

MATTHEW 18:1-6 THE REAL ABUSERS

“The disciples came to Jesus, saying, ‘Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’ And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them and said, ‘Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

“Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.”¹

Catholic bishops met in Dallas in the Spring of 2002. The purpose of their meeting was to discuss the spate of revelations revealing sexual predators lurking among the Catholic clergy. Despite their best efforts toward damage control, they were faced with a growing rebellion as ordinary worshippers learned of their spiritual perfidy throughout years of excusing the ordination of homosexuals and permitting them to prey on unsuspecting boys wishing to serve within their church. The bishops returned home and for months tried to sell their compromise to the people in the pews and to a host of other critics.

It was an embarrassing time for Catholics; but there remained a difficult question that was hardly asked by news media: Were there still other, perhaps even worse, child abusers out there, not yet called to account for the awful things they had done? The answer is, “Yes—by the thousands and tens of thousands.”²

The point is not merely some rhetorical device to make an abstract and theoretical point. We are weighing abuse of children so severe that Jesus said those who do it should be thrown into the ocean with huge stones tied to them so that there's no way for them to resurface and become repeat offenders. I am telling you that even after a massive cleanup in the Catholic Church, these evil abusers are out there in enormous numbers.

Not that what has happened in Roman Catholicism is not terrible in its own right. Catholic bishops were saying so themselves. “This is a harsh day,” confessed Cardinal Edward Egan to parishioners in New York after the bishops' meeting a couple of days earlier in Dallas. “We are all outraged, scandalised. We need to pick up the pieces, and we will.”

Neither is it clear yet that either the Roman Catholic hierarchy, or especially the secular media who were so fixated with this scandal at that time, have been honest either with themselves or with the public they serve about the uniquely homosexual nature of the problem. Both the church and the media have tried hard to suggest this is just a general problem with adults abusing children—as if that sad picture might somehow mask the harsher reality that this is overwhelmingly an issue of adult homosexual men taking sexual advantage of young boys.

In “Homosexuality and Child Sexual Abuse,” a paper published by the Family Research Council, Dr. Timothy J. Dailey statistically and scientifically highlights the unmistakable correlation between the two.³ It is a link that simply must be acknowledged by both the churches and the media if any long-term correctives are to be put in place.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² This introduction first appeared as an editorial by Joel Belz in **World**, June 29, 2002, pg. 3

³ Timothy J. Dailey, “Homosexuality and Child Sexual Abuse,” <http://www.traditionalvalues.org/urban/one-a.php>, accessed 19 January 2010

Tragically, it is all but impossible for such an acknowledgement to be made in today's politically correct culture. And it's precisely at the point of that refusal that we find the colossal assemblage of child abusers I mentioned earlier.

For if it is terrifying to tamper with a child in a manner that for the rest of his life leaves him struggling with his own sexual identity or with his ability to relate to other humans, how much worse is it to confuse a child about his own identity as a creature of God—and about how he can be properly related to that God? The first offence, as most reasonable folks in our society (but not all) seem now to agree, is so bad that at the very least, those found guilty of it should be removed from their jobs and from all further contact with children. Capital punishment, Jesus says, is a preferable alternative to the accountability that shall be demanded when that individual stands before the Living God!

Specifically, the behaviour that earns this incredibly strong response from Jesus in three of the four Gospels is simply causing “one of these little ones” to sin. But given the nature of the people to whom Jesus was talking, it's not likely that the sin He was warning them against was something as blatant and unsavoury as tempting some little boys to engage in activities most people know to be sinful. The really insidious danger was that the Pharisees would teach people to be blind to their own sin—and indeed by failing to see sin as sin, to walk the rest of their lives in sinful paths.

Such is precisely what most of our society today does with our children and adolescents. We have made truth relative. We tell our young people in so many words that there is no such thing as right and wrong. We say that all religions are valid, that all value systems have equal potential for working. Our government-controlled educational systems—from pre-school all the way through our big universities—are rooted in precisely such pluralistic doctrine. Even much of private education buys into the same thinking. And the media—the same ones whose newscasters cheer for anything that makes a church look bad—spend an inordinate amount of their time indoctrinating their listeners that there really is nothing ultimately good or bad.

