

A Critical Study of Matthew 18:15-18 in New Testament Greek and Selected Akan Mother-Tongue Translations: Implication for Peace-Making in Ghana

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[Doi: 10.19044/esipreprint.12.2023.p378](https://doi.org/10.19044/esipreprint.12.2023.p378)

Approved: 10 December 2023

Posted: 12 December 2023

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Cite As:

Asamoah E.F. & Kpalam E.T. (2023). *A Critical Study of Matthew 18:15-18 in New Testament Greek and Selected Akan Mother-Tongue Translations: Implication for Peace-Making in Ghana*. ESI Preprints. <https://doi.org/10.19044/esipreprint.12.2023.p378>

Abstract

Current research suggests that the globe is growing more fractured, less peaceful, and riskier for future generations. The world has seen family, marriage, community, and national conflicts in recent years. Ghana has ethnic conflict in many areas despite its low sub-regional conflict score. In a country where over 70% of the population is Christian, contextualising the sacred text to provide a biblical peace approach is crucial. The study examined Matthew 18:15–18 exegetically to inform Ghanaian peace-making initiatives. The study proposes that Ghanaian Christians' peace-making efforts could benefit from Jesus Christ's teachings in Matthew 18:15-18 interpreted in the Akan mothers' vernacular.

Keywords: Conflict, peace-making, mother-tongue, exegesis, New Testament

Introduction

Nelson and Quick (1977) define conflict as any situation in which incompatible goals, attitudes, emotions, or behaviours lead to disagreement or opposition between two or more parties as a fact of life and are, therefore,

inevitable. It happens in any human gathering or association, leading to strained relations or antagonistic interactions.

According to the Global Network of Religions for Children (2018), the world today is gradually becoming highly fragmented, less peaceful, and unsafe for both present and future generations because of conflict. It is immersed in an environment of tension, vehemence, falling values, injustices, and reduced tolerance, threatening the present and posterity, who deserve a peaceful and better quality of life.

Conflict can also emerge when individuals possess divergent values, opinions, needs, and interests and are unable to reach a mutually acceptable resolution. This happens anywhere: in families, marriages, communities, and nations. Conflict even happens among people of the same faith, such as Muslims and Christians. One will expect that conflict should be uncommon among Christians; Jesus Christ, the founder of Christianity, teaches his followers to live in peace. He was very emphatic in his teachings that not living at peace with others is inconsistent with the Christian faith (*cf.* Mark 9:50). It is an undeniable fact that conflict hinders peace between families, communities, nations, and religions, as well as among believers.

The core issue driving these conflicts is misunderstanding between the parties involved in these acts. These misunderstandings, according to Mustajoki (2014), often lead to complications or troubles and conflicts such as furious argument, litigation, assault, anxiety, broken relationships, destruction of assets, loss of production, war, and deaths and injuries in our everyday lives, which makes it difficult for people to co-exist in a peaceful atmosphere.

In Africa, countries like Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Rwanda, Central African Republic, and Sierra Leone have all experienced conflicts with damning consequences. While some experienced human rights abuses and humanitarian crises culminating in the death toll of citizens, others were hit by health and medical crises leading to epidemics such as measles, yellow fever, and cholera, and others suffered from serious effects on household food security leading to food hunger. Economic and financial systems also slowed down to a point in some nations where certain sectors, such as cocoa and coffee exports became paralysed, leading to massive layoffs (Obeng, n/d). He adds that in Sierra Leone, for instance, an amputee camp was created to house about 20,000 amputees.

Unlike the African nations mentioned above, where conflicts have been witnessed on a national scale, Ghana has experienced some violent conflicts on a small scale or within a geographical space at places such as Dagbon, Bawku, and between Nanumba and Konkomba, as well as between the people of Nkonya and Alavanyo. Notwithstanding, "Ghana's current image of peace and stability is worthy of attention" (Tsikata and Seini,

2004). The Global Peace Index (2022) places Ghana in the fortieth position in the world and first in Africa. This means that Ghana is going through a period of relative stability compared with her neighbouring countries. Thus, the country has the fewest conflicts and misunderstandings among other African countries. It does not mean there is no conflict, but it is comparatively low.

The aforementioned conflicts have resulted in various impacts on the populace. Tsikata and Seini (2004) provide an account of the toll that conflicts have taken on human life and property in Ghana. The pursuit of peaceful economic activities is rendered unfeasible during periods of conflict. Looting and arson have been prevalent themes in the majority of the country's conflicts. The emigration of personnel, including educators and healthcare professionals from conflict-affected regions has a negative impact on the provision of education, healthcare, and additional social services. In certain instances of conflict, there has been destruction of physical infrastructure, including educational and healthcare facilities, resulting in the loss of valuable teaching materials and the burning or looting of health resources. In addition to the human and property toll, the expenses associated with upholding law and order have consistently been excessive and inadequately accounted for, resulting in a strain on the country's financial resources. Violent conflicts have a significant impact on national security, casting doubt on the purported cohesiveness and unity of the Ghanaian society.

