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Binding and Loosing

Matthew 16:18-19

¹⁸ And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

¹⁹ **And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and 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

¹⁸ Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

A few months ago I was asked what the Bible means when it talks about binding and loosing. Certain types of churches have created a doctrine of their own and have used these verses to explain it.

This evening I want to look into this doctrine and see first what the Bible is not teaching and then see what the Bible is teaching.

I. What the Bible is Not Teaching

Some people claim that Jesus was telling us that we have power to “bind” the devil and his demons. Others claim that he was talking about “binding” sickness and poverty and “loosing” health and wealth.

"I bind you, Satan!" is uttered in thousands of prayers every day all around the world.

"Spiritual warfare" books teach Christian how to "bind Satan."

Satan isn't the only one that they try to bind.

They also go after a whole host of demons and "principalities and powers."

Christians practice this form of spiritual warfare with desires to hold back calamities and sickness, convert loved ones, and turn cities, states and even the nation to righteousness.

If this is something that we have the ability to do, then we need to do it.

BUT, if this practice is not Biblical, it may be more harmful than helpful.

As we look at the Bible we find that there is no scriptural command to bind Satan, nor is there any biblical example of the practice.

There is not even one time where the apostles ever uttered "I bind you, Satan."

Not once is such an utterance recorded in the New Testament.

Satan remains at large as the "prince of the power of the air" (Eph 2:2) until he is chained or bound (by an angel, not a human being) during the millennial reign of Christ (Revelation 20:1-3).

The disciples cast out devils, but they never bound them or Satan.

Even the archangel Michael did not tackle Satan on his own.

Despite his wisdom and power, he called on God to rebuke Satan. Christians should never suppose that they are smart enough to engage Satan on their own. Rather they, like Michael, should pray, "The Lord rebuke thee" (Jude 9).

Finally, while it makes sense to ask the Lord to “bind” the power of demons in the sense of thwarting their plans to undo us, to “loose” Satan and his minions makes no sense at all.

Thus, common sense alone should be enough to convince us that biblically “binding and loosing” has nothing whatsoever to do with the devil or demons.

II. What Does the Bible Teach About This Doctrine?

The main issue is “What did Jesus mean by these teachings?
What did He mean by the terms "bind" and "loose?"

“Binding” and “loosing” were common terms used by the Rabbis in biblical times.
When the rabbis “bound” something, they “forbade” it, and when they “loosed” something, they “permitted” it.
We could go deep into the Greek words, but that is all the words meant.

When we look at Matt 16:18,19 we see that Jesus does not give to Peter and the other disciples any power to enchant or to free by magic.

The Jewish rabbis had different schools that opposed one another.
(Remember the different groups like the Pharisees and sadducees, etc)
Rabbis of the school of Hillel 'loosed' many things that the school of Schammai 'bound.'
The “keys of the kingdom of heaven” is a reference to how Peter and the apostles had the authority under the direction of the Holy Spirit to unlock the door to various regions with the gospel.

In Acts 2, Peter preached on Pentecost and the church began with the Jews. A door was unlocked.

In Acts 10, Peter preached to Cornelius and saw the Gospel going out to Gentiles. Another door was unlocked.

Peter was given the keys and he used them by preaching the gospel and bringing people into the kingdom of heaven.

Remember how that Paul sought to go to Bithynia but the Holy Spirit would not allow him to go.
Rather, he went into Macedonia.

In so doing, and for reasons we do not understand, he left a region bound and another loosed by the gospel.

The preaching of the gospel thus releases souls bound by sin and its condemnation. Where the gospel does not go, men remain bound in their sin. They thus are either bound from going to heaven or they are loosed from sin to go thereto.

There is no mystical power or other hidden meaning in the keys to the kingdom of heaven.
They were not mysteriously passed on from Peter to his supposed successors through the Catholic Church, as the Catholic church likes to teach.
The keys to the kingdom of heaven is the gospel itself as it was unlocked to the Jews and then the Gentiles.

Where it is preached, people are loosed from sin and its condemnation. Where it is not preached, people remain bound in their sin.

As a person is loosed from sin there is rejoicing in Heaven and God records their name in the Book of Life – what is loosed on earth is loosed in heaven.

The person that rejects salvation remains bound, and that record remains in heaven.