Sadly, the young people of our nation have believed it. By the millions, and by the tens of millions, they have believed it. Even people who call themselves evangelical Christians have more and more questions about absolute truth.

But when you plant doubts about absolute truth, and when you teach children that there is only a shadowy difference between right and wrong, and when you promote relativism as a false god, you've done something far, far worse than abusing little children's bodies and psyches. Now you've stripped them of their consciences as well.

Go ask the gentle Jesus, who took little ones into His loving arms, what He would do with people who abuse children that way.

THE DISCIPLES' QUESTION — The question that prompted the instruction provided by the Master was on the surface innocuous. Perhaps we have even justified similar, if not identical, queries within our own churches. “Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven,” asked the disciples. The question appears to have been a matter of concern for all the disciples.

We are not so very different from those men; we want to know whether our voice counts. We become irritated at some of the brothers and we grumble that we are as good as they are; our ideas are just as valid as their ideas. We each would like to think that we are valuable to the Master, and the way we evaluate ourselves is to ask if we count in the church.

The disciples were a product of their culture, just as we are products of our own culture. We permit culture to shape the life of our churches far more than we are shaped either by the Word of God or by the Spirit of the Living God. This is especially true among contemporary congregations. As an example, congregations are more concerned to set up a democratic form of governance for the church than they are to take time to develop consensus among the members. At least, we are superficially more concerned to give the appearance of democratic governance for our churches, though in practice most churches operate as oligarchies. Generally, church members tend to be more concerned with avoiding conflict with the government than they are with avoiding actions that dishonour the Lord. We tell ourselves that “the King’s business requires haste,” never pausing to remember that we are responsible to be considerate of one another or to permit the Spirit to bring the people of God into harmony. As individuals, we are certain that *we* are correct, and so *we* believe *we* are justified in forcing *our* will on others. *We* know what God wants, and others will just have to come along with *us*.

Another example of being shaped by culture is the tendency among Christians to avoid overt evangelism out of fear that we might offend unsaved people. We are prepared to leave hints that we are Christians—a Bible left on the coffee table, signing our E-Mail with a slogan such as “Let the Son shine in,” or “God Bless.” However, we are uneasy if the preacher is too direct in denouncing sin or in calling sinners to repent and believe the Good News. We avoid telling others that the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ the Lord.

A final example of culture shaping life among the churches is related to the issue that prompted the disciples’ question. We live in a culture that stresses the need for self-esteem. This is so important that we are willing to cease teaching such basic educational concepts as reading and writing in order to teach children to feel good about themselves. Educators have assured us that if children don’t feel good about themselves, they can never succeed in life. Consequently, we bring that very attitude into the church. We are busy, and so we don’t want to inconvenience ourselves by doing too much in the church, but we do want to feel good about ourselves. We want to think that Jesus loves us, though we live as we wish rather than doing what He commands. We want to think that we are important, though we seldom invest our lives or our spiritual gifts in one another. This reflects our culture more than a Spirit-led life.

The issue of who was the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven was an important issue to the disciples. Perhaps it was at the same time as our text, or possibly it was another occasion that revolved around the same issue, but both Mark and Luke provide some insight into this matter, and it will be beneficial for us to consider the accounts that these evangelists have provided.

“They came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, “What were you discussing on the way?” But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.” And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, ‘Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me’” [MARK 9:33-37].

“An argument arose among them as to which of them was the greatest. But Jesus, knowing the reasoning of their hearts, took a child and put him by his side and said to them, ‘Whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. For he who is least among you all is the one who is great’” [LUKE 9:46-48].

For the record, I believe this was an ongoing, recurrent discussion among these men, not unlike the jockeying that occurs among those wishing to promote themselves as leaders within our congregations. For instance, even as the Saviour faced the cross within a matter of hours, we see some of the disciples trying to elbow their way to the front of the line. “A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. And he said to them, ‘The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves’” [LUKE 22:24-27].

Even as they neared Jerusalem on what would be His final day with the disciples before His Passion, John and James tried to engineer a coup that they imagined would promote them above the other disciples. “The mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him with her sons, and kneeling before him she asked him for something. And he said to her, ‘What do you want?’ She said to him, ‘Say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom.’ Jesus answered, ‘You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?’ They said to him, ‘We are able.’ He said to them, ‘You will drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father.’ And when the ten heard it, they were indignant at the two brothers. But Jesus called them to him and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many’” [MATTHEW 20:20-28].

