

Alêtheia Christian Fellowship

May 10, 2020

“Moms”

Zoom & in-person Sunday school at 8:30, in-person Service at 9:15, taped sermon online by Monday afternoon.

NEWS

Check out the video message Thursday evenings for updates to the schedule.

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Being concerned about greatness in the Kingdom of Heaven...

- 1) Is self-focused (how do I stack up).
- 2) It leads to competitive comparisons (sibling rivalry).
- 3) It over esteems one's own worth and worthiness (a sense of entitlement).
- 4) It is ultimately a failure to trust God (will I get what I think I deserve - is God fair?).
- 5) It proves that we are not humbly grateful (not simply dependent upon Him).

A weak, fully dependent, spiritually poor person saved by grace, is humble and grateful for whatever they get - they don't look a gift horse in the mouth.

When we trust God, we honor, love and praise Him, through thick and thin, through good times and bad, because we realize that He can turn even the worst things imaginable into good (Romans 8:28).

You can sing on the side of deliverance and be as faithless and stiff-necked as the people who died in the wilderness without ever entering the Land of Plenty... Or, you can sing God's praises when everything looks horrible and hopeless and be a child of faith with whom God is well pleased... It's a choice.

No one said it was an easy choice, but the Holy Spirit is eager to help you succeed... If you just ask.

The most difficult thing about true Biblical Christianity is allowing Jesus to do 100% of the work while you helplessly watch.

Matthew 18:5 ~ ^{5NASB}“And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me”

This is a transitional verse. The “Child,” in question is not a literal physical child. The child here, is any person who makes themselves as low as a child, and therefore receives the grace of God without any claim on it - the one who enters into Heaven humbly and gratefully.

By very definition the “Child,” is the Christian. Anyone who receives a Christian because they belong to Christ, has in effect, received Christ.

This is nothing new... It is just another way for Jesus to say, I command you to love one another.

There is no real church unity without us being humble enough to take ourselves much less seriously than we take the unity of the church... For His sake. Obedient to Him.

I don't know of the person who has put themselves out there in ministry service to other Christians who has not been hurt by them. It is because there are people who are far more concerned about being received, than they are about receiving another.

Matthew 18:6 ~ ^{6NASB}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.

Verse 5 was Jesus saying welcome others as you would welcome Him, and here, He's talking about the effect of being unwelcoming.

God gets His reputation from His people. People know that we are His, by the love we have for each other.

When the world sees Christian disharmony, it negatively affects the Gospel. Here, Jesus is talking about the negative effect on the church.

We need to be open and honest with each other and simultaneously understanding and forgiving towards each other.

Fill out the other side, detach this part of the page, and place it in the offering plate or the prayer/suggestion box in the lobby or with an Elder or Deacon of the church.

God Bless You!

- 1) The “Heavy millstone,” is literally, a stone pertaining to a donkey (Revelation 18:21).
- 2) Jesus is talking about eternal death (Philippians 2:12).
- 3) “Causes... to stumble,” is the exact same word σκανδαλίζω (skän-dä-lē-dzō).

Love your freedom in Christ... But don't love it more than you love God, or love your neighbor, because if you do, it shows you're not really free at all.

Matthew 18:7-11 ~ ⁷NASB “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. ¹⁰“See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven. ¹¹“For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.

Every person on the planet differs from you. It's okay. You can believe what you like, but you must also love, accept, and support, all those with whom you disagree. There can be respectful exchanges of ideas, but we must never use our freedom to scandalize others... Not if we want to be like Christ... Not if we want to be His.

Check all that apply – detach and place in the offering or the prayer box

I want to talk with the pastor about _____

I want prayer for _____

I want to volunteer to _____

I want more information about _____

Other _____

Name _____ Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Alêtheia ~ Matthew 18b ~ 051020
“Moms”



I want to continue our Matthew study and tie it in with Mother's Day. We are talking about children after all, in the opening of chapter 18.



The Disciples asked Jesus about “Greatness” in the Kingdom of Heaven. As we saw it was really a question about hierarchy and reward for themselves as compared with others... What will be my position, my status, my prize, my crown, in the Kingdom and implied, is there something I can do now, to make it better for myself then?

