

Introduction: I think it was the Rev. Dr. William Dennison, a scholar and OPC pastor, who said in an article that the reason Scripture mandates kind, considerate communication, as well as diligent pursuing of peace-filled relationships, is because, in light of the Resurrection and Ascension of our Savior, such communication and godly relationships *will be continued in Heaven*. Because that is the way we will be expected to treat each other *there*, it is imperative that we begin to learn to love each other with such a grace-filled love *here*. May these Bible notes renew our commitment to diligently “pursue peace, especially in the household of God.”

Mon/Tues: Matthew 18:1-4 and Galatians 2:20. The threats to a peace-making commitment in our relationships with other Christians are many – not least the size of our uncrucified egos. The sinful selfishness of our old nature continues to be a struggle all our life long. Though we are at once justified and declared perfectly righteous, when enabled by the Holy Spirit to believe in Christ’s perfect work on the Cross, the process of becoming *Christ-like and holy* is a continuous “work of grace,” requiring daily deaths to self and daily realizations that it is *no longer we who live* (with our own agendas and goals as pre-eminent) *but rather Christ that lives in us* (Galatians 2:20).

Meditate and Pray: Keenly aware of this ego-struggle among His apostles, Christ tells them that discipleship means continually *turning away from our own desires at self-exaltation* unto humble, child-like service of one another’s interests. Let us confess to the Lord Jesus now how much we need Him to expose this hidden pride. Ask Him to humble you - both as a *corrective* for your hardness of heart and as a means of *restoration* when you have gone astray. This is, in fact, what Jesus does in Matthew 18:1-4. His disciples are about to wander once again into the fantasy world of who is the greatest among them. But Jesus patiently brings them back to reality by speaking about the *offensiveness of the sin of self-exaltation*. “Oh, Lord, make us see the offensiveness of our own sins of pride instead of being so easily offended at the sins others commit towards us. Amen.”

Sing about the preciousness of this grace of humility, using hymn # 335:

Gracious Spirit, dwell with me:
I myself would gracious be;
and with words that help and heal
would thy life in mine reveal;
and with actions bold and meek
would for Christ my Savior speak.

Mighty Spirit, dwell with me:
I myself would mighty be;
mighty so as to prevail,
where unaided man must fail;
ever by a mighty hope,
pressing on and bearing up.

Truthful Spirit, dwell with me:
I myself would truthful be;
and with wisdom kind and clear
let Thy life in mine appear;
and with actions brotherly
speak my Lord’s sincerity.

Holy Spirit, dwell with me:
I myself would holy be;
separate from sin, I would
choose and cherish all things good,
and whatever I can be
give to him who gave me thee!

Weds/Thurs/Fri: Matthew 18:1-5. We are warned in this week’s notes to beware of the sin into which the Twelve plunge in Matthew 18: the sinful desire for pre-eminence. How obnoxious such jockeying for the highest place must be to the Savior, who “humbled Himself by taking the form of a servant.” (Philippians 2)

But more than that, what does Jesus do to counteract this ego competition? He enfolds a child in His arms and warns His disciples of the continual necessity for them to humble themselves like children under the mighty

hand of God (1 Peter 5:8). The language is significant in the use of a certain verb describing our continually being “changed” as we turn away from our proud attitudes and conflicts. Look especially at the various translations of this key verb in Mt 18:3:

“Unless you are **converted** and become as little children, you shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven.” (KJV)

“Unless you **change** and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” (NIV)

“Unless you **repent** and become like little children, you shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven.” (1599 Geneva Bible footnote)

Let’s think about both what this word means and does not mean. First, for the Twelve as believers and followers of Jesus, it does *not* mean that they could lose their salvation and have to repent in order to be reconverted again and again. But what it *does* mean is that Christian living is characterized by changes of direction, fresh deaths-to-self and re-consecration to God’s ways.

For example, a “turning back” to the Lord is promised Peter after his three-fold denial, when the Lord Jesus says to the Apostle: “When you have **turned back** (same idea as our word) strengthen your brethren” (Luke 22:32).

Meditate and Pray: Let us thank God that there are definite times when He checks us, bringing us to a halt in our sin with this warning: “Unless you repent and change your attitude in this matter, you cannot continue to call yourself a subject of my Kingdom!” That is the challenge of Matthew 18:3. But, oh, let us also thank the Lord that *it is the prayers of Jesus which explain why we do turn back to Him!* It was because Jesus prayed for Peter’s restoration that He could predict that this wayward disciple would indeed turn back after his sin in Luke 22:32.