

MATTHEW

Chapter 18

The Greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven

At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” 2 And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them 3 and said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5 “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, 6 but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.

Ch 18 Extensive teaching on sin, forgiveness, and the community of faith. (TLSB)

18:1 *who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven* – We might think of Abraham or Moses or the apostle Paul. When the disciples asked Jesus that question, however, they wanted to know which one of them would be the greatest. They all expected to have positions of importance in Jesus’ kingdom, and each of them would have liked to be Jesus’ right-hand man. It may have appeared to them that Peter, James and John were the likeliest candidates for that position. Earlier that same day Jesus had selected Peter to catch the fish with the coin in its mouth to pay the temple tax for himself and Jesus. It had been only a short time since Jesus took only Peter, James, and John with Him to the Mount of Transfiguration, and the rest of the disciples also remembered that Jesus had taken those same three with Him when He went into the house of Jairus to raise that man’s 12-year-old daughter from the dead. And Peter often assumed a role of leadership by speaking up in behalf of all the disciples. So we can understand why the other disciples wondered about their positions in the kingdom that Jesus was soon going to establish. The problem was that they failed to understand the concept of greatness in Jesus’ kingdom. (PBC)

In the previous chapter, the disciples have witnessed several miraculous events. Naturally, they would like to have a piece of Jesus’ glory, fame, and power, and are wondering how to become successful and “make it big” in the kingdom of God. Jesus’ response is shocking and counterintuitive to these competitive and self-absorbed disciples. Jesus intends to refocus them from adult patterns of reasoning and faith toward childlike ones. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

The disciples seem to have had a recurring dispute about who was the greatest (20:21; Lk 22:24). Jesus used their question as the occasion for His fourth major discourse, in which He taught how Christians should act toward one another. (TLSB)

18:2 *a child* – He is essentially a lowly and dependent figure and this understanding provides the central key to this chapter. (CC)

Jesus is proclaiming that the greatest in the reign of heaven is the one who is, in fact, in a condition of lowly powerlessness and who willingly acknowledges his own emptiness and utter inability in spiritual things. (CC)

Jesus places a small child (*paidion*) in the midst of them as a model of discipleship and faith. In a similar manner, the heavenly Father places Jesus, his one and only Son, in our midst through the incarnation. Jesus' action suggests a theology of the cross, which can be juxtaposed against the disciples' theology-of-glory approach to ministry and salvation. Ancient nativity scenes would depict the Christ Child lying in the manger in *cruciform*, for this small, cute *paidion* laid in the midst of humanity was sent with one mission: to be stretched out on a cross and die. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

18:3 *turn*. To change one's thinking as to what makes for greatness in God's kingdom. (TLSB)

turn. Hbr shub, "to turn, turn around." A very common verb, used over 1,000 times in the OT. Appropriately translated "repent" in more than 100 cases, most often in Jer (Isaiah rarely uses the term this way). Repentance is God's work that leads a person to renounce sin—requesting God's mercy and returning to His way. For a classic OT example, see David's confession and prayer in Ps 51. (TLSB p. 1080)

like little children. Trusting and unpretentious. (CSB)

The child served Jesus as an object lesson in humility. (TLSB)

straphēte: The second aorist passive is reflexive; unless a person turns (and continues to turn) into a child—and away from being an adult—in his heart and attitude, he shall in no way, shape, or form enter God's kingdom (as *ou mē* suggests). Only by seeing ourselves as babies in the arms of God can we begin to understand the nature of faith and the Christian walk. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

The main point of comparison was the child's humility. That is the basic Christian virtue. As a matter of fact, there can be no virtue in God's sight without humility. (PBC)

Jesus is simply and powerfully turning the disciples' perspective away from any thought of competition or comparison according to worldly standards of importance. He is proclaiming that as they live under the blessing of the reign of God in Him, they are to look at one another with new eyes and realize that when they see a fellow disciple who is struggling or hurting or alone and in desperate need, at that moment they have seen him who is the greatest in the reign of heaven. (CC)

Jesus is not primarily talking about literal children, although He does use a real child to illustrate His point. Jesus directs His teaching in the first place to His adult disciples, calling them to repent and to acknowledge that they are as needy and dependent on the mercy of God as a child is dependent upon others for life itself. Jesus further declares that it is precisely the needy and those who cannot fend for themselves who should be regarded as the greatest and the most significant. These "children" are the greatest in the *reign* of heaven and they are not limited to disciples who happen to be very young. (CC)

Throughout the entire life of discipleship, there is never a time when, in terms of one's relationship with God, one ceases to be a dependent child. (CC)

Until Christ returns in glory, there will always be powerless ones, weak and desperately needy Christians whom other disciples are to regard as the greatest and so worthy of welcome and concern and forgiveness. In a sense, what more eloquent picture could there be of a helpless

human being, utterly dependent upon God's mercy, than a little child who is being baptized. (CC)

18:4 *who humbles himself* – A child's humility is evident esp in dependence on and trust in a superior. Greatness in the kingdom is characterized by humble trust in the Lord. "Just as a child neither takes nor seeks sovereignty for himself, so this shows that there is not to be sovereignty among ministers" (Tr 8). (TLSB)

Humility means, first of all, recognizing personal sinfulness and unworthiness and inability to do anything at all to become worthy before God and earn salvation wholly or even partially. Humility depends entirely on God's mercy for forgiveness and salvation. It looks to Jesus Christ as the Savior, who offered up Himself as the perfect sacrifice for all sins. Humility is not about self-esteem; it is about Christ-esteem. Whoever humbles himself God exalts, and whoever exalts himself God humbles. (PBC)

The child is a model for the disciples' spiritual growth because children possess nothing in themselves but depend on Christ, which is the essence of salvation. God wants us adults to become more like children. He sees the Holy Church on earth as a Church of children. Views of Baptism that make the faith or the reasoning ability of an adult the model of discipleship are to be rejected. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

