

Rediscovering Jesus in the Jewish Gospels

Binding and Loosing on Earth and in Heaven

Matthew 18,19 Lesson 34

“Binding on earth - Binding in Heaven, Loosing on earth, Loosing in Heaven” (18:18-20)

This same phrase is used twice by Jesus in a short span of time. A.T. Robertson, in his Word Pictures of the New Testament, Matthew and Mark, notes that the only time this rare Greek construction is used is in these two verses.ⁱ It was used before the Transfiguration at Caesarea Phillipi and repeated after the Transfiguration near Capernaum.

Matthew 16:19 “whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

Matthew 18:18 “Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

The first usage is in response to Peter’s confession of salvation. In Matthew 16 we have the building process of the New Testament Church which was still future to that pronouncement by Jesus. The second usage in Matthew 18 is in regards to what would later become the principles for the process of “church discipline” after the birth of the Church in Acts 2. In the former, we have the blueprint structure given by the architect and the process of evangelization that provides the materials for building the edifice. In the latter, we see a maintenance principle of the New Testament Church via its purification and sanctification. The keys in chapter 16 are to be used by all disciples to open the doors for “whosoever will” may enter Heaven. Entrance is only through the same confession of faith that Peter gave. In chapter 18 no keys are mentioned. This is significant. No church body or church leader can use the threat of locking noncompliant members out of Heaven. There is no human authority or mechanism to remove a believer from their heavenly membership in the Church. Rather the principles of chapter 18:15-18 deal with in-house reconciliation and restoration to fellowship and the process for disfellowshipping an unrepentant brother. In both cases, Heaven’s authorization cooperates in the dynamic of human initiation by the key holder evangelists and the professor of faith and in the binding as well as in the loosing of a brother who is unrepentant from acceptance within the cooperate fellowship.

Many have emphasized that to better understand God’s inspired message we must be loosed from the “thees” and “thous” in the King James and stress that we shouldn’t be bound to the formalization of archaic English references regarding spiritual things. But they are missing the point of the early translators' intent, which was not at all about expressing reverence by use of formalized pronouns but rather by use of singular and plural pronouns, to clarify responsibility and accountability of both the individual and the cooperate assembly or *eklasia*. Here’s an excerpt that will enlighten us in the exposition of these verses in that seminal translation.

[Clarke Morledge](#) in his article/blog “Why the “Thee’s” and “Thou’s” Are More Important Than You Think” points out a subtle difference that has been discarded as archaic language by modern Bible version proponents. “The use of the “*thee’s*” and “*thou’s*” in the King James Version, might lead us to think that such language shows a special reverence for God, but this would be wrong. The “*thee’s*” and “*thou’s*” served for distinguishing between singular and plural pronoun usage. In the Greek of the New Testament, the distinction between singular and plural pronouns is very clear. Unfortunately, in modern English, it can be quite confusing. When it comes to second-person pronouns, today the word “*you*” makes no distinction between singular and plural.

A lot of regional dialects try to make up for this deficiency with some rather awkward, at times, solutions. For example, I grew up in the South saying “*you all*” or “*y’all*,” if I wanted to specify a plural sense of a second-person pronoun. A lot of my friends from up North, on the other hand, say “*you guys*,” instead. (Youse guys) Tyndale pretty much threw out the formal/informal distinction for pronouns and focused on the singular/plural pronoun instead, and the King James Version translators kept their efforts going, when the King James Bible was completed in 1611. Example: “*And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have **you**, that he may sift **you** as wheat: But I have prayed for **thee**, that **thy** faith fail not: and when **thou** art converted, strengthen thy brethren.*”

Notice how the “*you*” takes on the early modern English sense of being a plural pronoun, whereby all of the disciples are being addressed, in the first part of the passage. But in the latter part of the passage, you clearly see how the “*thee’s*,” “*thy’s*,” and “*thou’s*” reveal that the pronouns are singular, showing that Simon Peter, as an individual, is being addressed, exclusively.

It turns out that the KJV is very consistent, adding a sense of clarity that is missing by default in modern English. When we dropped the “*thee’s*” and “*thou’s*” from contemporary English, it really did impoverish us a bit. Therefore, if you are ever tempted to look down upon someone who uses the King James Version, because the language is archaic sounding,ⁱⁱ just be mindful that when it comes to the singular/plural second-person pronoun distinction, the old KJV generally has the modern translations beat.”ⁱⁱⁱ

In Matthew 16 Jesus emphasizes the potential of each disciple to wield the key of the Gospel ie: Peter’s confession, to open the door to salvation to anyone, “*whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven.*” Every individual “*thou*” is expected to use the key. In Matthew 18 when Jesus says “*whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven,*” He is stressing that “*ye*” or you all in the corporate church body under the Holy Spirit’s guidance of its leaders have the key removed from the local church those unrepentant offending, trespassing brothers. No one individual “*thou*” has the authority to remove another “*thee*.” However, the plural “*Ye*” following this exact procedure is authorized by heaven to remove a qualified “*thee*” from the fellowship.

This is not saying that disfellowshipping an unrepentant brother on earth makes them an unredeemed heathen and therefore doomed to miss heaven. The phrase “*let him be unto thee as*” does not say that he or she has become a heathen. The emphasis is on fellowship, not relationship. If an unrepentant violator could lose his relationship with God because of a trespass, then he would cease to be a brother and would become a heathen and indeed would thereby be self-expelled. Therefore the instructions to discipline him would be a moot point. Discipline can only be applied to one in a relationship as a brother by faith who is out of fellowship by actions.

