

A man was thinking and he wondered why ...

Matthew 18 speaks to believers becoming  
as little children,

when the rest of the Bible instructs believers  
to grow mature?

What is the solution to this Matthew 18  
paradox?

And why is it that understanding the solution to  
the Matthew 18 paradox is so important  
for all mankind?

# The Matthew 18 Paradox: Solved

By

Job S. Friend

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To The Peaceful

## **Introduction**

It has always puzzled your author why, in Matthew 18, Jesus Christ called a little child to him and then instructed the disciples to become as little children. This is contrasted with numerous other places, in the Bible, where there are clear instructions to grow mature. Which is it? Are believers supposed to grow mature, or to become as little children? On the surface the two instructions seem to be contradictory. Your author will label this apparent contradiction, or paradox, "The Matthew 18 Paradox." Is there a solution to this paradox? In fact there is and the purpose of this book is to share the solution. A further purpose of this book is to explain why the proper understanding of Matthew 18 is important, not only for us as individuals, but also for the human race as a whole. It is always your author's goal to provide a camera angle as to what is really happening and why. In the pages that follow I share with you my solution to The Matthew 18 Paradox. Some of my reasons are Biblical, some are historical, and some are based on logical reasoning and life experiences.

As a housekeeping point, the scriptural references, herein, are from the King James

Version, KJV, unless denoted otherwise. I will also quote from *Today's English Version*, TEV, also known as The Good News Bible. Any emphasis, in the scriptural or other quotations, is mine throughout this book.

As an additional important note, I have chosen to write the pages that follow mainly in a conversational style. Having said that, let's get started. I offer for your serious consideration and hopeful edification what I have learned below.

### **The Matthew 18 Paradox**

"At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and **become as little children,** ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 18:1-4, KJV

The disciples were no doubt arguing about who would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Greatest, to them, likely meant who

would have the most power over other people. They were the product of their times where the Romans dominated what was left of Israel. The disciples were also the product of their times in that there was a strong religious hierarchy ruling over the people. In this society the average man was told what to do by either the civil, or the religious authorities, or both. Ergo, it was natural, if you were one of the ruled, to dream of reversing this situation and to become one of the rulers - which is to say one of the great ones with power to use over others. A few chapters later, in Matthew 20, Christ set the record straight regarding this notion and clarified some things in this regard.

“Then came to him the mother of Zebedee’s children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him. And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom. But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able. And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized

with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father. And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren. But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and **they that are great** exercise authority upon them. **But it shall not be so among you:** but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”  
Matthew 20:20-28, KJV

Jesus Christ had followers who wanted to be great and they thought that greatness was having power to use over others. And so Jesus shot this idea down - right between the eyes. He shot it down in such a way that it was very clear that his followers should not organize themselves in the same way that the Gentiles do, which is to exercise dominion (domination) over others. This type of authoritarian organizational structure creates friction and is counterproductive to human development and social harmony. That said, dissecting

Matthew 20 and its meaning is beyond the scope of this book. The main point your author is making here is that the disciples, or at least some of them, were concerned about who would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven and this concern is what provides the run up to Matthew 18.

In verse 3 of Matthew 18 Christ said that, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." Of course Christ would say that unless you became converted you would not enter into the kingdom of heaven. But why did he add "and become as little children?" This is the confusing part. The Bible, as instruction from the Instructor, is to lead us to the fullness of integrity and maturity.

It is all right to start out as babes, as the below scripture from I Peter declares:

"Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, **that ye may grow** thereby:"  
1 Peter 2:1-2, KJV

Later on, however, Paul expresses his dismay to the church at Corinth that they were not growing mature like they should.

“Dear brothers and sisters, when I was with you **I couldn’t talk to you as I would to mature Christians**. I had to talk as though you belonged to this world **or as though you were infants** in the Christian life. I had to feed you with milk and not with solid food, because you couldn’t handle anything stronger. And you still aren’t ready, for you are still controlled by your own sinful desires. You are jealous of one another and quarrel with each other. Doesn’t that prove you are controlled by your own desires? You are acting like people who don’t belong to the Lord.” 1 Corinthians 3:1-3, NLT

A passage from Hebrews details the same basic problem, at another time and place:

“Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is

a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." Hebrews 5:11-14, KJV

There are numerous other scriptures admonishing believers to not be children any longer, but to grow up, to become mature, to be complete, to bear much fruit, etc. The below passages are just a few such scriptures:

"When I was an infant, I spoke as an infant, I thought as an infant, I reasoned as an infant. But when I became a man, I did away with the things of an infant." 1 Corinthians 13:11, MKJV

"Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, **may grow up** into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:"  
Ephesians 4:13-15, KJV

“But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.”  
2 Peter 3:18, KJV

“Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, **that ye may stand perfect and complete** in all the will of God.”  
Colossians 4:12, KJV

“For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God;” Colossians 1:9, 10, KJV

“Now He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for eating, may He supply and multiply your seed, **and increase the fruits of your righteousness** [we should grow mature and bear fruit]” 2 Corinthians 9:10, MKJV

“Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.” Philippians 1:11, KJV

Jesus Christ's Matthew 18 teaching, to his disciples and, by extension, to all believers, was to be converted **AND** to become as little children; otherwise we would not enter the kingdom of heaven. Not making it into the kingdom of heaven is serious and so we have a paradox, an apparent problem – which is how to reconcile the two seemingly contradictory commands. To be converted is a subject beyond the scope of this short book, but it is clear from the above scriptures that a believer in the process of conversion is to: grow mature, leave off being as a child, develop in integrity, bear fruit, and become complete. In short, it is to become like Jesus Christ himself, the goal of all instruction.