Nothing has changed. People are people. Since the dawn of time people have wondered about their own personal future.



As we discussed last week, we evaluate our success compared to others. We have this innate sense of fair play. We don't mind making \$10 an hour, so long as no one else is making more than that for similar work. At the same time, we would be bitter and angry if we made \$150 an hour, while others doing similar work, were paid \$200 an hour.



You trade your used car. You tell the salesman you think it's worth \$5,000. He says, it's actually worth more, I'll give you \$7,000. You're thrilled. You think the salesman is a great guy with great integrity - unexpectedly honest - you love the dude. After making the deal, you tell everyone. They quickly confirm that the car was actually worth \$9,000. What do you think of the salesman now?



Biblically, we see the phenomenon at work in Jesus' parable of the "Laborers in the Vineyard." Men were hired for a 12-hour workday at an agreed upon wage... They were happy to have the work and the wage was acceptable - all was well with the world. Only when they discovered that other men worked for only one hour and received the same pay, did they, "Grumble at the landowner" (Matthew 20:1-16).

So, the guys wanted to know what they could expect. This wasn't the first time, nor would it be the last. After Jesus was Resurrected and restored Peter, Peter asked Jesus about John's future. Jesus replied, in the fourth from the last verse, in the Gospels, "If I want him

to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me!” (John 21:22).



It really is, mind your own business, focus on your relationship with Me... As I used to say, “Drive your own car, instead of trying to remotely drive everyone else’s car.” Accept whatever God gives you - whatever Jesus has in store for you, without concern about how your situation stacks up against the situation of others.

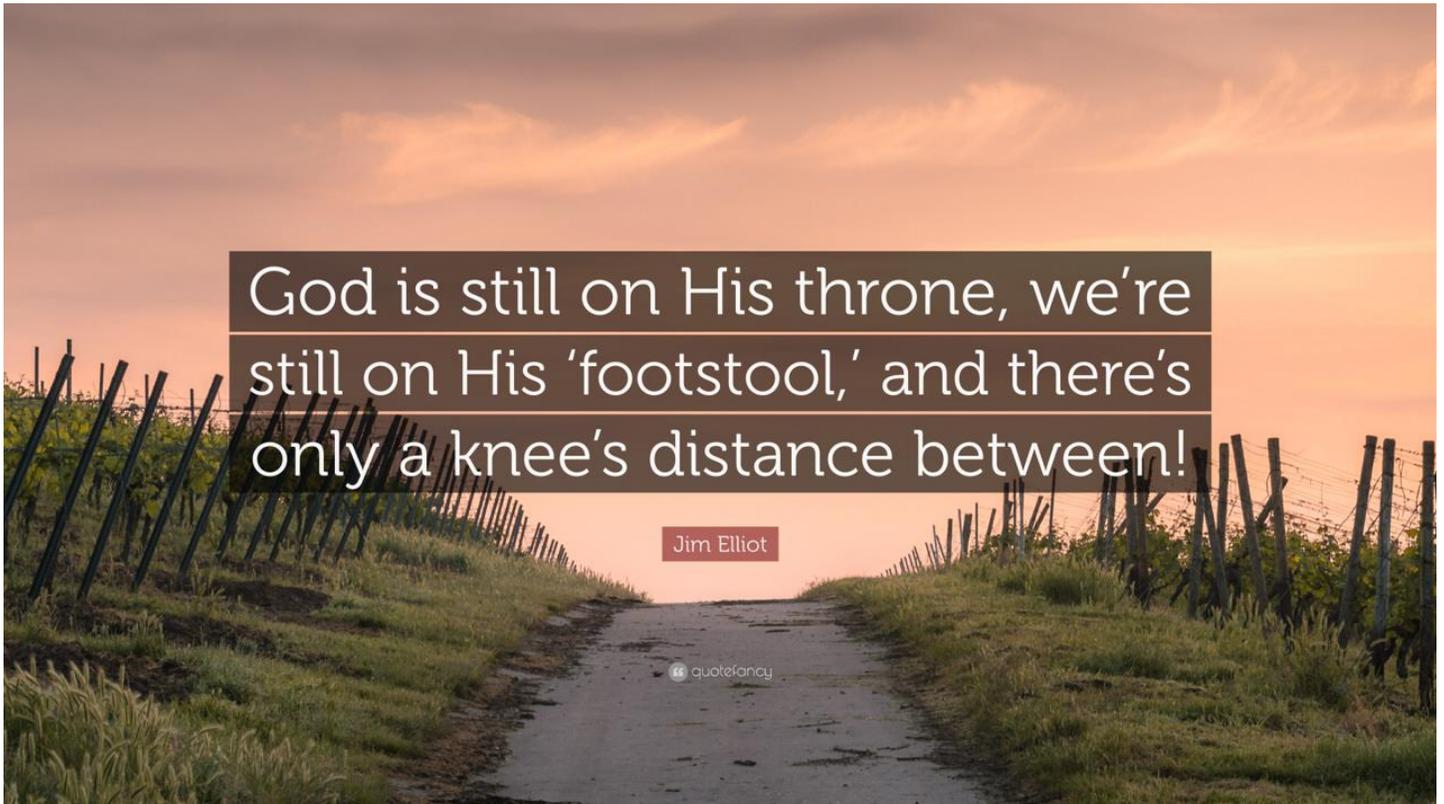
In short, it’s none of our concern what God chooses to give to us, or what He chooses to give anyone else... Why?



