



# SUNDAY CLASS

6/28/09

## Matthew 18:15-20 (New International Version)

### A Brother Who Sins Against You

***15*"If your brother sins against you,<sup>[a]</sup> go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. <sup>16</sup>But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.'<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>17</sup>If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.**

***18*"I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be<sup>[c]</sup> bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be<sup>[d]</sup> loosed in heaven.**

***19*"Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. <sup>20</sup>For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."**

*Christ, having cautioned his disciples not to give offence, comes next to direct them what they must do in case of offences given them; which may be understood either of personal injuries, and then these directions are intended for the preserving of the peace of the church; or of public scandals, and then they are intended for the preserving of the purity and beauty of the church.*

**Let us consider it both ways. *I. Let us apply it to the quarrels that happen, upon any account, among Christians.***

*If thy brother trespass against thee, by grieving thy soul (1 Corinthians 8:12), by affronting thee, or putting contempt or abuse upon thee; if he blemish thy good name by false reports or tale-bearing; if he encroach on thy rights, or be any way injurious to thee in thy estate; if he be guilty of any of those trespasses that are specified, Leviticus 6:2-3; if he transgress the laws of justice, charity, or relative duties; these are trespasses against us, and often happen among Christ's disciples, and sometimes, for want of prudence, are of very mischievous consequence.*

### 1 Corinthians 8:12 (New International Version)

**<sup>12</sup>When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.**

### Leviticus 6:2-3 (New International Version)

**<sup>2</sup> "If anyone sins and is unfaithful to the LORD by deceiving his neighbor about something entrusted to him or left in his care or stolen, or if he cheats him, <sup>3</sup> or if he finds lost property and lies about it, or if he swears falsely, or if he commits any such sin that people may do-**

**Now observe what is the rule prescribed in this case, 1. Go, and tell him his fault between thee and him alone. Let this be compared with, and explained by, Leviticus 19:17,**

### Leviticus 19:17 (New International Version)

**<sup>17</sup> " 'Do not hate your brother in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in his guilt.**

**Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart; that is,** *"If thou hast conceived a displeasure at thy brother for any injury he hath done thee, do not suffer thy resentments to ripen into a secret malice (like a wound, which is most dangerous when it bleed inwardly), but give vent to them in a mild and grave admonition, let them so spend themselves, and they will expire the sooner; do not go and rail against him behind his back, but thou shalt in any ways reprove him. If he has indeed done thee a considerable wrong, endeavor to make him sensible of it, but let the rebuke be private, between thee and him alone; if thou would convince him, do not expose him, for that will but exasperate him, and make the reproof look like a revenge."*

*This agrees with Proverbs 25:8-9, "Go not forth hastily to strive, but debate thy cause with thy neighbor himself, argue it calmly and amicably; and if he shall hear thee, well and good, thou hast gained thy brother, there is an end of the controversy, and it is a happy end; let no more be said of it, but let the falling out of friends be the renewing of friendship."*

### Proverbs 25:8-9 (New International Version)

**<sup>8</sup> do not bring hastily to court, for what will you do in the end if your neighbor puts you to shame? <sup>9</sup> If you argue your case with a neighbor, do not betray another man's confidence,**

2. "If he will not hear thee, *if he will not own himself in a fault, nor come to an agreement, **yet do not despair**, but try what he will say to it, **if thou take one or two or more, not only to be witnesses of what passes, but to reason the case further with him***; he will be the more likely to hearken to them because they are disinterested; and if reason will rule him, the word of reason in the mouth of two or three witnesses will be better spoken to him" (Plus vident oculi quam oculus—**Many eyes see more than one**), "and more regarded by him, and perhaps it will influence him to acknowledge his error, and to say, I repent."

3. "If he shall neglect to hear them, and will not refer the matter to their arbitration, then tell it to the church, to the ministers, elders, or other officers, or the most considerable persons in the congregation you belong to, make them the referees to accommodate the matter, and do not presently appeal to the magistrate, or fetch a writ for him."

This is fully explained by the apostle (1 Corinthians 6), where he reproves those that went to law before the unjust, and not before the saints (v. 1), and would have the saints to judge those small matters (v. 2) that pertain to this life, (v. 3). If you ask, "**Who is the church that must be told?**" the apostle directs there (v. 5),

### [1 Corinthians 6:1-11 \(New International Version\)](#)

#### Lawsuits Among Believers

**<sup>1</sup>If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints? <sup>2</sup>Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? <sup>3</sup>Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life! <sup>4</sup>Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judges even men of little account in the church!<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>5</sup>I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? <sup>6</sup>But instead, one brother goes to law against another—and this in front of unbelievers!**

**<sup>7</sup>The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?**

**<sup>8</sup>Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers. <sup>9</sup>Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders <sup>10</sup>nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>11</sup>And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.**

**Is there not a wise man among you?** *Those of the church that are presumed to be most capable of determining such matters; and he speaks ironically, when he says (v. 4), "Set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church; those, if there be no better, those, rather than suffer an irreconcilable breach between two church members."*

*This rule was then in a special manner requisite, when the civil government was in the hands of such as were not only aliens, but enemies. (v. 4). "If he will not hear the church, will not stand to their award, but persists in the wrong he has done thee, and proceeds to do thee further wrong, let him be to thee as a heathen man, and a publican; take the benefit of the law against him, but let that always be the last remedy; appeal not to the courts of justice till thou hast first tried all other means to compromise the matter in variance. Or thou may, if thou wilt, break off thy friendship and familiarity with him; though thou must by no means study revenge, yet thou may choose whether thou wilt have any dealings with him, at least, in such a way as may give him an opportunity of doing the like again. Thou would have healed him, would have preserved his friendship, but he would not, and so has forfeited it." **If a man cheat and abuse me once, it is his fault; if twice, it is my own.***

II. Let us apply it to scandalous sins, which are an offence to the little ones, **of bad example to those that are weak**, and of great grief to those that are weak.

*Christ, having taught us to indulge the weakness of our brethren, here cautions us not to indulge their wickedness under pretence of that. Christ, designing to erect a church for himself in the world, here took care for the preservation,*

- 1. Of its purity, that it might have an expulsive faculty, a power to cleanse and clear itself, like a fountain of living waters, which is necessary as long as the net of the gospel brings up both good fish and bad.*
- 2. Of its peace and order, that every member may know his place and duty, and the purity of it may be preserved in a regular way and not tumultuously.*

*Now let us see, (1.) What is the case supposed? If thy brother trespass against thee. [1.] "The offender is a brother, one that is in Christian communion, that is baptized, that hears the word, and prays with thee, with whom thou join in the worship of God, stated or occasionally."*

**\*\*\*Note, Church discipline is for church members.**

Them that are without God judges, 1 Corinthians 5:12-13.

## 1 Corinthians 5:12-13 (New International Version)

**<sup>12</sup>What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? <sup>13</sup>God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked man from among you."**

When any trespass is done against us, **it is good to remember that the trespasser is, a brother**, which furnishes us with qualifying consideration. [2.] "The offense is a trespass against thee; if thy brother sin against thee (so the word is), if he do any thing which is offensive to thee as a Christian."

**\*\*\*Note, A gross sin against God is a trespass against his people, who have a true concern for his honor.**

Christ and believers have twisted interests; what is done against them Christ takes as done against himself, and what is done against him they cannot but take as done against themselves. The reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me, Psalms 69:9.

## Psalms 69:9 (New International Version)

**<sup>9</sup> for zeal for your house consumes me, and the insults of those who insult you fall on me.**

## Matthew 18:15-17 (New International Version)

### A Brother Who Sins Against You

**<sup>15</sup>"If your brother sins against you,<sup>[a]</sup> go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. <sup>16</sup>But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.'<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>17</sup>If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.**

(2.) What is to be done in this case. We have here, [1.] The rules prescribed, v. 15-17. Proceed in this method: **First**, "Go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone. Do not stay till he comes to thee, but go to him, as the physician visits the patient, and the shepherd goes after the lost sheep."

**\*\*\*Note, We should think no pains too much to take for the recovering of a sinner to repentance.**

"Tell him his fault, *remind him of what he has done, and of the evil of it*, show him his abominations."

