



GOOD NEWS

for the unsaved WORLD!

(#153)

Forgiveness – recognizing when it's happened.

We have already looked at 9 FORGIVENESS ISSUES

1. Forgiveness does *NOT* cancel justice.
2. *SOMEONE* has to pay AND justice needs maintained.
3. There is an *obligation* connected to forgiveness.
4. FORGIVENESS does not erase all the consequences of sin.
5. God's FORGIVENESS of us is to influence our actions.
6. Forgiveness has to do with actual sin that causes a barrier or breakdown of fellowship.
7. Forgiveness is *NOT* avoidance of the issue, or merely being kind.
8. There are two parts to forgiveness: *OUR* willingness to forgive, and *THEIR* willingness to repent.
9. Our obligation to forgive others does *NOT* mean we're working for salvation.

One last FORGIVENESS ISSUE to consider:

Issue #10:

10. We have authority to tell others that God has forgiven (or not forgiven) them. It involves telling people what God has said he would do, according to Scripture. It does not cause God to do it.

If he **listens** to you, you have regained your brother. [= forgiveness and restoration] ...

If he refuses to **listen** to the church, treat him like a Gentile or a tax collector. [= unsaved; therefore, unforgiven]

I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever you release on earth will have been released in heaven.

Matthew 18:15b, 17b-18 (NET)

⇒ **THIS IS ACTUALLY A COMMON PRACTICE.** ⇐

- People often do it, *rightly or wrongly* – though usually *not* with the words "bind" and "loose."

I CONFESS JESUS AS LORD!

WELL THEN, GOD HAS FORGIVEN YOUR SINS!

To be done *rightly*, we need:

★ The "GENUINE Factor." ★

Two conditions must be met:

Condition #①: We must be GENUINE followers of Jesus.

- Down thru the centuries, FAKES have used this verse to excuse their persecuting and "condemning to hell" of genuine followers of Jesus.
- In God's sight, such words and actions by fakes are meaningless. It is *impossible* for them to make their assertions "in Jesus' name" (v. 20 – more about this later), since Jesus will *never* forsake his genuine followers!

Condition #②: There must be GENUINE evidence of repentance (or the lack thereof), before we can do this.

Don't jump to conclusions! It may take time for evidence to be visible! (Verses 16, 19-20 express the need for "two or three witnesses" to affirm the truth.)

IF WE SAY THEY ARE FORGIVEN...

- Such an affirmation can be true *only if* their repentance is genuine. (It can be *imperfect, yet growing* in Spirit-guided resolve.)

Am I forgiven?

We have seen the fruit of REPENTANCE in your life (evidenced by your words and actions), and can affirm that you have, indeed, been FORGIVEN.

- If we tell them they are saved, when there is NO evidence, we are in danger of being deceptive liars.

A LOOK AT THIS MATTHEW 18:18 PASSAGE.

Similar statements are found in two other New Testament passages. Understanding Matthew 18:18 will help us to also understand these other passages.

⇒ Matthew 16:19b, using the words "bind" and "loose."

⇒ John 20:22b-23, using the concept of "forgiveness."

⇒ Some things we can learn from the Matthew 18 passage.

If we use the "Basic Bible Study Method," we can better understand the intent of Matthew 18:18.

✓ The meanings of the words; ✓ How the words connect to each other; ✓ The immediate context; ✓ The rest of Scripture.

ISSUE (A) : "BINDING/LOOSING" – A TRANSLATION ISSUE.

- This passage is awkward to translate, because God's response is described as a past tense action, though it follows a present tense action done by us. (This past tense coming *after* the present tense seems to confuse some people.)
- Translations tend to say either:
 - Will be bound/loosed in heaven... (sounds like future tense)
 - Will have been bound/loosed in heaven... (past tense)
- Sometimes, translations will mention both – one of them being placed in a *footnote*.

What you bind/loose on earth

will have been bound/loosed in heaven.

AM I CAUSING GOD TO DO SOMETHING?

OR IS SOMETHING ELSE HAPPENING IN THESE VERSES?

7

What does this mean?

- The basic idea is this: If we "bind" or "loose" someone, it will have *ALREADY BEEN DONE* by God. We are basically affirming what God has done, based on the evidence we have seen.
- This is the only way it can occur! The *changes* we are observing are possible only in a *changed* person... and *God does the changing!*
- When people interpret this verse as telling us that God complies with our decision to forgive (or not), the door is open to all kinds of abuse and false claims.
 - Down through the centuries, many people (and religious organizations) have acted as though they were the ones who could decide who was (and wasn't) to be forgiven.
 - Sometimes people *known* to be unrepentant were "forgiven," and genuine followers of Jesus were "condemned to hell." (Of course, God never paid attention to their false judgments.)