It is clearly seen in the Parable of the “Laborers in the Vineyard.” When we think in natural human terms about fairness, we are, perhaps without realizing it, questioning God’s fairness - doubting God’s integrity - distrusting God’s judgment and His generosity and therefore His goodness.

Never compare yourself to any other person regarding God’s purposes for you in this life and His benevolence to you in the next one. Instead, fully trust Him and be humbly, happily, gleefully, exuberantly grateful for whatever He chooses to provide. Like the song, “Every blessing You pour out (when it’s the sun shining down on me, or there’s pain in the offering - no matter what),

Blesses be Your name.” Like the other song, “Whatever may pass, and whatever lies before me, let me be singing... Bless the Lord, oh my soul.”



It is a choice to love, honor and praise God, no matter what, because that is trust. It's crazy, it's painful, it's scary, but I know Who God is and I know nothing surprises Him, He is perfect, He is good, and He is on His throne.

The person who can be okay in the worst of times may be a stoic, or they may be a masochist, or they may be a fatalist, but the one who trusts God, weathers the

storms of life, because of their conviction that it serves a far greater purpose - a divine purpose.



The fundamental reason that the Children of Israel, delivered from Egyptian bondage, all died in the desert, never entering the Promised Land, was their inability to trust God. That character flaw is seen right out of the gate.

God performed 10 supernatural plagues to get Pharaoh to release the people, then God caused the Egyptians to fully fund their exit, then God Himself through a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day led the Israelites to the precise camping spot He

chose for them. Beyond that, God specifically told Moses, this is the exact place I want you to camp and gave him the reason. God said, “I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army” (Exodus 14:4), before they set up their tents by the Sea.

The people were completely trapped as Pharaoh’s army came rushing at them... They freaked. It’s over. God’s abandoned us. God doesn’t care about us, He’s punishing us, He’s either not all powerful, or He’s not all good, or He’s incompetent, otherwise this would not be happening to us. The people screamed at Moses, “Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness?” (Exodus 14:11).

Of course, God saved them anyway and destroyed Pharaoh’s army in the process. What did the Israelites do immediately after crossing the Sea on completely dry land and seeing the water rush in and annihilate their enemies? They sang God’s praises.

Three days later, the people were grumbling again about a lack of water... God gave them water, then right after that, the people grumbled about a lack of food... We can sum it up by saying that the problem

with those folks, was they sang on the wrong side of the Sea.

It is completely your choice as to where and when you will sing, my friends. You can sing on the side of deliverance and be as faithless and stiff-necked as the people who died in the wilderness without ever entering the Land of Plenty... Or, you can sing God's praises when everything looks horrible and hopeless and be a child of faith with whom God is well pleased... It's a choice.

Now, it's not an easy choice to make, and certainly not an easy choice to see through to the end, but my Bible says that the Holy Spirit of Almighty God is eager to help you succeed... If you just ask.

