

# The Gospel of Matthew #50

## Solving Problems Among Church Members

Matt 18:15-20

### Introduction:

1. John Fawcett was pastor of a poor church in Wainsgate, England. He was a powerful preacher and writer and became known far and wide. After six years as pastor of the Wainsgate church, the well-known John Gill passed away leaving the famed Baptist congregation in Southwark, London without a pastor. In the course of time, Fawcett was offered the position as pastor of the influential church in London. John announced to the members at Wainsgate that he had accepted the pastorate in London and his people were heartbroken. But as the wagons were being loaded with the Fawcett's few belongings, their people came for a tearful farewell. Mary Fawcett went into the empty house for one last look before leaving. She left the house weeping and said to her husband, "John, I know not how to go." He answered, "Neither do I. We shall remain here with our people." The wagons were unloaded, and John Fawcett spent his entire fifty-four year ministry in Wainsgate. Out of that experience, Fawcett wrote the beautiful hymn, "Blest Be the Tie That Binds"

Blest be the tie that binds  
Our hearts in Christian love  
The fellowship of kindred minds

Is like to that above.

2. Even though there is a tie that binds, there may still be problems in churches
  - a. When 50 or 100 people are brought together in close quarters there are bound to be problems occasionally.
  - b. In one Peanuts comic strip, Lucy demands that Linus change TV channels and threatens him with her fist if he doesn't. "What makes you think you can walk right in here and take over?" asks Linus. "These five fingers," says Lucy. "Individually they're nothing but when I curl them together like this into a single unit, they form a weapon that is terrible to behold." "What channel do you want?" asks Linus. Turning away, he looks at his fingers and says, "Why can't you guys get organized like that?"
3. We are connected with each other by our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ and our membership in our church.
  - a. In His wisdom, our Savior gives guidelines for solving quarrels and problems among believers
  - b. The verses that we study tonight are very important
4. Leonardo DaVinci had an argument with someone during the time that he was painting "The Last Supper." He decided to get even with his opponent by painting the face of his opponent on Judas Iscariot. After painting the face of Judas, he began painting the face of Jesus, but could not. The anger and hatred in DaVinci against the man that he was angry with, prevented him from painting Jesus' face. Only when he changed Judas' face, could he paint the face of Jesus.

## I. The Person Who Caused the Problem – vs 15a

15 Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee...

### A. He is a Christian - "If thy brother"

1. The person who is causing the problem is a brother who sins
2. The "brother" could be a man or a woman, any Christian
3. Any believer is to be confronted when he sins
4. Here is a case when a church member has sinned against another church member
5. This is not a case where a church member has sinned against the church

### B. He Has Sinned - "shall trespass against thee"

1. "trespass" = hamartano = sin - the basic NT verb for sin
  - a) *Just as the category of sinner is all-inclusive so is the category of sin also all-inclusive*
  - b) *All sin is an offense against God's holiness and corrupts the holiness of His people*
  - c) *It mars a believer's fellowship with God and his fellowship with believers*
  - d) *The literal meaning is "to miss the mark"*
2. Someone can sin against you directly by abusing, deceiving, cheating, maligning you
3. But, in a sense, a member of our church who sins publicly, is sinning against the rest of the church members indirectly
  - a) *A little leaven does affect the entire lump*
  - b) *"Some years ago a man in our church told me he had invited an attorney friend of his to attend the church. But when he told the friend the church's name, the friend said, "I'd never go there. That's where the most crooked attorney in Los Angeles attends." That man's sin indirectly affected everyone in our congregation and tarnished the whole cause of Christ. - MacArthur*
4. "Every sin by a believer stains the entire fellowship of believers. Whether it is slander, stealing, gossip, sexual immorality dishonesty doctrinal error, lack of submission, cruelty blasphemy profanity drunkenness, or anything else, every sin not dealt with by the offending child of God must be dealt with by the church." - MacArthur

BYZ **Matthew 18:15** Ἐὰν δὲ ἀμαρτήσῃ εἰς σὲ ὁ ἀδελφός σου, ὕπαγε καὶ ἔλεγξον αὐτὸν μεταξύ σου καὶ αὐτοῦ μόνου. Ἐάν σου ἀκούσῃ, ἐκέκδησας τὸν ἀδελφόν σου.  
Tell him his fault (ελεγξον)  
Rev., shew him. The verb means, first, to test, try, search out; therefore, to cross-examine with a view of convincing or refuting; thence to rebuke or chide. The Rev. shew is better than tell, which implies merely naming the fault; whereas the injunction is, go and prove to him how he has erred. Wyc., reprove, with snub as explanation.

## II. The Person Who Wants to Solve the Problem – vs 15b

15 Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone; if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

### A. Should Go to the Offender

1. The one who is sinned against should go to the offender in a spirit of meekness and humility
2. This is the gentlest step
  - a) *It is done in private to preserve the dignity of the straying brother*
  - b) *It is based on the foundation of a church relationship*
3. Go humbly; searching your own heart
  - a) *To see if you did anything to cause the offending behavior*
  - b) *Knowing that we too can offend others ever so easily*
4. Being soft spoken and gentle.
5. Expressing our desire for understanding and straightening out the matter so that we may be reconciled.