Jesus provides us with the perfect example of God-pleasing humility. He came down from heavenly glory and became one of us. He was born in a lowly stable, and He submitted to all the laws God had given to His chosen people, Israel. He never used His divine powers for His own convenience or comfort. He allowed sinful people to mistreat Him, condemn Him, and crucify Him. And He endured all these things for us. That was the purpose for which He came into the world. (PBC)

The smaller we grow in our own estimation, the greater do we become in the sight of God. True greatness before God consists in that humility of spirit which excludes every vestige of selfishness and pride. (Ylvisaker)

18:5-6 Jesus is not praising every quality of a child, but by qualifying his discussion about receiving children "in my name," he ties the discourse to a question of doctrine. Luther points out how the name of God is inseparable from his teaching. It is the faith of a child to which we strive as disciples of Christ. Each of the baptized has become a born-again child *of faith*. Not only that, but we also have a call to treat others as we ourselves have been treated by God (as precious children, 1 Jn 3:1, 10). This happens when we keep each other focused on Jesus instead of participating in one's slipping away. Whoever scandalizes or offends another believer, causing him or her to stumble, whether intentionally or accidentally, can destroy that soul. The life of sanctification involves receiving others as children (dirty diapers and all!), for Christ is found sacramentally present in every single Christian. This may mean giving up some of our rights for the sake of a neighbor who may be weaker in faith. It may also require courage in keeping each other accountable in doctrinal matters. Luther teaches how a right distinction between Law and Gospel (believing in Law as punishment and in Gospel as unconditional forgiveness) is the essence of being a child of God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

18:5 *receives one of these little ones* – We welcome a little child in Jesus' name, first of all, by recognizing that children are gifts of God, not grievous burdens. We serve Jesus by providing for the needs of our children. That means not only food and shelter and clothing and loving care, but

above all, bringing them to Jesus in Holy Baptism and training them to know and love and obey their Savior. (PBC)

One who humbly trusts in the Lord (v 4). Jesus identified Himself with such children (11:25; 25:40, 45). (TLSB)

18:6 *whoever causes one of these little ones* – If we are lacking in Christian humility, we may be guilty of causing little children to sin instead of serving them in Jesus’ name. We are personally responsible for children’s sin if we neglect to bring them to their Savior in Holy Baptism, if we fail to give our children Christian training, if we set a poor example in our homes. If we rely on others to teach our children the Word of God and then contradict God’s Word by the way we speak and act, we endanger our children’s faith. (PBC)

Prompting a fellow believer to sin through tempting words or bad examples. (TLSB)

The key concept here is “stumbling block,” in Greek skandalon. The word itself literally means a trap or snare. For example, Psalm 141:9 “Keep me from the snares they have laid for me.” The religious meaning of skandalon is a “temptation to sin, enticement to apostasy, false belief, etc.” Apostasy means falling away from the faith. (LL)

So who is it that’s hurt when parents fail to tell their children that so much on TV or radio is wrong? Who’s hurt when a person claims to be as good a Christian as anybody else but only shows up at church on Christmas or Easter? Who is hurt when a group spends its time maligning an absent person? Who’s hurt when Bible truths are forgotten in office politics or office parties? Who’s hurt? It is the quiet Christian who notices the discrepancy between what Christians profess and what they do. That discrepancy easily trips up a childlike faith. It easily snares the Christian into sinful conduct. “Must be okay. Everybody’s doing it!” Sin leads away from Christ and away from saving faith. (LL)

To offend, in Holy Writ, implies to build up moral obstacles in word or in deed, in doctrine or in our manner of life, so as to cause moral mischief or even a complete moral breakdown. He who is guilty of this, and who thus either hinders a person from coming to God or causes a child of God to be weakened in the faith, or even wholly to forfeit his life in God, commits a sin so grievous that it were better for him to lose his physical life by violence or by the death of a felon than to commit this awful offense and forfeit eternal life, and with bloodguilt upon his conscience, be drawn into the abyss of eternal degradation. So highly does Jesus esteem one of His believers. We should consider them equally priceless. (Ylvisaker)

who believe. Faith and the kingdom of God are not limited by age or mental abilities. They are gracious gifts of God. *better.* Better to die by drowning than to suffer eternal punishment (cf v 9) for causing a little one to sin. (TLSB)

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large millstone. Lit. “a millstone of a donkey,” i.e., a millstone turned by a donkey—far larger and heavier than the small millstones (24:41) used by women each morning in their homes. (CSB)

Such a person would be better off if he died a violent death before becoming guilty of such a sin. It would be better to be destroyed bodily than to be guilty of destroying a child spiritually. (PBC)

The millstones of this text are really the donkey millstones. Two kinds of mills were in use in Judea. The small house-mill, which could be placed on the table and be run by hand, and the larger variety turned by the donkey. Here there is reference to a millstone which would surely sink a person into the depths. (Ylvisaker)

18:1–6 Jesus demonstrates that humility is the hallmark of greatness in the Kingdom of heaven. Humility means confessing our inability to do anything at all to become worthy before God and earn salvation. Humility depends entirely on God’s mercy for forgiveness. It looks to Jesus Christ as the Savior who became one with sinners to redeem them. • Daily teach me, dear Jesus, to turn and become like a child. Amen. (TLSB)

Temptation to sin

7 “Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes! 8 And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. 9 And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire.

