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Authority to Affect the Spiritual Realm

by Dan Trygg

"I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of hades will not overpower it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."

Matthew 16:18,19

"For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. ⁴ For the weapons of our warfare *are* not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, ⁵ casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ..."

II Corinthians 10:3-5

As we have been talking about the church, ...the *ekklēsia*, or the congregation of those called out from the world to assemble to do the Lord's bidding..., it is very clear that Jesus appointed us to assault the very strongholds of the powers of darkness on this planet. He said that "hades' gates" will not be able to overcome the assault of the *ekklēsia*. **How do we fight against an unseen, invisible, intangible enemy?** We certainly cannot do it using human ingenuity and physical strength. Without some kind of weaponry or authority which the powers of darkness cannot hold out against, our task would be hopeless. This is precisely what Jesus' comment to Peter in this passage is addressing. He will give him (and every other disciple) the authority and power to get the job done.

This is not the only time in the NT where the issues of spiritual authority and power are mentioned. Jesus had recently called the twelve disciples together, and had given them power and authority over all the demons, and to heal diseases, and then sent them out to proclaim the Kingdom of God and perform healings (Lk. 9:1,2; Matt. 10:1; Mk. 6:7-13). They were conscious of the fact that Jesus was able to heal when the power of the Holy Spirit was present to perform healing (Lk. 5:17). When He traveled about preaching, the crowds would press in to touch Him, because they noticed that power seemed to be coming out from Him to heal people (Lk. 6:19). If they could observe this connection, how much more would the disciples have been able to see the fact that Jesus had some kind of power present with Him, or in Him, which flowed out when people were healed? Jesus Himself even talked of His experience of this phenomenon (Lk. 8:40-48). Based upon their observations, experiences, and what Jesus Himself told them, it is not surprising that they later spoke of Him as "a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which *God performed through Him* in your midst" (Acts 2:22), or again, "you know of Jesus of Nazareth, how *God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power*, who went about doing good, and healing all who were oppressed by the devil; for *God was with Him*" (Acts 10:38). It was very clear to them that He did the miraculous signs, and dealt with the demonic, because He had the authority from God, and the empowerment from the Holy Spirit, to do so. They had seen Jesus use these unseen powers and supernatural authority to bind and cast out demons, and loose people from bondage. That was what was striking about Jesus' ministry, and even set Him apart from John the Baptist (Jn. 10:41). He was clearly routing the powers of darkness, liberating those who had been held captive in affliction and disease.

The Keys of the Kingdom: Binding and Loosing

Let's take a look at the words Jesus used in this passage to describe the authority He will give His followers. Jesus said that He "will give the keys of the Kingdom of the heavens". **The "keys" are a symbol not only of access, but of authority. When the master gave his keys to his slave, the slave became the entrusted steward of the master's property and was also granted the master's authority, as his representative.** It meant being given access and authority over all the resources of the Kingdom. Being given the "keys of the Kingdom" is the general statement, the power to "bind" and "loose" are a more specific focus, having to do with the objective which Jesus had mentioned, that of assaulting the "gates" of the strongholds of the enemy.

He spoke of "binding" and "loosing". What is meant by these terms? **The word translated as "bind" is the Greek word *deō*.** It occurs 43 times in the NT. **In virtually every context it refers to a literal tying or binding something or someone with a rope or chain.**

In addition to the verbal form of "bind", there is also a related noun form, "bond", which occurs 18 times in the NT. Of these, all but two examples are references to literal bonds or chains. Of the two exceptions, one refers to a person who was deaf and had difficulty speaking. In the healing, Mark says that "his ears were opened, and the bond of his tongue was loosed" (Mk. 7:35). The other instance referred to the woman bent double (see #1 above), where Jesus said she was "loosed from this bond" (Lk. 13:16). Of the combined 61 related forms of the word, 54

occurrences are literally about binding or tying something up, and the metaphorical usage follows this image very closely. So, when Jesus speaks about “binding”, He is indicating that we have authority to put something that is loose into some kind of restriction or imprisonment. The clearest example of this would be from Matthew 12:29, “...how can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house.” Apparently, we have been given the means to “bind” or “tie up” the spiritual powers that are on the loose, and then we will be able to set free those who have been held captive by them.

The word translated as “loosing” is from the Greek word *luō*. It occurs 42 times in the NT. Most of these times **it refers to a literal untying of a rope or bond.** In 14 cases, there is a broader, more metaphorical usage, but these, too, are mostly about **setting something free, unbinding or breaking something** (Matt. 5:19; Jn. 2:19 [destroy]; 5:18; 7:23; 10:35; Acts 2:24; 13:43; Eph. 2:14; II Pet. 3:10,11,12; I Jn. 3:8; Rev. 1:5; 5:2). Of these, I Jn. 3:8 stands out strongly as applicable to our Matthew context, “The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy (loose) the works of the devil.” Furthermore, the “loosing” of the bond of the tongue of the deaf man who had difficulty talking (Mk. 7:35), and the “loosing” of the Satanic bond of the woman bent double (Lk. 13:16), provide practical illustrations of physical afflictions that were healed once the spiritual bondage was “loosed”. By giving us the ability to “loose”, Jesus has made us His representatives to do as He did, to set people free from the bonds which the enemy has managed to truss people up with. Our job, like His, is to “loose” the works of the enemy.

Spiritual Transactions

The language Jesus used in the last two thirds of Matthew 16:19 is very interesting. **Both conditional statements combine a point-in-time possibility with a strongly-stated once-for-all result.** The condition, “if ever you might (at a point in time) bind”, or “if ever you might (at a point in time) loose” really emphasizes the importance of *our* role in this entire venture. *If* we do something, it *will* have an effect. If we *don't* get involved, there is no guaranteed result, ...possibly *nothing* will happen. **The result follows the condition, ...our involvement in the accomplishment of the binding or loosing part of the transaction..., whatever that transaction may entail.** The result clause is very strongly stated. In the Greek it is a periphrastic construction, which means it *is an indirect way of stating something very strongly*. The construction consists of a form of the verb “to be”, in this case in the future, “it will be”, followed by a form of the verb that emphasizes that the action *has* taken place, and *its effect is ongoing*. In other words, *if* we do the first part, say, “if we might bind” something, then “it will be having been bound”, meaning, at some point in the future, it *will* be accomplished and *stay* accomplished, i.e., “it will be having been tied up (and still be tied up)”. If we might loose something or someone, then it will be (at some point) having been loosed (and still remain loosed). In other words, ***the lynch pin is our involvement***. If we do our part and get the transaction done, whatever that might entail, then the outcome of that *will be* accomplished in the future *with ongoing effect*.

Is this confusing? Well there is one more dimension to add to this. **Jesus said that if we might bind something on earth, it will be having been bound in heaven.** In other words, we make a transaction of some kind as God's representatives on the earth, and it will have an effect on the spiritual balance of power in the heavenlies. If we might loose someone or something *on earth*, it will be having been untied or loosed *in the heavenly realm*. This is huge! This definitely relates to what Jesus said that the *ekklesia* was being assembled to do. **We have the authority and power from God to make transactions on earth that will affect the outcome of things in the spiritual realm.**

It is important to note that **Jesus does not tell us how to make these transactions.** We don't see Him always saying, “I bind you, Satan”, or, “I loose you”. **He did different things in different circumstances. He had to listen to the Spirit, and watch for what the Father was doing, as do we.** He will teach us, if we will seek to learn from Him. In confirmation of this, Paul describes the sword of the Spirit as the word of God (Eph. 6:17). The Greek term for “word” here is *rhēma*, meaning a “personal word, that which is spoken by a living voice, a personal directive or word of instruction, command or declaration”. It is not about us calling to mind a Bible verse we learned. It is about hearing specific instruction from God as to what to do or say in a specific instance. Paul tells us that we are to “take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit”. This verb is different from the other times the verb “taking up” occurs in this context (vs. 13,16). In those verses, the focus is on “putting on” the parts of the armor of God. Paul describes the various parts of the armor, and exhorts us to “take up” each part. However, in vs. 17 he switches verbs to get at a different point. **We are to “receive” or “welcome” the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the directive of God**. This implies a more relational choice on our part, and fits with what we know of God. He does not generally come where He is not wanted. **We need to want and welcome His instructions.** Finally, the word for “sword” is the short sword, used for hand-to-hand combat. **We must get close to be effective.**