

Binding and Loosing

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Binding and Loosing, What Does That Mean?

"Hermeneutics" is the principles by which the Bible is to be interpreted properly. *Statements and quotes from the Bible must never be lifted from their context.* No part of the Bible should be lifted out of its text. A Biblical passage must be considered in the full light of: who was speaking . . . to whom were they speaking . . . and under what circumstances were they speaking? With this in mind, let's look at Matthew 18:18,

"Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

This is certainly an incredible statement! And, it comes from the lips of the Son of God. Is it possible that we can have that kind of spiritual power today? What sort of faith is spoken of here? Is heaven at such attention to earth that it is aware of this kind of human endeavor? What is Jesus speaking of when He said that if we *"bind on earth, it will be bound in heaven and, if we loose on earth it will be loosed in heaven?"* That is exactly what Jesus said. What did Jesus mean by this statement? What were the circumstances when Jesus said it? Does this exciting and generous promise mean that we can arbitrarily go about loosing and binding whatever comes into our minds? Could it be that heaven waits spellbound for our latest verbalized whim to be transacted?

I want to consider this passage carefully. The day Jesus spoke these words had been a very exciting day, especially for Peter, James, and John (the *"inner three"*) of the disciples.

Make no mistake about it: Jesus had favorites. But they were favorites because they wanted to be, and because they obeyed the Lord with willing hearts. Psalm 45:7 says, *"You love righteousness, and hate wickedness: therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions."* Jesus had 12 disciples. Four were obviously closer than the other eight; Peter, James, John, and Andrew. Of these Andrew ranked fourth, he was not seen on the Mount of Transfiguration and Jesus did not invite him into Gethsemane's inner garden to intercede the night before He was crucified. But Peter, James, and John were invited. Of these three, James ranked third. Peter and John were the obvious leaders. And of these two, John was first. It was John who braved Rome's wrath to stand at the foot of Christ's cross. It was John to whom the Lord placed the care of His mother, Mary.

On this day of days, Peter, James and John had been taken with their Lord to the top of the mountain. While in prayer, Jesus was visible glorified before the startled eyes of the selected three disciples. That is, Jesus was changed into another form. Luke 9:29 says, *"The fashion of His countenance was altered."* Matthew 17:2 states, *"His face did shine as the sun."* Mark 9:3 reports that, *"His raiment became shining, exceeding white."*

There on Mount Transfiguration, Jesus turned His back a second time on the beckoning

glory of the other world. At His incarnation He humbled Himself to take our flesh, "*being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself (even to the humiliation of a malefactor and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross*" (Philippians 2:8). Jesus' baptism in water was a *public* initiation to a public ministry of service for others. The Transfiguration was a *private* baptism of glory for a private ministry of suffering. In both baptisms there was the manifestation of the audible voice of God! Jesus rejoiced in that voice and walked in obedience to it. He proved what was that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God (Romans 12:1).

It is a fascinating insight into the personality of Jesus that He often wanted someone with Him during His most difficult hours. Of course, the duration of the desert temptation and necessary fasting, He faced alone. He would need to pay the supreme sacrifice for our sins alone. But at Gethsemane He wanted Peter, James, and John, with Him. And for His glorious manifestation on the mountain He sought the company of the same three privileged men. They were His favorites, just as any person can be who opts to live near to the heart of God.

One more preliminary commentary should be made at this point. Those three blessed men, Peter, James, and John, made the ascent of the mountain with their Lord, saw with their own eyes the visitors from eternity, and witnessed the very transfiguration of God's Son. Talk about spiritual experiences! Yet, shortly after, all three had assaults of doubt, and they cracked under the load! Showing it takes more than emotional experiences to stay on the front line! The ingredient of *faith* must be there, without which it is impossible to please God. And "*faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*" (Romans 10:17). Those firmly rooted in the soil of Scripture rarely, if ever, succumb to the howling winds of the soul's tempter! David penned it best, "*Thy Word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee*" (Psalms 119:11).

To understand what Jesus meant by "*loosing and binding,*" it is important that we carefully examine the events that led up to the Transfiguration. Before the ascent Jesus had asked His disciples concerning the consensus of opinion about Him: "*Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?*" (Matthew 16:13). Some strange reactions had been picked up by the disciples. "*Some say You are Elijah - others say You are John the Baptist, Others say, 'You are Jeremiah returned to us.'*" Various sundry suggestions were given as to who the personage of this Nazarene was. It was Peter who gave the inspired answer, "*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God*" (Matthew 16:16). But here at Mount Transfiguration, the ultimate affirmation came from an altogether eternal and divine source: "*While He was thus speaking, there came a cloud which spread over them; and they were awe-struck as they entered the cloud. Then there came a voice from within the cloud: 'This is My Son, My Chosen One: listen to Him.'*" (Luke 9:34-35, Weymouth Translation)

Still two more voices echoed the words of the Father. Luke 9:30-31 says, "*And, behold, there talked with Him (that is, talked with Jesus) two men, which were Moses and Elijah: who appeared in glory, and spake of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem.*" Heaven was putting its final stamp of authority on this One who came to seek and to save that which was lost.

Note, the posture of the three earthlings: Peter, James, and John: "*When the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were sore afraid*, (Matthew 17:6). And well they *should* have been shaken at this revelation of the divine glory. Years later, John would have a similar experience on Patmos. There he would see the Christ, majestic in glory Revelation 1:14, "*His head and His hairs were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes were as a flame of fire.*" Verse 16 says, "*His countenance was as the sun shineth in His strength.*" John says that when he saw Jesus in His glory, "*I fell at His feet as dead*" (Revelation 1:17).

It is indeed curious, when we see people "*slain in the Spirit*," they fall on their backs. Nowhere in Scripture do we find such a thing! Yes, people were stricken from their feet in the presence of the Almighty, however, in every case, they fell on their *faces* before Him! Matthew reports that when Peter, James, and John saw the Transfiguration, they fell on their *faces* in worship and awe.