18:7 *temptations to sin!* Gk word is also translated “take offense” (11:6; 15:12; 17:27) and “cause to sin” (vv 6, 8–9). The world sets up numerous stumbling blocks over which people trip and fall into sin. (TLSB)

necessary. Because sin has corrupted this world, temptations will persist until Judgment Day (1Jn 2:16). Jesus pronounced doom on anyone who causes another person to sin. (TLSB)

woe to the one by whom the temptation comes – There will be many things in this sinful world that will cause people to sin. That is inevitable. But that does not excuse the guilty. The sinner is guilty, and so is the person who causes another to sin. (PBC)

“Woe” (*ouai*), a verdict mixed with a heartfelt grief (R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel* [Columbus, Ohio: The Wartburg Press, 1943], 689). A God who loves us judges us for our self-destruction. A world of adultlike spirituality and reasoning is the cause of our own demise. It is ironic that the message of a religion that is almost universally despised, that of Satanism, is none other than our narcissistic focus on self-improvement at the expense of others. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

The effect of 18:6-7 on a believing follower of Jesus might be compared to a slap in the face. (CC)

Shifting from the danger of causing another to stumble, Jesus reminds His disciples that all must live vigilantly as they follow in His way. They must be aware that they too will encounter causes of stumbling. (CC)

18:8-9 Jesus offers a radical illustration to press home the seriousness of preserving a saving faith at any cost. Ultimately, Jesus’ instructions are impossible to fulfill for a Christian. We need a Savior from these sins. If one attempted to cut off one’s sinful limbs in order to cleanse oneself, the process of self-mutilation would be endless. In contrast, Jesus was truly maimed for us. He became sin for us in every way, shape, and form, and he underwent the ultimate slaughter on the

cross, since “what he did not assume he did not redeem” (St. Athanasius). By preaching the Law, Jesus is allowing these adult-minded disciples, who are fixated on earthly glory, to see their desperate condition as children in need of the saving Gospel and its eternal glory. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

This text may also have an ecclesiological perspective. St. John Chrysostom comments on how the removal of a limb is representative of excommunication. In short, it is better for the Church to enter the kingdom of God with fewer people than not at all (David P. Scaer, *Discourses in Matthew* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2004), 330). This idea then ties in with the discussion of the locking and unlocking effect of the Office of the Keys discussed in v 18. It is a necessary practice of exclusion, which is visually present in the administration of the Lord’s Supper. However, our Lord’s ultimate goal is reconciliation and restoration back to the Body (Scaer, 317). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

Cf 5:29–30, where Jesus spoke similar words to warn against sexual sins. He used such strong and hyperbolic language to emphasize the seriousness of sin.(TLSB)

18:8 hand or foot – Before you cripple or blind yourself, however, realize that no member of your body can be responsible for causing you to sin. The problem is how you use your body. Jesus used this same illustration in His Sermon on the Mount (see 5:29,30). The CSB comment is, “Jesus is not teaching self-mutilation, for even a blind man can lust. The point is that we should deal as drastically with sin as necessary.”

18:7–9 One need look no further than these words of Jesus to see how much the holy God hates sin. Here, the Law strikes us with all its fury. Who of us can say that our hand or foot or eye has not caused us to sin? We all deserve to be thrown into the hell of fire. Thank God that Jesus’ hands and feet were pierced for our iniquities and that His eyes beheld our sin in order to turn the Father’s face from it. By His wounds and precious death, we enter life. • Holy Father, I confess my sins of thought and word and deed. Forgive me for Jesus’ sake. Amen. (TLSB)

The Parable of the Lost Sheep

10 “See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven. 12 What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? 13 And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. 14 So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

18:10 not despise – The root word *phroneō* of *kataphronēsēte* suggests holding an attitude of judgment. A wrong understanding or worldview is being condemned, not just the belittling of children. To reject these words of Jesus and maintain an adultlike metaphysic regarding the faith is to despise children and reject their heavenly Father, both of whom are surrounded by angels. This, in essence, expresses hatred toward the Church, which is the community of worshipers (both human and angelic), and represents one’s own excommunication from the family of God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

E.g., cause a fellow believer to sin (v 6). (TLSB)

their angels. Guardian angels not exclusively for children, but for God’s people in general (Ps 34:7; 91:11; Heb 1:14). (CSB)

Believers can be certain that angels keep watch over them (Ps 91:10–11). This text is the basis for the depictions of “guardian angels” common in art. (TLSB)

This verse summarizes, rephrases, and captures the spirit of the teaching in 18:6-9. What is distinctive (and unusual) about this saying is the supporting clause that follows it: “for I say to you that their angels constantly see in heaven the face of my Father who is in heaven.” (CC)

Whatever else Jesus may be saying here in 18:10, He is teaching that God the Father’s heart is open to those who are in need and who cannot provide for themselves. To be sure, in the most profound sense, every disciple (and every human creature, for that matter) is a little one; all of us are poor in spirit in relation to God (5:3) and equally in need of His blessing. (CC)

In the process of overturning that way of thinking, Jesus teaches that the ones who might be most despised by the world – and by the worldly thinking disciples – are those whose angels are constantly in the very presence of the heavenly Father. The message is clear: the littlest ones must not be despised, because God Himself treasures and values them! (CC)

This single clause with “their angels” provides the only direct biblical support for the concept that in some way or in some sense or during some periods of time, God assigns particular angelic creatures for certain human creatures. (CC)

Although the seven churches in Revelation 1-3 each have an “angel” and throughout Scripture angels are sent for specific tasks and to minister to certain individuals (cf. Heb 1:14) or to fight for God’s people (cf 2 Kings 6:17; Dan 10:13-21), there is no other mention in the Bible of the idea that God has designated a particular angel or angels to guard each and every believer (all of the “little ones”). The closest parallel passage may be the obscure reference to Peter’s “angel” in Acts 12:15. (CC)

Rather than guess, I will leave the topic hanging in the face of our ignorance, rejoicing nevertheless in the goodness and grace of the heavenly Father, in whose eyes those whom the world would despise are so precious that, in whatever sense Jesus intends, it is true that “their angels” have constant access to God the Father in heaven. (CC)

see the face. Angels have direct access to our Father in heaven, who cares greatly for each of His little ones. (TLSB)

