

"WHERE TWO OR THREE ARE GATHERED IN MY NAME"

Matthew 18:15-22

AN OFTEN MISAPPLIED TEXT

- Used by many to excuse themselves from the assembly of the church – engage in secular activities upon the first day of the week thinking God will be "*in their midst*" wherever "*two or three are gathered.*"
- Others will use this verse to justify the practice of serving the Lord's Supper to others outside of the assembly such as in a hospital or care home.

AN OFTEN MISAPPLIED TEXT

- Was Jesus defining a local assembly as being anywhere and anytime two or more Christians are together and justifying any activity of two or three Christians?
- As with all of God's word, we need to concern ourselves with the context of the verse and not draw conclusions by taking it out of its inspired context. 2 Timothy 2:15; 2 Peter 3:16

THE LARGER CONTEXT OF MATTHEW 18

Beginning with verse 7, Jesus is teaching about:

1. The seriousness of sin and the need to do everything possible to prevent it (verses 7-10; Matthew 5:29-30),
2. The need to seek those entrapped in sin (verses 11-18; Galatians 6:1; James 5:19-20),
3. The need for forgiveness (verses 21-35; Psalms 130:3-4).

THE IMMEDIATE CONTEXT OF VERSES 15-20

Jesus is addressing our personal responsibility to:

- Address a brother/sister who has sinned, our efforts to restore them (cf. Galatians 6:1), and
- Understand when we are to forgive them (when he "*listens*" and repents),
- Understand when we are to consider him as a "*Gentile and tax-gatherer*" (when "*he refuses to listen*" and repent).

DEALING WITH A CHRISTIAN IN SIN – MATTHEW 18:15-17

1. Resolve sin and offenses at the lowest level and with the fewest number of people knowing (verse 15). "*If he listens to you, you have won your brother.*" 1 Timothy 5:19-20
2. Facts and truth are of utmost importance. It's what actually took place (verse 16). The word for "*show*" carries with it the idea of presenting evidence and making a case.
3. Reconciliation and forgiveness doesn't take place without listening (cf. James 1:19) on both sides. Joshua 22

"WHATEVER YOU BIND ON EARTH ..." –VERSE 18

- A similar statement is made in Matthew 16:19 specifically to the apostles after Peter's confession and speaks of their authority on earth to "bind" what has "been bound in heaven."
- Here in Matthew 18:18, Jesus speaks of the binding (and loosing) of sin based on whether one has listened and repented or not. John 20:23. Our standard is to be God's standard for forgiveness. Ephesians 4:32
- When a child of God listens to those who come to him, and we extend our forgiveness to him, we need to know that God has extended His forgiveness to him because he has obeyed the will God. 2 Corinthians 2:5-10; 2 Corinthians 7:10-11; 1 John 1:9-10; Psalms 32:1-5; Acts 8:22-24

"WHATEVER YOU BIND ON EARTH ..." –VERSE 18

- And if the one who has sinned refuses to listen and repent and he is considered as a Gentile and tax-gatherer (verse 17; 1 Corinthians 5), know that he remains bound in his sin by God.
- The binding and loosing are stated in the future perfect indicative which refers to that which is in a state of completion.
- The forgiveness – or lack thereof – exercised by faithful brethren has been completed in heaven.

HEAVEN'S WILL RE: BINDING AND LOOSING OF SIN

- Through our obedience to the gospel through the apostles' teaching.
- Peter first declared on the day of Pentecost the means by which mankind could be loosed from their sins (Acts 2:38) and the first century Christians are to continually devote themselves to what the apostles taught (Acts 2:42) as they were guided by the Holy Spirit (John 16:13; 20:21-23).
- By following the apostles' teaching regarding the forgiveness of sins, we do heaven's will by heaven's authority.

"... WHERE TWO OR THREE ARE GATHERED ..."

- It is in this context of following the will of God regarding the forgiveness of man's sins and offenses that Jesus says in verse 20, "*For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.*"
- The expression "*in My name*" is to be understood as "by My authority" or "in accordance with My will." John 16:23-26; Colossians 3:17
- When two or three are gathered to do that which Jesus has authorized (i.e., to forgive the sins of a brother who repents), Jesus stated that He is "*in their midst*" and we are in fellowship (jointly participating) with our Lord and Savior.

CONCLUSION:

- To take verse 20 as authority to:
- Pursue any activity, rather than assemble with the saints to worship God is a total misapplication of this passage.
 - Take the Lord's Supper to someone who cannot assemble with the saints is to miss the point of Jesus' teaching.

CONCLUSION:

- This verse doesn't give the church authority to establish truth (1 Corinthians 4:6; Galatians 1:8-9) or teach that Jesus is with us regardless of what we do (2 John 9; Matthew 12:46-50).
- Rather it is teaching us to respect what God has revealed through His Son and His chosen apostles regarding the conditions for the forgiveness of sins.

CONCLUSION:

- In this context, the expression "*two or three gathered together*" is not referring to an assembly of the Lord's saints and should not be used in an attempt to justify absencing oneself from children of God who are scripturally gathered together.
- To be "*gathered together*" in the name of Christ is something special (Acts 20:7-8) and we should commit ourselves to every opportunity to so with our brethren (Hebrews 10:24-25) rather than seeking to excuse ourselves from it.

CONCLUSION:

From Matthew chapter 18 we need to remember:

1. The seriousness of sin and the need to do everything possible to prevent it (verses 7-10),
2. The need to seek those entrapped in sin (verses 11-18),
3. The need for forgiveness (verses 21-35).

And the gospel's ability to address all three! Acts 2:38; 8:21-24; 1 John 1:8-9