“For Christ is the end [goal] of the law [instruction] for righteousness to every one that believeth.” Romans 10:4, KJV

The Matthew 18 Paradox is: how does a believer become as a little child while at the same time growing to become complete and mature?

## Some Common Explanations

Your author tends to think for himself. That being said, it never hurts to investigate what others have said about a particular problem. In the interests of making it easy for the reader, your author will share various quotes and thoughts, about the meaning of Matthew 18:3, from a variety of sources below. The quotes below are excerpted pertaining to the "become as little children" portion of the various author's comments/notes.

"and become as little children: the Arabic renders it, 'as this child'; that is, unless ye learn to entertain an **humble**, and modest opinion of yourselves, are **not envious** at one another, and **drop all contentions about primacy and pre-eminence**, and all your ambitious views of one being greater than another, in a vainly expected temporal kingdom; things which are not to be found in little children, though not free from sin in other respects" *An Exposition Of The Old And New Testament* by John Gill

"except you be converted = if not ... you have turned around - been changed from a proud person to become like little children

(referring to **their normal trusting mind**)”  
*Textual And Translation Notes On The Gospels*  
by Jay P. Green, Sr.

“Except ye be converted - The first step toward entering into the kingdom of grace, is to become as little children: **lowly in heart, knowing yourselves utterly ignorant and helpless, and hanging wholly on your Father** who is in heaven, for a supply of all your wants.” *Notes On The Old And New Testaments* by John Wesley

“And become as little children i.e. Be as truly **without worldly ambition**, and the lust of power, as little children are, **who act among themselves as if all were equal. ...**”  
*Commentary On The Bible* by Adam Clarke

“converted, and become as little children”  
That which would be proper for the kingdom was the **meekness** of a little child, which is unable to assert its own rights in the face of a world that passes it by - the spirit of **dependence and humility**. They must become as little children. In the absence of their rejected Lord this was the spirit that

became His followers." *Eclectic Notes*, compiled by John Greenhalgh

"As little children; humble, **docile, submissive, obedient**. Many of the characteristics of little children afford important instruction to mankind." *Family Bible Notes*, by Justin Edwards

"And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be {b} converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. (b) An idiom taken from the Hebrews which is equivalent to 'repent'." *Geneva Bible Notes*

"Become as little children. **Humble, teachable** and **free from selfish ambition**, like little children." *Peoples New Testament Commentary*, by B.W. Johnson

"A young child was the fittest pattern to commend **humility** to them. ...

1. Little children know not what dominion means, and therefore affect it not, are **not ambitious**.
2. They are **not given to boast and glory**, and to prefer themselves before others.

3. They are **ready to be taught** and instructed.
4. They **live upon their fathers' providence**, and are not over solicitous.
5. They are **not malicious and vindictive**. In malice (saith the apostle) be ye children.

The three first are principally here intended.  
If ye be not thus like little children, ye will be so far from being greatest in the kingdom of God, that you will never come here at all. ...”  
*Annotations Upon The Holy Bible*, by  
Matthew Poole

Your author attempted to highlight selections of the key thoughts of the possible explanations offered by these various authorities above. A listing of the highlighted terms, or concepts, is as follows:

Humble, lowly in heart, meekness, docile  
Not envious  
Forsaking primacy or pre-eminence, without worldly ambition  
Trusting  
Knowing oneself to be ignorant and helpless  
Being dependent on the Father

Acting as if all were equals  
Submissive and obedient  
Teachable  
Not malicious and vindictive

Your author appreciates the efforts of other thinking people to share their insights. And while each of the above concepts, or thoughts, are demonstrative of good character traits they do not solve The Matthew 18 Paradox. It cannot be denied that believers should: be humble, not be envious, not seek to exercise pre-eminence or dominance over others, be trusting and dependent on the Father, treat others as equals who have also been made in God's image and therefore possess equal rights, be submissive and obedient to God, be teachable, and not be malicious or vindictive. However, none of these characters traits either alone, or in combination, gets at what Jesus Christ was trying to teach the disciples in Matthew 18. At best they are partial answers.

