

THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Ministry: A Study of Matthew 14–20

STUDY FOURTEEN

Caring Enough to Confront

Matthew 18:15–20

If there's one place where people are to be protected, it's the church. If there's one place that's to stand for purity, it's the church. If there's one place where people are to be respected, it's the church. We are to be a body that represents Christ to a world that's always watching and always expecting us to handle things the wrong way. We should surprise them by handling things the correct way, even if it's not the easy way.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WHAT do you do when a Christian *ticks you off*? Conventional “wisdom” often says to point fingers in blame while our immediate feelings might compel us to get even and hold a grudge. But Jesus’ teaching doesn’t send us adrift through the currents of conventional wisdom, and it leaves no room for feelings to push His purposes out of the captain’s seat.

Jesus offered a new solution to this pervasive problem. Initially, Jesus’ new way may feel counterintuitive and even risky—because it often is. Yet, the way of the kingdom proves to be as beneficial as it is difficult as it calls us to address and overcome the lingering effects of sin’s power in our relationships.

How?

Thankfully, Jesus addressed that very question. In this *Searching the Scripture* study, we’ll explore how Jesus taught us to step out of the waters of vengeance and step into His streams, flowing with peace and mercy.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

Caring Enough to Confront

Matthew 18:15–20



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Before you pray, reflect on this exhortation from Pastor Chuck Swindoll:

Think about someone who has wronged you but whom you've not yet forgiven. Right now, you're holding a grudge. When you think of this person, wrong things get into your mind, so the bridge of a relationship is broken down. Ask the Lord to open your heart to what might be a better way to handle it than you may have done.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Matthew 18 contains a single discourse of Jesus' teaching. Even though this study examines just one piece of His sermon, all the pieces of the chapter fit together to convey a unified idea. The question the disciples asked in Matthew 18:1 grounds this whole discourse like a cornerstone:

“Who is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?”

Now, the disciples weren't showing genuine curiosity about Jesus' rule . . . they were only trying to climb the kingdom's social ladder. Jesus, however, couldn't have answered in a more surprising way. Summarize His answer from *verses 3 and 4*.

The rest of this discourse builds upon this answer:

- Welcoming the humble Christ-follower, regardless of worldly greatness, equates to welcoming the great King Himself (Matthew 18:5)
- Woe to those who tempt the humble Christ-follower away from true kingdom greatness (18:6–7)



Caring Enough to Confront

Matthew 18:15–20

- The humble Christ-follower must avoid at all cost the temptation of false greatness because its judgment will be so dreadful (Matthew 18:8–9)
- Every humble Christ-follower, regardless of worldly greatness, is of the greatest value to the Father and worthy to be sought back if temptation draws him or her away (18:10–14)

In Matthew 18:15–20, Jesus then moves to the role that we as kingdom citizens play in seeking after the wandering sheep and bringing him or her back to our good Shepherd.



Observation: Caring Confrontation

Read *Matthew 18:15–20* a few times as though you've never read it before.¹ Briefly outline Jesus' approach to restoring back into the fold the wandering brother or sister in Christ.

Bringing another person's sin to the light in an open, public setting would have caused immense shame. Jesus wanted His disciples to respect the offender by first speaking with him or her in private—which usually isn't the initial impulse of the offended.²

When we come to Christ, we discover there's a whole new set of directions for us to follow. And the difficulty in following them is we must unlearn so many habits.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

In *verse 17*, how did Jesus tell His disciples to respond to those who don't listen to the church's admonishments?



Caring Enough to Confront

Matthew 18:15–20

How to deal with sin in three easy steps! Well, maybe not “easy.” Jesus communicated this approach in just a few verses. But following these steps often proves to be complex, exhausting, and costly. Jesus’ rationale, however, offers us strength and hope by revealing His own involvement in the process, which, as we’ll see, ultimately assuages our inner turmoil.



