

The Meaning of "Binding and Loosing"

By Jim and Carolyn Murphy

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One day I received a telephone call from an attorney's office. He asked if I was related to a certain "Murphy" who had recently died in my city. Unfortunately I wasn't. It seems that Mr. Murphy had left millions of dollars to relatives whom the attorney was unable to locate! The money was there just sitting in the bank. The people were out there, too. If only the right relatives were located, the money would be "loosed" to them.

In a way this story illustrates a very profound but little understood principle in the Bible. Jesus spoke some extremely powerful words to the Apostle Peter when He said,

"...I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." (Matt 16:18-19 NIV).

When I read these words of Jesus, a series of questions come immediately to mind. Was Jesus speaking only to Peter, or are these words intended for all of us? Who or what is "my church"? What are the "gates of Hades"? What are the "keys of the kingdom of heaven"? How do the "keys" relate to binding and loosing? What does it mean to "bind" and "loose"? What do we bind and loose? When do we bind and loose? How do we bind and loose?

Who or What is "My Church"?

The church of Jesus Christ consists of those who have been washed in the blood of Jesus. The redeemed; the born again. They come from all Christian denominations, nations and races of the world. In these last days the church of Jesus Christ is invisible. It cannot be seen with the human eye. We see only individual people and corporate bodies who are all part of God's church. The church also consists of those who have gone on before us and are now with the Lord in glory. In short, the church consists of all of us who have been, are, and will be redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, past, present and future.

What Are The Gates of Hell?

The Bible often speaks in metaphoric language. This is one of those occasions. For centuries before and up to the time of Christ significant cities were protected by high, strongly built walls. The walls had large gates that were closed at night and during times of danger. The city rulers, or elders, sat at the gates of the city. (See Lam 5:14). All discussions regarding the city's business and plans were held there. Hence, by the time of Jesus the term "gates" had become synonymous with the word "rulers." So, in today's language, Jesus is saying, "I will build my church, and through the centuries the rulers of hell will not overcome it." Thus, Jesus is declaring that not even the rulers of Hell will be able to defeat His church!

What Does Bind and Loose Mean?

Last year while I was holding pastors' seminars in Tanzania I met an remarkable pastor. He is a man of mature spiritual vision. He told me that, through prayer and waiting on the Lord, he was led to send several of his elders, men with spiritual authority, to the capital cities of seven East African nations. There they fasted and prayed for seven days for the nation to which they had been sent. Their instructions? "Bind the strong man over the nation!" This pastor and his elders properly understood their authority to bind Satan and his demonic hold on those nations.

The dictionary defines binding and loosing as follows:

BIND - to hold or restrain as if tied down...to compel, as by oath, legal restraint or contract.
LOOSE - not confined or restrained; free;
unbound - to set free.

The dictionary defines "whatever" as an emphatic variant specifying a specific event, thing, or circumstance. In other words, Jesus is saying to us that whatever thing, event, or circumstance we bind is bound (restrained), and whatever thing, event, or circumstance we loose is loosed (set free).

What Are The "Keys" of The Kingdom of Heaven?

When Jesus told Peter that He would give him the "keys" of the kingdom of heaven He was using another metaphor. Obviously Jesus did not give Peter any physical keys with which to lock and unlock an existing gate. Jesus was referring to "keys" in the spiritual realm. In the natural, keys are used to open doors and locks. Keys were not as common in Jesus' day as they are today. In Jesus' time those who had keys had authority. Their authority extended over whatever was locked. So what Jesus was really saying was, "I will give you authority ("keys") in the kingdom of heaven."

Was Jesus speaking only to Peter? Absolutely not! It would be extremely short-sighted and narrow to give such authority only to one man, especially considering the fact that Peter was going to die long before the church was and is fully completed.

To whom then was Jesus speaking when He said, "I will give you the keys (authority) of the kingdom of heaven..." It is my belief that He was speaking to His disciples who were spiritually mature...including those in the church of Jesus Christ today who are spiritually mature.

What Have The Keys to do With Binding and Loosing?