Since conflicts cannot be eliminated or prevented from happening in any human gathering or association, such as in Ghana (and the world at large), an appropriate approach or method should be employed to handle such conflicts in homes, families, marriages, and among people and religious groups, such as Christians, for peaceful coexistence in the nation. This could be achieved when offending parties engage in peace-making as a fundamental component of community development, personal growth, and the survival of our planet. The Global Network of Religions for Children (2018) asserts that “[p]eace underlies our quality of life and the fabric of our communities, and as our weaponry becomes ever more powerful, our very survival as people on this planet depends on it.” At the heart of every faith community and culture lies a need to advance peaceful co-existence to enhance productive, meaningful lives and sustainable societies. No wonder Christians are commanded to live at peace with everyone (Mk 9:50; Rom 12:18; 14:19; Heb. 12:14), for it repairs broken relationships between people affected by a destructive misunderstanding and reforms institutions.

How then should Ghanaians handle conflict to enable them live at peace with their neighbours and loved ones in order to live as one family and repair broken relationships? This paper seeks to put forward a biblical

approach towards making peace among individuals to enable Africa in general and Ghanaians in particular to enjoy stability and peaceful coexistence.

Methodology

Exegetical, mother-tongue hermeneutics, and communicative models are the approaches this work will employ. According to Fee (1993), the exegetical method strives to discover the Biblical author's original intended meaning in the text. It talks about undergoing a careful exercise to historically investigate the Bible with the objective of coming out with an exact and useful interpretation. Mother-tongue hermeneutics finds out how the text has been translated into some indigenous Ghanaian languages and what it means to the readers. It tries to interpret the Scriptures by employing the home language—the generally accepted language the benefactors of the translated work have known and are familiar with from their infancy—to make it meaningful and culturally relevant. Asamoah (2020a) posits that the communicative model of translation aims to ensure cultural relevance, authenticity, and appreciation for the target audience or beneficiaries of the translated text. This approach enables individuals to access the word of God in their local language or mother-tongue with the same impact as the original text.

Extensive data will be obtained from lexicons, commentaries, Bible dictionaries, books, journal articles, and any other relevant materials that were useful in the research.

Peace-making efforts in Ghana

As stated earlier, Ghana has a relatively low conflict index. The country is often considered peaceful and stable and has not witnessed a nationwide conflict. However, this does not mean there are no pockets of conflict that require peace-making efforts. According to Inssiful (2017), Ghana has witnessed pockets of conflict in areas such as chieftaincy, farmer-herdsmen, and politics. Paalo (2020) argues that the farmer-herdsmen conflict in the Agogo of the Ashanti Region is the most complex one. It is observed that many of the conflicts in Ghana are ethnic in nature and, as a result, have traditional factors underpinning them. The Akans are the largest ethnic group in Ghana and are widely spread across the country. As a result, they could influence peace-making efforts in the nation and beyond.

In Ghana, several approaches have been employed to handle different forms of conflict at different levels of society. In some instances, the Government will constitute a committee or commission of inquiry to investigate the causes and effects of the conflict and initiate peace-building efforts. Inssiful & Bukari (2022) observed that in the Dagbon conflict, for

example, the government established the Mate Kole Committee of 1968 and the Ollenu Committee of 1972 to handle the issue. Another approach is the use of police and the military to bring calm and peace in some instances. This approach is usually used to stop open confrontation among parties and to help make agreements towards the initiation of peaceful dialogues (Inssiful & Bukari 2013). For example, in the farmers-herdsmen conflict in Agogo, in the Ashanti Region of Ghana, this was one of the approaches used in the peace-making efforts. In addition, other conflicts are also settled through the courts. In this case, the parties resort to seeking adjudication through the law court. For example, in the Dagbon case, the Supreme Court adjudicated on the matter (Inssiful & Bukari, 2022). However, it is observed that peace-making efforts through the court system have not been effective and, in some cases, have resulted in several tensions between the parties after the court decision. Another approach is conflict resolution led by civil society groups or organisations. Non-Governmental Organisations and Faith Communities such as churches and mosques, have been involved in some peace building efforts. It is observed that peace building efforts by civil society organisations are more effective than Government-led approaches, since, in most cases, civil society maintains neutral positions on the matter (Inssiful 2017).

Bukari (2013) records that a number of conflict situations in Ghana have protracted because of a lack of indigenous approaches to peace-making. This implies that there is a need to identify peace-making approaches that are contextual and relevant to Ghanaian culture. Some instances of conflicts have witnessed unsuccessful results due to the dynamics of the peace-making approaches and efforts. Bukari therefore advocates for indigenous peace-making and suggests that this approach should incorporate all spheres of society, such as economic, social, political, cultural, and religio-spiritual dimensions (2013). It implies that indigenous approaches should be grounded in the beliefs and worldview of the people. In order for this approach to be effective, it should be led by the chiefs, elders, and religious leaders. These leaders already command respect in the Ghanaian society. In fact, it was observed that religious leaders have become frontline personnel and are often called upon in times of crisis (Osafo 2015). The significance of religious leaders in upholding social stability and promoting peace-making endeavours in Ghana cannot be overstated. The incident involving Oyerepa FM and Manhyia¹, wherein a politician allegedly made derogatory remarks against traditional authority in Asanteman through the radio station's platform, resulted in the management of the radio station seeking the

¹ The aforementioned location serves as the official seat and residence of the Asantehene, who holds the position of Monarch within the Ashanti Kingdom. It is situated in Kumasi, the administrative centre of the Ashanti Region.

intervention of traditional rulers and officials from the Methodist Church of Ghana. As a result of their intercession, the radio station was granted clemency.

