

Binding and Loosing: Differentiating the True from the False

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Introduction

If the Christian who has been in the faith for some considerable time is often confused, desperate, frightened and dependant on the “specially anointed” exorcist, what more the novice just entering the Christian faith having been hewn from the rock of sin? They are certainly extremely vulnerable and headed for a worse experience than probably where they are coming from because sometimes, they are abused unawares thinking that they are rendering service to the King of Kings when in fact, they are being exploited. Another reason why they could be in extremely precarious situations is that in their naiveté, they may be completely unawares of the lurking dangers surrounding them, especially their delicate fragile minds which once crippled, can be led in any direction imaginable.

If that be the case, then it is ever so important to establish the truth so that the persons starting out in the faith as new born babes in Christ have as least bumpy a ride towards maturity as possible (1 Peter 2:2). However, in reality, these prospects appear to be farfetched dreams given the exponential proliferation (and near all pervasive) of false prophets, pastors and teachers. Their overwhelming infestation is almost beyond control appearing like legions; an army of determined warriors invading about every available communication media imaginable; literally flooding the air waves with their flawed message. Even more saddening is that those that know the truth in Christ strangely seem to be sinfully silent, cosy, at ease in Zion and comfortable with the status quo, conveniently behaving as though the house were not on fire! But is that what is expected of the saint? According to the Scriptures, the true child of God must occasionally, yea, consistently contend for the faith as it has been passed down from the apostles (Jude 3). This paper briskly explores what true or false binding could be. To achieve these grand ends, we consulted a number of sources, Bob DeWaay being the foremost. We are indebted to his insights though we have taken the liberty to add additional aspects to the discourse. All the errors however remain ours unless otherwise stated. We commence our discourse by tracing several thought lines from DeWaay:

In a separate write up, we mentioned that Bob De Waay wrote on *Binding*, seeking, among many things, to explain what biblical binding and loosing really was and what it meant. It was a good preliminary start but in 2007, he wrote another follow up article so that this matter might finally be put to rest, of course with possibly more articles on the matter at a future date. The reader is encouraged to review the *Critical issues Commentary* high value articles from their website. In this paper therefore, our goal is to summarise the substance of the points that were highlighted in the said document.

For starters, it needs to be stated that the issue of binding and loosing is a very biblical activity, in case someone may be tempted to think that we stand against the scriptures. What we raise a finger in protest against is not that which the page of scripture has expressly taught rather, it is the abuse of it that we attack. If it be done rightly and in the correct context, we shall be more than delighted to be party to that enterprise. For one thing, the Lord Jesus Himself is the one that talked about this matter. He spoke in clear terms and taught us that when some issue is agreed upon by a company of God's children and is in line with God's will and express teaching, even Heaven is in agreement with such a move. It is also important to note that this binding and loosing should be doctrinal in nature for the good of the Church.

Very well then, let us proceed also to state that when Christ was leaving the world after his successful earthly mission, he passed on all authority to the disciples to administer His mission of establishing the Church and growing it, promising that He would be with them all the way to the end (Matthew 28:16-20). Furthermore, He left them a deposit, a comforter, even the Holy Spirit that would ensure that His church was born, established and blossom over the centuries (John 14-16; Acts 1:8). But as we know, when the apostles were gathered to their fathers, Satan, as usual raised his counterfeits, or at best twisted that which had originally begun really well. The counterfeit appeared exactly like the genuine article and yet was something else. We speak here in reference to the false bindings that we observe or experience in the Church today and in a measure, in the past. It may even get worse in future if we do not take care to arrest the situation in all ways at our disposal.

False binding/ loosing exposed

What is false binding? What constitutes an abuse or misdirected practice? Though we do not answer these questions in detail, we do so in passing. *False binding/loosing* has to do with untrue or wrong binding/loosing. As highlighted elsewhere in this paper, meanings attached to binding or loosing vary across usage. A few wrong usages are here cited:

1. Manipulating, confusing or man-handling the Devil using some magical mantras or words.

2. Primarily on Spiritual warfare (Brown 1987).
3. Entering a verbal wrestling combat with demons and their cohorts.
4. Belittling Satan while threatening to thrash him!
5. Threats of curses to perceived enemies or attempting to control, let alone coerce haplessly clueless feeble souls into subjection.