In light of the above, the answer to this question comes clearly into focus. One who has authority in the spiritual realm may bind anything under his (or her) authority, and he may also loose anything under his authority. Thus, Jesus has given the spiritually mature believer complete authority to bind and loose because He has given the "keys" (authority) to us!

But, we ask, "How can that be? Will I always get what I ask for in this way? Why does this principle apply generally to the more spiritually mature?" Let's go back to the keys to answer these questions.

Keys have a unique quality. A key will only fit one specific, or, if it is a master key, it will fit a series of specific locks. How often have we tried to "loose" the wrong thing from the kingdom of heaven? How often have we tried to get God to supply things for us to consume on our own pleasures? James warns against this:

"You want something but don't get it....You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you

ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures." (Jas 4:2-4 NIV).

Obviously the more mature we are as believers, the more in line with God's will are our prayers. The more mature we are, the more we bind and loose in accordance with God's plans. Thus, it becomes clear that this binding and loosing only works when we exercise our authority in accordance with God's plans and purposes here on earth.

However, there are certainly some things we are capable of binding and loosing from very early in our Christian walk. These are the things that are always in line with God's will and general purpose. These things include salvation for our loved ones, adequate provision for good and faithful missionaries, sanctification of ourselves and all believers, and so on. These kinds of things we all can pray for daily.

When I say that the spiritually mature will have more success with this principle, I mean that, as we pray into each and every situation and circumstance, the more mature will more readily tune in to the Lord's plans in each of these circumstances. That is why it is often so very important to seek the Lord and act from directions as to how to pray.

How Do We Bind and Loose?

We have no direct example in Scripture where this power is experienced so a certain amount of subjectivity must be allowed here. I will share with you how I have learned to bind and loose. First, let's deal with loosing:

a. Loosing - The Apostle Paul tells us that "...my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus." (Phil 4:19 NIV). Paul didn't say that God will meet all our wants. To properly loose, it is important for us to know what our needs are from God's perspective. From our perspective we often say we "need" more money, more of this, or more of that. But God listens to our cries and responds, "No, what you truly need is more godliness, holiness and righteousness...if you had an abundance of these things, I could then freely give you "more than all we ask or imagine according to his power that is at work within us." (Eph 3:20 NIV). Of

course, if we were amply possessed of godliness, holiness and righteousness, we would never think of asking for more money or this or that for our own pleasures.

If this is the case, then what may I legitimately "loose" from that vast supply God has? I may "loose" 1) everything I need for my godliness, holiness and righteousness, and 2) everything I need to accomplish God's will in my life. The first applies to my inward being, the second applies to materiel things or physical provisions for my call as a bondservant of Christ. The key question we must always ask is, "What do I need in order to accomplish God's will in my life?" After we ask that question and wait upon the Lord for His answer, we are free to pray a loosing of those things and see them supplied.

b. Binding - Visualize an imaginary scene with me for a moment. A cleverly disguised, notorious bank robber intends to rob a bank. But to do so he must walk past a police officer directing traffic. Because of his disguise, he is able to pass the officer and walk into the busy bank and rob it. After he gets the money from the bank teller, he calmly walks out of the bank into a crowd of people and disappears. Now, the police officer had full authority to arrest the robber, didn't he? Then why didn't he do so? The answer is simple. He was unaware that the man was a robber.

Often we are in the same position as the policeman. We are unaware of the spiritual forces of darkness working in the circumstances of our lives because we don't see them. Paul said,

"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." (Eph 6:12 NIV).

Scripture makes it plain that we fight invisible forces of darkness and evil. Spiritual forces of evil are often behind our struggles. Or, many times the enemy will come in and exploit difficult circumstances. Demonic schemes are often set against us to discourage, demoralize, defeat, and, in general, cause us to fail. Remember, Satan's "job description" is set forth plainly in John 10:10: "The thief comes only to

steal and kill and destroy...." Demonic forces have this power, and nothing in our humanness is able to overcome them. But Paul also said,

"For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds." (2 Cor 10: 3 NIV).

How may we invoke this awesome spiritual weapon...this amazing power to demolish demonic strongholds? By exercising our authority to bind the power and plans of the world of darkness!