The disciples were asking the wrong question. Instead of asking who was greatest, they should have asked how they could be effective in the work of the Kingdom. Likewise, rather than asking whether we are significant or important, we should be asking how we can be effective in the Master’s work. Status is important to us; but service is vital to the Master. Therefore, with the visual answer provided by the trusting obedience of a little child whom Jesus placed in the centre of the knot of disciples, they were shown the importance of humility.

This is an emphasis missing too often among the churches. We forget the admonition of the Apostle, “Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others” [PHILIPPIANS 2:3, 4]. Listen to the Apostle’s words one more time, this time as I read from a contemporary version of the Bible that approximates what the original readers heard. “Don’t push your way to the front; don’t sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don’t be obsessed with getting your own advantage” [PHILIPPIANS 2:3, 4b].⁴

At the heart of sin is the exaltation of self. When we teach children to feel good about themselves, we instruct them how to be still more sinful. Likewise, when we pander to the clamour to feel good about ourselves, we are conceding to the sinful nature of mankind. Whenever a congregation begins to focus on making folk comfortable rather than speaking the truth in love, that church is drifting into embracing sin.

⁴ Eugene H. Peterson, **The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language** (NavPress, Colorado Springs, CO 2002

WELCOMING THE HUMBLE —Not content with simply stating what should have been obvious, the Master then spoke of the blessedness that attends humility among the people of God. “Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.” Greatness lies in the willing acceptance of an inferior position! Greatness is found in being little! This is not a call to false humility, but rather it points to a genuine acceptance of God’s placement.

I do not deny that children are included in this saying of the Master; however, He is speaking of believers, whom He compares to “little ones.” This becomes obvious as we read a little farther in the periscope. The child is used to picture those who might be considered as insignificant believers in verses 6, 10 and 14. “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea” [MATTHEW 18:6]. “See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven” [MATTHEW 18:10]. “It is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish” [MATTHEW 18:14]. Jesus’ followers—those who receive the humble in His Name—are also those who believe in Him; and they are identified as His precious children.

Certainly there is warrant in these words to justify ministries to children. I am not saying that children’s ministries are the only ministry a congregation should promote, nor even that such ministries should be the primary ministry of a congregation; I am only saying that it should be among the means of outreach promoted by a congregation. As a significant aside, I have never witnessed growth in a church that ignored the nursery of the congregation. There is no one more trusting, more humble or more dependent than a little child. In my years of service before the Lord I have made a significant observation—babies never come to church by themselves. They always bring moms and dads, aunts and uncles, brothers and sisters. Babies are the best visitors a church can have. A congregation that is not prepared to welcome the infants from the community is a congregation that must be prepared to remain stagnant.

However, we must not lose focus, which is being humble. The Master is teaching us that we must not permit ourselves to become exclusive, or to ignore those we imagine to be inferior to us in some way. The greatness of the disciple lies in the fact that he has believed in Jesus’ Name. Therefore, showing hospitality and consideration to humble believers reflects the willingness of the one showing such hospitality and consideration to receive the Master. Acceptance of the “little people,” average Christians, is what is in view in this passage. Here is a principle to note in the margin of your Bible: **it is impossible to separate Christ from His people**. Consequently, whatever affects those who believe in the Master, affects Him.

Preparing the disciples for His departure, Jesus said, “Does the world hate you? Remember that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you like one of its own. But you do not belong to the world. I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.

“Remember the words I spoke to you. I said, ‘A servant is not more important than his master.’ If people hated Me and tried to hurt Me, they will do the same to you. If they obeyed My teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you like that because of My Name. They do not know the One who sent Me. “If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. But now they have no excuse for their sin. Those who hate Me hate my Father also.