Jesus set the small boy in the midst of giants, relatively speaking. His point? It is impossible to even enter the Kingdom of Heaven unless you make yourself as low as a small child. This lowness, or complete humble dependence is not a subjective attitude. In other words, it isn't a state of mind, or a demeanor we cultivate. We're not talking about acting humble. As we saw last week, children are not inherently humble acting... Children are humble as an objective reality. They need

help - they are dependent - they cannot do for themselves.

Likewise, we are not to subjectively think of ourselves as weak and needy, unable and dependent... We are to recognize that, that is reality. Don't pretend you need Jesus and cannot help Him with your salvation... Realize that it is True.

Instead of thinking in terms of your power, privilege, prestige, and position, you must recognize that you have no strength, no ability, no power, no control over your eternity, and therefore, you truly and completely surrender to the rescue that Jesus provides... You "Lay down your life," "Surrender your spirit," trusting fully in His Salvation... That is if you want to live, because otherwise, you will die.



A rescue swimmer will attempt to save you if you're drowning, if, and this is a big if, if you go limp, and let him save you. He cannot save you if you fight him and any help you offer in your own salvation just makes his job more difficult.

The most difficult thing about true Biblical Christianity is allowing Jesus to do 100% of the work while you helplessly watch. We don't like that, it is humbling. It's like being a small weak child.



For Mariah, the thing that helped last week was when I talked about dropping a 4-year-old off in the middle of the Bob Marshall Wilderness. The kid's only chance of survival is for a savior to come along and for the kid to eagerly surrender to the rescue as provided. In that event, the savior would, in effect, give the child new life... Right? In a sense, the child would be "Born again." Fall into the arms of Jesus, relying solely on His merits.



Matthew 18:5, 5NASB “And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me”

This is a bit of a transitional verse to a related, but different thought. The “Child,” in question is not the small child Jesus set in their midst. It is not any other child in particular, and please get this, it is not children in general.

Remember context? The child here is any person who, not makes themselves, but recognizes that they are, as low as a child and therefore receives the grace of God without any claim on it - the one who enters into Heaven humbly and gratefully.

By very definition the “Child,” is the Christian. Anyone who receives a Christian because they belong to Christ, has in effect, received Christ. Christ and the “Child,” are inextricably intertwined. How you treat Christians is how you are treating Christ Himself.

This is not salvific... Jesus is not saying that if a non-Christian is nice to a Christian, that their extended kindness is going to make them a Christian too. It doesn't mean to “Receive” Christ Salvifically.

Two reasons... Jesus was taking to His Disciples, not people at large, and to receive a Christian in Christ's name, implies that the one doing the receiving is also a Christian. The point here is that when we as Christians are kind to other Christians because they belong to Christ and are our brothers and sisters, we are receiving Christ Jesus Himself.

This is nothing new... It is just another way for Jesus to say, I command you to love one another. It is your unconditional love for other Christians that proves that you are a Christian.

Unconditional love doesn't necessarily translate into repeated bail outs. What it does translate to is being humble and forgiving. There is no real church unity without being humble enough to take yourself much less seriously than you take the unity of the church... For His sake. In obedience to Him. There is no real church unity without being forgiving enough to recognize that your own forgiven failures are ultimately the same failures in others.

I don't know of the person who has put themselves out there in ministry service to other Christians who has not been hurt by them. I mentioned it last week. I'm used to it - I don't appreciate it - but I'm used to being hurt by those I'm doing my best to serve.

It grieves me when I see it happen to Nik and Michelle, to Karen, to the Elders, to Jon, to Stacey, to all who have had the insane desire, and gumption, to actually help out around here. I could tell story after story about people, just in this church, who volunteered to spend their own time, effort and money to serve others in this church who were hurt by the very ones they were trying to help. Right after the sermon last week - talking about what we talked about - I got a good dose of it once again. In case I forgot what it's like, I guess.

It always has to do with a self-focus, which leads to a lack of understanding, a lack of humility and a lack of gratitude.

