"THE LORD CARES FOR HIS LITTLE ONES"

Matthew 18:5-14

7-29-2018

INTRODUCTION:

***The Lord cares deeply about the *"little ones"* who believe in Him.**

Four evidences of His care:

I. The Lord wants His *"little ones"* to be <u>WELCOMED</u> as He would be welcomed (v. 5)

II. The Lord is vehemently <u>CONCERNED</u> that no one <u>STUMBLES</u> His *"little ones"* (v. 6-9)

III. The Lord has <u>ASSIGNED</u> special <u>ANGELS</u> to watch over His *"little ones"* (v. 10)

IV. The Lord <u>SEEKS</u> and <u>SAVES</u> each *"little one"* who goes <u>ASTRAY</u> and allows none to perish (v. 11-14).

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ILLUS: of the commitment, concern, care, protectiveness and zealousness I have for my four children. I'm deeply concerned about any harm, danger or bad influence that would come into their lives. "As any normal parent, I have great appreciation for those who help my children and great indignation for those who harm them" (SEE: MacArthur, p. 102).

If I, being a sinner, have such care for my children, how much more care does God have for His?!

EX: God loved Abraham so much that He said to him: *"I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you"* (Gen. 12:3).

The phrase *"little ones"* (*mikron* - cp. 10:42) appears 3 times (v. 6, 11, 14) in verses 6-14, tying this context together and giving us the theme of this text --

-- The Lord cares for young believers!

***The Lord cares deeply about the *"little ones"* who believe in Him.**

Four evidences of His care:

I. The Lord wants His *"little ones"* to be <u>WELCOMED</u> as He would be welcomed (v. 5)

"Receive" = to welcome, to accept

"Little child" - (*paidion)* a very young child

"In My name" - ie. for My sake. This phrase qualifies and defines what Jesus means by *"receiving little children"*

To welcome a young person in Christ's name means to welcome them (help them; teach them; care for them) for the sake of Jesus who loves them!
"Receiveth me" - No speaking of receiving Christ for "salvation," but for fellowship.

What He means is this: Whatever you do to or for a young believer in Christ, you actually do to or for Christ (because of His oneness and identity with that believer)

Examples:

> --Giving a cup of cold water to anyone who belongs to Christ will merit reward (Mk. 9:41 - *"For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward.")*
>
> --To do or not do something for the Lord's people is to do it or not do it for the Lord Himself (SEE: Mt. 25:34-46)
>
> --Whatever is done against Christ's people is done directly against Him (Acts 9:1, 4-5)

Luke 10:16 - *"He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me."* (cp. Jn. 13:20)

Jesus' point: "The way you treat one of my children is the way you treat me." Whatever affects them, affects Him.

To welcome a young believer (for any purpose that would glorify God) is to welcome Jesus Christ Himself. Why? Because Jesus is <u>One</u> with His children no matter how old or young they are.

Who are we to reject someone whom Christ has not rejected?

If He accepted that person, who are we not to?

Since He is willing to identify with him, so should we!

The Lord must have a special place in His heart for Sunday school, Junior church, and AWANA workers!

Any one who pours His heart into young people is pouring their life out for Christ! This is what living for Christ is all about!

You cannot be living for Jesus if you are not in some real, tangible way doing something for those people who belong to Him! (the two go hand in hand)

Something is desperately wrong with a church that has no active children's ministry, no outreach to kids, no youth work.

A "young church" is a healthy church!

Jesus is saying: Don't reject children and teens; receive them into your life and ministry.

Sure, they test your patience; sure, they dirty your carpets; sure, they require work.

But they are the future of the church! They are future leaders, pastors, missionaries, and lay-servants.

II. The Lord is vehemently CONCERNED that no one STUMBLES His *"little ones"* (v. 6-9)

V. 6

"Offend" - to cause to stumble and fall; to trip up (i.e. to hurt the faith of and lead astray or lead into sin).