Today we are confronted with all sorts of false doctrines - and pagan concepts that have crept into the most holy faith. Peter recalled that vivid hour on the mountain with Jesus and testified of it in 2 Peter 1:16-18, "*We have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with Him in the holy mount.*"

John, too, would recall that moment as he began his Spirit-anointed Gospel, he states in John 1:14, "*The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us **and we beheld His glory**, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth.*"

"*We beheld His glory!*" What a phrase! What a witness! Is it possible that we have not seen it? Could it be that we have only heard about it and only read the reliable account of yesteryear? Can any believer long endure the anxiety and pain of the journey who has not personally beheld Christ's glory?

The Mount of Transfiguration gave our Lord a blessed rest from His steady journey to Golgotha! Jesus leaves the Mount of Transfiguration and comes back down to the world below. Moses and Elijah are gone. Gone is the reverberating voice of the Father. And with His three subdued disciples, Jesus descends to the plain "*He comes from glory to face the gloom,*" He left that moment of hearing His Father's vote of confidence to the heartbreak of defecting disciples and the throb of the nails. Waiting for Him below was the multitude.

His afternoon was filled - healing the lunatic and setting straight matters of taxes to the Roman authorities. Now, in the waning day, Jesus needed quiet, a time for communing with His Father. But such was not to be! Matthew 18:1 tells us, "*The disciples came unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?*" What gall! What unimaginable audacity! What jarring words to mar a near-perfect day!

But kindly and lovingly Jesus drew His disciples about Him and began to unfold truths of

discipleship they still had not grasped. They were truths concerning, service, attitudes, relationships and discipline. And it was from this teaching discourse that the promise came concerning loosing, and binding on earth and the corresponding loosing and binding in heaven.

To attempt to understand the loosing and binding truths without the backdrop of the Transfiguration is like trying to understand man without using logic. The divine principle here is reduced to nonsense by the hucksters, the quick-buck artists who have no qualms about taking advantage of human illness. No, the loosing and binding principle is a *spiritual* truth. With this wonderful pledge comes incredible responsibility based upon spiritual maturity.

Lesson Two

"Who is The Greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?"

Faith does not necessarily equate greatness, that is, greatness as far as man is concerned. I read the other day of an unknown Scottish pastor who turned in his resignation many years ago. He was so depressed that his ministry had not been more fruitful. He told his officials that in the past year he only had one convert, and that was only "*a wee lad*." However, that boy turned out to be Bobby Moffat, who opened up Africa to missions. We would never see that pastor's face on any leading religious magazine. Can you imagine what the banner headlines would have read? "*Unknown Scottish Pastor Wins Small Boy to Christ!*" We just do not see the Kingdom from God's divine perspective.

It is now late afternoon of Transfiguration Day. Jesus is so weary. But the needed rest is not to be forthcoming. Matthew 18:1-5 reads, "*At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them; and said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoso shall receive one such little child in My name receiveth Me.*"

As Matthew 18 opens, Jesus is beginning His final journey to the holy city, Jerusalem. There He will be lifted by nails on a Roman cross, and He will give His life for the sins of the whole world. Moments ago, on the Mount of Transfiguration, He received the confirmation from the Father that the plan was now to be consummated. The final sacrifice, atonement for mankind, will be made. Jesus must be so physically weary. Perhaps even His nerves are on edge. How He must long for some kind of comfort, some camaraderie among His disciples to lift His spirits. But instead of such needed tenderness, His disciples show that still they have no concept of the nature of His kingdom.

They asked Jesus, "*Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?*"

And Jesus told these men who had been with Him so long that unless they were converted and became as little children, they would not even see the kingdom of heaven. What a rebuke! In their hearts and minds, the disciples were headed 180 degrees from the Kingdom. There are many today who love the "*loosing and binding*" part of this gospel but haven't the faintest idea what the gospel itself is all about.

Certain qualifications are demanded by Heaven for those who would be leaders in the Kingdom. The immature Christians need not apply! These qualifications require a rapid ascent from the nursery to the front line of action. Those not exhibiting maturity are still called upon by our Lord "to turn," to convert, or "to change!" (Matthew 18:3).

So much today that is called "spiritual" is quite the contrary; it is of the flesh. For example, there are many who would consider someone who talked about the sufferings of Christ as "dead," one who "quenched the Spirit." But, if one gyrates his body and does a little dance, he is considered "spiritual."

Let me read from 'The Message' paraphrase of Luke 6:20-40:

"You're blessed when you've lost it all. God's kingdom is there for the finding. You're blessed when you're ravenously hungry. Then you're ready for the Messianic meal. You're blessed when the tears flow freely. Joy comes with the morning. Count yourself blessed every time someone cuts you down or throws you out, every time someone smears or blackens your name or discredits Me. What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and that person is uncomfortable. You can be glad when that happens - skip like a lamb, if you like! - for even though they don't like it, I do, and all heaven applauds. And know that you are in good company, My preachers and witnesses have always been treated like this.

But it's trouble ahead if you think you have it made. What you have is all you'll get. And it's trouble ahead if you're satisfied with yourself. Your self-life will not satisfy you for long. And it's trouble ahead if you think life's all fun and games. There's trouble ahead when you live only for the approval of others, saying what flatters them, doing what indulges them. Popularity contests are not truth contests - look how many scoundrel preachers were approved by your ancestors. Your task is to be true, not popular.

To you who are ready for the truth, I say this: Love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst. When someone gives you a hard time, respond with the energies of prayer for that person. If someone slaps you in the face, stand there and take it. If someone grabs your shirt, gift wrap your best coat and make a present of it. If someone takes unfair advantage of you, use the occasion to practice the servant life. No more tit-for-tat stuff. Live generously.

Here is a simple rule of thumb for behavior: Ask yourself what you want people to do for you; then grab the initiative and do it for them! If you only love the lovable, do you expect a pat on the back? Run-of-the-mill sinners do that. If you only help those who help you, do you expect a medal? Garden-variety sinners do that. If you only give for what you hope to get out of it, do you think that's charity? The stingiest of pawnbrokers does that.

I tell you, love your enemies. Help and give without expecting a return. You'll never - I promise - regret it. Live out this God-created identity the way our Father lives toward us, generously and graciously, even when we're at our worst. Our Father is

kind; you be kind.