**\*\*\*Note, People loath to see their faults, and have need to be told of them.**

*Though the fact is plain, and the fault too, yet they must be put together with application. Great sins often amuse conscience, and for the present stupify and silence it; **and there is need of help to awaken it.***

*David's own heart smote him, when he had cut off Saul's skirt, and when he had numbered the people; but (which is very strange) we do not find that it smote him in the matter of Uriah, till Nathan told him, Thou art the man. "Tell him his fault, elenxon auton — argue the case with him" (so the word signifies); "and do it with reason and argument, not with passion."*

*Where the fault is plain and great, the person proper for us to deal with, and we have an opportunity for it, and there is no apparent danger of doing more hurt than good, we must with meekness and faithfulness tell people of what is amiss in them. Christian reproof is an ordinance of Christ for the bringing of sinners to repentance, and must be managed as an ordinance. "*

*Let the reproof be private, between thee and him alone; that it may appear you seek not his reproach, but his repentance."*

**\*\*\*Note, It is a good rule, which should ordinarily be observed among Christians, not to speak of our brethren's faults to others, till we have first spoken of them to themselves, this would make less reproaching and more reproof; that is, **less sin committed, and more duty done.****

*It will be likely to work upon an offender, when he sees his reproofer concerned not only for his salvation, in telling him his fault, but for his reputation in telling him of it privately. "If he shall hear thee" —that is, "heed thee—if he be wrought upon by the reproof, it is well, thou hast gained thy brother; thou hast helped to save him from sin and ruin, and it will be thy credit and comfort," James 5:19-20.*

### *James 5:19-20 (New International Version)*

***<sup>19</sup>My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, <sup>20</sup>remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.***

**\*\*\*Note, The converting of a soul is the winning of that soul (Proverbs 11:30); and we should covet it, and labor after it, as**

**gain to us; and, if the loss of a soul be a great loss, the gain of a soul is sure no small gain.**

**Proverbs 11:30 (New International Version)**

***<sup>30</sup> The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise***

**Secondly,** *If that doth not prevail, then take with thee one or two more, v. 16.*

**Matthew 18:16 (New International Version)**

***<sup>16</sup> But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.'***

**\*\*\*Note, We must not be weary of well-doing, though we see not presently the good success of it.**

*"If he will not hear thee, yet do not give him up as in a desperate case; say not, It will be to no purpose to deal with him any further; but go on in the use of other means; even those that harden their necks must be often reprov'd, and those that oppose themselves instructed in meekness." In work of this kind we must travail in birth again (Galatians 4:19); and it is after many pains and throes that the child is born.*

**Galatians 4:19 (New International Version)**

***<sup>19</sup> My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you,***

**"Take with thee one or two more; 1. To assist thee; they may speak some pertinent convincing word which thou didst not think of, and may manage the matter with more prudence than thou didst."**

**\*\*\*Note, Christians should see their need of help in doing good, and pray in the aid one of another; as in other things, so in giving reproofs, that the duty may be done, and may be done well.**

2. *"To affect him; he will be the more likely to be humbled for his fault, when he sees it witnessed against by two or three." Deuteronomy 19:15.*

## Deuteronomy 19:15 (New International Version)

### Witnesses

***<sup>15</sup> One witness is not enough to convict a man accused of any crime or offense he may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.***

***\*\*\*Note, Those should think it high time to repent and reform, who see their misconduct become a general offence and scandal.***

*Though in such a world as this it is rare to find one good whom all men speak well of, yet it is more rare to find one good whom all men speak ill of.*

3. "To be witnesses of his conduct, in case the matter should afterward be brought before the church." None should come under the censure of the church as obstinate, till it be very well proved that they are so. **Thirdly**, If he neglect to hear them, and will not be humbled, then tell it to the church, v. 17.

## Matthew 18:17 (New International Version)

***<sup>17</sup> If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.***

*There are some stubborn spirits to whom the likeliest means of conviction prove ineffectual; yet such must not be given over as incurable, but let the matter be made more public, and further help called in.*

***\*\*\*Note, 1. Private admonitions must always go before public censures; if gentler methods will do the work, those that are more rough and severe must not be used, Titus 3:10.***

## Titus 3:10 (New International Version)

***<sup>10</sup> Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him.***

***Those that will be reasoned out of their sins, need not be shamed out of them. Let God's work be done effectually, but with as little noise as may be; his kingdom comes with power, but not with observation.***

***But, 2. Where private admonition does not prevail, there public censure must take place. The church must receive the complaints of the offended, and rebuke the sins of the offenders, and judge between them, after an impartial enquiry made***

**into the merits of the cause. Tell it to the church. It is a thousand pities that this appointment of Christ, which was designed to end differences, and remove offences, should itself be so much a matter of debate, and occasion differences and offences, through the corruption of men's hearts.**

### **Matthew 18:18 (New International Version)**

***18*"I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.**

**What church must be told—is the great question.** The civil magistrate, say some; The Jewish Sanhedrin then in being, say others; but by what follows, v. 18, it is plain that he means a Christian church, which, though not yet formed, was now in the embryo. "Tell it to the church, that particular church in the communion of which the offender lives; make the matter known to those of that congregation who are by consent appointed to receive information of that kind.