“I did miracles among them that no one else did. If I hadn’t, they would not be guilty of sin. But now they have seen those miracles. And still they have hated both Me and My Father. This has happened so that what is written in their Law would come true. It says, ‘They hated Me without any reason’” [JOHN 15:18–25].⁵

There is a truth here that must not be overlooked: Christianity is not a system of religion, but a redeemed people who are united with the Living God—one with Him through faith in Christ Jesus, the Son of God. Christians not only follow Jesus’ teachings, but they follow Jesus Himself; they are fully identified with Him. He is the Vine and they are the branches [JOHN 15:5]; He is the Head and they are the body [1 CORINTHIANS 12:27]; He is the Bridegroom and they are the bride [REVELATION 21:2, 9]. For this reason Jesus taught His disciples, “The one who hears you hears Me; the one who rejects you rejects Me, and the one who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me” [LUKE 10:16]. Saul had been persecuting Christians; yet, when the Master confronted Him as he travelled to Damascus, He asked, “Saul, Saul, who are you persecuting Me” [ACTS 9:4]?

Let me be practical at this point. The tendency among the churches in our day is to treat the congregation as an organisation. A board of one kind or another makes decisions and a quorum from the congregation ratifies the decision the board makes. For most congregations, business meetings are so insignificant, so unimportant, that a provision to allow for a very few members gathered is necessary in order to “conduct business.” I have witnessed instances where the quorum required was limited to a single digit percentage of the congregation. It is a quiet statement that the membership believes that they have no voice in the church. Such a church is not a living entity, but an organisation designed to be run like any other organisation—poorly.

Congregations are taught to work at building harmony. “Live in harmony with one another,” urges the Apostle. “Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly” [ROMANS 12:16]. Shortly after that admonition, he offers a prayer for harmony: “May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God” [ROMANS 15:5-7]. “Welcome” translates the same Greek word that is translated “receives” in our text. It speaks of acceptance without reservation; it means to treat one another as honoured guests.

Again, Christians are urged to labour at maintaining a spirit of harmony. Paul writes the Christians in Ephesus, “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” [EPHESIANS 4:1-3]. He will continue that theme by noting that the gifted individuals whom God has given to the congregation are given to build God’s people and to bring unity among them. “He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things. And He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes” [EPHESIANS 4:10-14].

⁵ The Holy Bible: New International Reader’s Version (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI 1998, 2007)

I mention only one other instance of the biblical injunction to work at building unity. Peter writes, “Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing” [1 PETER 3:8, 9].

This repeated stress on striving for harmony among the people of God is nothing less than the practical application of Jesus’ plea in His High Priestly Prayer when He asked the Father, “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word, that they may all be one, just as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You have sent Me” [JOHN 17:20, 21].

CONDEMNATION FOR THOSE WHO ENTICE EVIL — The opposite of welcoming another believer is causing that believer to stumble. In this context, when a believer stumbles, he sins. Jesus is not removing responsibility for sinning—He is condemning the person who caused His “little one” to sin. If there was any question as to who His “little ones” might be, all doubt is removed when he clarifies the matter by identifying them as those who believe in Him.

The Master will pursue His “little one” who sins, as becomes evident when we read. “What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish” [MATTHEW 18:12-14].

Nevertheless, the Master takes a dim view of anyone who would entice His people to sin. When anyone assaults His children, when anyone assails His servants, they are attacking the Master Himself. If in the course of promoting one’s own agenda an individual causes a child of God to stumble, then that individual must realise the danger in which he has placed himself. When a cabal seizes control of a congregation, scandalising God’s children—they cause them to stumble, or they give offence. Should a pastor corrupt God’s children through failure to hold them accountable or through treating error as a small matter, he causes God’s children to stumble. When that happens, anyone who has acted so selfishly or proved so cowardly must realise the peril in which he or she places himself or herself. Anyone who trips a fellow disciple—whether by attitude or action, or even by failure to act—invites the Father’s protective wrath. It is as though God now stands with upraised hand to protect His child. You must know that God loves His people. Of ancient Israel, God declared that anyone who touches Israel “touches the apple of [God’s] eye” [ZECHARIAH 2:8]. Whoever harms God’s people pokes his finger in God’s eye, seriously irritating Almighty God.

Take note of Jesus’ statement: “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.” He is not speaking of eternal judgement, but rather of temporal judgement. The Master is saying that the Father is protective of His children, and those who cause them to stumble must know that they will experience His wrath. Jesus is not saying by this, or by the teaching that immediately follows, that a believer can lose her salvation; rather, the warning is meant to sober believers concerning the seriousness of stumbling. Eternal punishment, however, will be carried out on the individual who proves, through his persistent sin, that he has never been a child of God.