Let me share with you what I do every day. I don't know if it's necessary to do every day, but it gives me comfort when I do it. Daily I go to God in prayer and "loose" everything I and my family members need for godliness, holiness, righteousness, and to fulfill God's will for our lives. Then I take a brief leave from my prayer to God and orally declare aloud into the spirit realm a solemn declaration to the spiritual forces of darkness. I announce to the powers of this dark world and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms that the Murphy household and ministry are off limits to them. I declare that they are bound from devising any plans against myself or any member of my household and ministry. I don't spend a long time doing this binding. I like to get back to prayer to and waiting on my Heavenly Father.

c. Another "Loosing" - The loosing spoken of above in subsection "a" is directed towards the loosing of God's supply. However, there are occasions when we must command the forces of darkness to loose things. The knowledge and understanding of such commands must come from the Lord through prayer. For example, I know of a situation in which God gave a Christian organization specific instructions for a project and promised to supply every dollar needed for its completion. When it was finished not only was there no money left but there was a debt! Prayers of inquiry were lifted to the Lord. He answered, "I have supplied the money, but Satan is holding it back." With that answer, members and friends of the organization began to forcefully rebuke Satan and command him to loose the money

God had supplied. Very shortly every dollar needed was provided!

Spiritual forces of darkness will also bind people. Often under the leading of the Holy Spirit, a spiritually mature brother or sister may be directed to command the powers of darkness to loose the person.

Please note: I am not suggesting here some magic formula of "binding and loosing." Our prayers and seeking God should never be reduced to a formula. As always we must prayerfully seek the Holy Spirit for direction in our binding and loosing. And each time we do so, it should be with awareness and authority, not some rote prayer.

Binding, Loosing and Personal Responsibility

Now let us examine our own role or responsibility in this process. Yes, we do have this power to bind and loose. Jesus gave it to His church. But there are also things which we must do as we pray. It is not enough in any given situation to pray a binding and loosing even when our prayer is in accordance with God's plans. In other words, we must do our part. God doesn't do it all. We must, in every instance, seek to understand what we must do, or what our responsibility is, and then do it as best we can. Then God is free to answer our prayers.

For example, let us examine the raising of a child. A three year old may be very willful and try to rebel against our authority as the parent. Or it may be a rebellious teenager! In these instances, we must move in with our own authority as a parent and discipline that child. As we faithfully do our part

as parents, we can also bind and loose in the spiritual realm on behalf of that child.

Or, we can apply this principle to our own life and ministry. If you know you have been called by God to teach children about Jesus, you must do what you can to develop that gift. Begin by taking steps that will lead to that ministry. Get involved in a children's ministry as an assistant or in some other role. As you do these things, you are free to pray the binding and loosing which will enable the full fulfilling of that call.

Thus, as we are faithful to perform our human responsibilities, God will be faithful to perform His promises. God will not cross that line to do those things for which we are responsible. If we expect God to bind in heaven what we bind on earth, we must be obedient to His word and instructions in each and every matter.

Conclusion

In light of the above knowledge of the authority to bind and loose we have as believers we should began immediately exercising this binding and loosing power. Yes, the power will be somewhat limited in the initial stages of our spiritual growth but, as we mature, so will the power. This certainly is one of the spiritual weapons Paul spoke of to the church at Corinth as a means of demolishing strongholds of the enemy. (II Cor 10:4).

I want to emphasize again that this is not and should not be used as a "magic formula." Binding and loosing is a powerful spiritual weapon to be used by every soldier in the army of the Living God.

HUNDREDFOLD MINISTRIES, INTERNATIONAL

P. O. Box 625
Blue Jay, CA 92317

Telephone 909/336-9701

E-mail: jim.murphy@hundredfold.org Web site: www.hundredfold.org

Rev. Jim Murphy and his wife, Carolyn, of Blue Jay, California, United States, head Hundredfold Ministries, International. They write Christian teaching literature and travel to the Developing Nations of the world teaching Christian leaders. Hundredfold Ministries, Int'l is a cross-denominational Christian ministry dedicated to strengthening the church in the Developing Nations of the world.

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