In your author's opinion, the closest that any of the commentators came was Matthew Poole, in his list of five items, quoted above. The closest he came was his listed item number five. Unfortunately, he then said that items one to three were what were intended. And he did not

get completely at what was intended, even in his listed item number five – which was for the disciples not to be malicious and not to be vindictive. Not being malicious is certainly true and has scriptural support as follows:

“Brothers, do not be children in your minds, but in malice be like infants, and in your minds be mature.” 1 Corinthians 14:20, MKJV

1 Corinthians 14:20 is a great scripture in helping to understand part of the solution to The Matthew 18 Paradox. The dictionary definition of “malice” is the intention or desire to do evil. Ergo, believers are to be like infants in that infants do not have the intention or desire to do evil. They are not malicious. Further, 1 Corinthians 14:20 instructs believers to grow mature in their minds. This scripture relates to 1 Peter 2:1 and its admonition to lay aside all malice.

Not being malicious, as infants are not, while growing mature in our minds, is part of the solution to The Matthew 18 Paradox - but there is more to the story.

## **The Solution To The Paradox**

Your author was once going through a difficult trial and so he decided to read through the entire Bible in a modern language, easy-to-read, translation. The translation chosen was *Today's English Version*, also known as the Good News Bible (TEV). When you are reading through the Bible you never know what will jump off the page at you - even though you have read a section of the Bible many times before. And something "jumping off of the page" is exactly what happened to your author. In this case, what jumped off of the page was the solution to The Matthew 18 Paradox.

One of the helpful things the Good News Bible does is to section the chapters into verses, placed into topical groupings, and to put a topical grouping title, (a chapter sub-heading) centered and in **bold**, before the associated verses in that grouping. Before reading Matthew 18 your author read through the topical grouping titles, for that chapter, and noticed that the largest topical grouping of verses was at the end of the chapter – verses 21 to 35. The topical grouping title was, "The Parable Of The Unforgiving Servant."

This particular parable is not difficult to understand. In fact, it ends with Jesus Christ's point-blank statement, "That is how my Father in heaven will treat every one of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart." The statement is serious because the topic is serious and because Jesus was so emphatic. Some parables are difficult to understand, but not this one.

Your author then read backward through the other topical grouping titles, for Matthew 18, to see if there was a unified point of view for the entire chapter. And there was. There was a unified point of view being expressed in different ways from varied camera angles. The entire chapter was unified. And the central point of the chapter is very important for all mankind. And so your author will now take you, dear reader, through Matthew 18 backwards, in order to solve The Matthew 18 Paradox.

Counting backwards, the first topical grouping is verses 21-35 and the topical grouping title is:

## **The Parable Of The Unforgiving Servant**

“Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, if my brother keeps on sinning against me, how many times do I have to forgive him? Seven times?” “No, not seven times,” answered Jesus, “but seventy times seven, because the Kingdom of heaven is like this. Once there was a king who decided to check on his servants’ accounts. He had just begun to do so when one of them was brought in who owed him millions of dollars. The servant did not have enough to pay his debt, so the king ordered him to be sold as a slave, with his wife and his children and all that he had, in order to pay the debt. The servant fell on his knees before the king. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay you everything!’ The king felt sorry for him, so he forgave him the debt and let him go. “Then the man went out and met one of his fellow servants who owed him a few dollars. He grabbed him and started choking him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he said. His fellow servant fell down and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back!’ But he refused; instead, he had him thrown into jail until he should pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were

very upset and went to the king and told him everything. So he called the servant in. 'You worthless slave!' he said. 'I forgave you the whole amount you owed me, just because you asked me to. **You should have had mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you.**' The king was very angry, and he sent the servant to jail to be punished until he should pay back the whole amount." And Jesus concluded, "That is how my Father in heaven will treat every one of you **unless you forgive your brother from your heart.**"  
Matthew 18:21-35 TEV

The above parable does not need much explanation. Jesus Christ's death and resurrection makes possible the forgiveness of sin and the avoidance of the death penalty for every human being who takes advantage of it. Since all men have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23), all men are under the death penalty (Romans 6:23). In other words, all men owe more than they can pay. All men need mercy and forgiveness. Jesus Christ's death and resurrection provided for mercy and forgiveness for all mankind. Once availed of, with the forgiveness of sin, there is a restoration of the sin-damaged relationship. There is also a restoration of social

harmony and peace. Of course, there is the matter of the lack of justice involved, but Jesus Christ and God the Father are bigger and more forward thinking than mere men and they decided long ago (Revelation 13:8) that Jesus Christ himself would pay for the sins of others. This payment, resulting in forgiveness, was a gift from God. We owed more than we could pay, but our debts got cancelled. We were forgiven and thrown a saving lifeline.