8

ISSUE (B) : THE CONCEPT OF "CHURCH" – A DEFINITION ISSUE.

- Our understanding of these verses has been clouded by a *false* definition that was invented *centuries* after the New Testament was written.
- ORIGINALLY**, "church" referred to people (as a group) who were following Jesus. The New Covenant *changes* had taken place in their lives.
 - People knew who belonged to the church, because they could see them following Jesus – by what they said and what they did.
 - False teachers and the unrepentant would also be recognized for what they were.

CHURCH?

YES →



NO →



Jesus and the apostles never used the word "church" in reference to a religious institution, an organization, etc. – only in reference to people who were followers of Jesus.

The word "building" may be used *figuratively*, when describing the "church" (= people), but it isn't a building! (Ephesians 2:20-22.)

9

- TWO OR THREE CENTURIES LATER**, people started using the word "church" in reference to a building, an institution, a religious organization, etc. The heart/mind/conduct changes caused by the New Covenant were no longer the focus (and were often ignored).
 - People were considered "members" because their names were on a "membership list" or because they "went to church." (*Obeying* Jesus was no longer considered mandatory.)
 - With this definition, all kinds of corruption, sin, and false teaching could be present... and could result in persecution against the *genuine* followers of Jesus.

Definitions are IMPORTANT!

It's WE, the true church, who have been changed, not some institution or hierarchy – potentially corrupt, and dissociated from the heart-changes that are a part of *genuine* Christianity.

10

★ Reading the Bible with this *false* definition results in *false teachings!* ★

- Problems occur when we take these false definitions and read them back into the Bible text. We distort the meaning of the text. (It's just as sinful as when the world does it.)
- False definitions have serious consequences.**
 - People will be in the lake of fire because of false definitions.
 - Today, there are millions of "church-goers" who believe they are "saved" because their names are listed on a piece of paper, called a "membership list"; or even simply because they visit a "church" (building) on various occasions.

They thought they could get to heaven by having their name on a piece of paper, and by doing religious rituals in a building!



NOT HIS ACTUAL APPEARANCE (2 Corinthians 11:14).

11

ISSUE (C) : "IN JESUS' NAME" (v. 20).

- The *name* represents the person. The phrase "in his name" implies doing and saying what Jesus would do and say.
- ★ This can be done *only* by those who's lives are characterized by obedience to Scripture – the genuine followers of Jesus. ★

ISSUE (D) : "2 OR 3 WITNESSES" (v. 16; ALSO IN VS. 19-20).

- This is a requirement found in both Old and New Testaments. In order to verify the truthfulness of something, there must be 2 or 3 witnesses. Scripture also says that false witnesses must be punished.

We can say to anyone (without witnessing any change), "IF your repentance is genuine, you have been forgiven."

But when we witness an obvious change, we can remove the "IF" from our statement!

"Your repentance is genuine; you have been forgiven!"

12

ISSUE ☹️ : THE "ME" FACTOR – A QUESTION ABOUT THE TEXT ITSELF.

"If your brother sins against you..."
Matthew 18:15a (ESV)

"Now if your brother sins..."
Matthew 18:15a (NASB)

- There is some uncertainty as to whether verse 15 should read "sins against you" or just "sins" (referring to sin against *anyone*).
- Regardless of what conclusion we may reach on this verse (or if we remain undecided), our ultimate obligation goes *beyond* a focus on sins that effect just "me." There are other passages (such as Galatians 6:1) that focus on the wider application to *all* sin.

Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted.
Galatians 6:1 (NIV)

- There is an issue that is *much greater* than whether it affects "me" or other people. The ultimate issue is that all sin is "against God."

13

HERE ARE THE 3 PASSAGES:

- ✓ **Matthew 16:19b and 18:18** – These use the concept of "binding" and "loosing."

"... whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will have been loosed in heaven."

Matthew 16:19b (CSB)

... whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will have been loosed in heaven.

Matthew 18:18 (CSB)

- ✓ **John 20:22b-23** – The concept of "forgiveness" is used.

"Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

John 20:22b-23 (CSB)

14

COMMON FEATURES

1. All involve an interaction between what we do and what God does.
2. All of these verses have something to do with the Good News and salvation. (They focus on different aspects of it.)
3. These verses do NOT say that we can force God to do something! Rather, we are acknowledging what God has already done.

DIFFERENCES

{ Matthew and John were written to different audiences, which is probably why they use different words. }

1. Matthew wrote to Jews. He used a "bind/loose" concept that people with a Jewish background would understand. In these two passages, he used it in reference to: 1) truth (who Jesus is) and 2) actions (what people do).
2. John wrote to non-Jews. He used the concept of "forgiveness" – which would be easier for most to understand.

