

**PP Twisted Scriptures: Where Two or Three are Gathered**

**Text Matthew 18:1-20**

7/23-24/2016

In this Twisted Scriptures sermon series, we are straightening out misunderstood verses as well as getting some tips on how to rightly divide the Scriptures

And this week's verse is one most are familiar with: ***"For where two or three are gathered in My name, there am I among them."*** **Matthew 18:20**

Christians quote this verse when praying in a group or church, invoking the thought that when 2 or more gather together to pray, then it is extra powerful, bending God's will to theirs

Almost as if there is a quorum you must fill before God will really enter in and listen

If you're by yourself on a deserted island and need help, expect delays, but if 2 or more of you are stranded and pray, say Amen and there, behold, a Coast Guard Cutter, anchored

And once again, as we've seen every week, we have to reconnect this verse with its context

As we look at **Matthew 18**, know what John MacArthur said of it, that it is *"the single greatest [sermon] our Lord ever gave on life among the redeemed people in His church"*

He is engaged in discipling His followers, which is a very interesting word

I believe that one of the best understandings on discipleship come from these words of Paul:

**PP** ***"[Jesus] we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all His energy that He powerfully works within me."*** **Colossians 1:28-29**

**PP** We could then say that Discipleship is the process of laboring in the power of God, to help people come to know Jesus and then grow mature in Him

So in Matthew 18, Jesus is about to teach how we help each other grow spiritually mature

Something that we, as well as His disciples need, and we see that right from **verse 1**

***"At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?'"*** **18:1**

Jesus employs a stunning object lesson by calling a child into the midst of their group

He tells them that no one can even come into God's kingdom, no one can be saved if they do not humbly see their need for salvation

Like a child in need, they must come, hands up so to speak, to the Heavenly Father

Some take verses **5-6** as proof text for Jesus' incredible love for children, and many use this verse to underscore the high value of a children's ministry in a church

Others use these verses to fuel their notion that to harm or abuse children will be to earn a hotter place in hell

While it is terribly heinous to harm children, and Jesus does love them, and a children's ministry is really important, none of these are what Jesus is communicating here

**PP** ***'little ones'*** in **18:6, 10, 14** refers to the children of the Heavenly Father, not biological kids

This is about the church caring for each other as God's children so we can grow mature in Him

We should do all we can, **verse 5**, to receive brothers and sisters into our care, and do nothing, **verse 6**, to cause them to stumble into sin

The warning in **verse 6**-***"causes one of these little ones who believes in Me to sin"***-refers to a lifestyle that leads another Christian into sin, not a single indiscretion

In **verse 7**, He points out that the world is full of temptation, so we help each other overcome them, not hinder their spiritual growth

He continues this theme of overcoming sin in **verses 8-9**, but he's not teaching self-mutilation,  
but the serious pursuit of holiness for all His disciples  
You can pluck out an eye and still sin, and the same with one less hand

In **verse 10**, we are to not *'despise one of these little ones'*, not looking down on other believers  
with arrogant contempt, believing that someone is not worth our time and care  
God loves them, and has angels whose job it is to care for Christians  
This doesn't mean that every Christian has a guardian angel, but that angelic beings are  
ministering to us helping us endure in our faith on to maturity  
God loves His children so much that if one goes astray, *'does he not leave the ninety-nine on  
the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray?'* **18:12**  
He pursues that child, and He gives the church the responsibility to care for them  
How the church does this is where He goes next in His teaching, and we'll slow down to look

### **PP 1-The way we help each other overcome sin**

Friends, conflict between Christians is unavoidable, but Jesus teaches us how to respond

#### **PP a) Go Privately**

*"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he  
listens to you, you have gained your brother."* **15**

Some of the earliest manuscripts do not include the words *'against you'*, but in either case, the  
way Jesus tells us to respond doesn't change

We are to go to that person and do what no one likes, *'tell him his fault'*

This is linked back to the lost sheep, and it is the way that God rescues lost, wandering sheep  
God rescues sinning *'little ones'* through His loving, personal, truth-telling children!

We go, we pursue, and speak directly to that person and no one else at this step

It's important to examine your own heart, and make sure you aren't the moral police, looking for  
power by pointing out all the faults in another person

This isn't a command to fuel some sick desire to drop the hammer for each and every sin

There are times when someone sins against us and we are to choose to cover it over with love

**PP "Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins."**

**1 Peter 4:8**

Our hearts need to be motivated to help the person to grow in Christ and overcome sin, and to  
neglect this it to demonstrate a lack of care and love

It is commonly this first step that many Christians stumble over, and it's for a number of reasons

\*Who am I to tell them about their sin...I have my own sins and struggles

\*Or, he or she is going to blow up and get mad at me and it'll be awkward and uncomfortable

\*Or it's just going to end up in a fruitless debate

But look at the motivation: *"If he listens to you, you have gained your brother"*

Go, be clear, be private, you are rescuing, this is part of discipleship (not always formalized!)