18:12-14 Jesus shifts gears but continues with the idea that people are helpless children by comparing them to helpless sheep. Even after one sheep has stumbled away, God is committed to retrieving it. This happens through the confession and absolution of the repentant. God invites us to take an active (though humble) role in this mission of bringing back the baptized to his Son, who waits for them at his Holy Table of reconciliation. Although the world may often express a Darwinian “survival of the fittest” attitude in their dealings with others, the road to greatness in the kingdom of God comes through humility and selflessness. Though each of us plays a part in this divine shepherding, each of us is also a sheep gone astray, just as the Lord’s Prayer expresses it. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

18:12–13 God, like the good shepherd, will search for a single lost sheep and rejoice when it is found. (TLSB)

18:12 *has gone astray* – I agree with those (such as Carson, Matthew, 400) who think that Mt. 18:12-14 and Lk 15:3-7 are two related but distinct passages, rather than variants of the same unit. The two units share almost no verbal agreements in Greek. While they do exhibit a number of obviously common features, Franc, Gospel of Matthew, 685, notes importantly that in the Lukan text, the one sheep is already lost (to apololos, Lk 15:4), whereas here in Matthew, the one sheep is straying (to planomenon). Finally and most importantly, the meaning of the Lukan passage is directly Christological and evangelistic. Matthew, on the other hand, has recorded this teaching of Jesus, rooted to be sure in the Good News that Jesus is the Shepherd of Israel (see 2:6; 9:36; 26:31), primarily for pastoral purposes and an exhortation that fellow disciples should care for the little ones in their midst. (CC)

Long before a congregation reaches what might be thought of in North American terms as large, it becomes distressingly easy for the little ones to begin to stray without anyone noticing when they begin to falter. When that difficulty caused by the size of the congregation is coupled with the radically individualized thinking that comes so effortlessly to many in the societal context in which I and most of my readers have lived and worked, the very idea that Christian today would care for each other, look out for each other, and seek after even the littlest sheep who seems to be wandering seems like a foreign reality that will never be attained. This is, however, the will of the Father in heaven. (CC)

18:14 The heavenly Father wants all to be saved (cf 1Tm 2:4). (TLSB)

18:10–14 Jesus compares the Father’s love for His little ones to that of a shepherd who left his 99 sheep to search for the one who went astray. Do we show similar concern when fellow Christians stray from faith in Christ? May we never despise one of the little ones for whom Christ died. God did everything He could to seek and to save the lost. He spared not His only Son but gave Him up for us all. • Give me a heart, O Father, that cares about each of Your little ones. Amen. (TLSB)

A Brother Who Sins Against You

15 “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. 16 But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. 18 Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. 19 Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”

18:15-20 Here Jesus gives a practical example of this principle: containing sin through limiting the spread of gossip. In the end, if the individual in question refuses to repent, he proves that he is not a “little one” nor a sheep. The Office of the Keys is an authority given by Christ to his Church to bind and loose judgment upon sins. Though it is publicly exercised by called and ordained ministers for the sake of good order, it remains a power given to the whole Church. Each member shares a responsibility for the other. A church is never a single individual, but consists of at least two or three, mirroring the nature of our God who, although he is one, also is essentially a community of three. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

This duty of the Church is not an easy one. To encourage his disciples, Jesus promises that he is present “among” (*en mesōi*) them, even among the smallest of churches. The Word, which was

born to dwell among us, remains sacramentally hidden by grace through faith in the midst of the faithful. A tiny child may be barely visible in the midst of a large crowd. However, when it comes to Christianity, that tiny child is all that counts! (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

18:15–17 *If your brother sins against you.* Context is important here. After Jesus had stressed the seriousness of sin (vv 8–9), He warned against despising a little one (v 10), told the parable about seeking the lost sheep (vv 12–13), and stated that His Father did not want a single little one to perish (v 14). The entire process that Jesus here describes must be carried out in humility (v 4) with the goal of gaining your brother. See LC I 276–78. Hus: “Teach, counsel, punish, console, remit, bear, pray” (*The Church*, p 92). (TLSB)

18:15 *brother.* A fellow believer. (CSB)

adelphos is a fellow believer, a member of God’s family in Christ (Mt 12:50 adds “sister” and “mother”; cf Mt 25:40; 28:10). Jesus is therefore discussing church discipline, not evangelism of unbelievers. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

Brother is used here for the first time; it describes the loving relationship in God’s family. That person’s soul is precious and needs to be kept in the fellowship. (LL)

sins against – Sin by any member of Christ’s body is always sin against the other members, and against God (cf. 1 Cor 12:26). Concern for the welfare of our brother necessitates taking sin seriously as a threat to eternal salvation that must be rebuked. The other side of the coin is that we need to be ready to accept appropriate rebukes for our own sin. We need to also be careful not to confuse with person likes and dislikes. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

1 Peter 4:8 “Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.”

Galatians 6:1-2: “Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”

Once in a while a fellow Christian is guilty of a deliberate sin and shows no desire to forsake that sin and make amends for it. (PBC)

This is a fellow Christian who has succumbed to a flagrant sin and will wander from saving faith unless restored by confession and forgiveness. That person’s soul is precious and needs to be kept in the fellowship – even if he has sinned against you. (LL)

The context of the larger discourse and its ascending sense of urgent care for a fellow Christian in need would suggest that this situation of a brother sinning is a serious matter. The powerful sequence of the conditional sentences also strongly supports the view that Jesus’ words must mean something like “if your brothers sins in a way that makes you fear that he will fall from the faith...” Perhaps most importantly, the fact that the brother needs to be gained virtually demands that Jesus has in mind a situation where one who has been a fellow disciple now seems to be in peril of no longer being a brother. He is in danger of losing all faith and salvation. (CC)

go – No waiting game here. Take the initiative. Don’t wait for the other person to come to you first. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

tell him his fault – Is one possible translation of *elegcho*; stronger possible translations include “expose”; “convict”; “reprove, correct”; and “punish, discipline.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

between you and him alone – The first step is to meet with the brother privately. No gossip. Don’t run to the pastor or elder. Compassionately, lead the offender to admit guilt and request forgiveness. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