Don't pick on people, jump on their failures, criticize their faults- unless, of course, you want the same treatment. Don't condemn those who are down; that hardness can boomerang. Be easy on people; you'll find life a lot easier. God away your life; you'll find life given back, but not merely given back - given back with bonus and blessing. Giving, not getting, is the way. Generosity begets generosity."

It is sad, but true, a church can average hundreds in attendance and still be "*a very small, pathetic work*" in the kingdom of God. While other churches, who may not be nearly as large or elaborate, yet they remain on the front line of missions and intercession, and are truly great bodies in the kingdom of God.

What about the qualification of *discipline*? Never mistake Christian kindness and forgiveness with license to sin. Sin carries with it the necessity of correction. Paul admonished Pastor Timothy to "*reprove, rebuke, and exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine*" (2 Timothy 4:2). Discipline must, of course, be given in love and in an attitude of reconciliation. But anyone who will be considered great in the kingdom of God must be a disciplined person. That's what the word "*disciple*" means - "*a disciplined one.*"

A disciplined person will possess the quality of *humility*. He does not have to talk about himself all the time. One gospel singer said to a friend, "*But that's enough about my singing; let's talk now about you. What do you think of my records?*" The spiritually mature Christian does not have to have prominence. He is done with the insane struggle to be first.

He is *dependent* upon God for all things. At no time does he figure he is a source unto himself. The mature Christian understands that it is God, not his place of employment, who is his source income. He realizes that God, not some company where he works, is his source of livelihood. In our flagrant desires to satisfy what we consider to be human sources, we all too often slight God who truly *is* the source of everything.

These disciples who so callously inquired of the Lord, "*Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven,*" were displaying none of these vital spiritual traits. Appearance was so important to them. Being high profile with men seems to be "*big stuff.*" What God thought did not seem to matter a great deal.

At this point Jesus leaned over and picked up a child. Barclay tells us that "*According to tradition, the child was later known as Ignatius of Antioch, a servant, writer and martyr for God.*" (Others speculate that the child could have belong to Peter and his wife.) But no matter, it is the child as an object lesson that we view in this discussion. Jesus said, "*Except ye . . . become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven.*" Very important to note is that Jesus was talking about *conversion* here - not *reversion*. Christ did not tell us to act like kids. He said that when we come to Him we are "*born again,*" we have entered another life as babes in which we must grow into adulthood.

Many do not wish to come to Christ in such a way today. Perhaps this is one reason for the tragic and what seems to be the soon demise of the Sunday School. Some say, "*Ah, I don't*

need to go to Sunday school; that's for kids. Besides, what can the teacher teach me?" Obviously, just about everything! It grows even harder to recruit and train workers. They say, "Oh, it's just so inconvenient, and you know we cannot be in church all that many Sundays."

Moses did not lead the Children of Israel from bondage until he had labored in the desert for 4 decades, learning from God. Paul did not begin his ministry, despite his academic brilliance, until God had driven him into Arabia for a number of years, there to teach and train him. At no time in the Scriptures do we see God using men or women who were not first trained - and tried in the fire. But today many do not want such training. They want spotlights. They want headlines, not headaches. And so the church is rapidly becoming a Sunday morning cheering section (hoping the sermon won't be too long) so we can go home, watch NFL football in the afternoon and "60 minutes" at night. Yet all the time we want credence with God!

It won't work. It never has, and it will not commence now. The disciples spent over 3 years with Jesus, then had a 10 day prayer and fasting session, culminating with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. *Then*, and only then, did they begin to be effective for Jesus. And never again did any of them want to know if they would be greater than anyone else!

It takes more than visions and manifestations to bring about spiritual maturity. This is easily seen in the lives of Peter, James, and John who had been with their King on the Mount of Transfiguration. Yet their boyishness in things eternal came immediately to the surface once the vision had lifted. They had just witnessed the glorification of their Lord. Now they wanted to know how they rated in heaven's hit parade.

Yes, I know that we still haven't come to the "*binding and loosing*" part. But there is so much that precedes this promise, so much spiritual footing to secure first. Putting the power of binding and loosing in those who want to be great in the Kingdom would be lethal, like giving Gadhafi a warhead. If we want the provision of the Kingdom blessings, then we must first deal with the requirements God expects of us.

"Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 18:4)

Lesson Three

"Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in My name, there am I in the midst of them." (Matthew 18:18, 20)

Robert Frost, the poet, wrote that he had far to go before he slept. We still have far to go in our journey before we can claim the above promises. Our Lord still had much teaching to impart before the promise of binding and loosing was given. He had earlier that day been transfigured upon the mountain. Coming down from the heights He had been spiritually impaled with the childish question of His followers about who would be greatest in the Kingdom. As we

have learned, He brought a little child before them, stating that one must come into the Kingdom as a child. Now He continues with the pilgrim's progress toward binding and loosing.

In Matthew 18:10 Jesus says, "*Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones.*"

We live in a day of biting satire and scathing cynicism. Much of the current humor is based on putting another person down. Someone has said, "*A cynic is a person who looks down upon people above him.*" One historian states "*Contempt lifts its head, and the death of society begins.*"

Missionaries tell us that the spirit of contempt is strongly developed among savage races. A savage is nurtured to hate or to despise. Between his own tribe and every other tribe there is a deep and quite impassable gulf, and it never enters into the savage heart that love or kindness would seek to bridge that chasm. If other tribes are powerful they must be hated. If they are weak they must be treated with contempt. There is the belief in the sad creed of many a savage that there is virtue in despising others.

Let's face it: There is much contempt in the church world today (and, perhaps as a result, much contempt in the world *for* the church). No believer who practices - knowingly or unknowingly - the sin of contempt can expect to see fulfilled in his life the principle of binding and loosing.

Pentecostals are big on the gifts of the Holy Spirit, as well they should be! But what about the *fruit* of the Spirit? Do the gifts have any validity whatsoever unless they are predicated by the fruit of the Spirit? Frankly, it has been my observation that it seems to require less Christian maturity to be used in the spiritual manifestation than to exercise the fruit of the Spirit in one's life. When we are loved we are positively charming. However, to be courteous, charitable, gentle, loving, and kind "in season and out of season" is something else, altogether.