With reference to the fact that more than 70 percent of Ghanaians profess to be Christians, conflict resolution and peace-making efforts and approaches should be grounded in the Christian faith. In this approach, the role of scripture cannot be overemphasised. This is because the Bible is the chief authority in decision-making on matters of the Christian faith. This implies that peace-making efforts that find their approaches and expressions in the Christian faith and are informed by scripture are more likely to contribute significantly to peace building in Ghana.

The religious texts contain numerous messages promoting peace, yet one particular message stands out prominently. This statement is attributed to the central figure of the Christian faith, namely Jesus Christ. The instructor imparts knowledge on the pursuit of personal peace as a means to achieve collective well-being. The reference in question is located within the biblical book of Matthew 18, specifically in verses 15 through 18. What then is the approach used by Jesus in promoting reconciliation among disputing parties?

Exegesis of Matthew 18:15-18

Background to the Text

According to tradition, Matthew the Levi, who was a tax collector or publican and was called by Jesus to be a disciple, authored the initial Gospel (Mark 3:18; Matthew 9:9; 10:3; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13). In agreement with Tenney (2003), the authorship of Matthew is affirmed by early church writers. According to Vanlaningham (2014), the prevailing scholarly consensus is that the composition of this gospel took place in Antioch during the 80s A.D., subsequent to the Roman destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 AD. Additional internal evidence corroborates a date preceding 70 A.D. The estimated time frame for the occurrence in question is believed to be within the years 50 to 90 A.D. (NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible, 2016).

It can be inferred that the writer was a learned Jewish Christian of the early period, possessing a considerable degree of erudition. The author produced a literary work that features a Jewish theme. The text appears to have been intended for Jewish followers who held differing views on the interpretation of the Law. The author Vanlaningham (2014) posits that Jesus of Nazareth held the titles of Messiah, Son of David, King of the Jews, Immanuel, and King of the world.

As per Ladd's (1994) analysis, the book delineates the introduction of Jesus as the Messiah (1:1-4:16), presents a vivid account of his public ministry in Galilee (4:17-16:20), unveils the actual objective of his

messianic mission in the form of rejection and death through the confidential instructions imparted to his disciples (16:21–18:35), portrays the Messiah’s encounter with the official leadership of Israel (19:1–25:46), and culminates with his agony, demise, and resurrection (26:1–28:20). The author of this discourse has structured the book into five distinct “discourses” that comprise Jesus’ teachings on discipleship (chapters 5–7), mission (chapter 10), parables (chapter 13), relationships (chapter 18), and the future (chapters 24–25) (Ladd, 1994). This categorization is a meticulous compilation of Jesus’ utterances. According to Asamoah (2022), the inclusion of the five discourses in the book was intended to create the impression that Matthew fashioned his work after the Pentateuch or novel Torah. As per his account, Matthew has classified the discourses into five distinct lessons pertaining to the Kingdom of Heaven. These include the Sermon on the Mount (The Ethics of the Kingdom), comprising chapters 5–7; The Commissioning of the Twelve (The Mission of the Kingdom), featured in chapter 10; The Parables (The Nature of the Kingdom), discussed in chapter 13; Community Instructions (The Governance of the Kingdom), expounded upon in chapter 18; and The Olivet Discourse (The Future of the Kingdom), spanning chapters 23–25. Each of these lessons culminates with a speech delivered after the ascension of Jesus into heaven. Tenney (2003) categorises the discourses of Jesus in the book into six distinct sections. These include John’s proclamation (3:1–12), the Sermon on the Mount (5:1–7:29), the Commission (10:1–42), the meaning of forgiveness (18:1–35), denunciation and prediction (23:1–25:46), and the Great Commission (26:1–28:20), each of which is presented in various parts of the book.

The text under study in Greek

Ἐὰν δὲ ἁμαρτήσῃ ἑἰς σε ὁ ἀδελφός σου, ὕπαγε ἔλεγξον αὐτὸν μεταξὺ σοῦ καὶ αὐτοῦ μόνου. εἴαν σου ἀκούσῃ, ἐκέρδησας τὸν ἀδελφόν σου· εἴαν δὲ μὴ ἀκούσῃ, παράλαβε μετὰ σοῦ ἔτι ἓνα ἢ δύο, ἵνα ἐπὶ στόματος δύο μαρτύρων ἢ τριῶν σταθῇ πᾶν ῥῆμα· εἴαν δὲ παρακούσῃ αὐτῶν, εἰπὸν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ· εἴαν δὲ καὶ τῆς ἐκκλησίας παρακούσῃ, ἔστω σοι ὡσπερ ὁ ἐθνικὸς καὶ ὁ τελώνης. ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, ὅσα ἔάν δήσητε ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἔσται δεδεμένα ἔν οὐρανῷ καὶ ὅσα εἴαν λύσητε ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἔσται λελυμένα ἔν οὐρανῷ.