It is interesting that Jesus changes the word from ***"child"*** (*paidion* - v. 2-5) to ***"little one"*** (*mikron* - v. 6, 10, 14).

Such a shift indicates that Jesus is referring to any young Christian.

Although Jesus would not want any little one to be led into sin, He is especially jealous over those ***"little ones which believe in [Him] Me"***

"Believe in Me" - Jesus is the object of our faith (trust, confidence, reliance) (cp. John 14:1).

Anyone who would intentionally be a stumbling block to a new believer in Christ would be better off chocked with a several hundred pound millstone and dumped into the depths of the ocean; rather than to face the severity of hell fire that awaits them.

"Millstone" - the large, heavy upper millstone that was turned in a grinding process by a donkey (MacArthur, p. 104).

They say that drowning is one of the most terrifying ways of dying; yet such is nothing compared to the horror of facing the wrath of God.

Such a drowning is nothing compared to the intensely hot and eternal torment and wrath of God to fall upon those who are stumbling blocks to God's people.

Zechariah warned that whoever harms God's people Israel *"touches the apple of His eye"* (Zech. 2:8) (i.e. *"the apple of the eye"* was an ancient figure for the cornea, the most delicate and sensitive exposed part of the body (MacArthur, p. 105).

You are a serious irritation to God -- you who lead any of His children into sin!

God is severely upset with churches which tolerate members who stumble His children (Rev. 2:14 - *"But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication."* Rev. 2:20 - *"Notwithstanding i have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.")*.

Anyone who influences, entices, or leads a believer into sin, or makes it easier for him to sin, is in serious trouble with the Lord!

One of the main reasons for avoiding:

--pornography
--alcohol
--rock and rap music
--immodesty
etc.

is so that (out of love for others) we don't stumble anyone by what we allow into our lives.

Even in the area of *"Christian liberty"* we should *"use not [our] liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another"* (Gal. 5:13).

We should be so concerned that we do not cause another believer to stumble that we would even avoid practices that are lawful if by such a practice we would violate a weaker, more immature, believer's conscience (EX: Paul's not eating meat offered to idols - Rom. 14; I Cor. 8).

William Barclay tells the story of an old man on his deathbed who was terribly distraught. When asked what was bothering him, he replied, "When we were boys at play, one day at a crossroads we reversed a sign post, and I've never ceased to wonder how many people were sent in the wrong direction by what we did." (cited by MacArthur, p. 109).

Instead of tempting others to sin, we should provoke them to righteousness (Heb. 10:24).

One of the most common ways a "believer" will cause another believer to sin is by failing to lead them into righteousness (MacArthur, p. 108).

Parents (moms and dads), what kind of example are you setting for your children?

Is there a sin in your life that may cause your children to stumble?

Any parent who belittles, slanders, or verbally attacks spiritual authority or leadership (such as a S.S. teacher, deacon, or pastor) in front of their children is doing lethal harm to them. Don't be surprised when your kids turn teenagers and have no spiritual interest, desire for church, etc.

V. 7

"Woe" - a word expressing deep sorrow and pain for someone.

The lost, unregenerate, godless worked "is in a woeful state because of the stones of stumbling they throw out for God's people to trip on!

Because man is sinful, depraved, and lost, it is impossible for societies to avoid the planting of stones of stumbling.

But woe to the master minds behind such diabolical immorality and wickedness.

Woe to the TV producers whose seductive programs warp the minds of children!

Woe to the music bands, groups, and sponsors whose devilish, twisted, rebellious, lustful lyrics and sounds imbed themselves into the minds of young people!

Woe to the inventors of the RU486 French abortion pill, and to any president who would allow such a child-murderer into the USA!

Woe to the writers and publishers of the Rainbow curriculum!

Woe to those who use children for child pornography, books, and films!

Woe to those who teach evolution as if it were fact and boldly deny God's existence!

V. 8-9

It is interesting that Jesus shifts from speaking about not offending *"little ones"* to give a warning about not offending yourself!

Why? Because before you will ever stumble anyone else, you will stumble yourself.