If your fellow Christian has sinned against you in an obvious way, keep the matter as quiet as possible. (LL)

if he listens – Jesus eagerly anticipates that the brother will “listen. *Akouo* can mean “listen to, follow, obey” This is the kind of hearing that generates confession and receive the assurance of pardon. That is Christ’s strategy for winning back another offender. Spirit-led listening allows the Spirit to move a person to acknowledge sin and be rescued by God’s grace in Christ. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

The motivation must be to turn the offender to repentance – not to prove the accuser right or extract payment for the wrong. The point is to win back. (LL)

18:16 *take one or two others* – Prudent, thoughtful choice determines which witnesses are to be included in the strategy. Their testimony regarding what happens in the exchange will be pivotal later if the congregation must meet on the matter. Notice that Jesus upholds the divine law given through Moses regarding witnesses, even as in his own ministry he observed the principle (Jn 5:31-39; 8:13-19). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

To serve as witnesses that the accusation of sin was well-founded. (TLSB)

Note from Deuteronomy 19:15 – *single witness ... not suffice*. Protection against a wrongful conviction on the basis of inadequate or false testimony (vv 16–17). Cf 17:6. (TLSB)

Such person should be chosen very carefully. They should be mature Christians who have the respect of your erring brother. Perhaps two or three of you together can settle the matter. If you are unsuccessful, you have witnesses who can testify in the case. (PBC)

Here Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 19:15, “One witness is not enough to convict a man accused of any crime or offense he may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.” Don’t bring a militia. (LL)

18:17 *if he refuses to listen* – If the offender stubbornly refuses to repent, he is to be treated like a pagan or tax collector, who were utterly despised by 1st- century Jews. In its final act of concern the congregation declares the impenitent sinner to be outside the family of God, excommunicated, banned from the Holy Table, dropped from membership. By repulsing the congregation’s call to repent, the sinner has rejected God and the community of believers. That is spiritual self-destruction. The congregation’s purpose in excommunicating is still to win the person over. By the Spirit’s power, let the reality strike home in his heart. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

church. The local congregation. Here and 16:18 are the only two places where the Gospels speak of the “church.” (CSB)

If a brother refused to listen and repent, the Church was informed of his sin. The entire believing community had the opportunity to regain him. (TLSB)

The “church” is the gathering of believers in the local setting; the Christian congregation. Jesus anticipates the time when his followers will themselves be cast out of the synagogues and form their own communities of faith.

(Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

The purpose of calling it to the attention of the church is still to impress upon the brother the seriousness of his sin and to bring him to repentance. (PBC)

pagan. For the Jews this meant any Gentile. (CSB)

After all efforts had failed to convince the sinner to repent, he was to be regarded as outside the Christian fellowship. This did not preclude future efforts to regain him. See LC I 279–83. Hus: “A notorious sinner after the third warning or public citation, when he refuses to be corrected, ought on account of his criminal offence to be kept from [communion]” (*The Church*, p 271). (TLSB)

tax collector. This verse establishes one basis for excommunication. (CSB)

It can be and has been over-read in two directions. One view that takes an unwanted next step says, “Well, Jesus reached out and welcomed Gentiles and tax gatherers. That must be what He is telling the disciples to do: to continue to reach out to the fallen sinner.” Exegetically, this would be over-reading the text. Jesus’ words simply say that the person is a non-disciple, no more and no less. (CC)

The other over-interpretation is even more dangerous. It has especially occurred among groups of disciples who emphasize the fellowship of the visible church in a theologically unbalance way. I have good friends in the Anabaptist tradition, for instance, who have talked with the regret about the older practice of “shunning” a person who has been taken through the steps of church discipline as perceived here in 18:15-20. After the church member in question refused to respond in repentance and faith to the pleas of others, the congregation and (apparently) even the larger community ostracized the person socially and economically. Such an attitude would make loving outreach to the person being shunned virtually impossible. (CC)

18:18 *truly I say to you* – See Sermon Topic “Jesus – Teacher.”

Word is change agent. Comes up when appropriate (Gospel & Reconciliation Process)

bind on earth...bound in heaven – Where God’s forgiveness is refused, no neutral vacuum remains. God’s judgment fills the life from which God’s forgiveness has been expelled. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

The action that the Church took regarding the sinning brother was valid in heaven. “He means sin being forgiven, eternal death taken away, and eternal life bestowed. ‘Whatever you bind’ does not speak of requiring punishments, but of retaining the sins of those who are not converted” (Ap XIIB 41). (TLSB)

Jesus’ promise about binding and loosing in 18:18 strongly echoes His promise to Peter in 16:19. The two teachings are similar of course. I would argue, however, that the context here in chapter

18 makes this promise both more specific and more corporate. In the commentary on 16:19, I argue (in agreement with others) that what has been granted to Peter and the other apostles is the authority to teach Christocentrically and in so teaching to use the keys to open (or shut) the way to the reign of God. I suggest as well that the modern application of 16:19 would pertain most especially to pastors, since these men are entrusted with the office of the keys that accompanies the apostolic proclamation centered in Jesus' identity as the Christ and the Son of God. (CC)

Here in chapter 18, both the grammar and the context lead toward something more specific. The grammatical difference is obvious in Greek, although obscured in English. In 16:19, Peter alone is referenced by the second person singular pronouns and verbs (all translated with "you"), and it was necessary to determine responsibility who and what was included with "Peter." Here in 18:18, the verbs have shifted from the second person singular forms that characterize 18:15-17 to second person plural forms, which continue in 18:19-20. (CC)