Transliteration

Ean de hamartēsē eis se o adelphos sou, hypage elegxōn auton metaxu sou kai autou monou. ean sou akousē ekerdēsas ton adelphon sou. ean de mē akousē, paralabe meta sou eti hena ē duo, hina epi stomatos duo marturon ē trion stathē pan rhēma. ean de parakousē autōn, eipon tē ekklēsia. ean de kai tēs ekklēσίας parakousē, estō soi hōsper ho ethnikos kai

ho telōnēs. Amēn legō hymin, hosa ean dēsētē epi tēs gēs estai dedemena en ouranō kai hosa ean lusēte epi tēs gēs estai lelumena en ouranō.

Delimitation of the text

In the remotest context, the text under study is about Jesus' rebuke of His disciples for their pride and desire for worldly grandeur when they asked who was the foremost in God's kingdom (18:1). The disciples were frequently preoccupied with the issue of greatness. They appear to ask this question as if Jesus has previously selected someone among them as the greatest, whom he will appoint for the most prominent leadership position within the administration he will soon establish, or as if they want Jesus to choose amongst them the prominent one to occupy the top position in the soon-to-be-established government. Jesus rebukes His disciples for their arrogance and desire for earthly grandeur, which prompts Him to teach them the qualities and attitudes of citizens of the kingdom: humility—having the heart of a child and caring for God's children (18:1–14), honesty—dealing with sin or correcting another believer (18:15–20), and forgiveness—“letting go” of one's offences unlimited times (18:21–35). In the immediate context, the text falls under how a believer should handle another when one sins against the other. The text describes how the Lord Jesus Christ instructed Christians to get along with such individuals.

Structure of the text

The text is made up of five verses (18:15–18), with each being dependent on itself, though each derives full meaning from the other. The text can be put into four main parts—18:15; 18:16; 18:17; and 18:18—but under seven sub-headings.

Jesus' Method of Peace-Making

Part One

Ean de hamartēsē eis se o adelphos sou, (Matt 18:15a)

The sentence begins with the conjunction *Ean* (Ἐάν), which is a conditional particle making reference to time and experience, introducing something future but not determining; before the event, whether it is certainly to take place. This is followed by *de* (δέ), which gives the certainty and exact period for the occurrence of an action. What, then, is this action? *hamartēsē eis se o adelphos sou* (ἁμαρτήσῃ εἰς σὲ ὁ ἀδελφός σου). Thus, when a brother sins against you now or at that moment. According to Thayer (1999), the noun *adelphos*, the subject of the sentence, means a brother from the same parents or only one parent as in Matt 1:2; 4:18; one connected by tie of the Christian religion as in 1 Cor. 7:15; having the same national ancestor, belonging to the same people, countryman as in Acts

13:26; or a fellow believer, united to another by the bond of affection as in Matt 23:8. This could also mean any fellow man. All these hold in this context in the sense that some of the disciples shared common parentage, were all of one faith or religion, and were all Galileans or Jews. In effect, Jesus was telling them that they could hurt themselves individually or someone outside their camp could hurt them. The subject offends the object. By parsing, the object $\sigma\epsilon\grave{\iota}$ is a second-person singular, meaning that Jesus, in addressing the group, spoke to one person, possibly Peter as he was their leader. In other words, he was telling each one of them that a brother can sin against them individually. Jesus' usage of *adelphos* was possibly the result of the male dominance of his disciples. This does not exclude women.

hypage elegxōn auton metaxu sou kai autou monou. (Matt 18:15b)

What should the disciple who receives the effect of the action of a brother do? He must $\acute{\upsilon}\pi\alpha\gamma\epsilon$ (*hypage*) the brother. The verb is in the imperative mood, which commands the disciple to make a move to meet the brother, and $\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\epsilon\gamma\chi\omicron\nu$ (*elegxn*), thus confute or admonish. He must not wait for the brother to come to him, but must go to him and convict, refute, or confute what he did to him (Thayer 1999). On why the disciple should not wait for the brother, Wiersbe (2007) gives the reason that the brother may not even realise what he has done. Or, even if he did it deliberately, the disciple's attitude of humility, submission, and love will help the brother repent and apologise. This releases the disciple from the feelings of sadness, insomnia, trouble with memory, and clinginess that come as a result of depression and worry. The disciple must keep the engagement with the brother between themselves. Thus, the issue must be kept private. The disciple is not to tell others what the brother did but must go to him directly. Informing others makes them (third parties) lack consideration for the brother, which tarnishes his image. It even becomes worrying when the brother does it unknowingly.

ean sou akousē ekerdēsas ton adelphon sou (Matt 18:15c)

The essence of the disciple having a private conversation with the brother is for him to (*akousē*) hear or listen to the case of the disciple in order to (*ekerdēsas*) win him as a brother, not to win arguments. On why going with the intention of winning the brother is better than not winning the argument, Wiersbe (2007) believes that there is the possibility for the disciple to lose the brother when he tows that line, for it can create a stressful atmosphere, hostility, and anger. To win the brother, the disciple must go straight to what the brother did in humility and not introduce other issues that are not related to the matter at stake. On the other hand, the brother must give ear to the disciple's submission by way of comprehending and understanding complaints and not assume a deaf role. He should take time to

hear what the disciple is talking about. He should avoid anything that may distract him from listening; he must be perceived by the disciple to be listening.