The way to safeguard against causing others to fall into sin is to safeguard yourself against falling into sin.

Hence, the stern warning in vv. 8-9.

If what you do (*"hand"*), where you go (*"foot"*), or what you see (*"eye"*) will detract you from Christ (if it will turn your attention away from Christ and His salvation), you would be better off losing that body part than to be cause into the lake of fire with all your body parts and a dirty, sinful soul.

(Note: All who are cast into the "Lake of Fire" will be cast in - body and soul [resurrected body] - Rev. 20:11-15).

Jesus sternly warns to remove from your life anything that causes you to stumble cp. Mt. 5:29,30.

"Offend" - to cause to stumble and fall. The greek word referred to a stick in a trap that would spring and close the trap when an animal would touch it (Reinecker, p. 15).

v.9 **"Hell fire"** = gehenna (meaning "the land of Hinnom" - II Kings 23:10). A reference to the continual place of burning ("where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched")

Jesus is saying that if your eyes should look upon something that would trap you and detract your sight from ever seeing God's plan of salvation, it would be better off if you had no eyes than to forever end up in hell fire.

The "eyes" are that body part which triggers the lustful thought, and the "hands" are that which grasp that which is forbidden resulting in a sinful act, and the "feet" are that body part which carries one into dens of sin.

Jesus is not really encouraging bodily dismemberment. But he is saying that you would be better off losing anything in this life that would keep you from Heaven in the next life.

Victory does not come by amputating certain parts of your body, but by purifying

the desires of the heart.
Is there real "fire" in the Lake of fire? If not, then Jesus is a liar!

You had better believe that the Lake of fire has literal fire!

It is everlasting (never-ending; a place of no rest day nor night [Rev. 14], no relief; no way out)

III. The Lord has ASSIGNED special ANGELS to watch over His *"little ones"* (v. 10)

V. 10

Jesus now gets back to His point.

Beware that you do not "think down upon," look down at; even one of the little ones who believe in Him.

Why not? Because God thinks so much of them that He has at least one angel stationed on duty to minister to them (Heb. 1:14 - *"Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?")*

The phrase ***"their angels"*** shows a special relationship angels have with particular children of God (cp. Acts 12:12-15).

What is significant about angels continually looking at the face of God is that they can see as it were the expression on God's face when something which grieves Him is happening to one of His children on earth.

They get their orders from God; looking at Him, anticipating His command to go and defend His *"little ones."*

The angels wait attentively, never taking their eyes off of the Father "lest they miss some direction from Him regarding a task they are to perform on behalf of a believer" (MacArthur, p. 118).

The fact that God has "hosts of angels in His presence ready to be dispatched to their aid demonstrates clearly how valuable believers are and how unthinkably wicked it is to look with disdain on someone whom God so highly prizes." (MacArthur, p. 119)

IV. The Lord <u>SEEKS</u> and <u>SAVES</u> each *"little one"* who goes <u>ASTRAY</u> and allows none to perish (v. 11-14)

V. 11

"Save" = to deliver

"Lost" = all men and women (boys and girls) are born lost in need of salvation.

From the moment Christ (because of His payment on Calvary) saves someone, they become a special object of His love! They can never escape His presence (Ps. 139), will never be forsaken, and when they are led astray -- He is faithful to bring them back into fellowship.

V. 12-13

A good shepherd cares so much for each of His sheep (which are so prone to go astray and wander off -- Isaiah 53:6) that if even one gets off the path and errs from the fold, the Shepherd will personally (leave His sheep in the care of a hireling) and will go out and find the sheep and rejoice exuberantly that is found, safe, and back in the fold.

V. 14

"Even so" - in like manner.

It is not God's will that even one of His *"little ones"* perish (be destroyed - cp. I Cor. 8:11).

It is never God's will (desire) for one of His adopted children to have a ruined life (a destroyed testimony).

Certainly this verse may also imply the "eternal <u>security</u>" of the believer (cp. John 6:39 - *"And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day."*).

CONCLUSION: