

Matthew 18:15-20: 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. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.

Intro: This chapter is about how to relate to one another in the church – how to love one another in the church – how do deal with offenses and sins and temptations in the church – how to forgive one another in the church.

Verses 1-6: Jesus calls us to humility: we are small & utterly dependent on God, like little children are on parents.

Verses 7-9: Jesus calls us to turn away from sin in our own lives & to turn away from tempting others to sin.

Verses 10-14: Jesus calls us to love the straying/lost brother or sister like Jesus & our Father in heaven love them.

Verses 15-20: Jesus shows us how to pursue the straying brother or sister in love & for their own good.

As we saw several weeks ago, we see again today that **Jesus Christ, the God-Man, loves His people so much that He calls us to pursue the one caught in sin, just like He and His Father do, so that the lost or straying might be rescued, restored, & redeemed from the road to destruction.**

This text is about the practice of church discipline (there's formative discipline & corrective discipline). Why do it?

1) Jesus commands it; 2) It expressed God's great love for us; 3) It expresses our love for fellow church members; 4) We want to be holy – like Christ; 5) It keeps others in the church from sin; 6) It protects the reputation of Christ & His church; 7) It helps us know if we truly belong to Christ:

- **Matthew 7:21-23:** Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

- **Matthew 7:1-5:** Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye. (We must walk the walk to talk the talk!) **GOSPEL!**

1. The First Step To Take When A Fellow Christian Sins Against You

Matthew 18:15: 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.

a. Christian brothers and sisters still sin against each other: V. 15: “If your brother sins against you”

b. These steps Jesus commands us to take are done in order to gain our brother – this is love!

c. We ought to be the kind of people who invite this kind of confrontational, tough love

d. Jesus' command here is for dealing with sin

e. If a brother sins against you, you go to him privately in a loving, helpful way

(Ken Sande: *Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide To Resolving Personal Conflict*)

1) Go to him privately & show him his fault; 2) Bring hope through the Gospel

3) Be quick to listen; 4) Breathe grace

5) Make charitable/loving judgments; 6) Speak the truth in love

7) Talk from beside, not from above; 8) Help others examine the desires of their hearts

9) Choose the right time and place; 10) Talk in person whenever possible

11) Engage the heart rather than declare; 12) Communicate so clearly that you cannot be misunderstood

13) Plan your words; 14) Use “I” statements

15) Be objective; 16) Use the Bible carefully

- 17) Ask for feedback; 18) Recognize your limits (**Pray! Pray! Pray!**)
19) “If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.”

2. The Second Step To Take If The First Step Fails

Matthew 18:16: 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.

a. Ken Sande: We should try to keep the circle of people involved in a conflict as small as possible for as long as possible.

b. If the person we are confronting is not responsive, we should take witnesses to confront them: This command is grounded or echoed in **Deuteronomy 19:15:** A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established.

c. This is one reason why church membership is so important & so needed: We need help walking with Christ. We need help following Christ. We need help turning away from sin to Christ. We need help helping others turn from sin to Christ! How do you obey these verses of Jesus in Matthew 18 without formal church membership?

d. These witnesses are not people who witnessed the sin: Remember it was a private sin. These are witnesses who are to help do several things:

1) They bear witness to the charge that it may be established – was there really an offense? (The person accusing could be making a mountain out of a molehill. They could just have a misunderstanding.) These witnesses bear witness to the nature of the alleged offense. They will hear all the words spoken by both parties. They will bear witness to the response if a sin has occurred.

2) These witnesses add weight to the corrective discipline. This is not just a personal grudge, but witnesses are testifying that this person has broken God’s commandment, has sinned, and this is a serious matter.

3) They can act as mediators to help ensure clear understanding and communication and offer Biblical counsel.

e. You can ask the person who sinned against you if they would be willing to sit down and talk with these witnesses: But if they are not willing, you must obey Jesus anyway.

f. These witnesses should be trustworthy, mature believers: These are people who love Christ and love His church and want to help you resolve this conflict. They are not people you just want to take your side so you win!

g. This is God chasing us down with His mercy and love: This is how God goes after the lost sheep! This is how Jesus leaves the 99 and goes after the one! He does it through His people! This is God’s everlasting, unrelenting, unchanging, unstoppable, amazing love and mercy for you!

- **Zechariah 2:8:** he who touches you touches the apple of his eye

- God sings over you! God loves you!

- **David Platt:** God loves us so much that if we are caught in sin, He will send an entire army of believers to us as a demonstration of His love and mercy.

- **Tim Keller:** You’re more wicked than ever dared believe & yet, you’re more loved & accepted in Jesus Christ than you ever dared hope . . . If you were a hundred times worse than you are, your sins would be no match for his mercy.

3. The Third Step To Take If The First And Second Steps Fail

Matthew 18:17: If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church.

a. This is one strong reason I believe congregationalism is the clear form of church government taught in the Bible: Under Jesus Christ, the local church is the final authority who will make judgments on these matters of a sinning brother or sister who is unwilling to repent.

b. What is the process of you “telling it to the church”?:

- 1) Usually when the sin gets to this point, the sinning person is not attending the church anymore (non-attendance; unfaithfulness in marriage)
- 2) Usually the elders/pastors of the church are already involved at this point
- 3) You don’t stand up one Sunday morning and just announce this problem to the congregation.
- 4) You would go, possibly with the witnesses, to the elders/pastors of the church and tell them about the situation.
- 5) The elders & others who know that person well would reach out to the person for reconciliation and repentance.
- 6) The elders will announce the situation at a private, church-members-only meeting. They will ask for the church to pray about the situation and for the congregation to try to speak to this person and call them to repentance.

