

Glad Tidings

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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Binding and Loosing

(Jerry Fite)

Who are you to bind that on me? Who gave you the right to allow this and restrict that? These are legitimate questions to ask when our lives are being affected by our peers. Yet, making binding judgments seems to be the case when the church takes action in light of sinful conduct toward another member of the church. Jesus says, “...if he refuse to hear the church also, let him be unto thee as the Gentile and the publicans. Verily I say unto you, what things so ever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and what things so ever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 18:17-18).

In our religious world today when judging others is considered incompatible with true spirituality, it seems a little much for fellow members of the church to bind their views and label others as sinners. So, some believe Jesus is speaking about agreeing with each other in prayer on earth and letting God answer from heaven. Contextually Jesus says, “Again, I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father who is in heaven. For where two

or three are gathered together in my name, there shall I be in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:19-20).

While asking God is connected with prayer in other places in the New Testament (*Matt. 7:7-11, Luke 11:1-12*), and certainly should be done in Jesus’ name or by His authority (*John 16:23*), the context of Jesus’ remarks in Matthew 18 is connected with a local congregation of God’s people disciplining one of their own members. A member who continues to be impenitent though rebuked by the church is to be as a Gentile or the tax collectors, with whom the Jews would have no social contact. Members of the church should likewise withdraw their approving social contact from such a one. But who gives the church such a right to make such a binding judgment?

The authority issues first from God in heaven. This is understood easily from the New American Version translation: “*Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven” (Matthew 18:10).* This translation brings out the perfect tense of the verbs, in-

dicating a past action which continues in the present. Thus the action the church was taking in recognizing the sin and disciplining the sinner had already been ruled as “binding” from heaven.

Following the authority of the apostles, who were infallibly guided by the Holy Spirit (*John 16:13-15*), the church acts with divine approval. When the church in Corinth was slow to discipline a brother guilty of fornication, Paul had already judged the man in his sin, and exhorts the church to take action: “...in the name of our Lord Jesus, ye being gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, to deliver such a one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (*I Cor. 5:4-5*).

Jesus earlier had promised Peter and the apostles that what they bind or loose was to have been already bound or loosed in heaven (*Matt. 16:19, cf. John 20:22-23*). So, the church in following their lead, are doing so in the name of Jesus and are able to bind and loose what God already has bound or loosed in heaven. We can and must bind and loose, but only as apostolic teaching first directs.