



September 13, 2026 | *The Perfect Church Doesn't Exist...* | Pastor Eddie Eddy

Matthew 18:15-20 New International Version ¹⁵ "If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. ¹⁶ But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' ¹⁷ If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector. ¹⁸ 'Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹ 'Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them."

"The Perfect Church Doesn't Exist..."

Groucho Marx once said, "I refuse to join any club that would have me as a member." If you get past the fact that he might have been making a joke, this statement has some pretty profound meaning to it. His joke bears a lot of insight. What must he believe about himself that would lead to such a degrading comment?

If we were willing to really look at ourselves **as the church**...as the **body of Christ**...not just members of religious organization that meets our needs..., how would we feel about the way we genuinely treat each other? How would we rate on a scale of one to ten in how we see each person we come in contact with. Do we really see them as a child of God. Do we see them as someone worthy of Christ redeeming love? Do we actively seek to serve others the way Christ modeled to us...so they fully understand the magnitude of the loving sacrifice that Jesus endured for us?

When I look at the state of the world today...I am saddened by the fact that the church continues to decline in numbers. We are supposed to be a place that offers open arms to all people. We are supposed to have open doors that allow people to enter just as they are. We have built a reputation on having an open mind so others feel safe to be vulnerable in asking for healing and we are supposed to lead them to grow in their faith.

You see, while this is a collective call for each one of us who claim to live for Christ and who say they have died to self...It begins as an individual commitment and promise to understand that each one of us is a broken piece of a beautiful mosaic. It's the melding together of the broken pieces that forms the picture we want...that God wants the world to witness and join.

So, if that is the design that God had planned for us when he gave us this free will to choose our paths...Why are so many people not wanting to be part of this club? Could it be that we are trying to paint the image that we are the perfect church and people are afraid that even though the sign says all are welcome...once they see the true hearts of the members...they don't want to be part of it? Maybe we portray the image of a perfect church...but people see right through the painting.

PAUSE

Today's scripture reading tells us something of what Jesus himself thought about the church, and it tells us one of the secrets for having a perfect church. And to be honest...Like Peter being called Satan... this scripture might be hard to hear too. In fact, it is one of the more difficult ones to hear...and also to preach on. I would venture to say that most preachers might be glad, if possible, to avoid it all together.

PAUSE

Let me remind you of the verses we've just heard. Jesus describes a church where one member has sinned against another. Jesus doesn't know what the sin was. It could have been gossip or slander, by which someone's goal was to tarnish the reputation of another. Or perhaps cheating in a business deal. Or maybe...maybe it was nothing more than a misunderstanding between two people who have a difference of opinion.

Whatever the issue, the church member is to ask another member or two to go with him as he talks with the person that he thinks has done him wrong. If the member rejects the discussion, the offended person is instructed to tell the story to the whole church. If the offender still refuses to repent, the church is to treat that person as an outsider, as if he or she had been cast out of the membership.

Wow...if we did that...the church would be empty. And how does that promote open hearts, minds, and doors.

But Jesus doesn't stop there...Then He adds a further strong word. Whatever such action believers take on earth will be taken in heaven. Because when two or three are gathered in Jesus' name — that is, when they are together in the spirit and mind of Jesus — then Jesus is there, so that what they do...how they act... in a situation like this...their actions have eternal consequences.

Friends...this is challenging teaching isn't it? Our churches are all plagued with hurtful intentions wrapped up in a pretty bow. And the forces working to keep the church from succeeding...don't have to work too hard because we fall into the trap of doing the work for it.

If we take the time to listen to the voices of the lost instead of listening to our own self-centered spirits...we can almost hear someone saying that they would have nothing to do with a church like that. The people who go there and do all that good stuff...behind the scenes...they are far from perfect.

PAUSE

All of that's what makes Jesus' statement so interesting. Just before he gave these instructions, he had said that if a shepherd has a hundred sheep, and one of them "has gone astray," the shepherd leaves the 99 on the mountains while he goes out to find that one lost sheep. If he finds it, he rejoices more over the one that had been lost and was found than he does over the 99 that never went astray.¹ That's what Jesus said just before giving this rule for dealing with trouble in the church — that is, that we should do everything possible to help people who have done wrong, who have "gone astray."

And notice this: As soon as Jesus finished giving instructions about what to do in instances of misunderstanding in the church, the apostle Peter raised a question. "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?"²

Peter knew something about human beings. He knew that some folks just keep making trouble, and he wondered how long one person had to put up with another's hurtful behavior. Maybe he had somebody in mind (maybe even another disciple), and he had grown a little jaded by this person's actions. especially in the way those actions had caused him discomfort. I understand Peter's question; if I had been there, I probably would have applauded Peter for raising the question.

