reference to heaven (“in heaven” εν ουρανοις 7x, “heavenly” επουρανιος 3x) is more common than its omission (4x), while with “my,” the ratio is closer (7 + 2 vs. 7). Those who have human fathers must be careful to make the distinction; the Lord’s only Father is in heaven.

This table does not explore the difference between “heavenly Father” ο πατηρ ο επουρανιος and “Father which is in heaven”

Governing characteristics:

1. Relation, often with the point of imitation: Our conduct is exhorted based on family relation to God (5:16, 45, 48; 7:11; 23:9; 6:15; 10:20); the Lord’s blessings to us depend on his relation to his Father (10:32, 33; 12:50; 18:19)
2. Dependence: One who is in need calls on God as his own Father. This usage is particularly common in instances lacking “which is in Heaven”; the emphasis is on God’s immediate accessibility and presence with his own. Disciples: 6:8; 10:29. Our Lord: 26:39, 42, 53
3. Kingdom: References to the Father in the context of the coming kingdom (e.g., 7:21; 20:23; 24:36; 25:34) are as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, because it is his kingdom that the Father has given to him.

### **Go Astray πλαναω and Lose απολλυμι**

The verb is common throughout the NT, and is often used of believers:

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1 Cor. 6:9 Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not **deceived**: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind,

1 Cor. 15:33 Be not **deceived**: evil communications corrupt good manners.

Gal. 6:7 Be not **deceived**; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

Heb. 5:2 Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are **out of the way**; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity.

Jas. 1:16 Do not **err**, my beloved brethren.

Jas. 5:19 Brethren, if any of you do **err** from the truth, and one convert him;

Contrast Luke's verb, which is regularly used in contrast with those who are saved:

Rom. 2:12 For as many as have sinned without law shall also **perish** without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law;

1 Cor. 1:18 For the preaching of the cross is to them that **perish** foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.

2 Cor. 2:15 For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that **perish**:

2 Cor. 4:3 But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are **lost**:

2 Thess. 2:10 And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that **perish**; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

2 Pet. 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should **perish**, but that all should come to repentance.

### ***Binding and Loosing, v. 18***

Larson (1.1 (c)) discusses a range of possible meanings of these terms that have been proposed by various scholars. The previous context envisions a situation where one brother sins against another, the process leads to his condemnation, and he is treated as a heathen and a publican. Each of these three steps has been considered a candidate for the referent of binding and loosing: they might refer

1. to the determination of what conduct is permissible in the assembly, that is, what conduct constitutes a "sin" on the part of one brother against another;
2. to the retention or forgiveness of the sin of an erring brother, based on whether or not he repents;

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3. to the decision to exclude or include the erring brother from the assembly as a publican and a heathen.

Let's consider each of these in the light of a) its coherence with the immediate context, and b) whether the words "bind" and "loose" are used elsewhere in the Bible to speak of the action being discussed. This latter criterion is important because our Lord seems to assume that his hearers know what these terms mean, and one way to confirm the currency of a meaning is to show that it recurs in other texts that they would have known.<sup>42</sup>

### Excommunication?

#3 assumes that v. 17 describes a group decision to excommunicate. While the teaching of this chapter undoubtedly underlies the later teaching on excommunication (specifically in 1 Cor 5), the immediate instruction in v. 17 concerns the attitude of the individual who is offended: "let him be unto thee [singular]." The action of the church in that verse is not excommunicating, but rendering a judgment, either on the nature of the conduct of the erring brother (#1) or on whether he should be treated as sinful or forgiven (#1).

So #3 is not the best fit for the context. In addition, I'm not aware of any passages where "bind" or "loose" refer to excommunication or including someone in the church.

### Retention or Forgiveness of Sin?

Larson supports #2, motivated largely by a wide range of recent studies into the meaning of the terms themselves in the context of legal theory. This meaning would fit the context, if we conceive of the primary role of the church in v. 17 as determining the guilt or innocence of the offender.

Meaning #2 offers a conceptual parallel (though not a verbal one) with our Lord's later words to the disciples recorded in John:

Joh 20:21 Then said Jesus to them again, Peace *be* unto you: as *my* Father hath sent me, even so send I you. 22 And when he had said this, he breathed on *them*, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: 23 Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; *and* whose soever *sins* ye retain, they are retained.