Every person who has chosen to leave this pasture, for greener pastures, has done so because they were self-focused, lacked humility and lacked gratitude. Put another way, they were far more concerned about being received than they were about receiving another.

Matthew 18:6, 6NASBbut 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.

Now, we are in a position to clearly see what Jesus has in mind here. I cannot stress enough; how important this concept is and how sad that so few Christians get it. What a pity that the vast majority of Christ's Disciples are so out of tune with His heart.

People often think this is to do with literal physical children. Well, mess up a kid, and I promise you, God will not be amused... That's true, but this is not about that. This is still about the "Little ones who believe in

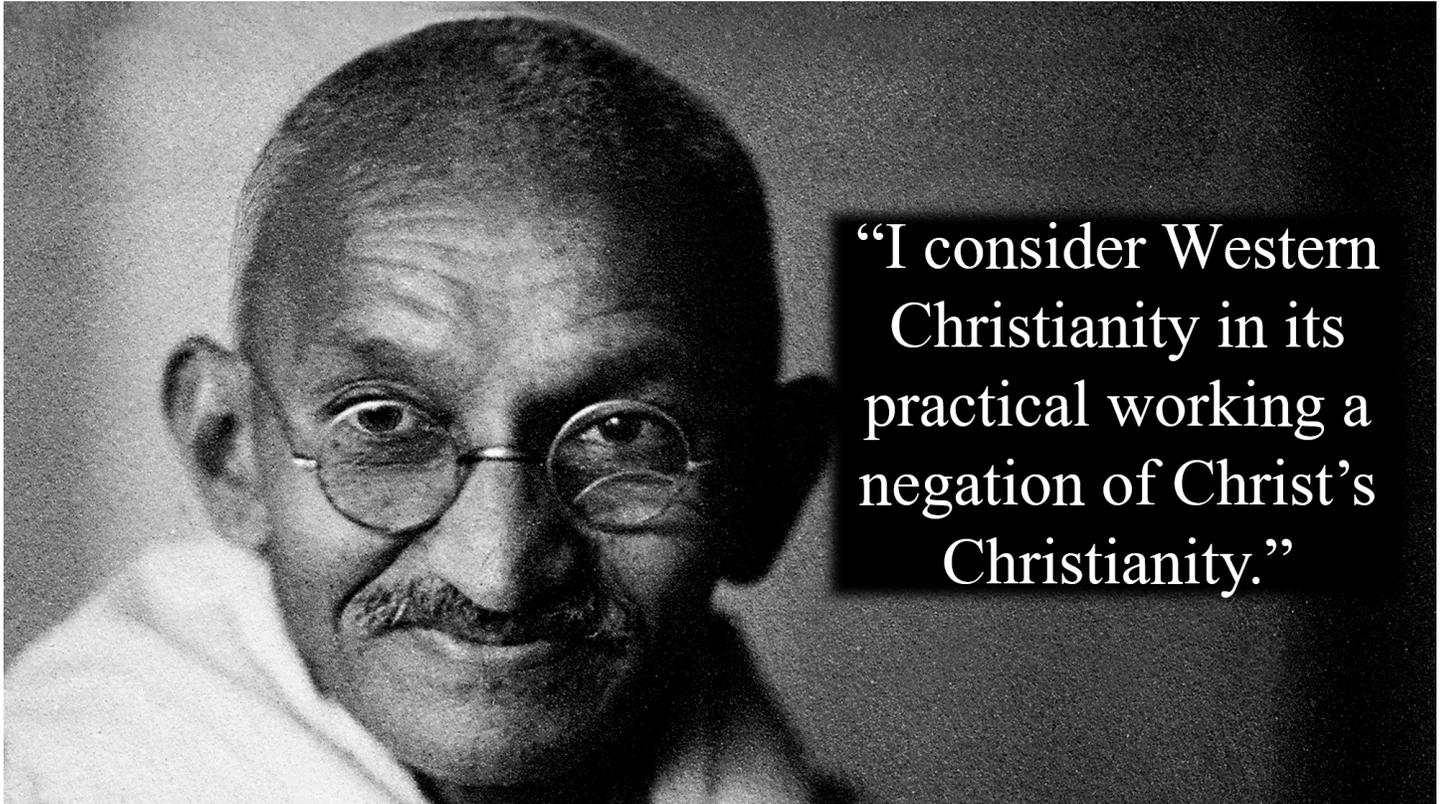
Jesus.” This is about your fellow Christian who has humbled herself enough to accept sonship without trying to add to it.