Men and women damage each other. We do it repeatedly. Sometimes the acts that damage are intentional and sometimes they are inadvertent. Sometimes the offender is aware their act hurt someone else and sometimes they are clueless that their act hurt. The act that damages usually does something far worse than the bad act considered alone. And that something far worse is there is a breach in social harmony – a damaged relationship. It happens all the time and we are all guilty of various acts that have harmed others. The damaged relationship, the lack of social harmony, leads to a condition of a lack of peace and, if not rectified, can lead to a simmering and long-lasting feud. Expanded to a tribal or national scale the lack of social harmony, the lack of peace, can lead to an actual war. If it

goes this far, to actual war, then there is a catastrophic loss of life, liberty, and property and the entire human race is impoverished. And the hatred and resentment toward the other side can then become almost embedded into a tribe or nation's psyche, or DNA (your author is using DNA as a metaphor and not making a biological statement). And then there can be a centuries-long hatred, with all of the associated problems. Energy and ability that could have worked to better the human race is instead spent on preparations for war, fighting wars, emotional and physical suffering, cleaning up from the results of wars, etc. The negative effect on people and on life itself is catastrophic.

Your author believes that most big problems come from fundamental weaknesses, which compound themselves over a period of time. I believe this is part of what Christ was getting at. An offense not forgiven can compound into a major disaster, as mentioned above. Even at the smaller human-to-human level an unforgiven slight can lead to a lack of social harmony, a lack of peace, uneasiness when the other person is around, etc. It would be better if the erring person were forgiven. And since we have all hurt others, we need the benefit of this forgiveness as well. Forgiveness leading to

social harmony and peace are critical for individuals, families, and societies to function effectively. And Jesus Christ knew this.

The next topical verse grouping is verses 18 to 20 and the topical grouping title is:

### **Prohibiting And Permitting**

““And so I tell all of you: what you prohibit on earth will be prohibited in heaven, and what you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven. “And I tell you more: whenever two of you on earth agree about anything you pray for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, I am there with them.””  
Matthew 18:18-20 TEV

Your author noticed that two or three were coming together and agreeing. Without social harmony and peace two or three could not come together. And even if they did come together they would not agree with each other. Estranged people do not agree and do not come together. This passage of scripture fits within the idea of the necessity of forgiveness leading to togetherness, social harmony, and peace. Eternity is a long time. We have to get along

with each other. God is not going to permit an eternity of warfare, or the attitudes leading up to warfare (Revelation 21:4).

The next topical verse grouping is verses 15 to 17 and the topical grouping title is:

### **A Brother Who Sins**

“If your brother sins against you, go to him and show him his fault. But do it privately, just between yourselves. If he listens to you, you have won your brother back. But if he will not listen to you, take one or two other persons with you, so that ‘every accusation may be upheld by the testimony of two or more witnesses,’ as the scripture says. And if he will not listen to them, then tell the whole thing to the church. Finally, if he will not listen to the church, treat him as though he were a pagan or a tax collector.” Matthew 18:15-17 TEV

The above instruction is Christ’s teaching regarding reconciling with a brother who sins against you. There are three steps involved, if necessary, but hopefully only the first step is necessary. The first step is to privately approach your brother so that he has a chance to say he is sorry and the relationship can

immediately be repaired and restored. If that does not work then take some others to help, all in an attempt to re-establish social harmony and peace. If that does not work then the process becomes more public. The process becoming more public would only occur, however, if the offender already had two chances to say he is sorry and to restore the relationship. Only then would he be publicly confronted and even then in the hopes that he would finally wise up and say he is sorry and change his behavior. The whole goal is reconciliation and forgiveness so there is social harmony, peace, and unity in the body of Christ.

The next topical verse grouping is verses 10 to 14 and the topical grouping title is:

### **The Parable Of The Lost Sheep**

“See that you don’t despise any of these little ones. Their angels in heaven, I tell you, are always in the presence of my Father in heaven. “What do you think a man does who has one hundred sheep and one of them gets lost? He will leave the other ninety-nine grazing on the hillside and go and look for the lost sheep. When he finds it, I tell you, he feels far happier over this one sheep than over the

ninety-nine that did not get lost. In just the same way your Father in heaven does not want any of these little ones to be lost.”

Matthew 18:10-14 TEV

There are a couple of main points in “The Parable Of The Lost Sheep.” First, Christ says that God the Father does not want anyone to be lost. Second, if someone is lost, an effort is made to go and find him or her so they can be reconciled and reunited to everyone else. This continues to fit into the forgiveness, social harmony, togetherness, and peace theme of Matthew 18. If someone is lost, they are obviously estranged, and the Shepherd is unhappy enough to do something about it. Action to effect an ultimate reconciliation is undertaken by the Shepherd himself. The goal is to reunite the lost sheep with the flock so there can be togetherness. This might take time, but do not bet against the Shepherd.

The next topical verse grouping is verses 6 to 9 and the topical grouping title is:

### **Temptations To Sin**

“If anyone should cause one of these little ones to lose his faith in me, it would be better

for that person to have a large millstone tied around his neck and be drowned in the deep sea. How terrible for the world that there are things that make people lose their faith! Such things will always happen - but how terrible for the one who causes them! If your hand or your foot makes you lose your faith, cut it off and throw it away! It is better for you to enter life without a hand or a foot than to keep both hands and both feet and be thrown into the eternal fire. And if your eye makes you lose your faith, take it out and throw it away! It is better for you to enter life with only one eye than to keep both eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell." Matthew 18:6-9 TEV

The main point of the above also fits within the forgiveness, social harmony, togetherness, and peace theme of the chapter. The main point is not to do something to someone else, which would result in them losing their faith and becoming estranged. "The Parable Of The Lost Sheep" follows just a few verses later. If we offend someone else to the point that they lose their faith and leave the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12), unity and togetherness are gone. The body of Christ is no longer complete. And so Christ warns against this.

The last topical verse grouping is verses 1 to 5 and the topical grouping title is:

### **Who Is The Greatest?**

“At that time the disciples came to Jesus, asking, “Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven?” So Jesus called a child to come and stand in front of them, and said, “**I assure you that unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the Kingdom of heaven.** The greatest in the Kingdom of heaven is the one who humbles himself **and becomes like this child.** And whoever welcomes in my name one such child as this, welcomes me.”” Matthew 18:1-5 TEV

And so we come to The Matthew 18 Paradox. How is it possible to become like little children and also, at the same time, to grow mature? That is the question. Humility can form part of the answer. And the other suggestions, put forth by various commentators, can perhaps also form part of the answer. But none of those things previously put forth, either alone, or in combination, are enough to get at what Jesus Christ was actually talking about.

Your author was a little boy once and he lived in a neighborhood where the other little boys, of that neighborhood, were constantly playing, either competitive sports games outdoors or table games indoors. Daily it was one competition after another, with various teams being chosen for each game. The composition of the teams constantly shifted, depending on the game being played and who was available to play on that given day. The competitions were often heated (intense) and many times things were both said and done that offended. What then? Did the boys in the neighborhood retreat forever, back into the safety of their own homes? No they did not – at least not for very long. If there is one thing most young boys cannot stand, and I am sure this also holds for most young girls, it is to be alone with no one to play with – especially on those long summer days. Ask any mother who has a bored young boy on her hands. He will drive his mother crazy until she finally tells him to go outside and play. However, let me make my illustration and explanation more particular.

Let us say there are only two boys available to play in the neighborhood on a given day. Their names are Johnny and Billy. Further, let us say that Billy, while playing with Johnny in

the morning, had picked up a dirt clod and thrown it at Johnny and hit him with it. It hurt Johnny and he promptly did two things. First, he yelled at Billy and told him he would never be friends with him again. Second, he went home crying to his mother.

Later in the day, after lunch, both boys were alone and bored. And they were both starting to get on their mother's nerves. Johnny complained that he had no one to play with. Billy voiced the same complaint to his mother. Both mothers offered suggestions for things to do alone, but both boys were getting bored. Perhaps a phone call between mothers took place and Billy ends up knocking on Johnny's front door. Enough boredom had set in such that Johnny agreed to play with Billy again, if Billy promised never to throw another dirt clod at Johnny and if Billy said he was sorry. Billy said he was sorry and promised not to do it again. The next thing you know both boys are playing together outside. A few hours of play later, our story ends with both boys sitting, right next to each other on the couch, watching a movie, and eating a snack together - the best of friends again. It was like the morning dirt clod incident **NEVER HAPPENED**. Johnny and Billy have long forgotten the morning incident and

are happy to be together again. Johnny did not only forgive Billy, it was like the offense never even happened. The capacity of young children to do this is what Christ was talking about. There was forgiveness, reconciliation, social harmony, and because it was like the incident never even happened, there was lasting peace. The boys were together again and they could not be happier. **Forgiving an offense so completely and so quickly that it is like the offense never even happened is what Christ was getting at when using a young child and referring to little children in Matthew 18. This is the solution to The Matthew 18 Paradox.** Johnny and Billy are not concerned with, "Who is the greatest?" They just want to be together and to enjoy each other's company, i.e., to have fun with each other.

We are to grow mature, and part of this maturity is to realize that without forgiveness there will not be social harmony and there will not be peace. Without forgiveness we will not be together and even if we were together we would not be at ease with each other, nor would we genuinely like each other. So, as little children have the capacity to do when wronged, we must forgive as quickly as possible and so

completely that it was like the offending incident never even happened. This is what Jesus Christ was talking about in Matthew 18. And this is what leads to social harmony, peace, and togetherness. It takes maturity to do this. There is no conflict with growing mature and following Christ's repeated instructions in Matthew 18, no conflict at all.

### **Forgiveness, Social Harmony And Peace**

The need for ongoing social harmony and lasting peace impels the need for forgiveness. This is because each of us has been wrong in our actions toward God and others and sometimes others have been wrong toward us. In other words, we are all part of the problem. In saying we are all part of the problem, your author is not minimizing the fact that some real monsters have walked the earth and done some horrific things. We are talking about a principle here, where all of us, unfortunately, have contributed to the mess the human race is in. All of us need forgiveness and all of us need to forgive. Until this happens there will not be the social harmony and peace necessary for life to flourish.

Interestingly, a lot of the description regarding the works of the flesh versus the works of the spirit, in Galatians 5, has to do with love toward each other and things pertaining to social harmony and peace. Your author's bracketed comments are intended to emphasize the aspect of good inter-personal relations and your author concedes the various fruits are more wide-ranging than your author's bracketed comments and could each be expanded into a book unto themselves.