But if that doesn't work, we are not to give up, for the person's spiritual growth depends on us

We can't wash our hands and say we tried, for we haven't yet obeyed the whole process

#### **PP b) Go with others**

***“But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.” 16***

1 or two others who will not take sides, but function as objective witnesses  
 This isn't to gang up with overwhelming force, but to implore the sinning believer to listen  
 These witnesses are not always witnesses to the sin, but are witnesses to the process of reconciliation, that the one offended is not falsely accusing, or to help the sinner see his sin and repent, or to be public witnesses should it go to the third step  
 The witnesses should be humble, impartial, loving, and skilled peace makers

**PP** ***“But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” James 3:17-18***

Yet there are, unfortunately, times where the person will not listen even to a godly group of Christians and refuse to repent of the sin, and Jesus moves us to the next step

### **PP c) Go to the Church**

***“If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church.” 18:17a***

The goal in this is to gain your brother or sister, not to gain victory in a dispute  
 The witnesses had the same goal but along with them, it was unsuccessful  
 Now, the whole church is to gather, and the reason, once again, is to communicate their love for the unrepentant brother or sister, and to appeal to the person to listen and do what is right  
 It isn't to gang up on the sinner, but to move the sinner to repent of the sin and to maturity  
 God loves us so much, that He'll move an entire church to show His love and mercy to a wayward sheep  
 Notice the progression: First, ***if he listens***, then ***if he does not listen***, then ***if he refuses to listen***  
 There are heart-wrenching times when the person will not listen to even the entire church, and it moves the church to its last step

### **PP d) The Church's Response**

***“And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.” 18:17b***

This is the final step and it is a painfully difficult one, and carries with it a change in relationship with the unrepentant sinner, now as to ***‘a Gentile and a tax collector.’***  
 The Jews viewed Gentiles, non-Jewish people, as outside of God's blessings and love, or in short, as unrepentant unbelievers  
 They viewed Tax Collectors as worse in some ways, traitors to their own people  
 He gave these two examples to show that there should not be within the church, a fellowship with an unrepentant brother or sister  
 We are to put the person out of our fellowship, and in doing so, allow him or her to feel the shame of the consequences of refusing to repent of sin, to live as an outsider  
 But Jesus wasn't agreeing with Jewish prejudices for He loves all people

**PP** We are to ***“not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.” 2 Thessalonians 3:15***

There is no hatred, no disdain, nothing but hearts of sorrow that will continually pray!  
 You may be recoiling from this right now, feeling that this is over the top and unwarranted  
 Isn't the church to be a place of love, not rejection?!  
 Understand that this is a direct command of Jesus, *'let him be to you...'*  
 And understand that we are to do this in the hope of leading the straying sheep back to Christ and  
 fellowship in the church  
 Yet, Jesus knows how difficult this and He promises to help us and it is where our twisted verse  
 comes in

## **PP 2. The Way God Helps us Carry Out Church Discipline**

### **PP i. *Jesus gives the church His authority***

***"Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."** Matthew 18:18*

This verse has been terribly misinterpreted to mean that church leadership has authority to  
 forgive or withhold forgiveness, or that we can bend God's will to our own  
 Binding and loosing were legal terms meaning to declare something forbidden or allowed  
 In this context, it is the authority that the church has to discipline and if necessary to expel an  
 unrepentant believer, or to affirm the person's repentance and forgiveness, and fellowship  
 The Greek tense of *'shall be bound'* and *'shall be loosed'* points to what has already been bound  
 or loosed in heaven, and the church exercises that so that God's will be done on earth as  
 it is in heaven

### **PP ii. *Jesus grants the church His support***

***"Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven."** Matthew 18:19*

He isn't saying to find someone that agrees with you on what you want, and go ask God for it  
 There is no blank check in prayer that can be signed by two believers and cashed in with God  
*'Again'* ties this into what Jesus had been teaching about a brother or sister who sinned and will  
 not listen to correction

As we follow what Jesus has laid out for us, seeking to bring the one who strayed back to God,  
 He will fully lend His support to the process

This is important because it's tempting to shy away from church discipline, it often gets ugly  
 People in the church not privy to the whole process get upset, the person disciplined get upset,  
 people who hear about it outside the church accuse...it is difficult to do

Yet it must be done when warranted and Jesus promises that God will strengthen us to do what is  
 so incredibly difficult and painful

### **PP iii. *Jesus guarantees the church His presence***

***"For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."** Matthew 18:20*

Notice that Jesus ties this back to **verse 16**, with *'two or three witnesses'*

Witnesses confirm the facts, but in Old Testament Capital cases, they were the first to execute  
 the penalty for the crime

They were the first to cast the stones, but here, they are the first to pray  
And what are they praying for?  
That the *'little one'*, the brother or sister being confronted, would listen and turn back to God  
so there would be great rejoicing in heaven

So what is the true meaning of our twisted verse?  
It isn't that when we get a quorum of Christians together, Jesus will finally join us, for He is with  
the solitary believer as well  
It is the promise of His authority, support and presence in the very difficult act of church  
discipline, done to bring back the one who has strayed, with the hopes that he would  
reach maturity in Christ

Amen?

Pray