### B. Start Soon

1. Don't wait for weeks or months
2. Don't assume that the trouble will go away all by itself
3. It will probably get worse and fester until it causes bigger church problems

### C. Tell Him His Fault Face to Face

15 Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone...

1. "tell him is fault" = reprove, convict from elencho - the root meaning is to bring to light or expose
  - a) *The first confrontation must be in private - one on one and if the erring person confesses and repents no further action is needed*
  - b) *It is possible that the person does not even realize what he has done*
2. When he is corrected privately in a spirit of humility and love, his change of heart is much more likely
3. When Peter was intimidated by the Judaizers in Antioch and began to separate himself from Gentile believers, Paul "opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned" (Gal. 2:11).
  - a) *Peter admitted his sin and repented, and years later he wrote of his "beloved brother Paul" (2 Pet. 3:15).*
  - b) *Their deepened friendship no doubt was due in no small measure to Paul's caring enough to rebuke his fellow apostle and turn him back to the purity of the gospel of grace.*
4. Unwillingness to reprove a sinning brother is a form of hatred - Lev 19:16-17 - you don't love enough to warn him

#### **D. Make Observations – Not Accusations**

1. State facts – don't accuse
2. "I believe you did me wrong" is better than "You're a dirty liar"

#### **E. Get the Facts from the Other Person**

1. Allow him a chance to speak
2. Maybe he did not even realize that there was a problem

### **III. The Purpose of Trying to Solve the Problem – vs 15c**

15c ... if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

1. The motive for approaching the sinning brother is to restore the fellowship, to strengthen the church and glorify the Lord
2. The purpose of the private confrontation is to promote resolution of the problem – not see who can gain the victory
3. You want to win back your brother – not win the argument
4. It should never come from a spirit of vindictiveness.
5. He should manifest a spirit of love and forgiveness even while he is rebuking, and he should be deeply concerned about the spiritual damage being suffered by the brother who sinned and have a genuine desire for him to be restored to holiness and its consequent blessing.
6. The goal of discipline is not throw people out of the church
7. The goal of discipline is not to feed the self-righteous pride of those who administer the discipline – Gal 6:1
8. It is God's will that His people be holy, and the purpose of discipline is to promote holiness by purging and purifying the church.
9. Rebuking a sinning brother should occur as soon as the offense is known
  - a) *This helps turn the sinning brother from his sin quickly*
  - b) *This helps head off resentment and bitterness by the one offended*
  - c) *Those destructive emotions are also sins and they tend to fester as long as the break in fellowship continues*

### **IV. The Process for Solving the Problem – vs 16-17a**

#### **A. Take Some Witnesses – vs 16**

1. An offending brother may not be willing to be reconciled nor willing to admit his wrong.

- a) *Some Christian brothers are stubborn*
  - b) *Others are immature*
  - c) *Still others are gripped by selfish and sinful motives and behavior.*
2. In such cases one or two loving and wise brothers are to be taken with us to the offending brother.
- a) *This shows the brother that there is deep concern; a number of people do care and want to help.*
  - b) *This also shows that the offense is known by more than one or two people. At least several know.*
  - c) *This also provides objective and wise counsel between the two differing parties. Agreement and reconciliation are more likely to arise from this.*
  - d) *This helps to prevent bias, selfish reaction, and partial interest.*
3. This procedure had been set forth by Moses in Deut 19:15
- a) *This was familiar to every Jew*
  - b) *This was an important protection against the false accusation of an innocent person*
  - c) *Two or 3 witnesses could confirm that a sin was committed*
  - d) *Two or three witnesses should be able to confirm that the sinning brother was properly rebuked and that he has or has not repented*
  - e) *The witnesses might have to be public witnesses against the sinning brother before the church*

16 But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

BYZ **Matthew 18:16** εἰς δὲ μὴ ἀκούσῃ, παράλαβε μετὰ σοῦ ἕτι ἓνα ἢ δύο, ἵνα ἐπὶ στόματος δύο μαρτύρων ἢ τριῶν σταθῇ πᾶν ῥῆμα·

## B. Tell It to the Church

17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

1. The first step was private
2. The second step is semi-private
3. This third step is public
4. The place for discipline is within the church
5. Those who say that the church began on Pentecost must make this future somehow.
  - a) *The fact that Jesus said to take it to the church must mean that there was a church to take it to*
  - b) *Jesus is not talking about the Jewish synagogue here or he would have used sunagoge instead of ekklesia*
6. Notice that in Jesus' mind there is nothing higher than the church
  - a) *He did not tell someone to take it to the Bishop or Archbishop*
  - b) *He did not say to take it to the synod or headquarters*

BYZ **Matthew 18:17** εἰς δὲ παρακούσῃ αὐτῶν, εἰπέ τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ· εἰς δὲ καὶ τῆς ἐκκλησίας παρακούσῃ, ἔστω σοι ὡσπερ ὁ ἔθνηκός καὶ ὁ τελώνης.