Part Two

ean de mē akousē. paralabe meta sou eti hena ē duo, hina epi stomatos duo marturon ē trion stathē pan rhēma. (Matt 18:16)

The next verse begins with a conjunction, connecting the previous sentence to bring out its meaning. In the event that the brother is not saved from the sin he commits against the disciple by way of the private engagement, Jesus provides the alternative. Jesus tells the disciples to *ean de mē akousē. paralabe meta sou eti hena ē duo, hina epi stomatos duo marturon ē trion stathē pan rhēma*. Thus, the disciple should take with him one or two more witnesses, so that upon the testimony of one or two witnesses, every word may be strengthened. Jesus tells the disciple that he should invite one or two more persons to affirm what they will see, hear, or experience what will transpire, when the brother persists in not accepting his faults (Thayer 1999). These persons may be adults or elders and not children. They become witnesses in both a legal and historical sense. In a legal sense, they have first-hand knowledge of the incidence and can give testimony at the public court, gathering of believers, or wherever so that their testimony can be admitted to the condemnation of an accused brother (*cf.* Deut. 19:15). And in a historical sense, they have become spectators to the incident and are in the best position to recall it. The witness or witnesses take records of the conversation between the disciple and the brother (the offender).

Part Three

ean de parakousē autōn, eipon tē ekklēsia. (Matt 18:17a)

The next verse starts with the conjunction *ean* which connects the previous text. When the brother *parakousē*, disobeys or fails to hear or accept his fault in the presence of one or two more witnesses, the disciple must take the matter to the church—the assembly of Christians gathered for worship, as in 1 Corinthians 14:19, 35. They are people hoping for eternal salvation through Jesus Christ who observe their own religious rites, hold their own religious meetings, and manage their own affairs according to regulations prescribed for the body's sake (Thayer 1999). They are also united into one body, as in Acts 5:11; 11:22. The disciple, together with the witness or witnesses, must bring the behaviour of the brother to the attention of the group united into one body, of which he (the brother) is part, for redress. At this point, the matter that started between two people privately is now out in the open for the whole church, manned by religious leaders, to see with the intention of winning the brother.

ean de kai tēs ekklēsias parakousē, estō soi hōsper ho ethnikos kai ho telōnēs. (Matt 18:17b)

If the brother *parakousē*, fails to listen to the body of believers to whom the matter has become open, *estō soi hōsper ho ethnikos kai ho telōnēs*; meaning, the disciple should see the brother as a pagan or tax collector. Thus, the brother should be considered someone who is alien to the worship of the true God or considered a sinner by the disciple. The disciple, not the witnesses or the church, should see the brother as such. The possessive pronoun *soi* is in the dative second person singular, meaning Jesus was referring to the individual disciples but not the collective. Thus, the individual disciple who is not listened to by the brother should recognise the brother as an unbeliever, not the whole church. The essence here is that the disciple cannot treat the brother as a spiritual person, for he has forfeited that position as a believer. The disciple should treat him as one outside the church (the pagan or Gentile, as in Gal 2:14), not hated but not held in close fellowship. In this case, the disciple will now follow the brother towards winning him for Christ as an unbeliever, for Christ came to seek, find, and save the lost. At this point, the disciple would marshal the appropriate ways of winning unbelievers over to the brother in order to save him.

Part four

Amēn legō hymin, hosa ean dēsētē epi tēs gēs estai dedemena en ouranō kai hosa ean lusēte epi tēs gēs estai lelumena en ouranō. (Matt 18:18)

In addition to the disciple recognising the brother as an unbeliever, the church should also discipline him. Jesus begins his statement with *Amēn* “truly” to support the decision of the church that *hosa ean dēsētē epi tēs gēs estai dedemena en ouranō* anything the called-out people, disciples, or church shall bind on earth no matter the number of times shall have been bound in heaven, and *hosa ean lusēte epi tēs gēs estai lelumena en ouranō* anything they loose on earth no matter the number of times will be loosed in heaven. Thus, whatever determinations they make in conformity with the directions for their conduct towards the offending brother will be accounted just and ratified by the Lord. In explaining further, Barnes (2005) opines that whatever you [the church] shall do in the discipline of the church shall be approved by God, or bound in heaven. Wiersbe (2007) explains that when a church disciplines a member, it is actually examining itself and disciplining itself; the church cannot discipline others if they themselves are not disciplined.

Summary of Text

In the event that a brother who is also a member of the faith or church community, transgresses against a fellow disciple, it is imperative that the

latter does not adopt a passive stance and await the former's initiative to make amends. Rather, the disciple who has been wronged must promptly approach the offending brother and confront him, presenting evidence to refute or challenge the wrongdoing. It is advisable to maintain confidentiality between the parties involved, with the objective of persuading the brother to reconcile rather than to prevail in a dispute. Upon conducting a confidential dialogue with the individual, the adherent ought to extend an invitation to one or two individuals to act as observers during the disciple's subsequent attempt to reconcile. In the event of a failed attempt, the disciple ought not to terminate their efforts but rather proceed to bring the matter to the church, which refers to the congregation of believers who have assembled for the purpose of worship. The church is headed by religious leaders. In the event that the brother exhibits disobedience or noncompliance towards the church, it is recommended that the disciple regard him as an individual who lacks faith, as he has relinquished his status as a believer. It is imperative for the church to administer disciplinary action against the offending brother. Any decision made in accordance with the guidelines for their behaviour towards the transgressor will be deemed righteous and validated by divine authority. The disciple ought not to dismiss the non-believer but rather accompany them in their journey towards accepting Jesus Christ.