For instance, one of the fruits of the Spirit is gentleness. Is there courtesy in our relationships? Is there kindness? Do we exhibit Godly, Christ-like, manners whatsoever! Jesus preached strongly against bad behavior, against harboring contempt in our hearts toward others. There is only one thing worse than being despised by others, and that is to be despised by one's own self!

In speaking of motivation in wanting the loosing and binding promise operative in our lives, that motivation must be the same as for all other spiritual manifestations: reaching the lost for Christ. The baptism of the Holy Spirit itself is given for witnessing power. God forgive us, if we attempt to use any of our scriptural blessings for anything other than eternal principles.

Matthew 18:11-14 states, "*For the son of man is come to save that which was lost. How think ye? If a man have a hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doeth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto You, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and*

nine which went not astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish."

Jesus is not speaking of the heathen here. He is speaking of a lamb, already safe in the flock and fold, however, this lamb has gone astray. Christians are oftentimes notorious for expelling their wanderers. Someone has said, "*Only Christians shoot their own wounded.*" The sad and tragic fact is - that if we rounded up all our spiritual strays, our towns would not have enough churches to hold the crowds!

We are often filled with contempt toward our wandering sheep. "*How dare they disgrace the church like that?*"

The occupation of shepherding was well-known and very active when Jesus gave this illustration. He used the portrayal of sheep and shepherding often in teaching about the Christians life. When Jesus roamed the Judean hills, flocks were often communal, that is, the sheep belonged to numerous owners rather than a single shepherd. If an animal became lost, the shepherd would make sure the remaining sheep were secure within a fold or with an under-shepherd; then he would go back into the mountains and make the most strenuous and sacrificial efforts to bring back the lost sheep.

Can you imagine the scene Jesus pictures? These shepherds return with their flocks back to the fold in the village at evening time and they tell others that there is one shepherd still out on the mountainside seeking a wandering sheep. The eyes of the people keep turning, again and again, to the hillside watching for the shepherd who had not come home. Can you imagine the shout of joy when they see him striding along the pathway, with the weary wondering sheep slung across his shoulder, safe at last. Can you imagine how the whole village welcomes him, and gathers around with gladness to hear the story of the sheep who was lost and now has been found?

The sole reason for any of God's promises, is the upbuilding of His kingdom. But never are these promises for carnal personal reasons. So before we come to the promise of binding and loosing, we ask ourselves *why* we would even want such a thing. Are we attempting to prove ourselves the "*greatest in the kingdom?*" Or have we seen our Lord glorified on the mountain and thereby understand that all things are for His glory alone?

Jesus continues with His lesson in Matthew 18:15-17, "*Moreover if thy bother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone; if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, than take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican."*

This is "*last resort*" theology. First, the glorification of the Savior . . . the realization of God's Kingdom rule . . . then coming as a little child to Christ. After which, the believer looks

out, realizing his purpose in a world that is so lost (Matthew 18:11), it certainly has the effect of reducing his inner frustrations. However, if frustrations erupt *in the church*, something must be done about them. Sin must never be allowed to fester in the family of God.

Note the order: When a believer sins against you, *you are to go to that person*, not wait until that person comes to you. The obligation is on the one who has been offended, not the offender!

There is a terrible tendency to cover up sin in the camp! We should never consider ourself an official spotlihter of another's transgressions, However, leadership must see to it that a Scriptural solution is reached when there are breaches of Christian relationships. Cancer does not just go away, it must be removed.

We dare not smother trouble and cover it up. This is not the way the Lord tells us to handle it! If there is a problem between two believers, it should be worked out between the two in an amiable, peaceful, and quiet manner. If the individuals cannot work things out, take it to two or three. If they cannot work things out, the last resort is to take the problem to the church as the final authority! Something that is so basic, yet so many miss it in their interpretation of Scripture again and again

We are given Christ's admonition, "*Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven,*" (Matthew 18:18).

This loosing and binding involves the church of Jesus Christ. Whatever there might be that could cause the Church harm we can, in the power of the Spirit, bind on this earth and that thing will be bound in heaven. If a church is under some terrible bondage, we can lose it in Jesus' name, and that thing will be loosed in heaven.

And, it doesn't have to be unanimous, either! Jesus said in Matthew 18:19-20, "*Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done of them of My Father which is in heaven. For were two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them.*"

Does that mean we can just bind or loose for anything at all? No! Consider the requirement: "*gather . . . in My name.*" Whatever can be asked for in the name of our Lord Jesus, with His divine sanction and approval, we may expect to receive. Asking God to do or give anything that would be inconsistent with His divinity would be an affront to Him, and certainly the asker could not seriously consider God answering such a request affirmatively. Scripture teaches us that those things that are asked "*amiss*" - and are outside of the binding and loosing consideration! (James 4:3).

For instance, if someone is a problem to you and you ask God to strike them dead or cause harm to them, that would be outside the "*binding*" prerogative. However, a believer certainly is within spiritual boundaries to ask God to bind the power of darkness, to hold back

the onslaught of paganism - that threatens the world. A preacher would be proper - in asking God to loose his mind and tongue that he might minister with anointing on any given occasion. A parent would be right in requesting God to bind forces against his child; forces of narcotics, - pornography, - alcohol, etc. And this list could go on virtually endlessly. Suffice it to say that the believer who knows his Bible will understand that some matters are not within the divine nature of God, and therefore God would never condescend to honor such requests.

If your little girl asked you to supply her with cocaine, certainly, such a thing would be far outside any dimensions of parenting. But she would be well within her rights as your daughter to request you to supply her with proper clothing and adequate food and shelter. She can ask for your love and protection. Within your finite ability you are going to bind anything she binds - and loose anything she looses.

And so it is with our Heavenly Father. He hears us when we pray! Scripture teaches us that "*His ear is not heavy that He cannot hear.*" Thank God for that precious promise! And those things I ask in His name - (meaning within the context of His nature) I can expect to receive in His time and in the particular manner He chooses to answer.