*Tell it to the guides and governors of the church, the minister or ministers, the elders or deacons, or (if such the constitution of the society be) tell it to the representatives or heads of the congregation, or to all the members of it; let them examine the matter and, if they find the complaint frivolous and groundless, let them rebuke the complainant; if they find it just, let them rebuke the offender, and call him to repentance, and this will be likely to put an edge and an efficacy upon the reproof."*

1. "With greater solemnity," and,

2. "With greater authority." It is an awful thing to receive a reproof from a church, from a minister, a reprover by office; and therefore it is the more regarded by such as pay any deference to an institution of Christ and his ambassadors.

**Fourthly,** "If he neglect to hear the church, if he slight the admonition, and will neither be ashamed of his faults, nor amend them, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and publican; let him be cast out of the communion of the church, secluded from special ordinances, degraded from the dignity of a church member, let him be put under disgrace, and let the members of the society be warned to withdraw from him, that he may be ashamed of his sin, and they may not be infected by it, or made chargeable with it."

Those who put contempt on the orders and rules of a society, and bring reproach upon it, forfeit the honors and privileges of it, **and are justly laid aside till they repent and submit**, and reconcile themselves to it again. Christ has appointed this method for the vindicating of the church's honor, the preserving of its purity, and the conviction and reformation of those that are scandalous.

**But observe**, he doth not say, "Let him be to thee as a devil or damned spirit, as one whose case is desperate," but "as a heathen and a publican, **as one in a capacity of being restored and received in again**. Count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother." The directions given to the church of Corinth concerning the incestuous person, agree with the rules here; he must be taken away from among them (1 Corinthians 5:2), must be delivered to Satan; for if he be cast out of Christ's kingdom, he is looked upon as belonging to Satan's kingdom; they must not keep company with him, v. 11, 13. But when by this he is humbled and reclaimed, he must be welcomed into communion again, and all shall be well.

### 1 Corinthians 5:2 (New International Version)

**<sup>2</sup>And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this?**

### Matthew 18:11 (King James Version)

**<sup>11</sup>For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.**

### Matthew 18:13 (New International Version)

**<sup>13</sup>And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off.**

### Matthew 18:18 (New International Version)

**<sup>18</sup>"I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.**

### Matthew 16:18-20 (New International Version)

**<sup>18</sup>And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. <sup>19</sup>I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." <sup>20</sup>Then he warned his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ.**

[2.] Here is a warrant signed for the ratification of all the church's proceedings according to these rules, v. 18. What was said before to Peter is here said to all the disciples, and in them to all the faithful office-bearers in the church, to the world's end. While ministers preach the word of Christ faithfully, and in their government of the church strictly adhere to his laws (clave non errante—the key not turning the wrong way), they may be assured that

*he will own them, and stand by them, and will ratify what they say and do, so that it shall be taken as said and done by himself. He will own them,*

**First,** *In their sentence of suspension; Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven. If the censures of the church duly follow the institution of Christ, his judgments will follow the censures of the church, his spiritual judgments, which are the sorest of all other, such as the rejected Jews fell under (Romans 11:8), a spirit of slumber; for Christ will not suffer his own ordinances to be trampled upon, but will say amen to the righteous sentences which the church passes on obstinate offenders.*

### **Romans 11:8 (New International Version)**

**<sup>8</sup>as it is written: "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes so that they could not see and ears so that they could not hear, to this very day."**

*How light so ever proud scorners may make of the censures of the church, let them know that they are confirmed in the court of heaven; and it is in vain for them to appeal to that court, for judgment is there already given against them. They that are shut out from the congregation of the righteous now shall not stand in it in the great day, Psalms 1:5.*

### **Psalms 1:5 (New International Version)**

**<sup>5</sup> Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.**

*Christ will not own those as his, nor receive them to himself, whom the church has duly delivered to Satan; but, if through error or envy the censures of the church be unjust, Christ will graciously find those who are so cast out, John 9:34-35.*