"For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; **Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.** But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another. This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law. **Now the works of the flesh** are manifest, **which are these**; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, **hatred, variance**

[quarrels], **emulations** [jealousies], **wrath, strife, seditions** [dissension], heresies, **Envyings, murders**, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love [for God and each other], joy [of being with each other and experiencing things together], peace [with each other so we can be relaxed when together], longsuffering [patience with each other, letting others grow at their own pace and becoming the unique individual who only they can become], gentleness [with each other], goodness [toward each other], faith [this could also be faithfulness to each other as well as toward God], Meekness [this can also be consideration toward each other], temperance [self-control]: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another."  
Galatians 5:13-26, KJV

Most of what your author wanted to say, or call to the reader's attention, about the above Galatians 5 passage, is in the underlined,

bolded, or bracketed comments. Obviously, all of the works of the flesh cause alienation - either toward God, or a spouse, or a fellow human being, and all are to be condemned. This is a short book and your author cannot cover everything, just some of the main points. One of the more telling sentences of Galatians 5 is verse 15. It says, "But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another." If we are going to pick fights with each other, we are going to end up in perpetual multi-generational feuds and wars - which has pretty much been the experience of the human race. Until there is forgiveness, like the wrong in question never happened, there will not be the social harmony and the peace we need for life to flourish. The current generation is not only poisoned, but the next generation, and so on, continues to harbor the grudge and look for the chance for revenge - which only sets the table for the next downward retrogression. It will not end until everyone is either dead, or everyone left alive forgives like the wrong never happened. This is the importance of the solution to The Matthew 18 Paradox for the human race.

Your author believes that, from God's point of view, the importance of forgiveness, social

harmony, and peace cannot be overemphasized. Galatians 6 ties back to the works of the flesh, mentioned in Galatians 5.

“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked. For whatever a man sows, that he also will reap. For he sowing to his flesh will reap corruption [destruction] from the flesh. But he sowing to the Spirit will reap life everlasting from the Spirit. But we should not lose heart in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we do not faint. So then as we have time, let us work good toward all, especially toward those of the household of faith.” Galatians 6:7-10, MKJV

Proverbs 6 lists seven things that God hates. Most, or all, of the seven things result in a lack of social harmony and peace and, if continued, ultimately lead to lasting feuds and war. War is terrible as it ends up causing the loss of life, liberty, and property – in other words the loss of mankind’s natural rights.

“These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, A false witness that speaketh lies, and

**he that soweth discord among brethren."**

Proverbs 6:16-19, KJV

The Sermon on the Mount speaks to being merciful and to being a peacemaker and to being reconciled with your brother who has something against you. You cannot be a peacemaker if you do not forgive the past.

"Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. ... Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God."

Matthew 5:7,9, KJV

"Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift."

Matthew 5:23, 24, KJV

James has a beautiful passage of scripture whereby the wisdom that comes from God (heaven) is described as pure and peace loving.

"But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure. **It is also peace loving,** gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and good deeds. It shows no

partiality and is always sincere. And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of goodness."

James 3:17, 18, NLT

The Sermon on the Mount also includes the famous passage mandating the necessity of forgiving others. We must do this to have our own sins, which we all have, forgiven.

"And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. ... For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." Matthew 6:12, 14-15, KJV

In addition to forgiving others so our own sins can be forgiven, we must also forgive others in order to reestablish social harmony and lasting peace. Johnny and Billy could teach mankind a lot. This was Christ's point in Matthew 18.

### **Some Examples Of Forgiveness**

This short book cannot completely cover the topic of forgiveness. The main point of this book, and its emphasis, is to solve and explain The Matthew 18 Paradox and its importance for

mankind. Nevertheless, your author thought he would include a few Biblical references where forgiveness was a central part of the story.

The first Biblical story that comes to many people's minds when it comes to forgiveness is Joseph forgiving his brothers for their betrayal. The betrayal is recorded in Genesis 37 and the consequences of that betrayal are recorded in the chapters that follow. Joseph's Hall Of Fame response to his brothers' evil against him is recorded in Genesis 50. There, he forgave them and charitably attributed it all to part of a plan of God to save Jacob and his descendents. And Joseph treated his brothers kindly, like their betrayal never happened.

"And when Joseph's brethren saw that their father was dead, they said, Joseph will peradventure hate us, and will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him. And they sent a messenger unto Joseph, saying, Thy father did command before he died, saying, So shall ye say unto Joseph, Forgive, I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin; for they did unto thee evil: and now, we pray thee, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father. And Joseph wept when they spake unto him. And his brethren also went

and fell down before his face; and they said, Behold, we be thy servants. And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God? But as for you, **ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good**, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them."  
Genesis 50:15-21 KJV

Another Bible story relating to forgiveness is Moses imploring God not to kill all of the Israelites for their rebellion against God. Their rebellion against God turned out to pretty much be ongoing, but the story your author wishes to reference is found in Exodus 32-34. Moses had to keep imploring God to forgive the Israelites and not to reject them as his inheritance and so God did.