All too often believers live far below their God-given dimension of authority. Let us not take undue license with this truth, for such a thing leads to presumption rather than faith. However, on the other hand, let us not be "*milk toast*" Christians. We don't have to be Satan's patsies! We have access to the Father. With Him all things are possible. We can bind forces of Satan on this earth that God will also bind with all His heavenly might!

We have just as much of God as we want to have. And, we can have as much of Him as we desire in the future. I believe that is fundamentally true. Satan's forces often have a field day in this world because believers fail to bind and loose these forces of Satan in accordance with God's nature. We take more abuse from Satan than we have to take. Jesus told us in Matthew 18:20, that whenever two or three believers join forces together on behalf of His kingdom that He is right there in the midst of them. And all the occupants of hell combined are no match for the slightest mediation of King Jesus!

The binding and loosing promise unravels at the point where the believer becomes presumptuous - that is, where he wants to use the power of God for his own personal benefit alone. We are reminded in the fourth chapter of Revelation that all human beings were created by God "*for His own personal pleasure.*" God was not created for our pleasure, but, rather, just the opposite. God's powers are not unleashed on earth for any purpose that pains His heart - or brings Him any form of displeasure.

Our Lord gave us the principle of binding and loosing just after the enormity of His transfiguration, when Moses and Elijah attending Him in that divine moment of God's sanction. In the aftermath of that majesty Jesus told His disciples that what they bound on earth would be bound in heaven and the same principle with loosing. In the wake of His glory, all things are possible to Him who believes. We dare not usurp God's authority for those matters that are

displeasing to Him. Any such praying is asking amiss; it is not meeting the requirement, "*in His name.*"

Oh, the dimensions of glorious action available to the one who "*does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly, nor sits in the seat of the scornful! But his delight is in the law of God; and in God's law does he meditate day and night.*" That believer has possibilities of service far beyond his normal ability.

Many of us live beneath our privileges as soldiers of the Cross. May this study awaken us to God's glory and purpose. May we see what we could be through Him who called us into His light. May those things we bind in His name - be truly bound in heaven and those things we loose for His glory - be loosed in His very presence. For His is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever.

Amen!

Lesson four

I want to continue looking at the events that surrounded Jesus giving the promise to believer that what they bind on earth will be bound in heaven and what the loose on earth will be loosed in heaven, asking ourselves, "*Just what does that mean? and how does one attain that promise?*"

Jesus gave certain principles of the "*binding and loosing capability*" right after His transfiguration! It was a divine moment of God, His Father's sanction upon what was about to take place, that is, His death and resurrection.

The last verse of chapter 16 Jesus said to His disciples, "*Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in His Kingdom.*" What could Jesus mean? Certainly all of His disciples died before His "*Kingdom on earth*" . . . which is still sometime in the future. What could He have meant?

The first verse of the next chapter, chapter 17, states, "*After six days, Jesus taketh Peter, James and John and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart.*" It was then that Jesus' transfiguration takes place. The transfiguration was a display of Christ's kingdom. Jesus being glorified, was showing the disciples, at least these three who were with Him "*the kingdom of heaven.*" The Kingdom of God, then, is where Jesus is glorified . . . where He is King! These disciples got a glimpse of the glory of Jesus, and God's Kingdom!

It was in the aftermath of that majesty Jesus told His disciples that what they bound on earth would be bound in heaven and what the loosed on earth would be loosed in heaven. In the wake of Christ's glory all things are possible to Him who believes!

We, of course, dare not attempt to usurp God's authority in matters that are displeasing to Him. This blessed pledge of our Lord Jesus Christ does not mean that we can "*bind,*" or "*loose,*"

just anything we feel like, at any time we feel like it. We must meet the requirements Jesus gives. We are to bind and loose "*in His name*," that is, we employ God's aid in our Christian walk, when we ask "*in His name*," and God will expedite the powers of heaven in our behalf!

Oh, the dimensions of glorious action available to the one who "*does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly, nor sit in the seat of the scornful, but his delight is in the law of God; and in God's law does he meditate day and night.*" That believer has possibilities of service far beyond his normal ability. So many of us live beneath our privileges.

It is my prayer that these studies will awaken us to God's glory and purpose in our life and we see what we could be through Him who called us into His light. May those things we bind in His name, be truly bound in heaven, and those things we loose for His glory, be loosed in His very presence. For His is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever!

Jesus had just said to His disciples, "*Except you change and become like a little child, you will not enter into the Kingdom of heaven.*" **Then**, follows that portion of Scripture that is so difficult for us to understand with our Western, American, English, mind-set.

Jesus said in Matthew 18:8-9, "*If your hand or foot offend you, cut them off, and cast them from you: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting hell. If your eye offend you, pluck it out and cast it from you, it is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire.*"

First of all, you will note that this portion of Scripture begins with Jesus saying, "*Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in Me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea*" (verse 6). And then, this portion of Scripture ends with Jesus' teaching, "*Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones, for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven*" (verse 10). Therefore, when Jesus spoke the words of verses 8 and 9, He was speaking of "**offenses, especially against new Christians,**" or, as the Scriptures says, "*little ones.*"

What does it mean?

These are the same words Jesus used in His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:29-30). These colloquialisms were used in the East. For instance, someone might say, "*Cut your eye from my boy*," meaning, "Don't envy my son" . . . or, again one might say, "*Don't cut your eye from my family while I am away*," meaning, "Look after my family's best interest while I am gone" . . . or, perhaps they might say, "*Cut off your hand from my vineyard*," which meant, "Do not gather fruit from my vineyard" . . . "*Cut your hand*" meant "*Don't steal.*"

These remarks, which sound so harsh to us, did not puzzle the Galilean mind. Neither Jesus, nor Matthew, had to explain what they meant by these terms, because these colloquialisms

were in current use at that time, and are currently used in oriental speech in some places today.

The "eye" was considered the most precious member of the body, the "hand" was considered most useful member, therefore Jesus uses these particular parts of the body in this teaching.

Interestingly, the Greek word which is translated as "offend," does not mean just to displease someone, rather, it has the meaning of "*hindering one in his Christian life,*" or "*to cause one to stumble.*" This word refers to anything that would cause some one to sin.

