

Family Bible Study

9/6/2026

11. As much as unchurched people consider Christians to be puritanical and judgmental, the fact is most churches in the West do not exercise stringent discipline among members, either on account of native inclination (social pressure) or because leaders recognize the futility of excommunicating sinners when they can just go to the next church down the road. So priests and pastors are not likely to confront sinners about their behavior. What problems might result from this silence?
12. What does it mean when Jesus talks of being “bound on earth,” or being “bound in heaven” (v18)? What is he talking about?
13. What kind of authority do you suppose has been given to the Church in Jesus’ promise?
14. Verse 19 seems like a radically open-ended promise—whatever you agree on, God will make it so. What parameters do you suspect would limit Jesus’ promise of God’s responsiveness? That is, is there anything that God would not affirm, even if a group of Christians agrees on it?
15. What does it mean to be gathered “in Jesus’ name” (v20)? What does that mean? What does operating “in his name” entail? What does it mean in connection with the commandment not “to take God’s name in vain”? How do Christians gather (or work together) in a way that does *not* honor Jesus’ name (and mission)?
16. This teaching was ostensibly given to prepare Jesus’ followers for his imminent departure (death and ascension). Yet v30 suggests that, though he is going away, he promises to be among those who gather in his name. What does it say that Jesus is present (especially) when Christians are working out the healing of sin in the community? What does it mean that this is one of only two times Jesus mentions “church” in Matthew’s Gospel, when Christians sin against each other?



Matthew 18:15-20

Confronting a Brother Who Sins

Jesus said, ¹⁵ “If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. ¹⁶ But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷ If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. ¹⁸ Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹ Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”

Questions to Wonder with Kids

- Here Jesus is teaching his disciples. He wants them to be ready for when he has to go (ascend to heaven). He is particularly concerned with how his followers are going to live and work together after he leaves. Like when a teacher leaves the classroom, he gives them instructions on what to do until he gets back, and also what to do when one of his students does wrong to another student.
- Do you think that Jesus expected his students to be perfect after he left? Does he think that we Christians will be perfect? If so, then why does he give instructions here about what to do when a church member sins against another member?
- What is the procedure for dealing with sin among Christians? What is supposed to happen first? If that doesn't work, then what? And if that still doesn't solve the problem, *then* what?
- What is curious here is that Jesus doesn't tell us we should ignore the sin or to just "forgive and forget." Instead the person who has been wronged is obligated to confront the offender and point this out. This can be scary. I wonder why Jesus would want Christians to confront our brothers and sisters, and not just let it go...
- What benefits do you think there is to dealing with sin/disagreements in the church? Why is it important?
- Have you ever had a friend or family member come to you to tell you that you hurt them? What happened? What did you do? How did you respond?
- Jesus promises at the end of this passage that "where two or three are gathered in his name, he is there with them." I wonder what he means by when are Christians gathered in Jesus' name...and his being present to us then...

Questions for Adults

12. In this passage, Jesus is delivering a series of teachings to his followers. His subject here concerns not simply how Christians should behave, but something larger--how the Church will be able to continue and grow after he leaves them. What does Jesus identify here as the central ethic that will hold the Church together? That is, what is this passage about?
13. Reading this passage, do you think Jesus expected his disciples—Christians—to be perfect? What does he expect from us?
14. What does Jesus indicate is the proper Christian response when wronged by another Christian (v15)?
15. What happens when the initial confrontation doesn't work (v16)?
16. What does Jesus say should happen if the offender refuses to listen when witnesses are brought in (v17)?
17. What is the result when the sinner refuses to repent when confronted by the church (v17)?
18. To treat someone "as a Gentile and tax collector" (v17)—how would you characterize what that means?
19. How did Jesus treat actual Gentiles and tax collectors? If we are to treat unrepentant sinners as if they were Gentiles and tax collectors, does that mean we have license to shun them and never talk to them again?
20. Do you see other Christians in the church following Jesus' instruction here? What problems (if any) do you anticipate in following Jesus' instruction here?
21. Excluding unrepentant sinners from the church was able to be done effectively when the "church" was small and intimate (under 50 people). How might it work in a country such as ours, where there are other churches within a short distance where an unrepentant sinner might run to and where they could participate anonymously?