Verse 5 was Jesus saying welcome others as you would welcome Him, and here, He’s talking about the effect of being unwelcoming.



The story goes that the Mahatma, Gandhi read the Gospel and was quite taken with it, so much so, that he went to church the next Sunday. When he arrived at the nearest church, he was barred from entering.

You see, it was a church for respectable white Christians and high caste Indians. The usher suggested that Gandhi worship with his own people.



“I consider Western Christianity in its practical working a negation of Christ’s Christianity.”

He never considered Christianity again, essentially claiming that Christianity couldn’t be true, because he had never met a single person who Christ-like.

God gets His reputation from His people. That’s exactly what Jesus meant when He said that people would know that we are His, by the love we have for each other.

When the world sees Christians being such absolute toads to each other, what message does that send to the world. In this place He's not really talking about the effect for the world, He's talking about the effect on our fellow Christians.



Let me be honest with you. Is that alright? Can I share my true feelings for just a moment in just one area? Over the last 16 years, I have on occasion, deeply regretted obeying Christ, by resigning my airline career, and starting this church. Does that rock your faith?

Does that cause you to think less of me? Why have I had those second thoughts? Every time it was due to

being worn down by the selfish backbiting, bickering and overall lack of Christian charity I see. It's hard on my faith. Now, fortunately, God is good. Faithful people pray for me and encourage me and I'm not down in the dumps too long.

If you want to do something for me... Get along with each other. Let me also say that you guys are, for the most part, absolutely wonderful. God probably knew that I couldn't handle a typical church. Alêtheia is comparatively mature - comparatively a joy. I am blessed to be your pastor. It's just that I'm far more blessed, when you treat each other, like you would treat the Christ Who is in them.

Now, truly loving one another does not mean that we all just bite our respective tongues and let everyone run roughshod over us... Ultimately that teaches our beloved brothers and sisters to value us less and themselves more, which is not right.

We need to be open and honest with each other and we need to be understanding and forgiving towards each other.

You can love your opinions, more than you love your Christian siblings, but for such a person, “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.”

Three quick points about that. The easiest first. The “Heavy millstone,” is literally, a stone pertaining to a donkey. It is the huge rolling stone pulled around by a donkey, or other beast of burden, to grind grain into flour.

The only place in the Bible, other than in this context, that we see a “Heavy millstone,” is Revelation 18:21, 21NASB Then a strong angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, “So will Babylon, the great city, be thrown down with violence, and will not be found any longer.

That refers to Jeremiah 51:63. The idea is that the thing sunk underwater with a heavy millstone can never return to the surface again.

So, the second thing, is Jesus is talking about eternal death. Jesus is telling them then, and He’s telling us now, that if we cause Christians to stumble, we are not Christians. He’s not giving us another requirement for

salvation, He's saying if that's how you act, you're not saved. You can't be a person, so full of yourself, that you are causing hate and discontent, confusion and disruption, in the Body of Christ and simultaneously be so low before God, that you are His...

All over Christendom, we have people in the church who are so much more concerned about themselves and their opinions, themselves and their kids, themselves and themselves... that they have little to no concern about how their attitudes, gossip and backbiting, their "Me first" mentality affects the church.

The church, whether universal or local is people - God's precious people - His children - His "Little ones."