PAUSE

But hear Jesus' response: "Not seven times, but ... seventy-seven times."³ Or as some translations put it, "seventy times seven." Whatever the number, Jesus is simply saying, "There's no limit to forgiveness. Stop counting and continue forgiving."

And like Jesus does...he goes a step further. He told the remarkable story of a man who had been forgiven a huge debt. In today's dollars...in the millions of dollars of debt. This same man then threw a debtor in jail over a few hundred bucks. The man who had been forgiven, Jesus said, was then imprisoned for the rest of his life. And Jesus said that this is what will happen to us if we **won't** forgive our brothers and sisters when they have hurt us.

Once again...are we acting like the perfect church? Are we treating each other in ways that are drawing people to the church or are we missing the boat?

PAUSE

So what is the message in our text today? What is the question we are called to ask ourselves. Not the members of the church...what are **we** supposed to dig deep into our souls and ask of ourselves...so we know if we are being the perfect church that Christ is looking for? What kind of church did Jesus want us to be, and how can we build a perfect church? My question is...does the perfect church even exist?

What strikes me most forcefully from our scripture reading and from the context of Jesus' words leading up to the lesson and following it is this: that the church is a very serious, very valuable and very needed place. I'm sure most of us here belong to one or more worthy organizations, from scouting to service clubs, and from professional associations and academic bodies to political or neighborhood organizations.

Many of those institutions are quite worthy of our respect. But the church is...or *ought* to be...unique in comparison to those bodies. It should not only **be** different than those types of organizations...it should be perceived as different...both from the outside and more importantly from the inside.

Those other organizations to which we belong are concerned with our bodies, our minds, our economic or political welfare and our social fulfillment. The thing that should be different about the church is this...we should be seen as the only entity that is concerned with our souls. All of the other organizations are concerned with *this* world... and the truth is...the church shares that responsibility also. The thing

that sets us apart from being just another business that's controlled by profit and loss reports...is that we...the church...exist to care for our welfare **beyond this** world.

PAUSE

So no matter how much the people of the church may sometimes disappoint us...the church...the body of Christ...made up of all of us broken, shellfish, power hungry, fearful, jealous, greedy, insecure, arrogant, lost people...is the only organization empowered by and entrusted to us by Jesus himself...to care about the eternal souls of our brothers and sisters. When we realize that it was Jesus who trusted us in our brokenness to build his church...to me...that says we must be on the path toward being the perfect church...and that the perfect church much exist.

PAUSE

Friends...it comes down to how we see each other. You see...the perception we form of someone in our mind...effects the way we treat each other. We can see others as stumbling block...we can see others as a threat to our position in business, or our family...or in our perfect church...or...we can see them as brothers and sisters in Christ and as members of the family of God. We can see someone as a person who has denigrated us and has hurt our reputation, or as a soul for whom Christ died. And in all honesty...they may be both.

But we must remember some things that are very sure. We should try to work things out as fellow believers concerned for our neighbors souls. And we should be mature enough to know that either of us might be wrong... and as Christians we should be capable of that kind of humility. As the body of Christ...we should have a great capacity for forgiving others, because we know that God has the desire to forgiven them.

If your idea of a perfect church is one where no one ever does wrong, you'll never find that church on this earth. And that's all right, because that isn't how God measures perfection. God measures by love, by our concern for others and by our readiness to give and receive forgiveness.

You and I can help to make that kind of church. And if we do, it will help any seeker to realize that it's our willingness to love each others imperfections...that makes the perfect church exist.

To God be the glory, Amen

Invitation to the Offering

Friends, the perfect church isn't a church filled with perfect people. It is a church filled with imperfect people who are learning to love, forgive, serve, and see one another through the eyes of Christ.

And our giving is part of that calling. What we place in the offering today becomes ministry beyond these walls. It helps us reach the lost, care for the hurting, welcome the stranger, teach the next generation, and share the good news of Jesus Christ.

So as we give today, let us give with grateful hearts—not simply to support a church, but to help **be the church** Christ has called us to be.

Closing Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for loving us despite all our imperfections. Thank you for forgiving us when we fall short. Thank You for seeking us when we wander. Thank You for never turning your back on us.

As we leave this place, help us remember that we are your church wherever we go. Teach us to see others not as problems, threats, or stumbling blocks, but as people created in your image...and souls for whom Christ died. Give us the humility to admit when we are wrong, the courage to seek reconciliation, and the grace to forgive as we have been forgiven.

And Lord, we dedicate to you the gifts we have offered today. Take what we have given...our money, our time, our abilities, and our very lives...and use them to build your kingdom.

May the world recognize your church...not because we are perfect people...but because imperfect people have learned to love one another through Jesus Christ.

In his name we pray. Amen.