

Matthew 18.1–14

At about the same time, the disciples came to Jesus asking, “Who gets the highest rank in God’s kingdom?” For an answer Jesus called over a child, whom he stood in the middle of the room, and said, “I’m telling you, once and for all, that unless you return to square one and start over like children, you’re not even going to get a look at the kingdom, let alone get in. Whoever becomes simple and elemental again, like this child, will rank high in God’s kingdom. What’s more, when you receive the childlike on my account, it’s the same as receiving me.

“But if you give them a hard time, bullying or taking advantage of their simple trust, you’ll soon wish you hadn’t. You’d be better off dropped in the middle of the lake with a millstone around your neck. Doom to the world for giving these God-believing children a hard time! Hard times are inevitable, but you don’t have to make it worse—and it’s doomsday to you if you do.

“If your hand or your foot gets in the way of God, chop it off and throw it away. You’re better off maimed or lame and alive than the proud owners of two hands and two feet, godless in a furnace of eternal fire. And if your eye distracts you from God, pull it out and throw it away. You’re better off one-eyed and alive than exercising your twenty-twenty vision from inside the fire of hell.

“Watch that you don’t treat a single one of these childlike believers arrogantly. You realize, don’t you, that their personal angels are constantly in touch with my Father in heaven?

“Look at it this way. If someone has a hundred sheep and one of them wanders off, doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine and go after the one? And if he finds it, doesn’t he make far more over it than over the ninety-nine who stay put? Your Father in heaven feels the same way. He doesn’t want to lose even one of these simple believers.