4. The Fourth Step To Take If The First, Second, And Third Steps All Fail

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

a. The sins that make it to this point are usually very public and very egregious: Non-attendance & adultery

b. The sinners in these situations are unrepentant sinners: These people have been loved, pursued, pleaded with, prayed for, wept over, confronted multiple times in multiple ways over periods of months, & they still refuse to repent.

c. Jesus instructs us to “let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector”: Let them be to you as an unbeliever – someone who does not rightly belong to the church community anymore because they are not living like it.

Daniel Dorinai: Jesus is not here telling the disciples that they ought to treat tax collectors poorly. In fact Jesus welcomed them, along with other sinners . . . he says, “Treat them . . . as people who stand outside the community and its fellowship” . . . That is, excommunicate them, while retaining hope of reconciliation through a fresh encounter with the gospel.

Read Ken Sande (*Peacemaker*) on “Step Five: Treat Him as a Nonbeliever”: Pages 193-196

Read 1 Corinthians 5:1-13

2 Thessalonians 3:14-15: If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. ¹⁵ Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.

d. Letter of concern/warning:

Dear Church Member,

We hope this letter finds you well. We care about your spiritual health, and therefore we are concerned about your lack of church attendance. If you would like to remain a member, you must contact us and commit to attend Sunday morning services. We can be reached at Phone/Email.

If you are attending another Bible-believing, Gospel preaching church, please let us know. Though we hate to see you go, we encourage you to join the church where you are attending regularly and resign your membership here at Olney Baptist.

We write because we love you, and we care about your spiritual growth in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Bible is very clear on the importance of the need for Christians to be together in fellowship regularly:

Hebrews 10:24-25: And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

As the leadership of Olney Baptist Church, we expect our members to attend Sunday morning services every Sunday in which they are not sick or out of town. This commitment is part of what it means to be a member. Part of the covenant that you made when you became a member means being present at the Sunday morning gatherings:

With joy I have taken my place in the family of God - the Church Universal, and its expression in this local Church, I accept the responsibility for its upbuilding, and to this end I commit myself to wholeheartedly support this Church in its local and world-wide ministry with my time, abilities, and possessions. I will strive for the unity of the Church, praying for, helping, forgiving, and being considerate toward my fellow members in Christian love . . . Realizing my own inadequacy, I will earnestly seek the help of the Holy Spirit and the fellowship of the Church in the accomplishment of these purposes, to the glory of God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.

Sincerely in Christ,
Pastors

e. Letter of discipline:

Dear Church Member,

We hope this letter finds you well. We care about your spiritual health, and therefore we continue to be concerned about your lack of church attendance. Because of your lack of attendance, and because of your failure to respond to our letters or phone calls, the church voted to remove you from the church membership roll at a called business meeting on stated date.

Beyond the official nature of this letter, we are gravely concerned for you and for the state of your soul. It is so vital for Christians to meet together that attending church is commanded to all Christians in the New Testament. Disobeying this direct command is not a trivial matter, but a sign that your soul is in serious danger, and calls into question whether you are indeed a Christian. Please consider returning. It is the Bible, not us, that commands you to attend church regularly.

Hebrews 10:24-27 says:

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.

Again we want to remind you that there is abundant mercy and forgiveness for you if you will only repent of your sin and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. You are still always welcome to meet with us and come to any of our church meetings except the business meetings. Furthermore, you are no longer allowed to take the Lord's Supper until you repent and return to regular church attendance.

But among God's people and under the preaching of God's Word is where you should be, so we hope you will come back and be with us or join another church that faithfully preaches God's Word. Please know that we are

taking all of these measures because we love you, and we want to see you fully restored to Christ and His people. We, as your church leaders, wait with open arms like the father of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). Please come home to Olney Baptist.

We would love to meet with you anytime and talk more about these important matters. We can be reached at Phone/Email.

God's mercy is great: 1 John 1:8-9: If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Sincerely in Christ,
Pastors

f. Because we trust and love Jesus and the glory of God the most, we should desire and delight in this kind of accountability: When new members join, we ask them to make commitments to us and to God. The 7th membership commitment states: “In loving obedience, do you submit yourself to the government and discipline of Olney Baptist Church, promising to seek the peace, purity, and prosperity of this congregation as long as you are a member of it?”

Next week: The Binding & Loosing Of The Church & The Presence Of Christ With His People: Vs. 18-20

Remember how the disciple letter ended: “God’s mercy is great!” Jesus bought us this great mercy on that cross!

Jesus was the One Who, on that cross, was treated as a Gentile sinner outside God’s covenant family & Jesus was the one treated as a godless tax collector! Jesus was treated as sexual immorality! Jesus was treated as malice & evil & greediness & swindling & idolatry & reviling & drunkenness! & Jesus Christ bore all those sins in Himself in His body on that tree! He was crushed & cursed for us – the Passover Lamb – so that we might be saved, redeemed, justified, adopted, brought into God’s covenant family, & sanctified! & He rose up from the dead!

Jesus Christ, the God-Man, loves His people so much that He calls us to pursue the one caught in sin, just like He and His Father do, so that the lost or straying might be rescued, restored, & redeemed from the road to destruction.

Christ Jesus’ Love Is Tough And Right
He Disciplines His Church To Fight
Against All Sin And Evil Blight
So She’ll Be Pure In His Clear Sight
He Died For Sinners, Took God’s Fright
And Bore God’s Everlasting Smite
Then Rose Alive, The World’s True Light
He Rules His Church With Gentle Might
Calls Her To Bind And Loose Contrue
We’ll Be Like Him, Pristine And Bright
These Thoughts With Joy Do Excite
For He’s Our All, Our Great Delight!