There could be more but these suffice for now. As far as we know, people abuse binding and loosing especially in Charismatic spiritual warfare antics/doctrine. Although warfare usage may apply but certainly not how most understand or practice it. A little experiential illustration will do perhaps. When I was a first year student at UNZA (1990/91), I often heard and witnessed so much about binding or loosing around campus, especially around the Goma fields, rooftops or in chair banging dramatic prayer meeting. It was electric to observe. Scarcely a day passed without hearing some mighty prayer warrior hurling out some threatening binding or loosing words! In today's parlance, it would be dubbed "*Dangerous prayers!*" The warriors felt powerful and often claimed to be demon chasers. They were an interesting lot, fascinating to watch. The thing that however baffled us was that no matter how many times Satan or his demons were bound, somehow they got loose causing further havoc to people around! While we know and acknowledge the existence of Satanic activity, we do not think the Bible is used correctly here. We could say more on this but we resist the temptation but instead hurtle along to pick out some direct or indirect examples of binding or loosing:

Authorities, Power, Binding & Loosing or related practices in selected religious groupings

For us to have a better grasp of or have an intelligent appreciation, we highlight some practical examples of what we consider as false binding:

As practiced by the Roman Catholic Church

The Church has given power to the Pope who claims to be the vicar of Christ and assumed powers to declare curses "*ex-cathedra*". The Pope of Rome can decree something and no one questions. This includes declaring a doctrine as true or false. There is no Biblical warrant for such powers and thus the pronouncements are void and a waste of time. Martin Luther realised this and defied the Pope accordingly, torching the useless papal bull.

As practiced by the New Apostolic Reformation

This group of latter day apostles teaches that the apostles were not the foundations of the church but rather their ministry was. This group holds a continuing ministry and apostolic authority even today. They thus hold that extra-biblical revelation is extant today. It means new doctrines and dogma's are still available today. Further, since there is no criterion or standard, anyone can claim to be a prophet and their words assume an authoritative status. Again, this has no Biblical backing what so ever. Peter C Wagner is part of this commandeering group which literary wants to control people's lives by claiming all sorts of weird things such as demons having control over certain territories, cities or towns. This is a very damaging group sweeping thousands into its gripping mould. Their bindings are void as they do not have the warrant or authority of scripture.

As practiced by Rick Warren's Saddleback Mega Church

Although hailed as one of the most successful churches in recent times, with a weekly attendance of over 15,000 people, the saddleback church practices a multi-phased oath taking process to membership and members. Peter Drucker, the legendary management guru, could have easily advised on some of the practices but these lack any Biblical warrant or authority. Some may look pragmatically workable but lack God's stamp. The fact that they work does not justify these oaths such as on tithe, obedience to elders etc. Though Rick Warren's best seller books like "*The Purpose driven life*" or "*The Purpose driven Church*" have been immensely successful and apparently helped many, the practice on oaths, man made rules is questionable and not biblically encouraged.

As practiced by the Judaisers

In a sense, the church has wrestled with the Judiasers and their claims right from the dawn of the church age. While they claim that Christian should obey the entire law as essential to salvation, the gospel of Grace teaches that salvation is not of works lest any man boasts (Acts 15:1-21; Philippians 3:2-10; Galatians 2:4-5). The saint obeys the law because they have been saved not the reverse.

As practiced by the Emergent Church

The Emergent Church claims that the scriptures cannot be fully known and thus not absolutely correctly interpreted. A bit agnostic in some sense, their church leaders lead people away from the biblical authority by introducing a relativistic view of scripture. They do not even care about authorial intent when reading scripture, hence their danger.

As practiced by liberal theologians

Though closely connected to the immediate past point above, this has to do with those that tear apart or scrutinise scriptures and thus introduce different wrong dogmas. They intend to “de-mythologize” the word of God reducing it to mere writing of men. Thus, once overthrown Biblical authority, they go on claim that some points forbidden in the scriptures are erroneous and out of line with reality. Their authorities and pronouncements are void.