Now lets look at:

Matthew 18:18

¹⁸ Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

In order to understand this verse you must look at the context in the preceding verses (v15-17).
If you pull the verse out by itself you can end up with confused doctrine.

If you keep it in context then the meaning is clear.

Matthew 18:15-17

¹⁵ Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

¹⁶ But if he will not hear *thee*, *then* take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

¹⁷ And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell *it* unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

- If we have a disagreement with anyone, then we are to go to them and sort it out.

- If they won't listen, then we bring one or two witnesses.

I believe that the witnesses are there to see that one person wants to see a resolution.

They are not there to join in or gang up on the person. They are simply to observe whether the person is willing to sort things out.

- If that doesn't sort it, then we bring it before the church to make a decision.

If the person will not respond, then the church votes and says that they believe it needs to be sorted out.

He is then like a heathen man or publican to us.

That does not mean that we hate them.

We still want repentance and resolution.

If you see them, you be courteous to them.

But, just as you shouldn't be close friends with someone that is unsaved or spend a lot of time with them, the same is true for this person.

V18 is talking about this process when it mentions binding and loosing.

God will honour the decision of the church, as long as the church was acting in accordance with His Word, and record that decision in heaven.

What does that mean?

It means that when things get to that point, what has happened is deadly serious.

This is how serious that it is:

Just as God, in that situation, would have accepted our decision and marked it in heaven, so should other Christians in other churches.

If a person under that judgment were to move to another city with a church like ours, the pastor there should ask about the status of their church membership. (After he has verified their salvation, of course.)

When he hears of this, he will not allow them to attend.

Other churches, even ones different from us, should honour that also and do the same thing, if they follow the Bible at all.

If they violate that, they are accountable before God.

This would restrict them from attending any church until they return and make things right here.

If they tried to start their own church, what would be God's view of it?

He has still bound our decision and would not bless the work.

It would be an act of defiance and an act of rebellion against God's Word.

This all sounds really mean.

Is this all done out of hatred? NO

In a situation like this there needs to be repentance, apology and a change of attitude and action.

Aren't we supposed to be loving? YES

True love is to do what will be best for a person.

If your child disobeys and you never correct him because you "love him" are you doing what is best for him?

No you are setting him up for a life that will go the wrong way.

The most loving thing to do is to bring discipline to get their attention, so they will hopefully make things right.

Are there any Biblical examples of this being done? YES

In the church in Corinth there was someone that was doing a terrible sin – committing adultery with his stepmother.

I Cor 5:1-7

Paul said that when they assembled together that they were "to deliver such an one unto Satan of the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."

In other words, Paul had consigned this immoral man to the devil that his flesh might be destroyed.

The thought is not essentially punitive but rather redemptive.

They delivered this fellow to allow the devil to destroy his body (perhaps through disease) that in the long run his spirit might be saved.

They couldn't keep him in the church because a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.

When someone has gone through this process and God has bound the decision in heaven, then it has reached a point where our prayer is "Lord, do whatever it takes to get their attention and make them repent."

What happened in the church in Corinth?

In II Cor Paul writes and says that the man has repented and asks them to receive him back.

The man's heart was broken.

When the church recognized that he had repented and accepted him back in, then their judgment against him was removed – he was loosed by them and also in heaven.

That is what binding and loosing is talking about.

In Matt 18 we also need to look at the next few verses after v18 to see the context.

Matthew 18:19-20

¹⁹ Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.

²⁰ For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

The principle of answered prayer is set forth as brethren are in harmony. "Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven."

Unresolved conflicts with others affect our prayers. If we will not forgive and work things out with brethren, God very well may not listen to our prayer.

But, when brethren resolve conflict and are in harmony one with another concerning anything they shall ask, it will be accomplished by the Father in heaven. When we resolve conflicts the matter is resolved in heaven and our prayers will not be affected.

Binding and loosing has nothing to do with the Charismatic teaching of binding Satan. (Would you also loose him?)

Their teaching comes out of superstition and has nothing to do with what the verses are talking about.

If you hear someone calling out to bind Satan, remember that they are taking something on themselves that Michael wouldn't do and they are working with a created doctrine.

Binding and loosing refers to God honouring and recording the decisions that a church makes as they follow His Word.