

We All Have Fallen Shorts

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Mathew 18:6-9

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It seems that much of what do and talk about in religious circles focuses on how we are getting along with God or our relationship with Jesus. Just look at the countless books, the elaborate worship events, or the lessons we teach. So much of it is designed to focus our attention heavenward. However, if you read what Jesus did with His disciples I believe you'll see that He was trying to move them not just closer to God, but closer to one another and the rest of the world. What Jesus has been doing with His followers (mostly with the twelve) has been to help them love God with all their heart, mind, strength, and soul, and to then teach them how to love others as they love themselves.

In Matthew 18, after Peter, James, and John had been to the mountain with Jesus, He begins to teach that in God's Kingdom, their relationship with others is just as important as their relationship with God. He tells them that they must have a humble and teachable heart so they can serve others and build up one another, not clamor to be King of the Hill. And He illustrates just how important our relationship to others really is in God's kingdom by talking about the child resting on His knee.

⁶ but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. ⁷ "Woe to the world because of *its* stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes! ⁸ "If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than to have two hands or two feet and be cast into the eternal fire. ⁹ "If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than to have two eyes and be cast into the fiery hell. ¹

(Mathew 18:6-9).

¹*New American Standard Bible : 1995 update*. 1995 (Mt 18:6-9). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

Jesus is taking His disciples through a process that should happen to all of His followers, both then and now. What it means to be a Christian is to allow Jesus to work in our lives so that we move from one point to the next. We begin by recognizing Him as Lord and Messiah. We confess our need for Him to be our Savior. We spend time drawing closer to God. And finally, we move down the mountain to serve others and to be faithful witnesses to a watching world.

There needs to come a time in our lives when we care enough about others that we begin to serve them. Yes, Jesus teaches us to surrender our lives to Him as Lord, Messiah, and Savior. But there also needs to come a time in our lives when we care about those around us. We recognize our responsibility to the people of this world like this young man has.

Hey, at least he tried. But like the young man we've just seen, there also needs to come a time in our Christianity when we think about how our words and actions might affect others. Because if we don't care about what our actions are doing to the faith of those who are watching, then Christ says its better we drown in the depths of the ocean.

I'm not trying to present some elaborate, confusing theology here. The point Christ is trying to make is that young children and the people of this world are watching us. And Christ says we have a responsibility to be faithful witnesses to those who might see God through us. We need to love others enough that we are willing to look long and hard at ourselves and see what we might be doing to cause someone to stumble. And if we find something, be willing to tear it from our lives for their good. The truth is, Christ did not just redeem you for yourself. He redeemed you for others. He died for you so that through you others may come to trust in our Lord.

Your Christian faith is not your own. Contrary to popular thought, Christianity is not a private religion between yourself and God. What sets Christianity apart from many world religions is that as Christians, our relationship with others is just as important as our relationship with God. This is the point Jesus is trying to get across to His followers (the group back then as well as the group of us today). This whole section in Matthew chapter 18 is designed to help us see the relational side of

Christianity. It begins by humbling ourselves with a servant attitude toward others, and by allowing the Holy Spirit to remove those things from our lives that cause others to stumble and fall.

So important is this to our Christian living that later on John the Apostle would write, ²⁰ **If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.** ²¹ **And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.** ² (1John 4:20-21). In other words, you do not love others if you do not care how your words or actions are affecting their faith.

Jesus says that it is inevitable that stumbling blocks may come. Which only makes sense considering the church is made up of imperfect people. But what He is asking us to do is to take a long hard look at ourselves and see if there be any wicked way in us; not just because it affects our relationship with Him, but because it affects someone else's relationship with Him. And as Christians, we're supposed to care that our actions may be affecting the faith of someone else.

My friend, Christ is not the only one who came to the cross to die. He is bidding all of us to come, not for our own sake, but for the sake of those not yet found. You need to know that there are people in this world who have a curiosity about the cross. They study the cross and wonder about its significance. And as their eyes look to the man hanging there, they see those who are gathered at His feet. What will our actions and words say to them? Will they bid them come and die, or will they drive them away?

²*New American Standard Bible : 1995 update.* 1995 (1 Jn 4:20-21). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.