"Then the LORD told Moses, "Quick! Go down the mountain! The people you brought from Egypt have defiled themselves. They have already turned from the way I commanded them to live. They have made an idol shaped like a calf, and they have worshiped and sacrificed to it. They are saying, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you out of

Egypt.” Then the LORD said, “I have seen how stubborn and rebellious these people are. Now leave me alone so my anger can blaze against them and destroy them all. Then I will make you, Moses, into a great nation instead of them.” But Moses pleaded with the LORD his God not to do it. “O LORD!” he exclaimed. “Why are you so angry with your own people whom you brought from the land of Egypt with such great power and mighty acts? The Egyptians will say, ‘God tricked them into coming to the mountains so he could kill them and wipe them from the face of the earth.’ Turn away from your fierce anger. Change your mind about this terrible disaster you are planning against your people! Remember your covenant with your servants - Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. You swore by your own self, ‘I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven. Yes, I will give them all of this land that I have promised to your descendants, and they will possess it forever.’” So the LORD withdrew his threat and didn’t bring against his people the disaster he had threatened.”  
Exodus 32:7-14, NLT

“The next day Moses said to the people,  
“You have committed a terrible sin, but I will return to the LORD on the mountain. Perhaps I

will be able to obtain forgiveness for you.” So Moses returned to the LORD and said, “Alas, these people have committed a terrible sin. They have made gods of gold for themselves. But now, please forgive their sin - and if not, then blot me out of the record [book] you are keeping.” The LORD replied to Moses, “I will blot out whoever has sinned against me.” Exodus 32:30-33, NLT

“And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children, unto the third and to the fourth generation. And Moses made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped. And he said, If now I have found grace in thy sight, O Lord, let my Lord, I pray thee, go among us; for it is a stiffnecked people; and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for thine inheritance [and God did].” Exodus 34:6-9, KJV

Another famous Biblical example, of a wrong completely forgiven, is David’s sin against God

in the matter of Bathsheba. The majority of the story is found in 2 Samuel 11 and 12. The heart of the story is that David committed adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah. Because Bathsheba got pregnant, it led to a series of even worse events whereby David conspired to have Uriah killed - and he was killed. David then took Bathsheba to be his wife. God had to send Nathan the prophet to confront David about his sins. David repented and God forgave him, but the baby Bathsheba delivered died. David then comforted his wife Bathsheba and she had Solomon, whom God loved.

“And David comforted Bathsheba his wife, and went in unto her, and lay with her: and she bare a son, and he called his name Solomon: and the LORD loved him.” 2 Samuel 12:24, KJV

David’s repentance is recorded in Psalm 51, a part of which is quoted below:

“To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba. Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me

thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee.

Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.”  
Psalms 51:1-14, KJV

God did forgive David, although there were some ongoing consequences to his actions (2 Samuel 12). The main point is that God forgave and loved David, and loved Solomon, a subsequent son through Bathsheba. Of all of David's sons, Solomon was chosen to succeed David as king. And Solomon is, of course, famous in his own right.

The story of the prodigal son is also thought of when it comes to forgiveness. In this story, what the father cares about most is reconciliation with his son that was lost to him. The father is overjoyed that he can be reunited with his estranged son so they can experience life together again. The older and more responsible brother was not so charitable, though he ought to have been.

"And he [Christ] said, A certain man had two sons: And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that

land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found [the relationship was restored and they could be together again]. And they began to be merry. Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard

musick and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him. And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet [necessary] that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found."

Luke 15:11-32, KJV

Jesus, while hanging on the cross, without anyone asking him to, forgave mankind for crucifying him and asked God the Father to do the same. Jesus came to make reconciliation possible. What would be the whole point of his life if he did not forgive – even the injustice of his public humiliation, physical suffering, and death? Before he was dead on the cross he

clearly showed just how serious he was about forgiveness. And this forgiveness is the kind that allows for, and ultimately leads to, social harmony and lasting togetherness and peace.

“And there were also two other, malefactors, led with him [Jesus Christ] to be put to death. And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.”  
Luke 23:32-34, KJV

## Final Thoughts

There is no conflict with the various Biblical admonitions to grow complete and mature, versus the instruction, in Matthew 18, to become as little children. The Matthew 18 Paradox only comes about because there has been a lack of understanding that the entire subject matter of Matthew 18 has to do with forgiveness, social harmony, and peace – all of which are necessary for us to live together and to be at ease with each other. It is not enough to be polite. Eternity is a long time. **We have to forgive each other as little children do –**

**quickly and like the offense in question never even happened.** That is what God the Father and Jesus Christ have done with our sins. One of the best examples is found in Psalm 103, portions of which are excerpted below:

“Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle’s. ...