Without question, the church does have this authority, but is that what the Lord has in mind in Matthew 18?

Larson doesn't provide much evidence for other verses with this meaning of bind and loose, but these uses are attested. Forgiveness is described as loosing in the LXX:

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<sup>42</sup> Much biblical scholarship seeks for evidence of meaning in extra-biblical literature. In principle, such sources (e.g., Philo, Josephus) may indeed provide good evidence for the currency of a meaning, but it is less likely that the Spirit of God would expect the ordinary believer reading the text to have access to extra-biblical sources. My preference for intra-biblical evidence is an example of study principle #2, "Stick to the Bible" ([http://www.cyber-chapel.org/BibleStudyPrinciples\\_FullPage.pdf](http://www.cyber-chapel.org/BibleStudyPrinciples_FullPage.pdf)).

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Job 42:9 So Eliphaz the Themanite, and Baldad the Sauchite, and Sophar the Minaean, went and did as the Lord commanded them: and he **pardoned** their sin for the sake of Job.

Isa 40:2 Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is **pardoned**:

I haven't found the verb "bind" δεω in the sense of "retain sin," but a related noun is used this way:

Act 8:23 For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and *in* the bond of iniquity.

In addition, the concept of binding, though with a different verb, is certainly applied in this way:

Pro 5:22 His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden σφιγγω with the cords of his sins.

So meaning #2 is certainly possible.

## Determination of Permissible Conduct?

In studying the parallel passage in 16:9, I advocated #1, "set the standards of conduct.

The notion of agreeing what conduct is acceptable seems more coherent with our passage than the notion of declaring whether someone is forgiven or not. Later NT invocation of the Lord's warning against "offense" (1 Cor 8; Rom 14) deals not with the guilt of the person who is offending, but with the conduct that he permits himself. The issue is restricting one's individual liberty for the sake of the spiritual health of others. Once we see "sin against" in 18:15 as another way of saying "offend" (as in 1 Cor 8:12), we are led to understand 18:15-17 in terms of the conduct chosen by the offender rather than his guilt in any abstract sense, and the role of the church in v. 17 is most naturally understood as mediating in a discussion of what conduct will or will not be considered acceptable.

"Binding" and "loosing" were common idioms among the Jews to describe specifying conduct that was or was not acceptable.<sup>43</sup> But our principles require us to show the point within the Bible itself, and in fact, we can do so within Matthew. To loose is to permit conduct, to tell what is permitted:

Mat 5:19 Whosoever therefore shall **break** [**loose**] one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven:

Conversely, to bind is to restrict conduct, to define what is forbidden:

Mat 23:3 All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, *that* observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. 4 For they **bind**<sup>44</sup> heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay *them* on men's shoulders; but they *themselves* will not move

<sup>43</sup> See Gill for references.

<sup>44</sup> In this case, the Greek verb differs; it is δεσμευω, not δεω. But semantically, it expresses a closely related idea.

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them with one of their fingers.

Importantly, both of these meanings are attested within Matthew, so we know that he is comfortable with them.

On balance, this appears to be the most appropriate interpretation of the expression.

### Εκκλησια

	Εκκλησια	συναγωγη	
קהל	70	34	87x "congregation," 17 assembly, 16 company
עדה	0	130	123x "congregation", 8 assembly, 13 company

Girdlestone: Whilst Kahal generally refers to the *representative* gathering, 'Adah often signifies an informal massing of the people.<sup>45</sup>

TWOT: A distinction between 'ēdā and qāhāl seems to be intended in “if the whole congregation ('ēdā) commit sin ... and the thing is hidden from the eyes of the assembly” (qah Lev 4:13). Here the qāhāl is the judicial representatives of the community. There is also the case where certain Israelite persons cannot enter the qāhāl (Deut 23:2). But elsewhere the two words are used in successive clauses in the same sense (Num 16:3) and are joined together (Prov 5:14). In general, the terms are synonymous.<sup>46</sup>

### Expressions for “In the Name”

Three Greek expressions are translated “in the name” in our version. The table shows are some statistics.