When Jesus used this same teaching in the Sermon on Mount, it meant to "*hinder someone from keeping God's law.*" What Jesus is saying here is, "*If the most precious thing that you have causes you to sin then get rid of it! No matter how valuable it may be to you, if it causes you, or anyone else, to stumble, throw it away!*" Jesus is saying that nothing must be allowed to come between you and the eternal destiny of your soul. The most important thing that you have to do in this world is prepare for eternity. More important than having all those things which seem so precious and dear to you in this life, it is better to go through this life without them . . . [*even maimed and blind*] . . . than to lose everything in the life to come!

In the Sermon on the Mount, when Jesus uses these same allegories, He is teaching on, "*Making one's HEART pure!*"

All through the New Testament it teaches "*the mortification of our flesh life.*"

Romans 8:13, "*Put to death all the base pursuits of the body.*"

1 Corinthians 9:27, "*I keep under, my body and bring it into subjection.*" - or, I make my flesh behave

Romans 13:14, "*Put a stop to gratifying the evil desires that lurk in your lower nature.*"

Colossians 3:5, "*Put to death your lower, earthly, nature.*"

These Scriptures are **not** referring to the mortification of any **physical** members of one's body, but, rather to the obtainment of control over the strong passions of one's flesh-life. They refer to obtaining victory over the flesh, and that is not an easy matter. It is as difficult, and hurtful, as literally cutting off a physical part of your body. Jesus is speaking of painful discipline . . . sacrificing those things that one delights in and holds very dear . . . as painful as "*plucking out an eye*" or "*cutting off a hand!*"

We must choose between this kind of mortification of our carnal flesh, or missing out on God's best for us. "*We must be willing to sacrifice the most valued thing in our life, if it, in anyway, jeopardizes the eternal destiny of our soul!*"

There are some things that God will not do for us. We must do them for ourselves! We must decide to surrender our will to God's will! Only when we are willing to do this, then Jesus says, "*Whatsoever you bind on earth, will be bound in heaven and whatsoever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven*" (Matthew 18:18).

Lesson five

Another factor of Jesus' giving the "*Binding and Loosing*" pledge was within the context of Peter's question in Matthew 18:21-22. You will notice that the Holy Spirit saw fit to include this section of divine inspiration immediately after Jesus' word on the fact that Heaven would stand behind any action of the believer, making "*perpetual forgiveness*" a part of the specifications of the *Binding and Loosing* ministry. That is, if Heaven is going to stand behind the endeavors of the believer, there must be a continual life of forgiveness.

In Matthew 18:21-22, Peter asked Jesus, "*How often shall we forgive those who trespass against us, seven times?*" Jesus answered, "*Our forgiveness must be perpetual forgiveness.*" Jesus uses the term, "*seventy times seven*" . . . that's 490 times! In Luke's account of this same conversation, Jesus indicates that one should forgive **450 times a day!**

Jesus follows this statement that one should "*forgive those who trespass against them seventy times seven,*" with a parable of an unforgiving servant who refused to forgive another of a small, almost insignificant offense, after he himself had been generously forgiven of a large offense by his master. The master then ordered that the unforgiving servant be turned over to the tormentors till he paid all that he owed. (Matthew 18:23-35)

The question concerning forgiveness, we must ask ourself, is **not CAN** we forgive, but **WILL** we forgive. "Do we really **WANT** to forgive?"

If we would only realize the limitless strength and ability God has promised us, we would be the recipient of an incredible extra inner reservoir of power to forgive, which God has placed within us . . . we would realize that we are more than a match for anything life can throw at us. When this power of the Holy Spirit is made operative, by an act of our **will**, phenomenal, even miraculous, accomplishments would be achieved.

For believer to say, "*I can't rid myself of these deep inward feelings of bitterness that fester up inside of me. I can't get over the hurt. I can't forgive!*" is a lame excuse. Let's be honest with our self and change our "*can'ts*" into "*won'ts*" and quit deceiving our self, and stop avoiding the truth, only then will we be able to fully forgive every offense ever committed against us!

Only non-believers have to be victims of unforgiveness, trapped and bound, like slaves in a fierce struggle with bitterness, because they are without Christ. And, without His power, they **do** lack what it takes to change. The reason they "*don't*" forgive is because they truly "*can't*" forgive. Those who accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior, unlike their unsaved counterparts, "*don't*" forgive, because they "*won't*" forgive.

When we are willing to own up to the fact that God's Word tells us to forgive, we have a

responsibility to forgive. God help us to stop playing the "blame game" at pity parties for our self and confess our unforgiveness, because God has given us the power and ability to overcome his unforgiveness. Our "*I can't forgive*" is, truly, "*I won't forgive.*" To arrive at this conviction, read and take seriously the following Scriptures:

Philippians 4:13, "*I can do everything through Him Who gives me strength.*"

2 Corinthians 12:9, "*My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.*"

Ephesians 3:14, 16, "*For this reason I bow my knees before the Father...that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man.*"

2 Peter 1:4, "*He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature...*"

1 Corinthians 10:13, "*No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.*"

Malachi 2:15 gives some good advice, it states, "*You that desire a spiritual seed . . . (You want a spiritual ministry) . . . therefore take heed to your spirit.*"

If have a *bitter spirit*, you will not only unable to produce forgiveness, gentleness, and righteousness in your life, and unable to produce these virtues in the lives of those around you.

Exactly what is forgiveness *from God's point of view?*

FORGIVING SOMEONE, WITH GOD'S FORGIVENESS, IS: DESIRING TO HELP THAT PERSON WHO OFFENDED ME AS MUCH AFTER THE OFFENSE, AS I DID BEFORE THE

OFFENSE. GOD'S FORGIVENESS IS CLEARING THAT PERSON'S RECORD FOR HIS OFFENSE AGAINST ME. AND, IN THE PROCESS, TRANSFERRING ALL RESPONSIBILITY FOR PUNISHMENT OVER TO GOD. THIS FORGIVENESS IS HAVING THE SAME OPENNESS TOWARD THE OFFENDER AFTER THE OFFENSE, AS I DID BEFORE THE OFFENSE!

1. It just maybe that God wants to use a person's offense as a way of getting my attention, in order to show me where I need help . . . or . . . maybe I am even the cause of the offense and need to realize my own need to change.