The Akan people of Ghana

The nation Ghana, located in West Africa and falling within the sub-Saharan region, is distinguished by the presence of numerous autochthonous languages, among which is the Akan language. The Akan language is used by the Akan ethnic group, also known as Akans. The Ghana Statistical Service (2012) asserts that the Akans constitute a significant proportion of the Ghanaian populace, accounting for approximately 47.5% of the total population. The Akans are primarily situated in the southern region of Ghana. The favourable geographic positioning of the community enables the Akans to engage in farming, fishing, and hunting as viable livelihood options. Ghana is characterised by a multitude of linguistic divisions, with Akan being the predominant language spoken in nine out of the sixteen regions of the country. These regions include Ashanti, Eastern, Bono, Ahafo, Bono East, Oti, Western, and Central Regions (Ekem 2009; Agyekum 2006). The Akan language comprises a variety of dialects, namely Asante-Twi, Akuapem-Twi, Agona, Akyem, Mfantse, Kwahu, Wasa, Assin, Denkyira, Buem, and Bron. The aforementioned dialects exhibit mutual comprehensibility as they share a significant amount of vocabulary. In addition to their native languages, the Anyi (Aowin), Sefwi, Nzema, Ahanta, Efutu/Awutu, and Anum-Kyerepong-Larteh communities are also proficient in the Akan language (Ekem 2009).

Akan societies' religio-cultural beliefs, values, and etiquettes

Akan societies exhibit a shared set of religio-cultural beliefs, values, and etiquettes, which are manifested through their linguistic expressions, cultural practises, and overall perspective on the world. These, according to Asamoah (2020b), are realised in the Akan language, culture, and worldview. They are the religious beliefs, values, and etiquette that the Akan people have upheld since their earliest beginnings and for the vast majority of their history. Among these are respect for religious leaders and elders, and avoiding gossip and disgrace.

Respect for Elders and Religious Leaders

According to van der Geest's (1998) definition, an elder (*ɔpanyin*) is selected for the position of ancestor (nana). The individual proceeds to elaborate on his gentlemanly demeanour, characterised by traits such as civility, kindness, patience, and composure, which could be described as exhibiting a sense of coolness. The entirety of his virtues and qualities can be succinctly encapsulated by the term "honour." Adding on, Danquah (1944) characterises an "elder" as an individual who has conducted himself honourably in various aspects of life. These include engaging in marriage and being given marriage with honour, participating in open or private market transactions with honour, being a member of the *Asafo*, or company of fighting men, dining and drinking with honourable men, engaging in agricultural activities with honour, and experiencing both scarcity and abundance with honour. Others are raising children with honour, worshipping at shrines [or churches] with honour, enduring bereavement with honour, and most importantly, collaborating with others or acting independently to resolve family and other disputes, thereby promoting peace and prosperity within the family, with honour. These characteristics of an elder (*ɔpanyin*) put them on a pedestal and hold them in high regard by the community due to the wisdom they possess. Kariuki (2015) orates that the resolution of disputes is often entrusted to elders who possess extensive experience and wisdom and enjoy a high degree of societal reverence. These elders become religious leaders when they join the church; they are selected by the body of Christ to lead the church of God.

Gossip and disgrace

Gossip, as defined by Ben-Nun (2021), is the private information about others shared in conversation or in print with others. Thus, it reveals some personal information about a person to others. Aside from the advantages gossip is likely to have, Ben-Nun, quoting Peter Vadja, remarks that gossip serves as a form of attack on another person to disempower them from being active and functioning. Hence, it is banned in a number of

quarters and institutions because of the damning consequences it sometimes brings. The Akans see themselves as one and find it difficult to attack themselves. This is seen in one of their proverbs, which says: *Etire ne tire nka a, yenkase abontenefo nbefa nkodi* (Notwithstanding any dissimilarities that may exist, individuals tend to refrain from disclosing their personal attributes for the purpose of others deriving advantages from them). This clearly shows that Akans do not entertain anything that would deprive them of their advantages; gossip is one such thing. They do not entertain people who gossip about others because “*Aninguase mfata Okanni ba*” (Disgrace does not befit an Akan).

Also, the preservation of honour is deemed a crucial virtue within Akan culture, warranting utmost attention and effort. It is advisable to stay clear of any actions or behaviours that may result in *aninguase* (a state of shame or disgrace) as opposed to *animuonyam* (a state of glory or honour). No wonder they have the proverb, namely *Feree ne aninguasee dee fanyinam owuo*, which posits that experiencing death is preferable to enduring shame and dishonour.