	לשם	בשם	על שם	כשם	NT Instances	Total
Bare dative	14	~47				114
Εἰς ὄνομα	3				15	3
Ἐν ὀνομα	1 (Jos 9:9)	38			40	44
Ἐπι ὀνομα		30	8		16	41
Δια ὀνομα	3		1		10	9
κατ'ὀνομα		3	1	5		
Total	30	131	15			

### Ἐν τῷ ὀνομα

The expression ἐν ὀνομα is much more common in the LXX, and sometimes translates לשם, sometimes

בשם. ἐν ὀνομα is also the more common expression in the NT (40x), and is Paul’s expression other than when speaking of baptism in 1 Cor 1. Importantly, in the disciplinary setting of 1 Cor 5:5, Paul uses ἐν τῷ ὀνοματι τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ, while the Lord in Matt 18:20 uses εἰς ....

45 Girdlestone, R. B. (1998). *Synonyms of the Old Testament: their bearing on Christian doctrine*. (p. 231). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

46 Lewis, J. P. (1999). 1991 קהל. R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer Jr., & B. K. Waltke (Eds.), *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (electronic ed., p. 790). Chicago: Moody Press.

## ΕΙΣ ΤΟ ΟΝΟΜΑ

In the NT, used

- of baptism, Matt 28:19; Acts 8:16; 19:5; 1 Cor 1:13, 15;
- of faith, John 1:12; 2:23; 3:18; 1 John 5:13
- of the motive for other conduct, Matt 10:41, 42; 18:20; Heb 6:10;

Heb 6:10 For God *is* not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed **toward his name**, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.

The preposition has the sense of “for,” indicating the purpose or objective of the action, as in the LXX, where it translates עִלְיָ:

1Ch 22:5 the house *that is* to be builded for the LORD *must be* exceeding magnificent, **of fame** and of glory throughout all countries: I will *therefore* now make preparation for it. So David prepared abundantly before his death.

Neh 6:13 Therefore *was* he hired, that I should be afraid, and do so, and sin, and *that* they might have **matter for an evil report**, that they might reproach me.

Isa 55:13 Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the LORD **for a name**, for an everlasting sign *that* shall not be cut off.

These are the only instances in the LXX of the canonical books; there are three more in 1, 2, 3, Macc. For an extensive study, see Hartman, NTS 20 (1974), 432-440, who shows that the usage of עִלְיָ is very diverse, and argues that 18:20 and 28:19 are similar to one another but distinct from 10:41-42. But note from the table below that though עִלְיָ is the dominant (indeed, only) reflex of εἰς ὄνομα in the LXX, it is far from devoted, being used for two other constructions and mostly for the bare dative. So it's not clear that his semantic survey of the semitic expression can be carried over directly to the Greek.

The use of baptism invites comparison with the same preposition with the same verb but another object:

1Co 12:13 For by one Spirit are we all **baptized into εἰς one body**, whether *we be* Jews or Gentiles, whether *we be* bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

Here, the preposition indicates the result or product of the baptizing.

## ΕΠΙ ΤΟ ΟΝΟΜΑ

The notable verse 1 Kings 21:8 uses ἐπι το ὄνομα:

1Ki 21:8 So she wrote letters in Ahab's name, and sealed *them* with his seal, and sent the letters unto the elders and to the nobles that *were* in his city, dwelling with Naboth



## Matthew 17b-18

This expression appears 14x in the NT, only in the synoptics and Acts. Let's sort out the instances:

### **Receiving a little child ...**

Matt. 18:5 And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me.

Mk. 9:37 Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me.

Lk. 9:48 And said unto them, Whosoever shall receive this child in my name receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me receiveth him that sent me: for he that is least among you all, the same shall be great.

### **False Teachers Coming in the name of Christ ...**

Matt. 24:5 For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.

Mk. 13:6 For many shall come in my name, saying, I am *Christ*; and shall deceive many.

Lk. 21:8 And he said, Take heed that ye be not deceived: for many shall come in my name, saying, I am *Christ*; and the time draweth near: go ye not therefore after them.

### **Doing Miracles**

Mk. 9:39 But Jesus said, Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me.

