

Pentecost Study 15 - Matthew 18:15-20 Reconciliation & Prayer

15 "If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the offense. If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back. **16** But if you are unsuccessful, take one or two others with you and go back again, so that everything you say may be confirmed by two or three witnesses. **17** If the person still refuses to listen, take your case to the church. Then if he or she won't accept the church's decision, treat that person as a pagan or a corrupt tax collector.

18 "I tell you the truth, whatever you forbid^[a] on earth will be forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit^[a] on earth will be permitted in heaven.

19 "I also tell you this: If two of you agree here on earth concerning anything you ask, my Father in heaven will do it for you. **20** For where two or three gather together as my followers,^[a] I am there among them."

Q.1. Who is Jesus addressing in this passage?

Q.2. Speculate – what sort of 'sin' might Jesus have in mind v.15?

Q.3. What mitigating circumstances could be in play when one believer accuses another of 'sin against them'?

Q.4. Why in step 1 of the reconciliation process does Jesus say to go 'privately' to the offender? What is the desired outcome? V.15

Q.5. What obstacles does Jesus suggest (v.15) might frustrate the process?

Q.6. In step two v.16, why take 'one or two' with you to see the offender? V.16 Who would be a wise choice to take?

Q.7. Look up Deut 19:15. Does this help explain why witnesses are needed to help in disputes?

Q.8. In step 3 the 'church' is asked to be involved. What might the word 'church' mean for Jesus?

Q.9. V.17 talks about a meeting in which 'the church' makes a decision. How do you think this happened, i.e. the process?

Q.10. If the offender won't accept the verdict of the church 'treat that person as a pagan or a corrupt tax collector' v.17, what would that imply will happen: i. for the offender; ii. at church gatherings?

Q.11. What is the basic point Jesus is making in Vv.18-20?

Q.12. What does Jesus mean by 'Whatever you forbid on earth' v.18? Who are the 'you' involved? See Matt 16:19

Q.13. Vv.19-20 seem like an open cheque as we pray. Does the context in vv.15-20 help us understand Jesus' meaning?

Q.14. V.20 is a great promise of Jesus' presence when we gather to pray. How and when should this promise be used?

Application: for reflection, prayer and action

Q.15. Why do you think 'reconciliation' is important?

Q.16. In what circumstance would you use this 3-step process.

Matt 18:15-20 (my suggested answers)

NB. Please answer the questions yourself. We all have different ways of answering; God may give you greater insights than mine. Put '*John thinks*' ... before each answer.

A.1. Jesus is addressing believers. As v.17b implies there needs to be high standards of interaction among church-members (believers) and in families.

A.2. Jesus probably had a break of one of the 5th -9th of the 10 commandments. I.e. some relational harm is done.

A.3. All sorts of possibilities come into play. E.g. if money is involved both parties may believe they have a right to it (inheritance) or loan.

A.4. The best outcome to any dispute is a private resolution – where the matter can be resolved, and the relationship restored v.15c

A.5. Obstacles such as 'pride' or 'ignorance' or 'unwillingness to yield' or 'a refusal to see one's actions as sinful or harmful to another person'

A.6. The aggrieved party takes a couple of church members to give some broader perspective and force to the conversation. Both sides can put their case. It's not for intimidation or pressure and should include prayer. The wise choice would be church leaders known for fairness and careful council

A.7. Witnesses are important so that hearsay or lies can be avoided.

A.8. 'Church' in Jesus day mean small groups of believers in each town.

A.9. The probable process was to let both sides put their case, let the witnesses give their input, ask for consensus from the gathered church members and then as the offender to yield or repay or repent.

A.10. For the offender this would mean a barring from church activities; for the church – a loss of a member, a grief and prayer for them.

A.11. The basic point is that as the church meets, and prayerfully decides cases like vv.15-17 then that verdict is has a corresponding heavenly one as well. God has guided the church – so uphold the verdict

A.12. We are unsure whether 'forbid' should be 'bind' – it refers to the 'sin' before it refers to the sinner. 'You' is the church.

A.13. V.19 is surely aimed at situations like vv.15-17. When the church comes together, prayerfully decides an action under God, then that has divine sanction to act and (for. E.g expel the offender)

A.14. This is a broad promise. As the Body of Christ, the church should come together to make decisions like v.17 with the prayerful assurance that Jesus' authority and guidance unbinds them.

A.15. your answer. Reconciliation is vital for the body of Christ and families to be healthy and a good witness. Disunity is a curse.

A.16. It should be used within a local church or Christian family.