### **John 9:34-35 (New International Version)**

**<sup>34</sup>To this they replied, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out.**

### **Spiritual Blindness**

**<sup>35</sup>Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"**

**Secondly,** *In their sentence of absolution; Whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*

**\*\*\*Note, 1. No church censures bind so fast, but that, upon the sinner's repentance and reformation, they may and must be loosed again. Sufficient is the punishment which has attained its end, and the offender must then be forgiven and comforted, 2 Corinthians 2:6. There is no passable gulf fixed but that between hell and heaven.**

### **2 Corinthians 2:6 (New International Version)**

***<sup>6</sup>The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient for him.***

***2. Those who, upon their repentance, are received by the church into communion again may take the comfort of their absolution in heaven, if their hearts be upright with God. As suspension is for the terror of the obstinate, so absolution is for the encouragement of the penitent. St. Paul speaks in the person of Christ, when he saith, To whom ye forgive any thing, I forgive also, 2 Corinthians 2:10.***

### **2 Corinthians 2:10 (New International Version)**

***<sup>10</sup>If you forgive anyone, I also forgive him. And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake,***

Now it is a great honor which Christ here puts upon the church, that he will condescend not only to take cognizance of their sentences, but to confirm them; and in the following verses we have two things laid down as ground of this.

### **Matthew 18:19 (New International Version)**

***<sup>19</sup>"Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.***

(1.) God's readiness to answer the church's prayers (v. 19); If two of you shall agree harmoniously, touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them.

Apply this, [1.] In general, to all the requests of the faithful praying seed of Jacob; they shall not seek God's face in vain. Many promises we have in scripture of a gracious answer to the prayers of faith, but this gives a particular encouragement to the joint-prayer; "the requests which two of you agree in, much more which many agree in." No law of heaven limits the number of petitioners.

***\*\*\*Note, Christ has been pleased to put an honor upon, and to allow a special efficacy in, the joint-prayers of the faithful, and the common supplications they make to God.***

If they join in the same prayer, if they meet by appointment to come together to the throne of grace on some special errand, or, though at a distance, agree in some particular matter of prayer, they shall speed well. Besides the general regard God has to the prayers of the saints, he is particularly pleased with their union and communion in those prayers. **See 2 Chronicles 5:13; Acts 4:31.**

### [2 Chronicles 5:13 \(New International Version\)](#)

**<sup>13</sup> The trumpeters and singers joined in unison, as with one voice, to give praise and thanks to the LORD. Accompanied by trumpets, cymbals and other instruments, they raised their voices in praise to the LORD and sang: "He is good; his love endures forever." Then the temple of the LORD was filled with a cloud,**

### [Acts 4:31 \(New International Version\)](#)

**<sup>31</sup>After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.**

*In particular, to those requests that are put up to God about binding and loosing; to which this promise seems more especially to refer.*

**Observe, First,** That the power of church discipline is not here lodged in the hand of a single person, but two, at least, are supposed to be concerned in it. When the incestuous Corinthian was to be cast out, the church was gathered together (1 Corinthians 5:4), and it was a punishment inflicted of many, 2 Corinthians 2:6. In an affair of such importance, two are better than one, and in the multitude of counselors there is safety.

### [1 Corinthians 5:4 \(New International Version\)](#)

**<sup>4</sup>When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present,**

### [2 Corinthians 2:6 \(New International Version\)](#)

**<sup>6</sup>The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient for him.**

**Secondly,** It is good to see those who have the management of church discipline, agreeing in it. Heats and animosities, among those whose work it is to remove offences, will be the greatest offence of all.

**Thirdly,** Prayer must evermore go along with church discipline. Pass no sentence, which you cannot in faith ask God to confirm. The binding and loosing spoken of (Matthew 16:19) was done by preaching, this by praying. Thus the whole power of gospel ministers is

resolved into the word and prayer, to which they must wholly give themselves. He doth not say, "If you shall agree to sentence and decree a thing, it shall be done" (**as if ministers were judges and lords**); but, "If you agree to ask it of God, from him you shall obtain it." Prayer must go along with all our endeavors for the conversion of sinners; see James. 5:16.

### James 5:16 (New International Version)

**<sup>16</sup>Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.**

**Fourthly**, The unanimous petitions of the church of God, for the ratification of their just censures, shall be heard in heaven, and **obtain an answer**; "It shall be done, it shall be bound and loosed in heaven; God will set his fiat to the appeals and applications you make to him." If Christ (who here speaks as one having authority) say, "It shall be done," we may be assured that it is done, though we see not the effect in the way that we look for it.