Lk. 9:49 And John answered and said, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name; and we forbad him, because he followeth not with us.<sup>47</sup>

### **Preaching**

Lk. 24:47 And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

Acts 4:17 But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name.

Acts 4:18 And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.

Acts 5:28 Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us.

Act 5:40 And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten *them*, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

### **Baptism**

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<sup>47</sup> Mark's parallel to this verse (9:38) uses the bare dative in BYZ, but *ev* in NTG28, so NTG28 invites a contrast between the expressions, while BYZ suggests a refinement.

## Matthew 17b-18

Acts 2:38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.<sup>48</sup>

### Nonce usages

Lk. 1:59 And it came to pass, that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they called him Zacharias, after the name of his father.

Acts 15:14 Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.

### Other Expressions

Εκ ονομα appears in the LXX for על שם but not the NT. But the NT does use δια ονομα, 10x, which in the LXX translates בעבור שם in 1 Sam 12:22, למען שם in 2 Chr 6:32; Jer 14:21, לשם in Isa 60:9; Ezek 36:22; 39:25; על שם in Ezek 36:21.

κατ'ονομα is in John 10:3; 3 John 15, "by name," and appears in the LXX 9x, mostly for כשם.

### Summary of Matthew's Usage

There is some distributional difference, so we need to compare usage within a single corpus, and for us that would be Matthew. Which expressions appear there?

#### Εἰς ονομα

10:41 He that receiveth a prophet **in the name** of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man **in the name** of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward.

10:42 And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold *water* only **in the name** of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.

18:20 For where two or three are gathered together **in my name**, there am I in the midst of them.

28:19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them **in the name** of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

#### εν ονομα

21:9; 23:9; both times quoting Psa 118:26.

#### επι ονομα

18:5 And whoso shall receive one such little child **in my name** receiveth me.

24:5 For many shall come **in my name**, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.

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<sup>48</sup> It is unusual that Peter would use this preposition, but the other two instances in Acts are by Luke, and perhaps we see here Peter's unfamiliarity with the Greek idiom.

**δια ονομα**

10:22 And ye shall be hated of all *men* **for my name's sake**: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.

24:9 Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations **for my name's sake**.

**Summary of Usage in Acts**

Acts also uses all three. Interestingly, it uses all three of {εις, εν, επι} in connection with baptism, though in 10:48 it is possible that the prepositional phrase modifies “commanded” rather than “be baptized.”

**εις ονομα**

Only of baptism, as in Matt 28:19.

8:16 (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.)

19:5 When they heard *this*, they were **baptized in the name** of the Lord Jesus.

**Ev ονομα**

The examples all appear to give the authority for a word or an action.

3:6 Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: **In the name** of Jesus Christ of Nazareth [I **command** thee] rise up and walk.

4:7 And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?

4:10 Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, *even* by him doth this man stand here before you whole.

9:27 But Barnabas took him, and brought *him* to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had **preached** boldly at Damascus **in the name** of Jesus.

9:29 And he **spake** boldly **in the name** of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him.

10:48 And he commanded them to be **baptized in the name** of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days. *!! usually eis. Perhaps εν ονοματι modifies “commanded” rather than “baptized,” as in 16:8*

16:18 And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I **command thee in the name** of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour.

**επι ονομα**

Appears to refer to an explicit reference to the name, either in confession or in preaching. Επι = על "concerning"?

2:38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and **be baptized every one of you in the name** of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. *Alford: "on the Name—i.e. on the confession of that which the Name implies, and into the benefits and blessings which the Name implies"*

4:17 But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they **speak** henceforth to no man **in this name**.

4:18 And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.

5:28 Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us.

5:40 And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten *them*, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

15:14 Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.

**δια ονομα**

4:30 By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done **by the name** of thy holy child Jesus.

10:43 To him give all the prophets witness, that **through his name** whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.

**Summary**

Ev indicates that the name of the Lord constitutes the authority or power associated with an action; επι indicates that the name itself is part of the action, as in proclamation or confession; εις indicates that the name is the object of the action. In each case, it is important to keep in mind that "name" stands for the person. We act in the authority of the Lord, proclaiming him, and seeking his glory and honor.