

THE WAY UP IS DOWN ?

When the disciples argued in Luke 9 about who was the greatest, verses 47-48 says that *Jesus, knowing the reasoning of their hearts, took a child and put him by His side and said to them, "Whoever receives this child in My name receives Me, and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me. For he who is least among you all is the one who is great."*

Consider another object lesson: Which is the greatest pet, dog or cat? A dog sees its master and thinks, "he feeds and pets and loves me, he must be God." A cat sees its master and thinks, "he feeds and pets and loves me, I must be God." Hmm. All too often, we think like cats.

CAREFUL REASONING - Jesus shows His disciples' reasoning to miss the mark. In the world's eyes, children are relatively unimportant, even dispensable. But in God's sight children are of inestimable value. When we take time for a child, it is as though we are doing it for Jesus.

Jesus adds, "*whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me.*" Scholars explain that this is 'step parallelism', where each logical connection increases the weight of the concept. So if a child is received as a representative of Jesus, and Jesus is received as a representative of God, then the child has value in God's eyes, and should also in our sight.

RECEIVE CHRIST JESUS - In the same way, Jesus says, "*he who is least among you all is the one who is great.*" We must receive the ones Christ sends, even if they don't measure up to our standards. Even the apostles. Because Jesus has sent them, they are to be received as Jesus Himself, as with His authority. That's why the written Bible is so important.

Because of apostolic authority, we regard it as God's Word, written by God Himself through them, so that it is the standard which judges anything and anyone else who says 'God says.'

ULTIMATE STANDARD - The disciples were measuring themselves against one another, instead of by the ultimate standard, Christ Himself. "Jesus teaches that greatness is measured in God's sight by service, obedience, humility," observes RC Sproul. "We measure greatness in this world by power, wealth, achievement, talent. There will be many surprises when we reach heaven and discover who God has elevated to the higher levels in His kingdom."

This was the issue in Mark 10:35-45, when James and John asked Jesus to be seated at His right and left hand in the glory of His kingdom, which they expected any day. They also misunderstood Jesus' mission, and how they would have to suffer with Him before receiving glory with Him. Jesus said such honor was "*for those for whom it has been prepared.*"

GOD IS SOVEREIGN - Then Jesus said, "*you know that those who are considered rulers of Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. Whoever would be first among you must be servant of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.*"

CH Spurgeon puts it straight: "This is the only way to get to the front of Christ's army—he who would be chief, must always be aiming at the rear rank, willing to do the most humble service and to be the lowest menial in his Master's service. Only in this way can we rise. In Christ's Kingdom, the way to go up is to go down. Sink self and you shall surely rise." (Prov 29:23, Isaiah 2:17).

FOR OR AGAINST? - The uncomfortable disciples changed the subject, reasoning, if we are Your representatives, what about others? In verse 49 John said, "*Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we tried to stop him because he does not follow with us.*"

An undercurrent may be how he cast out demons when the disciples had failed to do so. Pride? Jesus replied, "*Do not stop him, for the one who is not against you is for you.*" He's not part of your church, but he's ministering in Jesus' name and bearing God's fruit. We may not promote him, but we will not oppose Jesus' work. There's more to this in other gospel episodes.

EXALT JESUS - Mark 9:38-41 "*No one who does a mighty work in My name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of Me.*" Matthew 12:30 "*Whoever is not with Me is against Me, and whoever does not gather with Me scatters*" refers to those who attributed His power to the devil.

"We must distinguish between one's commitment to Christ and one's resistance to the work of Christ and His followers," notes RC Sproul. Focus on essentials, not non-essentials! □