

HOW TO FIGHT LIKE A CHRISTIAN

Matthew 18:15-20

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MATTHEW - TIME

1. In Matthew, there is a clear struggle with Judaism. In John (written around 95 AD), we see a break between Jews and Christians. The struggle is not as severe in Matthew. Therefore, it was likely written somewhere between 80-85 AD.

MATTHEW - PLACE/AUTHOR

1. Matthew was composed in Greek. It reads too smoothly in Greek to be a translation. Plus, the Old Testament citations are from the Septuagint.
2. At the same time, there is evidence that Matthew has re-worked the tradition along Jewish lines. The emphasis on the law – which happens only in Matthew – is evidence of this re-working.
3. There is a tension between the mission to the Gentiles and the Jesus tradition reshaped in terms of a Jewish mentality. This suggests Matthew's community had a liberal group who wanted to spread the gospel to all the world and a conservative group who believed Gentiles must come through Judaism. Matthew is trying to bridge the gap.
4. 'Every scribe trained in the kingdom of heaven brings out of his treasury store things new and old' – Matthew 13:52. Matthew sees himself as a scribe trained in the kingdom of heaven. The phrase 'new and old' suggests that the Jesus event colors the whole Hebrew tradition.
5. It is likely that the author of Matthew was a Hellenistic Jew trained in the scribal tradition. He was not as conservative as Jews on Palestinian soil BUT he does not wish to lose the Jewish tradition.
6. There are numerous theories regarding the author of the gospel of Matthew. However, the exact identity of the author is unknown.

MATTEW - PURPOSE

- 1 The gospel intends to show the **authority** of Jesus (consider the five great teaching blocks).
- 2 The gospel shows the creation of a new **community** over/against the worldly community.
- 3 The gospel presents the promise of **Emmanuel** (I am with you always).

THREE STEP PROCESS FOR RECONCILIATION: Matthew 18:15-18

1. The text presents a three-step process for dealing with sin.
2. The goal is RECONCILIATION by helping the sinner to recognize and repent of his/her sin.

STEP ONE (one on one): Matthew 18:15

1. The phrase 'against you' is likely a scribal addition.
 - Therefore, the original text was less specific which means the text is intended as a three step process for the entire community.
2. The first step in the process is based on Lev 19:17 (*You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbor, or you will incur guilt yourself*).
3. '*...go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone.*'
 - The initial step is to be done in private
 - Public confrontation requires both parties to 'save face' which means reconciliation is even more challenging.

STEP TWO (with 1-2 witnesses): Matthew 18:16

1. The second step is based on Deuteronomy 19:15 (*A single witness shall not suffice to convict a person of any crime or wrongdoing in connection with any offence that may be committed. Only on the evidence of two or three witnesses shall a charge be sustained*).
 - This text presupposes a criminal offense – not a problem within the community.
2. The witnesses seemingly did not witness the sin in question.
3. The witnesses serve as protection to both parties.

STEP THREE (the church): Matthew 18:17

1. Christians in this day avoided taking such issues to secular courts.
 - Either person had the right to take the issue to the church and the church might side with either party.
2. The only other reference to 'church' in the Gospels is in Matthew 16:18.
3. 'like a Gentile and a tax collector' probably is written with the assumption that the readers will be Jewish Christians (see Matt 5:46-47; 6:7)
 - These were the prime examples of outcast people in those times.
 - Elsewhere in the Gospel of Matthew, these people have demonstrated great faith (8:1-11, 9:9-13, 11:19, 15:21-28).

AUTHORITY OF CHURCH: Matthew 18:18-19

1. These verses repeat what Jesus first said to Peter in Matthew 16:19.
 - Here, the power to bind and loose is extended to the disciples.
 - Taken in context with Matthew 18:15-17, the power concerns the imposing (and lifting) of decrees of excommunication or the forgiving (and not forgiving) of sins
2. Although modern Christians have a more individualistic idea of sin, early Christians understood sin in more of a corporate way.
 - Thus, a serious sin was considered a cancer threatening the entire body of Christ.
3. The verses affirm that the church's decisions regarding discipline of an erring member are made with the authority of God and in the presence of Jesus.
 - This is why the ruling of the church is to be accepted.

JESUS' PROMISED PRESENCE: Matthew 18:20

1. This verse is NOT a general promise regarding prayer or worship.
2. Rather, it is a pronouncement that Jesus would be present when church decisions are made – lending his authority.

Sources:

Interpretation: Matthew. Douglas A. Hare, John Knox Press, 1993.