**Matthew 18:15-18 in selected Akan mother-tongue bible translations
Asante Twi Twere Kronkron (The Asante-Twi Full Bible, BSG/UBS, 2012)/Asante Twi Twere Kronkron (The Asante-Twi Full Bible, BSG/UBS, 2020)/ Asante Twi Twere Kronkron (The Asante-Twi Full Bible, BSG/UBS, 2021)**

Na se wo nua fom wo a, ko n koyi no aten, wo ne no nko ara ntam. Se otie wo a, woanya wo nua. Na se wantie a, fa onipa baako anaa baanu ka wo ho, na asem no nyinaa nnyina adansefoɔ mmienu anaa mmiensa anomu. Na se wantie won nso a, koka kyere asafɔ no. Na se wantie asafɔ no nso a, ennee bu no se obosonsonni ne togyeni. Nokore mese mo se, biribiara a mobekyekyere no asase soɔ no, wobekyekyere no soro; na biribiara a mobesane noo asase soɔ no, wcbesane no soro. (If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him. If he listens to you, you have gained a brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, so that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell the church. And if he refuses to listen, even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven).

The Holy Bible Twere Kronkron: New Testament English-Twi Version (2012)

Se wo nua bi ye mfomsoɔ a, firi adi ko na wo ne no nko ara nsiesie mo mmienu ntam. Se otie wo a, woanya no aka w oho se wo nua bio. Na se

wantie wo a, fa onipa baako anaase afoforɔ mmienu ka wo ho; adansefoɔ mmienu anaa mmiensa adansedie tumi ma kwaadubɔ biara nya nnyinasoɔ. Nanso sɛ ɔpo sɛ ɔbetie oyinom a, fa to asɔre no anim; na sɛ ɔpo sɛ cbjtie asɔre no nso a ennee fa no sɛ ɔye anhununyameni anaase togyeni bi. Mepae mu ka kyere mo pen sɛ, biribiara a mobekykyere no wɔ asaase no wɔbɛbu no sɛ wɔakkykyere no wɔ soro; biribiara a mobesane mu wɔ asaase so no wɔbɛhu no sɛ wɔasane mu wɔ soro. (If your brother does something wrong, go and have it out with him alone, between your two selves. If he listens to you, you have won back your brother. If he does not listen, take one or two others along with you. Whatever the misdemeanour, the evidence of two or three witnesses is required to sustain the charge. But if he refuses to listen to these, report it to the community, and if he refuses to listen to the community, treat him like a gentile or a tax collector. In truth, I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven).

Nwoma Krɔnkrɔn (The Fante Full Bible, BSG/UBS, 2019)

Na sɛ wo nua fom wo a, kɔ na keyi no atsen wɔ won ye no nko ntamu: sɛ otsie wo a, enya wo nua. Na sɛ oenntsie wo a, fa kor anaa ebien ka woho, ma asem biara ngyina adasefo beenu anaa baasa anomu. Na ɔpow de obetsie hɛn a, kɛka kyere asɔr, na sɛ ɔpow de obetsie asɔr so a, bu no de amanamamfo mu baako nye towgyenyi. Nokwar mese hom de, Biribiara a hom bekkykyer wɔ asaase do no, wɔbekkykyer no wɔ sor; na biribiara a hom besan wɔ asaase do no, wɔbesan no wɔ sor. (If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him. If he listens to you, you have gained a brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, so that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell the church. And if he refuses to listen, even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven).

Ahyerɛ Krongron (The Esahie Full Bible, BSG/BFBS, 2019)

Sɛ eliema ye wɔ tɛɛ a, kɔha ye mvomsoɛ kyire ye wɔ mmere bɔ ene ye bɛ munyɔ pɛ yee bɛwɔ bere ɔ. Sɛ otie wo a, anya eliema. Nakoso sɛ wandie a, fa sona ko anaa nyɔ boka wɔ nwo so, kyebɔ ɔkɔye bc mmenia nyɔ anaa nza kɔye edwire ne nwo adanzefoɛ ɔ. Na sɛ wandie asɔre ne koso a, ye de bu ye kye bosoensolenie ne etoɔdidelenie. Nahore nu, meka mekyire emɔ kye, nikyee biala bɔ emɔkɔsangye nu wɔ aseɛ ye aso nen, bekɔkyekye ye nyamejso; yee nikyee biala bɔ emɔkɔsangye nu wɔ aseɛ ye aso nen, bekɔsangye nu nyameeso. (If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him. If he listens to you, you have gained a

brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, so that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell the church. And if he refuses to listen, even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven).

Analysis and Interpretations of the texts in the selected Akan mother-tongue Bibles

All the works employed the home language—the generally accepted language the benefactors of the translated work have known and are familiar with from their infancy—to make the translations meaningful and culturally relevant. Again, there is cultural relevance, authenticity, and appreciation of the translated text for the target audience or beneficiaries. This enables the Akans (or Ghanaians) to access the word of God in their local language or mother-tongue with the same impact as the original text.

However, the Holy Bible, *Twere Kronkron: New Testament English-Twi Version* (2012) translates *asore* as “community” other than church. This is not out of place; the usage of the word “community” refers to the body of believers living in a particular place—thus, the church community.

