

**Humility as a Child**  
**Matthew 18:1—4**

A reoccurring theme throughout the Bible is humility. All people at all times are to humble themselves before God. Christ humbled Himself when He came to earth. He put Himself completely under the Father giving us an example to follow in this Age of Grace (Philippians 2:8). Paul also exhorts us to be humble (Colossians 3:12). Israel was sent into the wilderness to learn humility (Deuteronomy 8:2). When Israel desires to come back to God they do so by humbling themselves, praying, seeking God and turning from their ways (2 Chronicles 7:14). The Tribulation will be a very special and specific time of humbling for Israel. It will be how God gets Israel's attention and purifies the nation to make her ready to go into the kingdom at His coming.

**Who is greatest?** (Verses 1—4; Mark 9:33—35; Luke 9:46—47; 22:24—27)

It seems the Disciples have a lot to learn and only a short period of time to do so. Jesus recently announced His forthcoming death and has been trying to get them trained for their leadership duties during the Tribulation. This training was so they would not stumble when the hour comes when members of the Little Flock will be killed in the name of God during the Tribulation (John 16:1—4). Now the Disciples are actually arguing with each other about who will be the greatest in the Kingdom. According to Mark 9:34 it seems they were embarrassed to tell Jesus what they were discussing but by the time we pick up the story in Matthew 18 the Disciples ask Jesus who then is the greatest in the Kingdom. It's possible that they were looking forward to ruling on 12 thrones in the Kingdom (Matthew 19:28) although they may not have been told yet that this would happen.

To be humble is to make yourself low. We can certainly humble ourselves before men but a biblical humility is about humbling ourselves before God. Only those who are believers have humbled themselves before God, unbelievers remain in a state of pride, unwilling to humble themselves before Him (Psalm 10:4). Humbleness is contrary to human nature. Our old nature constantly wants to be elevated, raised above others and ultimately to be as a god. This was a major factor in Adam's sin of eating of the forbidden fruit. The woman saw the tree as a pathway to great wisdom to be able to know good from evil like God (Genesis 3:5—6). The desire to become greater than what God had created them to be led them and the whole human race to physical and spiritual destruction.

Worldly wisdom embraces self-esteem as something necessary for humans to possess to be able to function properly. This is completely contrary to Scripture which places a premium on humility. The person striving to boost their self-esteem is working to glorify himself. Scripture condemns self-glorification and praises humility (Romans 12:3).

Just as self-esteem is condemned, self-loathing is just as wrong (1 Corinthians 12:14—26). The problem with both is that the focus is on self instead of upon Christ (2 Corinthians 5:15). This is why the Disciples were wrong to discuss which one of them was the greatest. Their focus was on themselves instead of on Jesus.

Instead of berating the Disciples for wrong behavior, Jesus uses the example of a child to get them to understand the importance of humility. The Kingdom is not about whom the greatest will be but about being humble. The proud have no place in the Kingdom and it is during the Tribulation that the proud will be separated from the humble with the proud going to destruction and the humble into the Kingdom.

**The Lord resists the proud**

In contrast to the humble, there are the proud. The proud think they are sufficient within themselves and therefore there is no room for God in their lives. Teachings on the proud and humble have a very special

meaning in light of the Tribulation. The proud in Jesus' day were the leaders of Israel and that will be the case during the Tribulation. During this time, right will be called wrong and wrong will be called right. The religious leaders of Israel will condemn the Little Flock of believers (John 16:1—4; James 5:1—6). This was already happening shortly after Jesus Christ ascended when the Jewish leaders stoned Stephan and Saul (a Pharisee) persecuted believers.

I believe James 4 gives us a glimpse into the interaction of believers and non-believers during the Tribulation. Those who do not take the mark of the beast will be pressured to do so because they will have so little. They and their families will be living on the edge of starvation and death while those who do take the mark of the beast will be fairly well off. However, it's those who humble themselves who will be exalted (James 4:10).

### **Childlike faith**

We are often confronted with the idea that we need to approach Christ with a childlike faith. This passage in Matthew 18 is where this idea comes from. A careful reading of this chapter should lead the reader to understand the context is about being humble, not faith. If we were to have the faith of a child we would be easily tossed by every wind of doctrine because we would not have yet grown up in the faith. Our faith needs to grow as we live out our life for Christ. Having a childlike faith would be a negative, not a positive. However, we should have the humility of a child. A child looks up to the adult and in so doing is displaying humility.

The Disciples were not to approach God with a childlike faith but in humbleness. They actually needed to grow in their faith but retain the humbleness of a child. These are instructions to the Little Flock of Israel that will be particularly useful during the Tribulation. During the Tribulation there will be many who are "first." They will be in positions of leadership and have plenty of worldly possessions. There will be others who do not take the mark of the beast and in so doing give up all worldly pleasures for the glory that will follow the Tribulation. These will be considered "last" in the Tribulation but will be given a place of prominence in the Kingdom." (Matthew 20:26; Mark 9:35)

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