2. Maybe God is showing me how I might be able to help others in their need to change.

FORGIVENESS INVOLVES USING HURTS
AS A MOTIVATION FOR REFLECTING CHRIST'S LOVE!

FORGIVENESS IS NOT "PARDON!"

There is a big difference between "*forgiveness*" and "*pardon*." If someone breaks the law, (commits crime) we must forgive them, however, we do not have the power to "*pardon*" them!

BITTERNESS PERSISTS WHEN:

1. THERE IS "*PERSONAL*" GUILT

Proverbs 26:2 tells us that "*an undeserved curse has no more effect upon you than a bird flitting through the air,*" that is, if someone curses (or, accuses us), if the accusation is false, it has no more effect upon us "*than a bird flying through the air,*" however, if the accusation is true, then it, "*cuts deep like a knife.*"

Just a *little bit* of guilt (even if it be only 10%) will still cause bitterness to become inflamed, therefore, it is very important to take care of guilt in our life . . . clearing our conscience before God . . . before we go to someone to ask forgiveness. We will never be able get rid of "*bitterness*" as long as we have "*guilt!*"

The *Scale of bitterness* and *guilt* must balance
in order for us to have emotional health!

Romans 2:1-3 says, "*You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself . . . (One translation states, "you pin-point the problem in your own life") . . . because you who pass judgment do the same thing. Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment?"*

2. ONE HAS A REVENGEFUL SPIRIT

Romans 12:19 states, "*Vengeance is Mine, I will repay saith the Lord.*" When God takes vengeance for an offense committed, He leaves person with a clean wound that will bring healing to the person, however, when we attempt to take vengeance for an offense, we leave a festering infection which brings the person, and ourselves, all sorts of problems. That is the reason God says, "*Leave vengeance to Me, I'll take care of the situation for you.*" If we allow the spirit of revenge to controls us, we will never able to forgive or remove bitterness from our heart toward the offender.

3. THERE IS A TEMPORAL VALUE SYSTEM

If we have a desire for "*things that last for time*, more than we have a desire for the development of Christ-like attitudes and character . . . things last for eternity . . . we will be incapable of any real forgiveness!

The inability to forgive is often the result of a temporal value system which governs a life. If one is controlled by the world's value system, when anyone gyps, steals, hurts the person's reputation, they become bitter, and unforgiving, over any offense.

We have learned a great lesson when we discover that God is not concerned about our reputation - until it is identified with Christ's reputation. One of the most beautiful things one can do is to trade his own reputation for Christ's reputation!

Our attitude should be, "*Lord, because it is Your reputation which is at stake, please vindicate Your name!*" We will find that, then, God will always come to our rescue.

Colossians 3:1-3 states, "*Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.*"

God allows certain things to happen to us, in order to let us see ourselves as we really are, to let us know we have been "*setting our affections*" on a temporal value system.

4. ONE "TAKES UP AN OFFENSE"

Someone says, "*Oh, he didn't hurt me, but if you knew what he did to my friend, you would never forgive him either!*"

Taking up an offense, means to become bitter toward the offender because he offended someone you love.

God has promised us that, "*We will face no trial beyond what we are able to bear! We can depend upon God to not to allow us to suffer any temptation beyond our strength. God will see to it that in every temptation we `have a way out,' so that we will be able to bear it*" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

The *way out* which God promises us . . . enabling us to endure any temptation . . . is the provision of His "*grace*" in our time of need. God says, "*My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness*" (2 Corinthians 12:9). God provides His "**grace**," to enable us to go through any trial, which He allows to come into our life. That is, when we are offended, God will give us His "**grace**" . . . extra ability . . . to respond correctly to that offense.

God will *not only* give us the ability to see the **why**, and the **purpose for** the offense, but God will also give us the ability to receive **BENEFIT** from the offense.

"**Taking up an offense**" is when someone else says, "*The offender didn't hurt me, but he did hurt my friend!*" and he **takes up his friend's offense**. When he does this, he is intruding into a situation which God has not ordained for his personal spiritual growth. God's

promise of grace . . . (the ability to forgive the offender) . . . to the one who was offended, not, necessarily, to others who, on their own, get involved.

When someone we love is hurt, it is possible for us to be motivated by a kind of *self righteous anger* . . . with a heartbeat of vengeance . . . to repay hurt with our bitter feelings toward the offender.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF UNFORGIVENESS

1. PHYSICALLY

Those who have studied carefully what bitterness can do, tell us that *"bitterness writes itself on one's face. It tightens the muscle tone of facial expression and etches its way into facial features. It hardens the jaw and neck. You can't hide bitterness!"*

In his book, *"None of These Diseases,"* Dr. S. I. Mc Millen, M.D. says, *"Ulcerative colitis, toxic goiters, high blood pressure are only a few of the scores of diseases caused by bitterness. Our resentments call forth certain hormones from the pituitary, adrenal, thyroid and other glands. Excesses of these hormones can cause diseases in any part of the body."*

Dr. Mc Millen tells us that our system was never made to handle bitterness, or guilt and, refusal to forgive someone can result in **physical** fatigue, loss of sleep, and other disorders. Unforgiveness is like a dangerous poison and can bring one to the point where they are in need of a medical, or a mental, hospital.

Doctors estimate that **75%** (some estimate as high as **90%**) patients in hospitals there *"because of emotional disorders"* which are the result of bitterness, guilt, or one's lack of love.

WHAT ABOUT GERMS?

Someone might say, *"Aren't patients in hospitals because of having infection (germs) or exposed to some kind of viruses?"*

One doctor writes, *"Bitterness breaks down one's inner resistance, their ability to ward off germs. Many germs would not affect the person who is not carrying around bitterness or guilt!"*

How does this line-up with the Bible?

There is an interesting passage of Scripture in Numbers 5:11-13, which teaches that, when a woman was accused of adultery, and she denied it, she could be given a special kind of drink made of some kind of dust and some special herbs, and her drinking this would determine her guilt or innocence. If she was guilty, her chemical balance would be upset by this drink and, this, so called *"germ,"* would create a turmoil within her, making her unable hereafter to bear any children. If, however, she was innocent, the mixture would have no effect upon her whatsoever.

