

How to Address Spiritual Stumbling Matthew 18:10-17

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God seeks for and restores the ones who have stumbled, like a lost sheep 18:10-14

See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven v. 10. Do not despise one of these little ones. He illustrates this with children, but His point is about children of heaven. Their angels in heaven continually see the face of God. This may mean that children have guardian angels, but the point here is that He is not talking about children but children of heaven.

For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost v. 11. This verse is not in some of the manuscripts. It is something Christ said. It's included in Luke 19:10, which is not a questionable text. But perhaps Jesus did not say it here.

What do you think? If any man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one that is straying? v. 12. A short version of a story Jesus tells in Luke 15. The man who leaves the ninety-nine sheep to search for the one which is lost. The sheep and the child are the same.

If it turns out that he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray. So it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish vss. 13-14. He comes back to the children. So, He is comparing the sheep and the child. Since the children of heaven are like sheep to a shepherd, and because one who goes astray is important to God, it's important that you discipline one another with the process He is about to describe in verses 15-19.

We should help one another when we stumble 18:15-17

If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother v 15. First go in private, if the brother listens to you, you can settle it in private.

But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED v 16. If he doesn't listen, take two or three with you. The purpose of this is fact-finding, that every fact may be confirmed.

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 v. 17. If that doesn't bring about repentance, then tell it to the church (the network of believer friends in his life).

And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector v. 17. If he doesn't listen to them either, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax gatherer, which does not mean you do friendship evangelism with him. This is a believer who is hardened against the truth and is living in sin. The discipline process has two different goals. Up to the last stage (treating him as a Gentile), the whole purpose is restoration. After he refuses to listen to the church, then the goal is no longer restoration but the goal is to keep the leaven out of the lump (1 Corinthians 5). You change completely your objective at this point. Now your goal is you don't want him to influence everyone else. The point is, deal with it. Don't let the sin go on.

Don't use the word "excommunication" because it has institutional meaning. Removal of fellowship is better. Actually, you are the one removing your own fellowship from the person.

APPLICATION:

- Do not despise, be against, or look down on, other children of heaven when they go astray and get into trouble (v. 10-14).
- Instead, help one another get on the path of obedience, as long as they are willing to work on it. When they refuse to repent (an issue of pride), then remove fellowship with them as a final act, in the hope of their future return (v. 15-17).