

Matthew 18:1-22 | Context of the Passage

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- Verse 1 -
  - This verse sets the tone for the entire passage.
  - The question about greatness in the Kingdom is fundamental to interpretation.
  - Because this chapter is about **the kingdom of heaven**, it is *not* a chapter about the church (or the price of tea in China!).
- Verses 2-6 –
  - The word στρέφω [strepo] is not the usual word for **converted**. Of the 18 times it is used in the King James, it is translated "turn" 17 times.
  - Verses 2-6 speak of a humility that was fitting for the Jewish nation in light of the coming offer of the Kingdom, but it will not get you to heaven in the age of grace.
  - There is nothing about "grace through faith" in vv. 2-6, but everything matches the beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount.
- Verses 7-9 –
  - Once again, these verses are incompatible with the age of grace, thus covenant theology is at a loss as to what to do with them.
  - The context is greatness in the Kingdom, and the word from the Lord is one of **woe to the man by whom the offence commeth**.
  - To avoid the damnation of **hellfire**, the Lord recommends cutting off hands or feet and plucking out eyes. These words had been proclaimed earlier on the Sermon on the Mount in connection with adultery (Matt. 5:29-30).
  - If salvation is *by grace through faith* (Eph. 2:8-9) and God is *not counting our trespasses against us* (2 Cor. 5:19), then these verses make no sense whatsoever. But entrance to the Jewish, Davidic, Theocratic Kingdom was *never* taught to be *by grace through faith*.
- Verses 10-14 –
  - In these verses Matthew gives the parable of the lost sheep (the same or similar to that told in Luke 15).
  - The only change is the application, which speaks of **these little ones**, tying the parable to verses 1-6.
- Verses 15-17 –
  - These verses are, once again, about greatness in the Kingdom, not about church discipline, as is so often taught.
  - The verses are about getting right with a *trespassing brother* (i.e.: a fellow citizen of Israel and thus one who can inherit the Kingdom).
  - If one-on-one confrontation does not fix the problem, the Israelite was to get a witness (based on Deuteronomy 19:15). This principle of a witness was very rooted in Jewish law.
  - If the offending brother would not remedy the problem even with witnesses, the offense was to be told to *the ecclesia*.
    - It is absolutely impossible that the original hearers would have understood this a *church* discipline.
    - It is totally in line with Torah discipline to *take it to the assembly*.
  - If going before the *assembly* did not remedy the problem, the man was to be treated as an **heathen man**. The word **heathen** is from the root *ethnos*, and here relates to the fact that the man would be treated as *outside the camp of Israel*. Thus this instruction says that *if a man cannot abide in harmony with the nation of Israel, he cannot inherit the Kingdom of Israel*. Such a

teaching is perfectly aligned with Kingdom theology and completely unaligned with salvation-by-grace theology.

- Verses 18-20 –
  - We know that the pronoun **ye** is a reference to **the disciples** (v. 1), but both the context of the previous verses and the fact that the parable of the lost sheep was given to the presence of the Pharisees (Luke 15), we cannot limit this audience to disciples only. This leaves us with the context of the Kingdom (v. 1), and thus this is a message to *the nation of Israel* when it is **gathered together in my name** (v. 20). Thus, these oft-claimed verses are given in a Kingdom context, not a church/Christian context.
- Verses 21-22 –
  - Peter's question is presumably in the context of the previous setting (beginning in verse 1), as nothing in the text leads us to another conclusion.
  - The Lord's instruction to forgive **until seventy times seven** is usually taken as a reference to *forever*. However, if we allow Scripture to interpret Scripture, then the only reference to 70 times seven is Daniel 9:24-27, in which *seventy sevens* is given as the time-table for the arrival of the Kingdom. Allowing this to be the definitive reference, the instruction is to *forgive until the Kingdom comes*.

### Matthew 18:23-35 | The Parable

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- Verse 23 –
  - It is important to note that the parable begins with **therefore**, thus connecting it to the previous discussion on greatness in the Kingdom (v. 1) and the related aspect of forgiveness (vv. 21-22).
  - Note that **the kingdom of heaven is likened unto...**, and if we say *salvation-by-grace is likened unto...* we will end up with huge theological problems so unacceptable that this parable alone should cause us to question the Kingdom=Church dogma.
- Verses 24-33 –
  - The parable itself: a man forgiven of a huge and unmanageable debt is given grace, and then he turns and allows no grace given to his own debtors.
  - Does this in any way *prove* that salvation was *by grace through faith* in the dispensation in which the story is given? Not at all, and for these reasons:
    - The means of salvation is not the topic of this parable.
    - The parable begins with a king who would **take account of his servants** (v. 23), which is opposite of 2 Corinthians 5:19.
    - The servant whose debt was forgiven ends up being **delivered to the tormentors** (v. 34) rather than being shown continued grace, thus *works were required for this servant*.
  - The point of the parable is that the nation needed to *forgive until the Kingdom comes* (70x7).
- Verses 34-35 –
  - The outcome of lack of forgiveness was *torment* until **he should pay all that was due unto him**. Could this be a reference to the Tribulation? Roman Catholics take this as a teaching about *purgatory*.
  - Verse 35 is crystal clear: **if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses** then the audience would be **delivered...to the tormentors** (v. 34). To make any attempt to apply this to the Christian life is to totally *wrongly divide the word of truth*.
  - John Piper: *"The greatest risk we face as a church in these days is not that we may lose an organ, or that we may lose money, or that we may lose members, or that we may lose staff, or that we may lose reputation. The greatest risk is that we may lose heaven. Because one way to lose heaven is to hold fast to an unforgiving spirit and so prove that we have never been indwelt by the Spirit of Christ."*