As practiced by the hyper-dispensationalism

These hold that Paul had a different gospel from Peter and thus introduce all sorts of erroneous views. They thus reject some parts of scripture or hold on to what they perceive right and correct according to their perspective. These too are in error and thus their pronouncements void by that token.

We note clearly from the points thus far advanced that these subtle but dangerous approaches to binding often lead to bondage and loss of identity. Though they may initially appear harmless at face value, they are in fact the very root of confusion.

Suggested remedy

There could be several suggestions advanced to arrest this problem but for our purposes, we zero in on one, which is our view, sorts all others. This is the issue of exploiting the right hermeneutics approach. If we are to have a correct understanding, let us aim for the authorial intent by discovering what the Spirit of God originally intended to communicate. This means we must let scripture speak and then we believe rather than we arriving with our prejudices and hope to squeeze scripture into our scheme of things. As De Waay has correctly remarked, “*Bad theology begins with a hermeneutic that fails to be concerned with the meaning of the Biblical authors.*” We do well to take heed and apply accordingly.

What Binding or loosing is (brief statements)

Many different interpretations come to the fore in relation to biblical texts talking about binding or loosing (Matthew 16:19; 18:18). While some claim that it primarily has to do with locking up, frustrating, chaining, incapacitating, hindering or stopping the Devil in his tracks, others claim that none of such exist (i.e. demons etc.), so what is there to bind? How is the Christian to understand this text? After all, most of us have been schooled to believe that we can and must

clamp Satan! A closer look at both texts and background will reveal that as Jesus speaks, he could probably be using familiar picture language or things people could easily resonate or relate to in his day either customary or what was commonly taught. One source suggests that scripture could be referring to the Jewish *Mishnaic* or even *Targum* use in which case could connote the idea of permitting or forbidding by some strong authority. We quote that source verbatim at length: *“In usage, to bind and to loose simply means to forbid by an indisputable authority and to permit by an indisputable authority.”* Another source issues similar sentiments when it states: *“The expressions “bind” and “loose” were common to Jewish legal phraseology meaning to declare something forbidden or to declare it allowed.”* If this argument holds true, then it is safe to conclude that the Bible refers to the Church exercising disciplinary authority rather than individuals (Matthew 18:18). Second, implies that there is need to take care where applied, to Church discipline not necessarily the Devil, although admittedly the Bible in at least one instance alludes to *binding the strong man* of the house (Matthew 12:22-29; Mark 3:24-26; Luke 11: 21-22). Third, it does mean that what the Church decides, if biblically consistent, will be honored in Heaven. In reference to Matthew 16:19, different interpretations arise but we think this too, still has to do with Authority to forbid or permit, except in this case it is said to Peter and indirectly to the rest of the Disciples or even Church. I am not dogmatic on the latter part of the previous sentence though.

Lessons

Several lessons are drawn from this scanty coverage of this wide subject. We pick a few take home lessons for our application, going forward:

1. People appeal to several authority sources, the Bible being merely one of them. Authentic Christians espouse only the Bible.
2. A correct hermeneutical approach helps arrive at the correct conclusions and applications.
3. This paper gave overview synopsis of different views available on the religious market. Each view is different from the other, though in some cases overlap.
4. Binding and loosing are Biblical concepts but must be understood from a correct premise and perspective lest we veer into abuse.
5. In a separate discourse, we closely analyse and explore the several meaning and sense of the words Bind & loose. In general parlance across scripture, it has reference to a church making a decision (to forbid or allow using it's authority) that is equally sanctioned by Heaven.

6. If not correctly understood, this binding and loosing can reintroduce some one into bondage of needless fear.
7. Being naive never helps anyone. It is best to be equipped before hand to avoid being misled.
8. The Church has authority to bind or loose in which case carrying out Heaven's sanction.

Conclusion

Having surveyed the theological and world view landscape, especially in religious circles, we conclude by stating that depending on how well one interprets the scriptures and to what extent they submit to scripture rather than teachings of men, to that extent they will be liberated from the clutches of false teaching. This is an urgent matter needing immediate attention lest thousand others dive into the same spiritual mess, which is paganism really in the main.

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