All translations also advise the need to confront the culprit and give proof to dispute the wrongdoing. They must do this alone and not to gossip around which is frowned upon in Akan culture, for “*Aninguase mfata Okanni ba*” (Disgrace does not befit an Akan). The preservation of honour is deemed a crucial virtue within Akan culture, warranting utmost attention and effort.

After a confidential conversation, the adherent should invite one or two people to see the disciple’s reconciliation endeavour. If an attempt fails, the disciple should bring the situation to the church, the congregation of Christians who have gathered for worship. Perhaps, the Akan culture’s reverence and deference towards elderly individuals and religious authorities will have a significant role in this context. The disciple should treat the brother as a non-believer if he disobeys the church. The church must discipline the brother; the rules for treating the transgressor will be righteous and approved by God. The follower should help the offender who is seen as an unbeliever to accept Jesus Christ.

Impliavation of Matthew 18:15-18 for peace-making in Ghana

The text provides guidance on conflict resolution strategies for Ghanaians who are predominantly identified as Christians, with a focus on promoting peace-making efforts in the event of interpersonal disputes.

According to the teachings of Jesus Christ, in the event that an Akan or a Ghanaian commits a transgression against a fellow brother or sister, either by birth or otherwise, the offended party should not anticipate the offender rectifying their wrongdoing. Instead, the offended party should promptly approach the offender and confront them with evidence of their actions in order to challenge or disprove their behaviour. The essence of this is to maintain the unity within themselves to live in harmony. It is advisable to maintain confidentiality between the parties involved in this issue, with the primary objective of enabling the transgressor to acknowledge, comprehend, and rectify their misconduct, rather than engaging in a dispute with the aim of emerging victorious. Maintaining confidentiality is paramount because the offender might not know what he has done wrong. Not going to him but spreading the news or explaining to others tends to become gossip, which is not given the needed attention among the Akans, in particular, and Ghanaians, in general. This is because Ben-Nun (2021), quoting Peter Vadja, remarks that gossip serves as a form of attack on the offender to disempower him from being active and functioning. In situations where a private conversation between two parties becomes difficult due to the offender's refusal to acknowledge their wrongdoing, it is advisable for the offended party to seek the presence of one or more witnesses from the same environment during subsequent attempts to reconcile. This person could be an elder; the resolution of disputes is often entrusted to elders who possess extensive experience and wisdom and enjoy a high degree of societal reverence.

In order for reconciliation to occur, it is imperative that the aggrieved party continues their efforts towards resolution in the event that the transgressor remains unwilling to acknowledge their culpability. It is advisable for the individual to bring the issue to the attention of the church leadership in order to achieve a peaceful resolution. This could be the church the offender attends or otherwise, as long as it belongs to the body of Christ. The church because the largest percentage of Ghanaians are Christians who belong to different denominations.

In the event that the transgressor refuses to acknowledge their transgressions, it is appropriate for the aggrieved party to publicly identify them as unbelievers. This is to enable the offended person to know how to relate to him, not as a mature Christian but as an unbeliever. Knowing this will allow him to follow the offender as an unbeliever who must be won for Christ. The offended person would now devote much time to the offender by leading him to Christ. This is to enable the offended individual, who happens to be a mature Christian, not to relent in winning his brother but to make the necessary efforts to win the lost.

Subsequently, the church imposes discipline upon the transgressor, which is deemed righteous and validated by divine authority. It is suggested that in situations where an Akan or a Ghanaian individual feels offended, it may be beneficial to refrain from severing ties with the offending party. Instead, it is recommended that the individual continues to engage with the offender in a manner that is consistent with the principles of evangelism, with the ultimate goal of leading the offender towards a Christian faith. Given the perpetual nature of evangelism, the aggrieved individual is compelled to persistently pursue the offender who is seen as a non-believer, regardless of obstacles, in order to lead them to Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

The paper undertook an exegetical and mother-tongue analysis of Matthew 18:15–18 to obtain insights for peace-making efforts among the Akan-speaking Christians of Ghana. It was observed that both the exegetical and mother-tongue hermeneutics revealed certain key principles and actions propounded by Jesus Christ as critical to peace-making efforts among adherents of the Christian faith. Firstly, it teaches that the person who is offended should rather go to the offender and point out his fault. This should be done privately between the two parties only, without the involvement of a third party. This provides no space for gossip in the process. Secondly, if the first step fails to work, the offender should take one or two witnesses along and go to the offender to make peace. Thirdly, the offender should take the matter to the church leaders in order for the leaders to facilitate the peace-making efforts. Fourthly, the offender should be considered someone who has not yet converted to the Christian faith. This implies that there is a need to confront the person all over again with the need for repentance and offer God's forgiving love again. Finally, the church should take the offender through the appropriate disciplinary measures.

The study concludes that Matthew 18:15–18 provides a stronger foundation for peace-making efforts among the Akan-speaking Christians and Christians in Ghana as a whole. This approach, when pursued, has the potential to foster stability and peaceful coexistence in Ghana and across Africa, thereby reducing pockets of conflict.

Conflicts of interest: No conflict of interest

Data Availability: All of the data are included in the content of the paper.

Funding Statement: The author did not obtain any funding for this research

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