15

Matthew 16:19

"... whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will have been loosed in heaven."

Matthew 16:19b (CSB)

Said to: Peter, with the other apostles listening.

God's involvement: The **FATHER** reveals the truth; we must accept it as true.

Emphasis is on the truth content of the Good News – "Who Jesus is." This truth, which Peter acknowledged, has been revealed by the Father, and is the foundation of the "church" – the people who follow Jesus.

People who say this must acknowledge the truth that God has revealed.

What we can say, based on their confession of the truth: We can pronounce them as loosed from the slavery of sin – forgiven and justified. (If they deny the truth, we can pronounce them as still bound by sin.) *By their response to the truth, we know what God has done.*

But we also need to consider the next passage... →

16

Matthew 18:18

... whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will have been loosed in heaven.

Matthew 18:18 (CSB)

Said to: all the apostles, but given as the responsibility of *all* the "church" (as *the Bible* defines the word "church").

God's involvement: **JESUS** is present with us, so we say it "in his name."

Emphasis is on the conduct of the individual – the turning from sin (repentance), which results in forgiveness.

People who say this must do it "in Jesus' name" (v. 20) – i.e., they must say what *Jesus* would have said (as revealed in Scripture) – after the person's changes have been confirmed by witnesses (v. 16, 19-20).

What we can say, based on their living of the truth: We can pronounce them as loosed from the slavery of sin – forgiven and justified. (If they deny the truth *by their actions*, we can pronounce them as still bound by sin.) *By their actions, we know what God has done.*

17

John 20:22b-23

"Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

John 20:22b-23 (CSB)

Said to: most of the apostles (one was absent), and to the others who were present with them. (Based on a comparison of different resurrection accounts, there were more than just the apostles in the room.)

God's involvement: The **HOLY SPIRIT** is present; so we say it in his power. (The Spirit enables us to *recognize* the truth and its effect on people's lives. This is *not* the power to *proclaim* the Good News, seen in Acts 2.)

Emphasis is on the basic "forgiveness" principle.

People who say this must be under the Spirit's control. (Otherwise, it's meaningless.)

What we can say, based on their response to the Good News: We can pronounce them forgiven or unforgiven, whichever is appropriate to the situation. *By their responses, we know what God has done.*

18

"Conclusion" 1

YES, we do have authority to tell others that God has forgiven (or not forgiven) them.

- What we say does not cause it to happen, but involves us telling them what Scripture says God has done.
- We are *recognizing* that the changes caused by the New Covenant have taken place in their lives. (In other situations, we may have to affirm that the changes have *not* occurred.)

"Conclusion" 2

There are criteria in Scripture for determining whether our affirmation is genuine or fake.

- Merely *wanting* it to be genuine does not *cause* it to be genuine!
- Fake "churches" can make lots of claims, declaring people saved or unsaved...but their statements are *meaningless*, even if they use these verses to "support" them.

19

WE HAVE SEEN MANY ASPECTS TO THE CONCEPT OF "FORGIVENESS."

- SUCH AS...
- ✓ It's a privilege that God's people can experience.
 - ✓ It's an attitude God's people can have toward others.
 - ✓ It's something that results in a recognizable change in a person's life.
 - ✓ [And more...]

⇒ **Your mission** ⇐

Make it your goal to be a person who is characterized by the different dimensions of the word "forgive"!

20

Credits

SCRIPTURE

- Scriptures marked "NIV" - Scripture quotations taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®, Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. (www.biblica.com)
- Scriptures marked "ESV" - Scripture quotation from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. (www.grocity.org)
- Scriptures marked "NASB" - Scripture quotations taken from the (NASB®) New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1971, 1977, 1995, 2020 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. All rights reserved. (www.lockman.org)
- Scriptures marked "NET" - Scripture quoted by permission. Quotations designated (NET) are from the NET Bible® copyright ©1996-2006 by Biblical Studies Press, L.L.C. <http://netbible.com> All rights reserved.
- Scriptures marked "CSB" - Scripture quotations marked CSB have been taken from the Christian Standard Bible®, Copyright © 2020 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Christian Standard Bible® and CSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers.

PICTURES (original sources; modifications may have been made)

- Megaphone – roshellin / CC0; <https://openclipart.org/detail/167891/megaphone>
- Page divider – GDJ / CC0; <https://openclipart.org/detail/266320/page-divider-2>
- Three people – ricubunu / CC0; <https://openclipart.org/detail/15049/people>
- "Church" building – Helm42 / CC0; <https://openclipart.org/detail/169272/w/ase-church>
- "Devil" – J4p4n / CC0; <https://openclipart.org/detail/220303/devil-face>

Presentation – Dennis Hinks © 2022.

21