

Commonly Misused Bible Verses: Matthew 18:19–20

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Both Christians and unbelievers are guilty of misusing Bible verses by ripping them from their original context.

This is post #4 in the Commonly Misused Bible Verses series. So far I have commented on [2 Chronicles 7:14](#) and [Jeremiah 29:11](#). These two verses are often pulled out of their contexts by well-meaning Christians. [Matthew 7:1](#) is a very popular verse for unbelievers to misuse.

For today's post, I want to take a look at another verse that is frequently misused by well-meaning Christians. Bear in mind that I am not trying to pick on anyone or attack them for misusing these verses. Most of the time they are misused because we have heard someone else misuse them and we're used to hearing the verse in a particular (but wrong) context, so we repeat the same error. This series is designed to encourage people to take a close look at Scripture before repeating what we've heard.

Think about how many times you have heard someone quote or summarize this passage during a prayer or immediately before praying.

“Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.” ([Matthew 18:19–20, NKJV](#))

The idea that is commonly promoted is that if there are two or more people gathered together who agree on something, and they ask God for it in prayer, then Jesus will be present and God will answer their request.

If you've read any of the other posts in this series, then you know that we need to look at the context to see what is wrong with the way many people use this verse. However, before we do that, can you see some problems with the idea that God will grant the request of those who come together and are in agreement in prayer? First of all, Jesus said “where two or three are gathered” in His name, so how could this apply to settings of four or more? Also, why would it take two or three believers to be gathered together for Jesus to be in their midst? Isn't He already

present in each and every individual believer? So even if one Christian prays, isn't Jesus already there?

So there are already a couple of problems with the common use of this passage. Now let's take a look at the context. This section deals with a subject that most churches completely neglect: church discipline. Jesus said that if you have a brother who sins against you, then you need to go to him and try to work it out. If he refuses to acknowledge his fault, then you bring one or two more witnesses to help work things out. So including you, that would make *two or three witnesses*—recognize that phrase? Not only is it repeated in these verses, but it comes from the Old Testament ([Deuteronomy 19:15](#) and more). Legal cases needed to have two or three witnesses to establish a matter.

Back to Jesus' story. If the sinning brother did not make things right in the presence of two or three witnesses, then the case was to be brought before the church. If he refused to listen to the church's decision, then he was to be thrown out of the congregation. I know that sounds harsh in our day because precious few churches practice discipline as Jesus instructed, but that is what we are commanded to do.

It is with this in mind that Jesus said that the Father would grant the request of two or more who gather together in Christ's name and are in agreement. Agreement on what? On disciplining the erring brother. That's what this passage is about and yet so many Christians use it as though Jesus promised to answer their prayers when offered in certain situations.

Before I finish this post let me stress what the Bible actually does say about prayer. The Apostle John wrote, "Now this is the confidence we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him" ([1 John 5:14–15](#)). John also wrote, "And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight" ([1 John 3:22](#)).

So we can have confidence about God answering our prayers when we are obediently following Him and praying according to His will. If you haven't experienced answered prayer, then perhaps you aren't living in obedience and/or praying according to His will (or maybe He did answer it and you didn't recognize the response because He often answers in ways we don't expect).