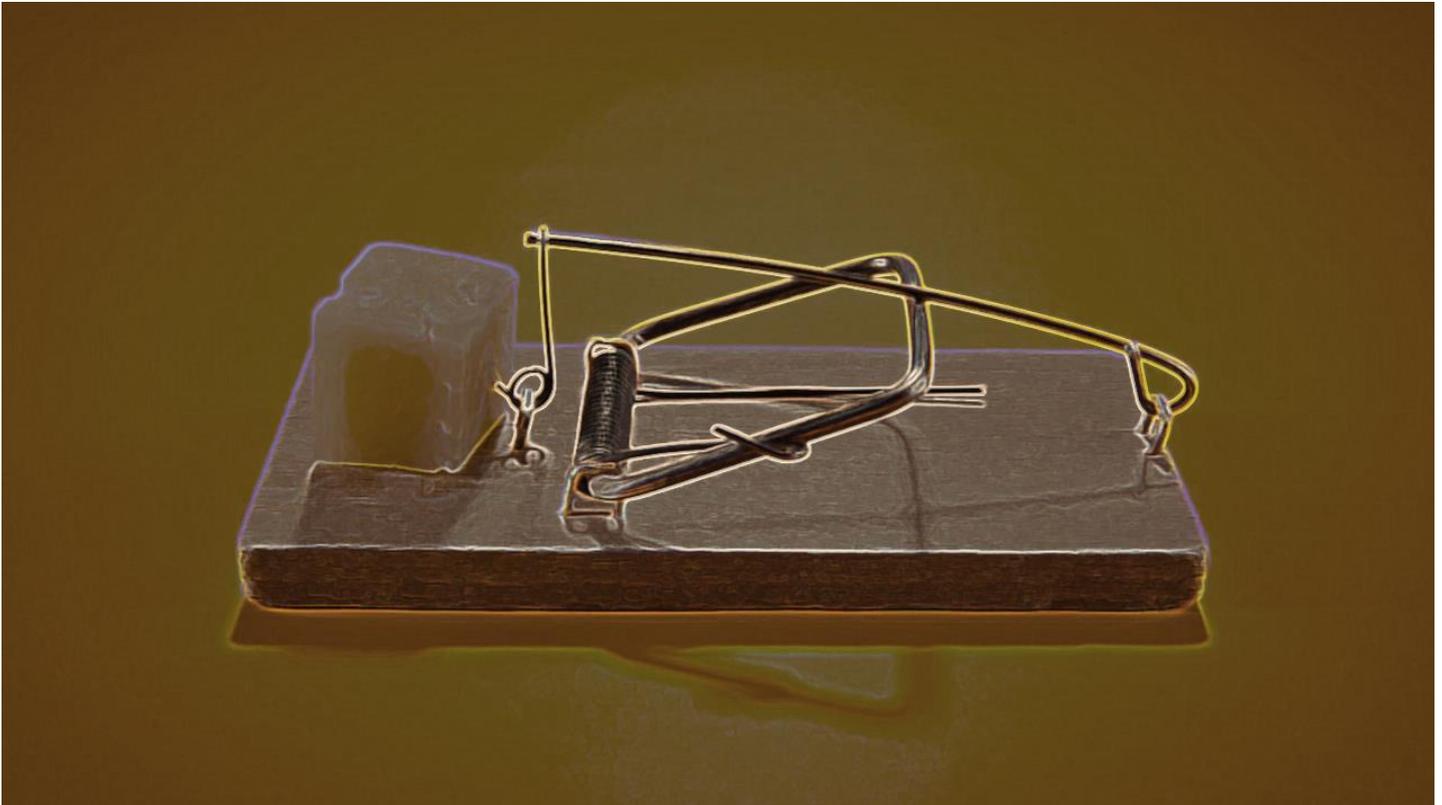
So many in the churches around the world running roughshod over the pastor, over the leaders, over the people, causing humbly grateful Christians to leave the church with such a bad taste in their mouth that they never want to return to fellowship again... As I said, you can't be that full of yourself and simultaneously be so low before God that you are His.

"Work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12). That doesn't mean do a bunch of

good works to assist Jesus in saving you... It means make sure you're truly saved, as evidenced by the attitude, words, and deeds you exhibit. By how well you love His church. God is watching. I hear this stupid pronouncement all the time... "Well, I love Jesus, but I don't like church." Jesus loved the church so much He died for her. The church is the very Body of Christ Jesus on earth. The church is His beloved Bride. If you love Jesus, you better love His church.

The third thing... "Causes... to stumble," is the exact same word σκανδαλίζω (skän-dä-lē-dzō) that Jesus used at the end of chapter 17, regarding His own actions and the Temple Tax. Remember? He did not want His freedom to cause anyone to stumble.