Accordingly, the binding or loosing of which Jesus speaks in 18:18 is precisely the retaining or the forgiving of sins. When concerned and loving Christians reprove one of the greatest in their midst and that brother repents again and believes, his sins are loosed from him, released and forgiven. The word of forgiveness that Christians speak together will be the earthly enactment and bestowal of what has already taken place in God's own presence. In similar but sorrowful fashion, if the congregation finds that it must bind upon someone his or her sins and announce that the unrepentant sinner is no longer a Christian nor a member of the church, then that word that binds sins is a true word, fastening on earth what God has already done in heaven. (CC)

It needs to be said that in all of these matters, the promise in 18:18 applies only when Jesus' disciples carry out their loving reproof and outreach in accordance with the truth. There is no basis for thinking that people can force God's hand. In that sense, every word of losing/forgiving or binding/retaining sins is contingent upon the truth, as the words of absolution spoken in the worship service. (CC)

If there has been no true confession, there is no forgiveness. On the other hand, if Christians have wrongly concluded that a brother or sister has left the faith, then their word of exclusion is invalid. The necessity of uttering the appropriate declaration (getting it right) ought always and ever to add even more caution, care, and diligence to the task of urgently caring for one who is the most important in the congregation, the sinning brother or sister. (CC)

18:19 *two of you* – As with witnesses (v 16), God promises a certain power in numbers. Christians should not try to "go it alone" when they can enjoy the blessings of the communion of saints. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

This verse should not be read as a sort of blanket promise regarding all or any prayer that a disciple may utter. This saying of Jesus is given to us in a context, and to that context it belongs. It is a word of comfort and authority as Christian and the pastor and the Christian congregation seek how best to reach out in love to straying fellow disciples. As they love and pray, the promise is that God Himself will hear their request and be present in their common efforts. (CC)

In their labors to care for the greatest in their midst, Christians should not despair that they are only a few in number. Employing a kind of reverse hyperbole, Jesus takes the smallest group possible (two of you) and promises that the heavenly Father will hear their cries for help and wisdom and guidance. He is emphasizing just how attentive the Father in heaven is to His children as they reach out in love to the little ones in need. After all, it is not the Father's will that any of them perish (18:14)! (CC)

agree – When two Christians harmonize their intentions, they speak a powerful petition to God that he will answer. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

symphoneisoin – This is the word for agree. It is important Biblical term. Scripture’s values’ arrangement has an emphasis on symphony and harmony, not hierarchy. (Qualben)

symphony is a large-scale musical composition for an orchestra. Since the late eighteenth century, composers have regarded the symphony as “the central form of orchestral composition”, similar to how writers of fiction regard the novel, and filmmakers the feature film. According to music historian Michael Kennedy, the symphony “is reserved by composers for their most weighty and profound orchestral thoughts, but of course there are many light-hearted, witty, and entertaining

anything. Gk *pragma*, “an issue,” as in a common legal case (Eng “pragmatic”). Likely refers to church matters such as dealing with a sinning brother. (TLSB)

they ask, it will be done. The heavenly Father will ratify the Church’s actions done in Christ’s name (v 20). (TLSB)

18:20 *there am I among them* – Jesus guarantees his presence among all who are connected to him through faith in his name. Jesus’ presence gives us his energy, protection, guidance, and comfort, which we receive through confession and absolution. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

As with the saying about two agreeing in 18:19, Jesus is not proposing a sort of minimum attendance requirement that would guarantee His presence among and with His disciples. His words are a kind of exaggeration and have the force of “even if only two or three are gathered in my name, I am still there.” The stress lies, in other words, not on the number of disciples but upon the promise of the One in whose name they are gathered. To be gathered in the name of Jesus means that disciples come together on the basis of who Jesus is and what He has done. In the post-Easter, post-Great Commission church, disciples gather as those who have been baptized into the triune name (28:19) and who are teaching and learning all that He has said (28:20). (CC)

Most directly, Jesus is referring to the assembly of Christians, the congregation that has amassed to care for the needy and endangered brothers and sisters in their midst – to care for the greatest. In a remarkable turn of phrase, Jesus, who earlier had placed a child in their midst and named it as the paradigm for finally entering the reign of God (18:2-3), now promises that He Himself will be in their midst as they seek to care for and reach out to the little ones, even to the extent of lovingly excluding the impenitent from the fellowship of believers. The goal is all of this is to bring the straying or lost brother or sister back into the communion. This love and compassion are at the very heart of what Jesus is all about, the very heart of His name. (CC)

Jewish Mishnah states that God’s glory is present when two or three men consider the Torah together (Avot 3:2). Here, the actions of believers are valid in heaven because of Jesus’ presence among them. Cf 6:10. “God is superabundantly generous in His grace: First, through the spoken Word... Also through the mutual conversation and consolation of brethren” (SA III IV). “The Keys have been given to the Church, and not merely to certain persons” (Tr 68). (TLSB)

18:15–20 Jesus commands the Church to do all it can to regain an unrepentant sinner. To humbly and lovingly speak to such a brother or sister is to follow the example of the shepherd who searched for one lost sheep. Christ has promised to stand behind the actions of the Church in either forgiving or refusing to forgive sins. We need personally to cherish His gifts and to present His Law and Gospel to anyone caught in the grip of sin. Through the precious gift of forgiveness, the door of heaven is opened to each repentant sinner. • Loving Lord, help me to act as my brother’s keeper, even as You care for me and keep me by grace. Amen. (TLSB)

The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant

21 Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” **22** Jesus said to him, “**I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.** **23** “Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. **24** When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. **25** And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. **26** So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ **27** And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. **28** But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay what you owe.’ **29** So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ **30** He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. **31** When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. **32** Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. **33** And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ **34** And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. **35** So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”