Interpretation: Reproof and Reconciliation

The Greek verb used in *Matthew 18:15* to describe the winning of the sinning believer back to the community was an economic term that typically referred to financial gain made through investment. How does this background illuminate the personal cost and payoff of confronting sin among our fellow believers?

The second step of the confrontation process finds its origin in the legal customs of ancient Israel. Read *Deuteronomy 19:15* and explain why Jesus required the presence of one or two others. Check *Constable’s Notes* at netbible.org for some additional insights.

The word *church* pops up in only two verses in this gospel: *Matthew 16:18 and 18:17*. Matthew didn’t think of the church as most do today: a mere building filled with pews and pianos, pastors and parishioners. Rather, for Matthew, the church consisted of a local assembly of believers who confessed Jesus to be “the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16).



Caring Enough to Confront

Matthew 18:15–20

What timeless truth do we learn from this picture of confrontation within a local assembly of believers?

What would it have meant for one of Jesus' disciples to treat an offender as a pagan or a tax collector (*Matthew 18:17*)? What would it look like for a Christian to do this today?

Explain Jesus' ideal outcome of this confrontation process and how this goal is instructive for His followers today?



Caring Enough to Confront

Matthew 18:15–20

What does [Matthew 18:18–20](#) teach about Jesus' own activity in the confrontation process? How does this truth offer strength and hope—and even relieve some of the self-imposed pressure—for following His steps to restore the wanderer? See pages 83–84 of Pastor Chuck's commentary *Insights on Matthew 16–28* for further helpful information.

The goal is to help the person back on the right path. This is called the ministry of restoration. The goal is never discipline. That's the means to the end. The goal is restoration: assisting an individual to deal with the sin that is taking its toll in his or her life and to reach full recovery. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Helping Someone Back onto the Right Path

Jesus was not the only one who talked about this topic of handling sin in the community of faith. The apostle Paul had plenty to say as well. Read [Galatians 6:1–5](#) and summarize how Paul's teaching complements Jesus' teaching in Matthew 18:15–20.



Caring Enough to Confront

Matthew 18:15–20



Application: Maintaining Essential Balance

Pastor Chuck provides us with three guidelines based on this passage:

First, *we are to model Jesus' teaching*. If someone has sinned against you, go directly to him or her. Don't gossip about it or let resentment simmer until it boils into a full grudge. If someone comes to you about an offense, receive the correction with humility and grace.

Second, *guard against extremes*. Swing the pendulum too far one way, and a community will show only legalistic demands and severe discipline. Swing it the other way, and holiness is diminished as grace becomes mere license to sin.

Third, *remember the ultimate objectives*. Jesus did not offer this lesson with the intention of kicking people *out*. Quite the opposite! The goal is to keep them *in*. Seek unity not alienation in your relationships with all your Christian brothers and sisters.

Putting these truths into practice is challenging. Accepting a rebuke and confronting our own sin requires an enormous amount of humility. And sometimes it's easier to cling to bitterness than to offer openhanded forgiveness. How do you sense God leading you to apply this passage of Scripture? Write your reflections below.

What a novel approach to handling interpersonal disputes! How different from the way of the world! Jesus' way uses caring confrontation to bring healing to broken relationships. You may be thinking that Jesus left out one key part of reconciliation, but He instantly turned to meet it head on in the next passage, ending His whole discourse on the vital subject of *forgiveness*.



Caring Enough to Confront

Matthew 18:15–20



A FINAL PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank You for the gift of reconciliation. I know that, through the sacrifice of Jesus, my relationship with You has been restored. Thank You for giving me a way to mend my cracking relationships with my fellow believers. Give me the faith, the strength, and the humility to listen to Jesus and to obey His commands. It's in His mighty name I pray. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
2. This idea comes from the dynamic meaning of the Greek verb translated "point out" (*elencho*). This term often was used in a literal sense to describe bringing something out of the darkness and into the light, but it had a figurative nuance of exposing something hidden or unknown. In this instance, it refers to one's disapproval of another's actions and a subsequent correction of the behavior.