God doth especially own and accept us, **when we are praying for those that have offended him and us**. The Lord turned the captivity of Job, not when he prayed for himself, but when he prayed for his friends who had trespassed against him.

### Matthew 18:20 (New International Version)

**<sup>20</sup>For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."**

(2.) The presence of Christ in the assemblies of Christians, v. 20. Every believer has the presence of Christ with him; but the promise here refers to the meetings where two or three are gathered in his name, not only for discipline, but for religious worship, or any act of Christian communion. Assemblies of Christians for holy purposes are hereby appointed, directed, and encouraged.

[1.] They are hereby appointed; the church of Christ in the world exists most visibly in religious assemblies; **it is the will of Christ that these should be set up, and kept up, for the honor of God, the edification of men, and the preserving of a face of religion upon the world**. When God intends special answers to prayer, he calls for a solemn assembly, Joel 2:15-16. If there be no liberty and opportunity for large and numerous assemblies, **yet then it is the will of God that two or three should gather together**, to show their good-will to the great congregation.

### Joel 2:15-16 (New International Version)

**<sup>15</sup> Blow the trumpet in Zion, declare a holy fast, call a sacred assembly. <sup>16</sup> Gather the people, consecrate the assembly; bring together the elders, gather the**

**children, those nursing at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his room and the bride her chamber.**

**\*\*\*Note, When we cannot do what we would in religion, we must do as we can, and God will accept us.**

[2.] They are hereby directed to gather together in Christ's name. In the exercise of church discipline, they must come together in the name of Christ, 1 Corinthians 5:4. **That name gives to what they do an authority on earth, and an acceptableness in heaven.** In meeting or worship, we must have an eye to Christ; must come together by virtue of his warrant and appointment, in token of our relation to him, professing faith in him, and in communion with all that in every place call upon him.

### **1 Corinthians 5:4 (New International Version)**

**<sup>4</sup>When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present,**

**\*\*\*Note, When we come together, to worship God in a dependence upon the Spirit and grace of Christ as Mediator for assistance, and upon his merit and righteousness as Mediator for acceptance, having an actual regard to him as our Way to the Father, and our Advocate with the Father, then we are met together in his name.**

[3.] They are hereby encouraged with an assurance of the presence of Christ; **There am I in the midst of them.** By his common presence he is in all places, as God; but this is a promise of his special presence.

**\*\*\*Note, Where his saints are, his sanctuary is, and there he will dwell; it is his rest (Psalms 132:14), it is his walk (Revelation 2:1); he is in the midst of them, to quicken and strengthen them, to refresh and comfort them, as the sun in the midst of the universe.**

### **Psalms 132:14 (New International Version)**

**<sup>14</sup> "This is my resting place for ever and ever; here I will sit enthroned, for I have desired it-**

## Revelation 2:1 (New International Version)

### To the church in Ephesus

**<sup>1</sup>"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands:**

He is in the midst of them, that is, in their hearts; it is a spiritual presence, the presence of Christ's Spirit with their spirits, that is here intended. **There am I, not only I will be there, but I am there;** as if he came first, is ready before them, they shall find him there; he repeated this promise at parting (Matthew 28:20), **Lo, I am with you always.**

**\*\*\*Note, The presence of Christ in the assemblies of Christians is promised, and may in faith be prayed for and depended on; There am I.**

This is equivalent to the Shekinah, or special presence of God in the tabernacle and temple of old, Exodus 40:34; 2 Chronicles 5:14. Though but two or three are met together, Christ is among them; this is an encouragement to the meeting of a few, when it is either,

## Exodus 40:34 (New International Version)

### The Glory of the LORD

**<sup>34</sup> Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.**

## 2 Chronicles 5:14 (New International Version)

**<sup>14</sup> and the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the temple of God.**

**First**, of choice. Besides the secret worship performed by particular persons, and the public services of the whole congregation, there may be occasion sometimes for two or three to come together, either for mutual assistance in conference or joint assistance in prayer, not in contempt of public worship, but in concurrence with it; there Christ will be present.

**Or, Secondly**, By constraint; when there are not more than two or three to come together, or, if there be, they dare not, for fear of the Jews, yet Christ will be in the midst of them, for it is not the multitude, but the faith and sincere devotion, of the worshippers, that invites the presence of Christ; and though there be but two or three, the smallest number that can be, yet, it Christ make one among them, **who is the principal one, their meeting is as honorable and comfortable as if they were two or three thousand.**