Love your freedom in Christ, my friends, but don't love it more than you love God, or love your neighbor, because if you do, it shows you're not really free at all.



What is it, more specifically, to scandalize a Child of God that would be indicative of the scandalizer not being in Christ?

Biblically, it always carries the meaning of causing someone to trip and fall, or to be trapped. Typically, we're talking about a Christian being so traumatized, so hurt, so disillusioned, so misled, so tempted, so confused, that they fall away from the Faith.

Now, to tackle a question that you may have... The person may be a Christian in what we would call a backslidden state who will eventually be saved by the proverbial skin of their teeth, or it could even be a

person who we would call a seeker - someone receptive to the Gospel - nearly accepting, who was driven away.

Whatever the particulars, the person themselves is ultimately responsible and will be judged by God according the Grace they received, and the affect it had. But, but, and this is a big but, woe to the person through whom this person fell...

Matthew 18:7–11, 7NASB“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. 10“See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven. 11“For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.

It totally makes sense now doesn't it?

Every person on the planet differs from you. As much as another person has in common with you, dig deep enough and you'll discover a difference. When the difference is too great, or there are just too many, we shake our head in wonder, in disbelief... How can they think that way? How can they be that way? We never stop to think that they, just as legitimately, wonder the same thing about us.

We judge them according to what we think is right and of course we assume that what we think is right is actually right. I mean if we thought that there was any chance that our thinking was wrong, we would change it and since we haven't, we must be right.

So, when it comes to others, it's practically impossible to understand why they would essentially choose to be wrong! It makes no sense!

I'm a realist - which means that I'm a pessimist who buys my own rationalization about being a cynic. It's who I am. I've learned much from the Holy Spirit over the years. When I was much younger, when people, especially women, displayed deep emotion about

things that I was barely conscious of, it made me uncomfortable and caused me to be dismissive of their feelings.

As an example: A person had a dog for 15 years... The dog got run over and killed by a truck... They were devastated... For days and weeks, very upset. I could not understand those feelings even a little bit. In my mind it was just a dog - good grief get over it. Beyond that, I thought you should be the happiest person around... Your old, soon to die a languishing painful death dog was just spared that misery.

Oftentimes, when we were first married, Mariah would feel a certain way about something, and I not only couldn't understand the emotion - I thought it was inappropriate... It was the wrong emotion to have - because it wasn't the emotion I had.



I learned that I don't have to have the same emotion, or understand the emotion or even agree with the thing that drives the emotion, I just need to know that the person I love has what to them is a right emotion and support her. It is irrelevant whether you understand, or agree with what someone believes, or feels... Love them... Love the person, not necessarily their ideas, or emotions, but them... Love them.



In this pandemic we have people who strongly believe that we should have never stopped having in-person services at all. We should have rebelled against the whole made up thing. In the other corner, we have people who strongly believe that we should shut things down tight as a drum until there's a cure. They think we're moving far too fast. They are angry at the other side's freedom they see as a blatant disregard for others and they think the government should do more to stop it.

What I'm saying is as a Christian, you can believe what you like, but you must also love, accept, and support, all those with whom you disagree. There can be

respectful exchanges of ideas, but we must never use our freedom to scandalize others... Not if we want to be like Christ... Not if we want to be His. Jesus said, "Do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven."



And that's my Mother's Day tie in. Women are so much better at accepting the beliefs and emotions of others... So much better at comforting others without the necessity to understand. Particularly when they have experience as mothers.

A kid does something dumb and hurts himself. His dad says, "Why were you doing that, don't you have any sense?" While his mom holds him and bandages his skinned knee. A daughter calls and says, "I was in an accident." Dad asks, "How badly did you wreck the car?" Mom asks, "Are you alright?"

God love and bless women... God love and bless the mothering instinct in women that all Christians should emulate more.

Patience, kindness, goodness, and gentleness. Compassion, mercy, nurture, and comfort. These are the female attributes of God. His characteristics that he placed in women, to enable them to be good mothers and to show the rest of us, more Who He is.

We need to learn from our own mothers and the mothers around us. We need to be more like them.



Lord help us all to be more like them.