The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: **neither will he keep his anger for ever**. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.”  
Psalm 103:2-5, 8-14, KJV

There are a number of important points encompassed in Psalm 103 that tie into the message of this book. First, God forgives ALL our iniquities. We must do the same for each other. Second, God does not keep his anger forever. Neither should we. Third, God does not deal with us according to our sins. One of the reasons that grudges are held is that we insist on treating others according to their sins. This leads to ongoing animosity, deep-seated grudges, perpetual fighting, and ultimately to murders and wars. Fourth, God has removed our sins from us "as far as the east is from the west." In other words, once God has completely forgiven our sins it is just like the sins in question never even happened. Ergo, we must do the same for others. We are going to be spending eternity together, with God and others, and for life to flourish there must be genuine peace. Genuine peace involves social harmony, not just politeness and toleration, and social harmony requires forgiveness. All of us, at one point in time or another, have been part of the problem by hurting someone else. The only way back to togetherness, harmony, peace, and joy is for there to be forgiveness as little children forgive – which is to say like the sins involved never even happened. *Today's English Version* (The Good News Bible) has a phrase, in

1 Corinthians 13:5, which is right on point: “ ... **love does not keep a record of wrongs.**”

In contrast to this, notice God’s criticism of Esau pertaining to Esau holding his anger forever.

“The LORD says, “The people of Edom [Esau] have sinned again and again, and for this I will certainly punish them. They hunted down their relatives, the Israelites, and showed them no mercy. **Their anger had no limits, and they never let it die.**” Amos 1:11 TEV

God the Father and Jesus Christ cannot have eternal warring factions. Life cannot flourish under such a circumstance. If we forgive others their sins against us, God will forgive our sins (Matthew 6:14). If we do not forgive others, we have a big problem with God. **Further, if we do not forgive others, we tie ourselves to a poisoned past.** Whatever wrong happened to us in the past cannot be made right by continuing in anger and by continuing to treat the wrong-doer according to their sins. No one can change the past. Not even God can change the past. And since whatever wrong needing to be forgiven was unpleasant, if we perpetuate an ongoing anger we are quite literally tethering

ourselves to a bad experience of the past. In so doing we make our present lives less livable. It has to end. Someone has to be big enough to let it end – even if the perpetrator is currently unrepentant. We can un-tether and free ourselves by forgiving and moving on. The unrepentant perpetrator will have to catch up later, and they will, or God will ultimately resolve the problem to their detriment. Part of loving others as we love our own self is to forgive and forget wrongs. This is important because each one of us has also wronged others and so each one of us needs the same forgiveness and the same ability to have a fresh start in life. If each of us so desperately needs this forgiveness, how can we deny it to others?

“And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake has forgiven you.” Ephesians 4:32, MKJV

The importance to human society and civilization of forgiving others cannot be over-emphasized. Centuries and millennia of wars, strivings, murders, hatreds, occupations, slavery, etc., have ruined millions of valuable human lives. Races, religions, nations, tribes, families, and individuals are all guilty to some degree. It has to stop for life to flourish. This is

one of the main reasons that Jesus Christ will return again, only this time to rule over others and to make it stop – one way or another.

“And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD’S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law [instruction], and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”

Isaiah 2:2-4, KJV

Notice in the scripture above that Christ will rebuke many nations and they will not learn war any more. The opposite of war is peace. People will learn the way of peace. Peace involves more than just not fighting wars. It means social harmony and that social harmony is going to require forgiveness because there have

literally been thousands of years of wrongs perpetrated. If everyone, who has ever been wronged, holds a grudge, then there is no path to lasting peace. This is because everyone has been wronged and also everyone has committed wrongs against others. And this goes to Matthew 18:3 where Christ cautioned:

“And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, **and become as little children,** ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”  
Matthew 18:3, KJV

Unless we become big enough, with God’s help, to not hold our anger forever, but to let the wrong go, aka to become as little children, we will not be allowed into the kingdom of heaven. As a little child is so good at, we have to forgive like the wrong never even happened. And then our hearts are open to a restart of the damaged relationship, a relationship that might very well prove to be of eternal benefit.

In this world there have been constant strivings. Some of the strivings have been tribe against tribe, nation against nation, religion against religion, political party against political party, family against family, husband against wife, brother against brother, parent against

child, and individual against individual. War, raping and pillaging, slavery, hatred, thefts, destruction, isolation, economic devastation, pain, suffering, fear, death, and hurts of all kinds have been unleashed and experienced as a result. All are guilty, yes, some more than others – but all are guilty. There have been and literally are thousands and millions of ongoing unresolved conflicts. It is a very complicated and frightening world – with deep-seated and age-old hatreds and conflicts.

Against this worldly backdrop of millions of unresolved, and sometimes age-old conflicts, are Johnny and Billy. Oblivious to it all, they have long since forgotten this morning's dirt clod incident. At the moment, they are sitting right next to each other, on a couch, eating a bowl of popcorn, while they watch a good movie. Later on, since the weather is good, they are going outside to ride their bikes. And after that, they plan to take a ball and play some catch. Life is good when you have a friend like Billy.