

“Where Two or Three Have Gathered in My Name”

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The words which form the title to this article were spoken by Jesus (Matt. 18:20). I have heard brethren quote these words nearly my whole life. They are often used to justify brethren forming an impromptu assembly on the first day of the week, when no local congregation is within close driving distance, and sometimes even when a congregation is nearby.

Today, these words of our Savior are used by some brethren to justify meeting in their homes instead of identifying with a local congregation in the area. Why won't they identify with an established local assembly of the saints? It could be they don't like their position on some issue of importance to them. Maybe they are upset with a particular eldership. It could be any number of reasons. The bigger question to consider is: do these words of Jesus authorize such actions?

From a practical point of view, if Jesus meant that two or three believers could meet together on the first day of the week, independent of a local congregation, what need would there really be for our local congregations? If families could just stay home and worship, the New Testament pattern of local congregations would end. What need would there be for elders, deacons, or evangelists? To what would the family really be financially contributing on the first day of week? How could other Christians encourage and support them, if they isolate themselves from a larger body of believers?

Further, if these words of Jesus mean what some brethren think they mean, why not have worship on the children's soccer field prior to their Sunday game, or on the beach on a nice warm Sunday morning, or on the mountain before skiing on the weekend? If these words of Jesus were carried out to such extremes, what then would we do with these inspired words of instruction?

And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, **not forsaking our own assembling together**, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

Hebrews 10:24-25 (Emphasis Mine)

It seems there is something wrong with the popular application of Jesus' words we have been discussing. Let's go back and take a close look at the context of the words. This should help us understand their intended meaning.

Contextually, Jesus is dealing with matters of church discipline. This discussion begins in verse fifteen of Matthew eighteen.

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

This whole section is dealing with the same theme. Verse twenty is not a separate or general statement. It too is related to this very serious matter of church discipline.

The words "gathered in My name" would speak of gathering with His authority in such matters. Contextually, the authority here is to do as He had just instructed in matters of discipline. This is also seen in verse nineteen, where He tells them they have the support of heaven when they follow these inspired instructions.

The context of these words of Jesus we have been discussing is far different than how they are applied today by some brethren. Yes, there may be a principle gleaned from these words. However, if the principle is applied in such a way that it creates a conflict with other Scriptures, or weakens the local assembly (such as meeting in your home independent of sound local congregations in the area), the principle is being misapplied.

Chances are good that you will not agree with everything that happens in a local congregation. You will not be in full agreement with every sermon or newsletter article. You will not like every decision by a local eldership. However, let us strive to work together, and not apart, as brothers and sisters in Christ.