

Handout 1: Matthew Lesson 19

The 4th narrative (13:543-17:27) focused on defining the Kingdom. It is followed by the 4th discourse called the Ecclesial Discourse (18:1-35) in which Jesus defines how His disciples are to live together in the New Covenant community. The discourse is divided into two sections with each section ending in a parable. The discourse ends, like the others, with an eschatological/judgment teaching. Section I in 18:1-14 is divided three parts:

1. Greatness in the Kingdom defined as humility (verses 1-5)
2. Temptations to sin (verses 6-9)
3. Parable of the lost sheep (verses 10-14)

Each of the three parts of verses 1-14 has significant repeated words:

Part 1: “child/children” (verses 2, 3, 4 and 5)

Part 2: “causes to sin” (6 times in verses 6, 7 three times, 8 and 9)*

Part 3: “little ones” and “heavenly Father;” both occur twice—once at the beginning and again at the end of the passage but in reverse order (verses 10 and 14)

* the verb *skandalizo*, noun *skandalon* = “cause to stumble,” “to offend”, or “stumbling block,” “an offense” or “scandal.” It is the same word Jesus used in 16:23 when He rebuked Peter, saying: *Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle [skandalon] to me.*

Jesus makes three key declarations in verses 3, 4 and 5:

1. *Amen, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.*
2. *Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*
3. *And whoever receives one child such as this in my name receives me.*

In verses 6-9 Jesus makes three statements about sin and its impact on the “little ones” of His kingdom and on the world:

1. Jesus says that anyone who causes one of His disciples to sin will face divine judgment (verse 6).
2. Jesus expresses grief over sin that brings suffering to the world and grief over the consequences for those who tempt others to sin (verse 7).
3. Jesus sums up His comments on sin by saying that sin not only causes others to stumble into sin and brings suffering to the world but one must avoid sin at all costs because sin can ultimately lead to eternal death in Gehenna (verses 8- 9).

Section II of Jesus’ homily in 18:15-35 is also divided into three parts and ends in a parable:

1. Brotherly correction within the faith community (verses 15-20)
2. Forgiveness of Christian brothers/sisters who have expressed sorrow for sins (verses 21-22)
3. Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (verses 23-35)

Verse 10: Guardian angels are the guardians and intercessors for people and nations. For some passages about guardian angels and for what the Catholic Church teaches about guardian angels see Tobit 5:4-8; 12:12-15; Job 33:23-24; Ps 34:7/8; 91:10-13; Dan 8:15-17; 9:20-23; 10:4-14, 20-21; 12:1; Zech 1:7-11; Mt 18:10; Lk 16:22; Acts 12:15 and CCC 336.

Handout 2: Matthew Lesson 19

The four steps we are to follow when a Christian “brother” or “sister” has fallen into error in Mt 18:15-18:

1. Go to the person within the community who is in error or who has wronged you and tell him his fault (Lev 19:17).
2. If he listens be reconciled with him, but if he does not listen take others along and speak to him a second time so that you have witnesses to the discussion (Dt 19:15).
3. If he still refuses to listen or mend his ways take the problem to the Church (first the priest or possibly the Bishop).
4. If he refuses to listen even to the Church, then the person is to be considered outside the fellowship of the community and the Church may impose the ban of excommunication (Rom 16:17-18; 2 Thes 3:6, 13-16; CCC 1445).

The authority Jesus gives to the Apostles in 18:18 is the same given to Peter in 16:19 and stated in the same words except the pronoun and verbs are in the plural. According to Mt 16:18-19; 18:18 and Jn 20:22-23, the hierarchy of the Church, established by Jesus through Peter and the Apostles and continued through their successors in the Universal Magisterium composed of the Pope and the council of Bishops, has the authority of heaven itself in passing verdicts on:

- the forgiveness of sin
- on authoritative teaching and the interpretation of Sacred Scripture
- on the conduct of Christians that can lead to reproof or excommunication

See CCC 553 and 1444

Seven = a number symbolizing completeness and fulfillment; ten = perfection in divine government. Seventy-seven (seven times ten plus seven) or seven times seventy (seven times ten times seven) in 18:22 = Church’s judicial power for unlimited forgiveness.

The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant

1. The Master is God.
2. The servant who was deeply in debt to the Master is every Christian who comes to God in repentance asking for His mercy and forgiveness.
3. The second servant who owed the first servant is any Christian who seeks forgiveness for having wronged a fellow Christian.
4. The fellow servants of the household are the community of believers.
5. The place where the debt is paid is Sheol/Purgatory.

Jesus uses the metaphor of prison and the payment of a debt in referring to Sheol/Purgatory in His teaching about forgiveness in 5:25-26: *Settle with your opponent quickly while on the way to court with him. Otherwise your opponent will hand you over to the judge, and the judge will hand you over to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. Amen, I say to you, you will not be released until you have paid the last penny* (emphasis added; also see Lk 12:58-9). St. Peter also refers to Sheol as prison in 1 Pt 3:19.