## V. The Punishment for the Offender – vs 17b

17b ... let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

1. The next step is ostracism
2. The sinning brother is to be treated like a tax collector or a Gentile - both of which were despised outcasts
3. When a man in the Corinthian church refused to forsake an incestuous relationship with his stepmother, Paul commanded that he be removed from their midst (1 Cor. 5:1-2).
4. Persistently unrepentant believers are to be totally ostracized from the fellowship of the church.
  - a) *They are no longer to know the blessedness of the church's company and encouragement.*
  - b) *Because they willingly reject the standards of the gospel, they make shipwreck of their faith.*
  - c) *When Hymenaeus and Alexander would not forsake their profane use of the Lord's name, Paul "delivered [them] over to Satan, so that they may be taught not to blaspheme" (1 Tim. 1:20).*

## VI. The Praying in the Problem – vs 18-20

### A. The Pronouncement for Praying – vs 18

18 Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

1. In light of the context of what Jesus had just said, in the light of common rabbinical expressions of that day, and in light of the grammatical construction of the text, it is clear that He was not teaching that God's power can be bent to men's will.
2. As in Matthew 16:19, shall be bound and shall be loosed translate future perfect passives and are more accurately rendered "will have been bound" and "will have been loosed."
3. The idea is not that God is compelled to conform to the church's decisions but that, when the church follows Christ's pattern for discipline, it conforms its decisions to what God has already done and thereby receives heaven's approval and authority.
4. The RCC has misinterpreted this and teaches that the church has power to forgive sins
5. Many charismatics use these promises—along with others, such as those of Matthew 7:7 and 21:22—to claim from God every imaginable blessing and privilege just for the asking.
6. He was not saying that men can force heaven to do things.
7. God here promises that when His people bend their wills to His, He will endorse and empower their act of obedience.

### B. The People in the Praying – vs 19

19 Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.

1. Church discipline is to be bathed in prayer
2. When the church acts in God's behalf and in accordance with His Word in matters dealing with Sin, He acts in their behalf by confirming and empowering their faithful decisions and actions.
3. Agree is from *sumphōneō*, which literally means to sound together and is the term from which we get symphony.
4. If even two of Jesus' followers are in agreement with each other that a Sinning believer has either repented or refused to repent, they can be sure they are also in agreement with the Father who is in heaven.
5. To interpret this verse as promising believers a blank check for anything they might agree to ask God for not only does not fit the context of church discipline but does violence to the rest of Scripture.
6. Such an interpretation is tantamount to magic, in which God is automatically bound to grant the most foolish or sinful request, simply because two of His children conspire to ask Him for it.
7. The idea flies in the face of God's sovereignty and completely undercuts the countless scriptural commands for believers' obedient submission to His will.

### C. The Promise in the Praying – vs 19

19 Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.

Note three things about the reward

1. Specifics - "It shall be done"
  - a) *The reward is answered prayer*
  - b) *How thrilling to have our prayers answered*
2. Supplicants - "for them"
  - a) *Only those who do the praying get the reward*
3. Source - "Of my Father which is in heaven"
  - a) *No one is better able to answer our prayers than God*
  - b) *He has the greatest resources*

### D. The Gathering in the Praying – vs 20

BYZ **Matthew 18:18** Ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, ὅσα ἐὰν δήσητε ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, ἔσται δεδεμένα ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ· καὶ ὅσα ἐὰν λύσητε ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, ἔσται λελυμένα ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ.

Shall be bound in heaven (*estai dedemena en ouranōi*). Future passive periphrastic perfect indicative as in "shall be loosed" (*estai lelumena*). In Matthew 16:19 this same unusual form occurs

BYZ **Matthew 18:19** Πάλιν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, ὅτι ἐὰν δύο ὑμῶν συμφωνήσωσιν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς περὶ παντός πράγματος οὐ ἐὰν αἰτήσωνται, γενήσεται αὐτοῖς παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς μου τοῦ ἐν οὐρανοῖς.

20 For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

1. To use this statement to claim the Lord's presence at a small worship service or prayer meeting does not fit the context of church discipline and is superfluous.
2. Christ is always present with His people, even with a lone believer totally separated from fellow Christians by prison walls or by hundreds of miles.
3. The context demands that the two or three are witnesses in the process of discipline.
4. To ask or to do anything in God's name is not to utter His name but to ask and to work according to His divine will and character.
5. For the witnesses to have gathered in His name is therefore for them to have faithfully performed their work of verifying the repentance or impenitence of a Sinning brother or sister on the Lord's behalf.
6. When the church gathers in the Lord's name and for His cause and glory, it must be engaged in self-purifying ministry under His power and authority, and with His heavenly confirmation and partnership.

<sup>BYZ</sup> **Matthew 18:20** Οὐ γὰρ εἰσιν δύο ἢ τρεῖς συνηγμένοι εἰς τὸ ἕμὸν ὄνομα, ἐκεῖ εἰμι ἐν μέσῳ αὐτῶν.