



# Misapplied Scripture: Matthew 18:20

By Andrew Olson

*"For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst."* - **Matthew 18:20** – NASB

**W**hat a beautiful verse, though so often misunderstood. It is common for Christians to comfort each other with it, implying some mystical presence of the Lord whenever and wherever his people are gathered together in fellowship. However, in keeping with the purpose of this series on "Misapplied Scripture," let us examine this verse in its context.

Normally it is our contention that, at a minimum, one should read the entire chapter containing a verse to get a proper idea of the context of that verse. Doing so will reveal that the 18th chapter of Matthew's Gospel is about judgment and forgiveness. It begins with a warning against causing the faithful (who are commanded to humble themselves like a child) to stumble, with a pronouncement of judgment on those who cause others to stumble. Our Lord goes on to exhort us to avoid those things that would cause us to stumble, saying even "If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than to have two eyes and be cast into the fiery hell" (verse 9).

The portion of chapter 18 most relevant to our passage begins in verse 15, which deals with the means of discipline ordained for the Church:

*"15. If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. 16. But if he does not listen {to you,} take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED. 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 have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. 19. Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. 20. For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst."*

Matthew 18:15-20 NASB

As you can see, verse 20 does not exist in a vacuum. It is stating that when Godly men, exercising discipline in the Church in accordance with the precepts of scripture, do so with the blessing of the Lord. In addition, their judgment carries the full authority of the Lord Himself.

It is very likely that the reader has heard Matthew 18:20 recited numerous times. Don't take it for granted that because a verse has been recited often enough to become quite familiar that it is being used correctly. Rather, examine the scriptures to see what the Bible really says.