

Matthew 18:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.

Analysis

Jesus issues a severe warning about causing 'little ones which believe in me' to stumble. The Greek 'skandalizo' means to entrap, cause to sin, or destroy faith. The proposed punishment—drowning with a millstone—illustrates the seriousness of leading believers into sin. Reformed pastoral theology takes seriously the responsibility of spiritual leadership and the dangers of false teaching or immoral example. Those who influence others bear weighty accountability for the spiritual damage they cause.

Historical Context

Millstones were large stones used for grinding grain, turned by donkeys ('mulos onikos'—donkey-turned millstone). Drowning with such weight ensured death. While hyperbolic, Jesus' language emphasizes the gravity of spiritual harm. In Roman law, drowning was a punishment for serious crimes. Jesus elevates spiritual offense against believers to the level of capital crime.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How seriously do you consider your influence on other believers?
2. What examples or teachings might cause weaker Christians to stumble?
3. How does this warning shape your responsibility as a parent, teacher, or leader?

Interlinear Text

Ὅς	δ'	ἂν	σκανδαλίση	ἓνα	τῆς	μικρῶν	τούτων	τῆς
whoso	But	G302	shall offend	one	which	little ones	of these	which
G3739	G1161		G4624	G1520	G3588	G3398	G5130	G3588
πιστευόντων	εἰς	ἐμέ	συμφέρει	αὐτοῦ	ἵνα	κρεμασθῇ		
believe	in	me	it were better	for him	that	were hanged		
G4100	G1519	G1691	G4851	G846	G2443	G2910		
μύλος	ὀνικὸς	ἐπὶ	τῆς	τράχηλον	αὐτοῦ	καὶ		
a millstone	G3684	about	which	neck	for him	and		
G3458		G1909	G3588	G5137	G846	G2532		
καταποντισθῇ	ἐν	τῆς	πελάγει	τῆς	θαλάσσης			
that he were drowned	in	which	the depth	which	of the sea			
G2670	G1722	G3588	G3989	G3588	G2281			

Additional Cross-References

Mark 9:42 (Faith): And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea.

Matthew 18:10 (Parallel theme): Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.

Matthew 18:14 (Parallel theme): Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.

Psalms 105:15 (Parallel theme): Saying, Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm.

Romans 14:21 (Parallel theme): It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.

Zechariah 2:8 (Parallel theme): For thus saith the LORD of hosts; After the glory hath he sent me unto the nations which spoiled you: for he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye.

Zechariah 13:7 (Parallel theme): Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the LORD of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones.

Acts 9:5 (Parallel theme): And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.