Later, Jesus will stress the obligation for disciples to direct fellow believers into life by turning them from the path of sin that is placed on His followers. “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 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. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them” [MATTHEW 18:15-20].

After this, Jesus will insist that any who follow Him are obligated to forgive the offences of fellow believers. The teaching was a response to a question Peter asked, perhaps as in an attempt to change the subject. “‘Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive Him? As many as seven times?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven’” [MATTHEW 18:21, 22]. Don’t keep count! Forgive, as the Lord has forgiven you.

It is vitally important to instruct children in righteousness. Frankly, if an educator fails to teach children to distinguish between right and wrong, she has done a disservice to the children. However, if that educator fails to equip children to think critically—to measure life and actions by a fixed standard rather than a fluid standard determined by what makes the child feel good or by the consensus of the majority—that educator has not only done a disservice to the child, she has turned that child from pursuing righteousness and doing what is good and honourable. If the educator has instructed the child to embrace error—to approve of wickedness while eschewing righteousness, that educator has placed herself in divine jeopardy since she is defying Holy God.

If a teacher stands in danger for perverting what is right and for promoting what is wrong, how much greater is the condemnation awaiting that one who presents himself as a preacher of righteousness should he fail to speak the truth, thus leading those who attend his teaching into grave sin? That man causes his listeners to stumble; he has defied the Master, placing himself in opposition to His will. He has harmed God’s little ones, and he shall face the Father’s wrath.

In **MARK 9:38-42** we have a similar account to that provided in our text. “John said to [Jesus], ‘Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.’ But Jesus said, ‘Do not stop him, for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. For the one who is not against us is for us. For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.

“‘Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea.’”

This account leads me to believe that as the Master was instructing His disciples, John attempted to change the subject. Perhaps he thought Jesus was getting too close to home, much as Peter thought Jesus was targeting him. So, he also attempted to change the subject, only to realise that he had blundered into yet another opportunity for the Master to expand on what He was teaching. The picture is that the disciples heard the Master’s teaching, and they reacted by attempting to turn Him away from focusing too closely on their lives. They were acting much as we act within our modern churches. In other words, the disciples were decidedly uncomfortable because they realised both by His words and by His intensity that Jesus had them in His sights.

Jesus continued by saying, “Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes” [MATTHEW 18:7]! “Temptations” translates a word that is derived from the word that is translated “sin” in our text. Clearly, disciples of the Master can cause others to sin. Consider a few instances where we are warned against such evil as followers of the Lord.

The Apostle instructs us, “Let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or *hindrance* in the way of a brother” [ROMANS 14:13].

Again, he issues a warning to be alert to anyone who causes believers to stumble when he writes, “I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create *obstacles* contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites” [ROMANS 16:17, 18a].

Using the verb form of the same word, Paul asserts, “If food makes my brother *stumble*, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother *stumble*” [1 CORINTHIANS 8:13].

It should be obvious that causing disciples to sin through enticing them to sin, through misleading them, through minimising their sin, through failure to rebuke them for error, through cowardice that keeps our mouths shut when they disseminate errant teaching, is serious business. To cause one of God’s little ones to stumble is to expose oneself as standing in opposition to the Master. It may be that the one who acts in such a deliberately defiant manner is unsaved, and they are thus in danger of eternal condemnation. Such people need to hear the warning of the Master concerning such sinners. “The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” [MATTHEW 13:41, 42]. Take note that the phrase “all causes of sin” is akin to the warning that warns of divine wrath for “whoever causes one of these little ones ... to sin” found in our text.

If any who listen are still standing outside of the grace of God, there is mercy and grace extended now. God has presented His Son as the infinite sacrifice because of sin. Christ the Lord took all sin—even yours—upon Himself and provides atonement because of your sin. God says, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

“Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For he says,

“‘In a favourable time I listened to you,
and in a day of salvation I have helped you.’

Behold, now is the favourable time; behold, now is the day of salvation”

[2 CORINTHIANS 5:17-6:2].

Put your faith in this Saviour and be saved today. This is our prayer; this is our invitation to you now. God calls you now, saying, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.” His plea concludes with a gracious promise, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” [**ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13**]. Believe and be saved. Amen.