

“Binding and Loosing”, (Matthew 16:19)

Companion Paper to the Sermon Preached on September 15th. 2024, By James Moriello, Firm Foundation Christian Church, Woonsocket, RI

“When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, “Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?” So they said, “Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered and said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus answered and said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:13-18).

Jesus and His disciples had come to a place which featured a giant rock cliff, and He posed this question to all of His disciples. *“But who do you say that I am?”* Peter, the spokesman, wisely replied, *“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”* The Lord drew the contrast between Peter, the small stone, and the statement of Jesus Christ’s deity, which identifies Him as the Foundation Stone, the Rock, the promised Messiah of Israel (Isaiah 28:16). Then the Lord continues.

“And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:19, NKJV).

This verse is set in the context of the institution of Christ’s church. It has been a verse often misinterpreted throughout the church age, both by traditional churches such as Roman Catholic, and also by certain Pentecostal churches. First, we will quickly dispatch the incorrect interpretations. The traditional churches use this as a basis for unfettered ecclesiastical authority based on apostolic succession. However, there is nothing said about apostolic succession here or elsewhere in the New Testament. Further, the church is based on *“Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone”*, and the *“apostles and prophets”* played a foundational role in the founding of the church as an institution, as is clearly taught in Ephesians 2:20. The Pentecostal churches apply this to the authority of believers over demons, but this is completely foreign to the context, since there is nothing about demons anywhere in the context of the whole of Matthew Chapter 16.

The Old Testament backdrop is found concerning the teaching authority of the High Priest. In Isaiah we read, *“Then it shall be in that day, That I will call My servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah; I will clothe him with your robe And strengthen him with your belt; I will commit your responsibility into his hand. He shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem And to the house of Judah. The key of the house of David I will lay on his shoulder; So he shall open, and no one shall shut; And he shall shut, and no one shall open. I will fasten him as a peg in a secure place, And he will become a glorious throne to his father’s house”* (Isaiah 22:20-23). In the rabbinic theology of the day, there was the derived concept from that passage of the permitting and forbidding of certain things. The binding (Hebrew: Asur) would forbid a certain action and the loosing (Hebrew: Mutar) would permit a certain action. These were executive declarations with legislative actions that would have judicial consequences. Peter was given this authority by Jesus, and this authority was later extended to the other apostles. The binding and loosing is seen in the Book of Acts. In Acts 2:22-39, Peter clearly defines the Gospel of Jesus Christ. *“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know— Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it. For David says concerning Him: ‘I foresaw the Lord always before my face, For He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken. Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad; Moreover my flesh also will rest in hope. For You will not leave my soul in Hades, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You have made known to me the ways of life; You will make me full of joy in Your presence.’ “Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear. “For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: ‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.” ’ “Therefore let all the house*

of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.” Men who were bound by the Law, and bound by sin, are now loosed by Christ! In Acts 5:1-11, we have an example of the judicial outworking of binding and loosing. *“But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. And he kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles’ feet. But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.” Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things. And the young men arose and wrapped him up, carried him out, and buried him. Now it was about three hours later when his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. And Peter answered her, “Tell me whether you sold the land for so much?” She said, “Yes, for so much.” Then Peter said to her, “How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out.” Then immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. And the young men came in and found her dead, and carrying her out, buried her by her husband. So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things.”* This ought to instill in us a holy fear. Is there anything that God the Holy Spirit does not know? You may think to put one over on Him, but that is not happening! Rash promises often have crash results. In Acts 15:22-29, we have a legislative example of binding and loosing, and this time, other church apostles and elders are involved. In the first church, which the Bible tells us in Acts Chapter 2, is the one at Jerusalem, we find Peter present but James the half-brother of our Lord presiding. *“Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely, Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren. They wrote this letter by them: The apostles, the elders, and the brethren, To the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia: Greetings. Since we have heard*

that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, "You must be circumcised and keep the law"—to whom we gave no such commandment— it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who will also report the same things by word of mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell." The binding and loosing finds its fulfillment in the completion of the New Testament Scriptures, which were not the words of Peter or any other man, *"but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit"* (2 Peter 1:21). So the binding and loosing is, in effect, specifically prescribed by God alone through His inspired Word. When we come to Matthew 18:15-20, the passage about dealing with a sinning brother, we find that the church has authority to exercise discipline, but only within its own ranks, and only in strict accordance to the precepts of Scripture. *"Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."* Today's church cannot go beyond these boundaries.

So, our applications are five. **First**, let us make sure we carefully study the context of a Bible passage before drawing far-reaching conclusions. Consider how bad hermeneutics led to the unscriptural doctrine of apostolic succession. **Second**, let us learn to find our directions from directly within the pages of the Bible, and not creeds of men. When these creeds agree with the Bible, they are helpful in our understanding, but they are not a substitute for Scripture itself. For example, at Firm Foundation Christian Church, we have bylaws which point to our Statement of Christian Faith which does no more than point to the Bible in complete deference to

the divine guidance. **Third**, let the church take heed to exercise discipline according to the Bible truth alone, and never based upon decrees apart from it. The sense in which the church today may bind and loose is the sense in which it judicially applies what is legislatively prescribed in the Law of Christ (the New Testament). Do not join yourself to, nor participate with, any church in which there are judicial decrees which bind and loose that are not biblically based, having been created by men. The church does not have authority to add to the Word of God in this way through its traditions and catechisms. According to 1 John 1:9- *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”*, coupled with 1 Timothy 2:5- *“For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus”*, we can confess our sins directly to God through Christ Jesus, without a human mediator, so the idea that confession to a man is what is required to have one’s sins loosed is an unbiblical and gross overreach by any institutional church that teaches this. **Fourth**, ministers and Christian workers, know the Word of God and submit to those things which it binds, and allow Christian liberty in those areas in which the gospel has loosed. **Fifth**, may the skeptic begin with the truths of salvation. *John 3:16, 5:24, 10:28-30*, and *1 Corinthians 15:3-4* are good verses to start with, to see what is bound and loosed with relation to the gospel. May the one bound by skepticism and unbelief be loosed by faith in Jesus Christ this very morning!