“*Loosed in Heaven*” by putting one out of the church does not mean putting them out of Heaven. That belief is a man-made dogma with roots in Catholicism based on the false interpretation that not only do Peter and his successors have the only key to let people into heaven but falsely interpret that they have the keys to shut people out of heaven. Neither Peter nor the church has the power to bestow eternal life or to rescind it. Peter and all of Jesus’ disciples have the key of the Gospel of Grace to provide access and open the door to whosoever will. If we don’t open it to the lost then to them the door remains locked. But in regards to “*church discipline*,”

Pastor Dr. W. A. Criswell summarizes this verse when addressing the local church’s responsibility in discipline. “*The Greek original reads, Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall have been loosed in Heaven.*” The tenses of the verbs indicate that the action in Heaven precedes that on earth and there is correspondence between the action on earth and the action in heaven... When thus given to the will of God, the church acts with the full sanction of heaven in dealing thus with an unrepentant brother...If Christ is really in the midst of

His disciples, then they must be thinking His thoughts and uttering His prayers and there will be no question about the fulfillment of their petitions...Under such conditions Christ will be there to reveal His will to them and guide them.”^{iv}

“There will I be in the midst of them,” is saying I am with you in this matter but the process must be followed. Pastors often avoid this uncomfortable process because they don’t understand nor have taught the congregation regarding this ahead of time. Only reacting after the fact with no instruction to the congregation of Christ’s guidelines and presence puts the entire congregation at risk of being divided by the devices of Satan. Satan makes inroads of sin into the Church and ties their hands in fear until sin becomes accepted, overlooked, and deeply rooted thereby defiling the Church and destroying their testimony among the lost. Christ no longer can remain in a disobedient and defiled church and as He warned the seven churches of Revelation, He can walk away and take His candlestick with Him. He doesn’t have to remain on the outside knocking to be let into His church. He can and does move on, relegating a once spiritual assembly to a mere social assembly. He can also walk away when we cease using the keys to provide access to salvation. He can only build His church with the building materials of newly redeemed souls.

“two of you shall agree” (18:19) Greek συμφωνέω *sumphōneō* = transliterated in English as symphony or harmony.

The emphasis is that the gathered are in unity “one accord” Acts 2:26; Philippians 2:2, “be likeminded... of one accord.” The sin of the offending brother has brought disharmony. The process of confrontation and reconciliation, when neglected by church leaders, causes disharmony. The refusal of the offender to repent and reconcile continues to disrupt harmony. The removal of the unrepentant is the beginning of the restoration of harmony. Unforgiveness toward the offending brother by the gathered disciples can cement the disharmony. Coming together in the name of Christ to conduct the requirements of His Church, however uncomfortable it may be, is the only way to have His presence constant in our midst. We either choose to allow sin in our midst or make it the number one priority of His presence in our midst. “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” 1 John 1:7

“Two or three gathered” in His name asking, is in the context of this church discipline scenario.

“There will I be in the midst of them” indicates that His presence through His Spirit, and His mind through His word will guide the church in the matter and He will deal with the unrepentant offender. If the church wants the blessing of Christ on a matter of discipline, they had better seek His mind in the decision. When Jesus has very clearly laid out the required process in dealing with an offending and or trespassing brother and we refuse to carry it out, we are hindering His correction in that person’s life because we are a part of His sanctification process in their life. We as local believers are members of His body ie: the Church universal and are organically connected to one another. (Romans 12:5; Ephesians 4:25)

“That there should be no schism in the body; but *that* the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.” (1 Corinthians 12:25-27)

“Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.” (1 Corinthians 2:12-16)

- **The final result of reconciliation is presented to Christ by the unified prayer of the church**
- **We are to pray that God grant the errant brother repentance and restoration and if necessary discipline him.**

“In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.” (1 Corinthians 5:4,5) “for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.” (Hebrews 12:6)

Frequent trespasses and perpetual forgiveness (18:21-22)

- Peter knew his limitation to forgive others. How many times?
- Jesus stressed the unlimited resource of God’s forgiveness.
- When our resources run out, we can rely on His resources.
- Peter would be his own test case by denying Christ three times.

The Parable of the forgiven but unforgiving steward. (18:23- 35)

- A servant is forgiven a great debt
- The servant refuses to forgive a small debt owed to him
- Fellow servants report it to the King
- The King reverses his forgiveness of debt and imprisons the servant

Jesus said “likewise shall my Heavenly Father do also to you” (18:35)

God can dispense forgiveness based on the forgiveness we show. God can deliver us to torment just like we wish torment on those who sin against us. “If ye from your hearts forgive not everyone his brother.”

How could the disciple “tell it to the Church” if no church existed yet? (18:17)

The Greek word is ἐκκλησία, *ekklēsia*, a *calling out*, that is, a *meeting*, assembly.

Was He speaking prophetically as to how to manage this issue when the church comes into existence?

Some argue that the church was already in existence, made up of the 12? (including Judas?)

“gathered to gather” Greek =συνάγω *sunagō* = synagogue, *convene*

Did Jesus mean the Church or an assembly of believers before Acts 2?

The Synagogues would soon be expelling believers in Jesus. “because they feared the Jews: for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue.” (John 9:22)

ⁱ A.T. Robertson in his word Picture of the New Testament, Matthew and Mark, Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, MI 2004, P156

ⁱⁱ <https://sharedveracity.net/2018/12/06/why-keep-the-king-james-version-or-why-the-thees-and-thous-are-more-important-than-you-think/>

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^{iv} Expository Notes on the Gospel of Matthew, W.A. Criswell, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1961, P 108