18:21 *how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him* – Some rabbis taught that a person should be forgiven three times but no more, citing Amos 2:6 and Job 33:29; but we must note that God kept forgiving Israel for hundreds of years. Peter generously proposed that the number be more than doubled – make it seven times, a number that can represent God’s perfection (cf. Gen 2:3; rev 1:20; 5:6). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

Peter’s question was a follow-up to the instructions Jesus had given on how to treat a sinning brother (vv 15–20). (TLSB)

seven times? Peter probably regarded his suggestion as quite lenient since some rabbis taught that one needed to forgive the same sin only three times. (TLSB)

18:22 *seventy-seven times.* Times without number (see NIV text note). (CSB)

Jesus meant that forgiveness has no limits. (TLSB)

The Greek number could be 77 or $70 \times 7 = 490$. But in either case, Jesus was not tagging 490 or 77 as the number of times a person was to be forgiven. God does not number our sins: “If you O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness” (Ps. 130:3-4). He forgives totally because of Jesus’ saving work. Christians also are called to forgive completely, with no restraints. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

Jesus declares that forgiveness eschews all moral arithmetic and keeping of any record. Jesus says that, in effect, there can be no limit to the forgiveness given and received between those who are His disciples. (CC)

Don't keep score and finally decide that enough is enough. If God kept such a record of our sins, He would have written us off long ago. We need God's forgiveness over and over every day as long as we live. (PBC)

18:23-35 Jesus also told this parable to make His point that forgiveness has no limits for those who repent. (TLSB)

The king had come to check on his servants' accounts.

The parable is composed of an introduction (18:23) and a concluding interpretation (18:35) that are wrapped around three scenes:

1. The master's compassion for the hopelessly indebted slave (18:24-27)
2. That forgiven slaves refusal to show mercy to his fellow slave who had far less debt (18:28-30)
3. The master's angry retraction of his forgiveness and the subsequent punishment of the unforgiving slave (18:31-34) (CC)

The striking parallels and even more significant contrasts between scene 1 and scene 2 advance the plot of this little story and communicate its essential theology. Although scene 3 is the obvious and grim result is described.

First I can describe the parallels between the first two scenes. Both scenes begin by presenting the figure of one who is indebted to another. The first slave is indebted to his master (18:24), and the fellow slaves owes the first slave (18:28). Both indebted people are initially treated mercilessly and, we may think inhumanely. The master orders the first slave, along with his family, to be sold to help pay at least a small fraction of the debt (18:25), and the first slave find his fellow and then begins to choke him to demand payment (18:28). Each of the indebted figures falls down (18:26, 29) before his accuser with the same attitude of supplication. Each also makes a nearly identical verbal appeal to the creditor who is demanding repayment (18:26, 29). (CC)

All the more noteworthy are the contrasts between the first two scenes. Three may be highlighted. The first contrast obviously consists in the relationship between the pairs of figures. In the first scene, it is a master and a slave, whereas the scene depicts two fellow slaves. Second and even more obvious is the contrast between the amounts of debt in each case. The first slave's debt is so large that he could never pay it off. The staggering amount forces some interpreters to conclude that this "slave" must be equivalent of the provincial governor. No one else, they conclude, could possibly have a debt so immense. The effect of so huge an amount is to reduce the relative size of the second debt to a meaningless speck, even though a hundred denarii was still a considerable sum. (CC)

The third and most significant contrast consists, of course, in the response that comes from the two different creditors after each debtor has made his appeal for patience and the chance to repay. The first slave has incredibly promised that, given the opportunity, he will repay the entire amount – he simply has asked for more time (18:26). Even more unexpectedly, his master feels

compassion for him, unilaterally releases him, and forgives him the entire, catastrophically large debt (18:27). By shocking contrast, this slave who has been released from an unthinkable burden goes out and finds a fellow slave who owes him a sum that in this context scarcely deserves to be called a debt at all. When the fellow slave makes the nearly identical appeal for patience and promises (reasonably enough) to repay (18:29), the pardoned slave “kept on not being willing” to be patient or to forgive. Instead, he imprisoned his fellow slave, demanding that he pay what was owed. (CC)

There is a terrifying contrast with the master’s original response to this slave, now that the master is enraged. It was a casual predicate position participle that had provided the master’s motivation for forgiveness: “Because he felt compassion (18:27). Now it is another casual predicate position participle that indicates the master’s motivation for his condemnation: “because he was angry” (18:34). The slave’s fate reflects his earlier presumptuous request: as he promised that he would repay “all things/everything” (18:26), now he will be imprisoned until he might repay “aa that was being owed” (18:34). This judgment is clearly just. (CC)

I would propose that the effect of 18:35 is threefold. First, the injustice and pettiness of the wicked slave cannot be denied; he should have forgiven his fellow! That means that I, as a disciple, should forgive – it is the right thing to do because the Master has already had compassion on me. Second, Jesus’ words allow for no wiggle room. Just as that master condemned the evil slave to torment in a prison from which he could never escape, so God will condemn all who do not forgive. That means that I, as a disciple, must forgive: there is no other option if I want to avoid everlasting agony. Third, and most challenging theologically, the justice and the necessity of forgiving my brother drive me to the question of empowerment. How will it be possible? How can I do this? (CC)

The Unforgiving Servant, then brings every believing disciple of Jesus face-to-face with this question: Since it is right and necessary, how is it possible that I can forgive my brother or sister, even one who sins against me repeatedly? The ultimate answer is found in the structure of the parable itself. It all depends on locating my own act of forgiving in the framework and in the flow of God’s forgiveness. (CC)

18:23 *kingdom of heaven may be compared to* – The kingdom is God’s gracious rule in the lives of his people. Jesus likens its operation to a human king who wanted to get to the bottom line with those he had appointed to manage his empire. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

settle accounts – This is a technical expression used in business and commerce. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

