

# Expository Thoughts On Matthew - Matthew

## 18:1-14

by J.C. Ryle

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### Transcript

The first thing that we are taught in these verses is the necessity of conversion, and of conversion manifested by childlike humility. The disciples came to our Lord with the question, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" They spoke as men half-enlightened, and full of worldly expectations. They received an answer well calculated to awaken them from their day-dream. An answer containing a truth which lies at the very foundation of Christianity: "except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." Let these words sink down deeply in our hearts. Without conversion there is no salvation. We all need an entire change of nature: of ourselves we have neither faith, fear, nor love towards God. We "must be born again" (John 3:8). Of ourselves we are utterly unfit for dwelling in God's presence. Heaven would be no heaven to us if we were not converted. It is true of all ranks, classes and orders of mankind: all are born in sin and children of wrath, and all, without exception, need to be born again and made new creatures. A new heart must be given to us, and a new spirit put within us; old things must pass away, and all things must become new. It is a good thing to be baptized into the Christian church, and use Christian means of grace, but after all, "are we converted?" Would we know whether we are really converted? Would we know the test by which we must try ourselves? The surest mark of true conversion is humility. If we have really received the Holy Ghost, we shall show it by a meek and childlike spirit. Like children, we shall think humbly of our own strength and wisdom, and be very dependent on our Father in heaven. Like children, we shall not seek great things in this world; but having food and raiment and a Father's love, we shall be content. Truly this is a heart-searching test! It exposes the unsoundness of many a so-called conversion. It is easy to be a convert from one party to another party, from one sect to another sect, from one set of opinions to another set of opinions: such conversions save no one's soul. What we all want is a conversion from pride to humility, from high thoughts about ourselves to lowly thoughts about ourselves, from self-conceit to self-abasement, from the mind of the Pharisee to the mind of the publican. A conversion of this kind we must experience if we hope to be saved. These are the conversions that are wrought by the Holy Ghost. The next thing that we are taught in these verses is the great sin of putting stumbling-blocks in the way of believers. The words of the Lord Jesus on this subject are peculiarly solemn: "Woe unto the world because of offences! Woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!" We put offences or stumbling-blocks in the way of men's souls whenever we do anything to keep them back from Christ, or to turn them out of the way of salvation, or to disgust them with true religion. We may do it directly, by persecuting, ridiculing, opposing or dissuading them from committed service of Christ; we may do it indirectly by living a life inconsistent with our religious profession, and by making Christianity loathsome

and distasteful by our own conduct. Whenever we do anything of the kind, it is clear, from our Lord's words, that we commit a great sin. There is something very fearful in the doctrine here laid down: it ought to stir up within us great searchings of heart. It is not enough that we wish to do good in this world: are we quite sure that we are not doing harm? We may not openly persecute Christ's servants, but are there none that we are injuring by our ways and our example? It is awful to think of the amount of harm that can be done by one inconsistent professor of religion. He gives a handle to the infidel; he supplies the worldly man with an excuse for remaining undecided; he checks the inquirer after salvation; he discourages the saints. He is, in short, a living sermon on behalf of the devil. The last day alone will reveal the wholesale ruin of souls that offences have occasioned in the church of Christ. One of Nathan's charges against David was, "Thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme." (2 Samuel 12:14). The next thing that we are taught in these verses is the reality of future punishment after death. Two strong expressions are used by our Lord on this point. He speaks of being "cast into everlasting fire;" he speaks of being "cast into hell fire." The meaning of these words is clear and unmistakable. There is a place of unspeakable misery in the world to come, to which all who die impenitent and unbelieving must ultimately be consigned. There is revealed in Scripture a "fiery indignation" which sooner or later will devour all God's adversaries (Hebrews 10:27). The same sure Word which holds out a heaven to all who repent and are converted, declares plainly that there will be a hell for all the ungodly. Let no man deceive us with vain words upon this awful subject. Men have arisen in these latter days who profess to deny the eternity of future punishment, and repeat the devil's old argument, that we "shall not surely die" ("I" Genesis 3:4) Let none of their reasonings move us, however plausible they may sound. Let us stand fast in the old paths. The God of love and mercy is also a God of justice: he will surely requite. The flood in Noah's day, and the burning of Sodom, were meant to show us what he will one day do. No lips have ever spoken so clearly about hell as those of Christ himself. Hardened sinners will find out, to their cost, that there is such a thing as the wrath of the Lamb (Revelation). The last thing we are taught in these verses the value that God sets on the least and lowest of believers. "It is not the will of your father in heaven that one of these little ones should perish." These words are meant for the encouragement of all true Christians, and not for little children only. The connection in which they are found with the parable of the hundred sheep and one that went astray seems to place this beyond doubt. They are meant to show us that our Lord Jesus is a Shepherd who cares tenderly for every soul committed to his charge. The youngest, the weakest, the sickliest of his flock is as dear to him as the strongest: they shall never perish. None shall ever pluck them out of his hand. He will lead them gently through the wilderness of this world; he will not overdrive them a single day, lest any die (Genesis 33:13). He will carry them through every difficulty; he will defend them against every enemy. The saying which he spoke shall be literally fulfilled: "Of them which thou gavest me have I lost none" (John 18:9). With such a Saviour, who need fear beginning to be a thorough Christian? With such a Shepherd who, having once begun, need fear being cast away?

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