

## Who Among Us Is the Greatest?

What a question to ask! In Mt.18.1-20 Jesus was answering a question posed by His disciples, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? Doubtless, after they heard his response, the disciples very likely began to ask themselves another, more important, very soul-searching question: 'Which of them was the *least* offensive in the kingdom of heaven?' The answer to this question will answer the other.

Jesus' remarks here noted two kinds of offenses: one kind is when a disciple *offends another* (vss. 6-10), and the other kind is when a disciple *becomes offended* (vss. 15-20). So the answer to the disciples' original question is, the greatest disciple in the kingdom of heaven is the one which will live without offense: living without *offending* others, and living without being *offendable*. This is comprehended in the reply of our Lord in verses 3, 4.

*Mt 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.*

*4 Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*

I think this is one of the benchmarks of the life that the Spirit of God puts within every genuine disciple of Jesus Christ. But there is found nestled in Christ's response to the disciples a very hard thing to reconcile. Why would He implicate any one of His disciples with the threat of eternal punishment? And to be sure that this is what He means read the same account as recorded in the gospel of Mark.

*Mk.9.43 And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched:*

*44 Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.*

How can those who are the elect of God, chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, given to the blessed Son of God in eternity past, those for whom Christ came and redeemed by His shed blood, those which were inextricably linked to God's whole work of salvation by His foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification, and glorification; how can these be so threatened with the sufferings of the torments of an everlasting hell fire? Before answering this consider the first part of the text as it is recorded in Matthew chapter 18. It reads, *it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed*. Here, *life* is not with reference to the life that shall be at the second coming of Jesus Christ. Certainly none will enter into that life halt or maimed, or with one eye. In that day the faithful will be raised in incorruption, glory, power, and in a spiritual body. (1Co.15.42-44) So the words, *entering into life*, must refer to the life that now is, not to that which is coming. Real disciples of Jesus Christ will *alter*, that is cut off, cast away, or pluck out of their lives such things that offend Christ's little ones, those most

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susceptible to being discouraged from following after Christ. That's a tall order, but this is what the Spirit of God works in the hearts of all of His children. So what about the threat standing against those disciples which will not live in this way?

The answer to this lies in the assumption that there might be one among them which was not a true disciple. One of them might have no interest in putting away from his life those things which cause offense. One of them might have no care for Christ's little ones. One who is incorrigible, 'Like it or lump it, I am what I am and you gotta live with it.' will not *enter into the life* of Christ that *now* is, and it is certain that he will not enter into that blessed life which *shall be* at His appearing. Of these twelve we know this one by name. His name is Judas Iscariot. And today there are those who, for many and various reasons, have attached themselves to the disciples, feigning be a follower of Jesus Christ.

Sadly, this question, which of them should be the greatest? (Lk.9.46) was raised twice in Scripture. In both instances it followed immediately after Jesus spoke to them of His betrayal and death. (cf. 1st instance: Mt.17.23, 24; Mk.9.31;Lk.9.44, 45; second instance: Mt.20.17-24; Lk.22.22) There is no doubt that these disciples had before them some serious lessons to be learned. And they would learn them! Disciples care about one another and will do what they must to remove from their lives those things which cause offense. By answering this question Jesus told them what marks the true character of those which are the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. His answer directs His people to the highest calling of God for them; not to a life of mediocrity. His word gives no assurance to a disciple that would settle for less than living wholly devoted unto God. Therefore a significant proof of discipleship is the desire to live without offense; and the proof of greatness in the kingdom is when that principle is the expression of one's life.

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