18:24 *ten thousand talents* – This was an astronomical amount, estimated at \$10 to 20 Million, depending on the weight and nationality of the coinage, and the effect of inflation. The implication is that our sin puts us so far in debt to God that we ourselves can never repay the amount. His forgiveness is the only way our account can be settled favorably. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

The “ten thousand talents” (v. 24) was an astronomical amount, estimated at \$10 to 20 million, depending on the weight and nationality of the coinage, and the effect of inflation. A talent was a monetary unit worth twenty years’ wages for a laborer. (TLSB)

ESV note indicates that the debt of one servant was fantastically high, more than what one individual could ever hope to repay. (TLSB)

ESV note – a talent was a monetary unit worth twenty years’ wages for a laborer. (TLSB)

18:25 *sold*. The king ordered a most degrading and protracted punishment for this debtor and his family—slavery. (TLSB)

For this practice of selling into slavery see Ex 21:2; Lev 25:39; 2Ki 4:1; Ne 5:5; Isa 50:1. (CSB)

Debtors in Israel could be sold into slavery (Ex 22:3; 2 Ki 4:1). Wife and children were considered property that could also go on the auction block to repay debts. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

18:26 This servant could never repay his debt, though he promised to do so. (TLSB)

have patience – makrothumeo literally means “holding back anger for a long time.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

imploing him – The servant did not make excuses or deny his debt. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

18:27 *out of pity* – From sklagchnidzomai which describes Jesus in Mt 9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 20:34; Mk 1:41; Lk 7:13. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

Out of pity, the king forgave the gigantic debt. So our heavenly Father has forgiven the enormous debt of our sin. (TLSB)

forgave him his debt – The king both released him and forgave the debt, sending it into oblivion (Ps 103:12; Micah 7:19) (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

his debt – This financial or accounting model of justification is similar to forensic (legal) justification in that the liability of the sinner is immediately and completely canceled by divine decree on account of Christ. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

How grateful that man should have been! But he wasn’t. (PBC)

18:28 *owed 100 denari* – A denarius was the standard wage for one day’s labor, so 100 denarii was worth a substantial amount of money. However, one talent was worth 6000 denarii, so the debt the king forgave was 600,000 times larger than this debt. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

This debt is thousands of times less than what the king had forgiven the first servant. (TLSB)

18:29 Second debtor made almost the same appeal as had the forgiven servant (v 26). (TLSB)

have patience – The same verb makrothumeo, is also used of patient Christian love toward others (1 Cor 13:4; 1 Thess 5:14; 2 Peter 3:9) and of Christians waiting patiently for Christ’s return (James 5:7-8). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

18:30 *he refused* –It would seem only natural that he would cheerfully forgive that man his small debt, but instead he became violent and demanded immediate payment in full. He turned a deaf ear to the man’s pleas for mercy and his promises to pay the debt as soon as possible. (PBC)

Forgiven servant showed no pity to his fellow servant. (TLSB)

18:32 *wicked servant!* Not for running up an enormous debt but for refusing to forgive his fellow servant. (TLSB)

18:33 *should not have mercy* – He had been treated with incredible mercy. Should that not generate in him mercy toward the one who owed him the much smaller sum? (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

18:34 *delivered him to jailers* – The Roman historian Livy (59 B.C. – A.D 17) told of “an old centurion complaining that he was taken by his creditors, not into servitude, but to a workhouse and torture, and showing his back scarred with fresh wounds.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

Jailers often tortured inmates. The servant who refused to forgive was doomed. This condemnation represents eternal punishment. (TLSB)

until he should pay all his debt – This meant that he would never escape, since he had no means to repay the debt. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

18:35 *so also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you* – God forgives us without limit from his hear, for Jesus’ sake. He calls us to forgive others in the same way. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

That was Peter’s answer to his question about how often to forgive a brother who sinned against him. It is our answer too. As we look at the servant with the impossible debt, we see ourselves, so great is the debt of our sin. Any efforts or promises we may make about paying that debt are meaningless. Our debt only gets larger, for we could not possibly earn forgiveness as fast as we commit more sins. As a matter of fact, we cannot possibly earn any forgiveness at all. Our only hope is in the mercy of our gracious God. And He has told us that He freely forgives us all our sins for Jesus’ sake. We are free. We are heirs of everlasting life. No sin stands between us and our heavenly Father. (PBC)

forgive. The one main teaching of the parable. (CSB)

Satan wants us to believe that we have a right to refuse to forgive someone who deliberately harms us, especially if that harm is repeated and the offender shows no repentance and doesn’t even care about being forgiven by us. The devil wants us to imagine that we can derive a certain satisfaction from holding a grudge or even trying to get revenge. But such an unforgiving spirit is spiritual poison, which harms us most of all and threatens to destroy us utterly and eternally. When we forgive others as God forgives us, we are the ones who are blessed by that. When we refuse to forgive others, we endanger our own faith and salvation. (PBC)

Jesus summed up His teaching about how Christians should act toward one another (see note, v 1) by repeating that our heavenly Father expects those whom He has forgiven to forgive others

(6:15). The blessing of forgiveness is the defining gift of the Church. No other institution can offer this heavenly blessing. (TLSB)

18:21–35 Jesus teaches that God has forgiven us far more than we will ever be called on to forgive. Our willingness to forgive a brother or sister is grounded in God’s abundant mercy toward us (see note, Lk 23:34). To forgive is to exercise our childlike faith (v 3). Pray for such simplicity of heart; trust likewise in the simple, enduring love of your gracious heavenly Father, who daily forgives all your debts. • Jesus, Your forgiveness for my sin has no limits. Move me likewise to forgive those who sin against me. Amen. (TLSB)