One man writing of his unwillingness to forgive someone said, "*I have become a slave to my bitterness. I can't enjoy my work because he . . . (the one who had offended him) . . . controls my thoughts. My resentment produces many stress hormones in my body and I become fatigued after only a few hours of work. Work, which I formerly enjoyed, is now drudgery for me. I cannot escape the tyrannical grasp bitterness has on my mind. The thought of the one whom I hate will not permit me to enjoy my food.*"

*"Better is a dish of vegetables with love,
than the best beef served with hatred."* (Proverbs 15:17).

2. PSYCHOLOGICALLY

Depression is one of the major psychological consequences of bitterness. There are, of course, other causes for depression as well, but when there is bitterness toward an individual, the emotional energy it takes to maintain that bitterness, almost guarantees to result in depression. Whenever anyone exerts *emotional* energy, it reduces their strength in much the same way that one becomes exhausted whenever they exert *physical* energy. One simply cannot maintain bitterness without using up *emotional* energy. And, when that *emotional* energy is used up, it puts a constant drain on one's system that not only causes depression, but can also cause many other problems. There is a price one has to pay for his "*unforgiving spirit.*"

3. SPIRITUALLY

Jesus taught us to pray, "*Father, forgive me my trespasses in the same way that I forgive those who trespass against me.*" Whenever anyone says, "*I will NOT forgive those who trespass against me,*" they are also praying that God not for them!

In Matthew 18:21-22, Peter asked Jesus, "*How often shall we forgive those who trespass against us, seven times?*" Jesus answered, "*Our forgiveness must be seventy times seven . . . (that's 490 times!) . . . or . . . perpetual forgiveness.*" In Luke's account of this same conversation, Jesus indicates that one should forgive **450 times a day!** Jesus follows this statement that we should "*forgive those who trespass against us seventy times seven* with a parable of an unforgiving servant who refused to forgive another of a small, almost insignificant offense, after he himself had been generously forgiven of a large offense by his master. The master then ordered that the unforgiving servant be turned over to the tormentors till he paid all that he owed. (Matthew 18:23-35)

F. W. Boreham tells the story of visiting a man, who spent the last years of his life as a very gruff hermit, on his death bed. There was a great deal of speculation as to just *why* this man had chosen to be a hermit. Was he a fugitive from justice, or perhaps he had some terrible secret to hide. As he lay dying, Dr. Boreham discovered the real explanation *why* he chose to live the way he did. It was because he had harbored a resentment all his life. He had been offended by someone when he was a young man and he said, "*I'll never forgive that person. I'll remember it to my dying day.*" That is exactly what he did, and it ruined his entire life!

Gasping for breath from a cot in his little shack, said, "*I've gone over the incident in my mind every morning . . . I've thought about it every night and a hundred times a day . . . I've cursed the person who offended me.*"

Then, in an indication of brokenness, he added, "*My curses have eaten at my soul. They've been like gall on my tongue and gravel in my teeth. My hatred has hurt nobody but myself. God knows it has turned my life into hell!*"

Too late, learned that resentment is a cruel tormentor.

What Christ is saying in Matthew 18:22-35 is, "*Don't you realize how great a debt I have forgiven you? I have forgiven you of an ETERNAL offense, therefore, how unjust it is not to forgive someone of a small TEMPORAL offense!*"

In studying on God's concept of what forgiveness is, one must consider the concept of 1 John 2:8-11, "*I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in Him (Christ) and you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining. Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him.*"

And 1 John 4:20-21, which states, "*If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, Whom he has not seen. And He has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.*"

This concept maybe difficult to apply to our lives because it comes too close to where we live.

FORGIVENESS IS NOT SOMETHING WE "DO," BUT, RATHER, IT IS THE RESULT OF WHO WE "ARE." IT IS THE CONSEQUENCES OF A WHOLE NEW DIRECTION OF LIVING!

In these passages from 1 John, God is speaking of "*emotional focus*," and He is saying that one **cannot** have an *emotional focus* of **hatred** toward someone and, at the same time, an *emotional focus* of **love** toward God. One cannot love God and, at the same time hate his brother. If he attempts to do so, he is "*only deceiving himself*." It is only as one breaks the "*emotional focus of bitterness*," that he will be able to develop the "*emotional focus of genuine love*" toward God and toward his fellow man.

When no "*emotional focus of bitterness*" exists, then one is free to establish an "*emotional focus toward Jesus Christ*" . . . for the express purpose of being like Him! It is **Christ's actions** living through the believer . . . that is, the way Christ would do things **become the standard of conduct** for the believer. When he fails to measure up to this standard, he realizes it and then allows the Holy Spirit to develop his life into the attitudes

which Jesus has.

Isn't it ironic that invariably whenever there is deep hatred toward someone, that person who hates, becomes like the person he hates? Here's a son who says, "*I'll never be like my father!*" Yet, very often, as a result of the bitterness he has toward his father, he **does** become just like his father! ***Why does this happen?*** It is because, where there is real bitterness toward a person, there are certain spiritual and emotional laws, which are beyond anyone's control, that go into effect. Which is why, years later, the wife of that son, will say to him, "*You are just like your father!*"

This son's father may have been a drunk, unfaithful to his wife, and neglected his children, while, on the other hand the son has never touched alcohol, has always been faithful to wife, and spends a great deal of time with his children.

How, then can anyone say that the son was anything like his father?

The truth is that, while the **VISIBLE, OUTWARD, ACTIONS** were nothing like his father, the "**ROOT ATTITUDE**" was exactly the same in the son because he turned out to be bitter, proud, selfish, and stubborn . . . **just like his father!**

This is exactly what generally happens, despite the fact that one's deep bitterness toward someone makes him say, "*I will never be like the person I despise*" because, in the process of setting up a standard of comparison, one begins to judge actions and responses, as compared to those of the one they are bitter toward and their "*emotional focus*" begins to be built around the person they hate. **They become like the person who has their "emotional focus."**

The ultimate purpose of the first, and greatest, commandment is that one establish his "*emotional focus*" upon God. Matthew 22:37-38 teaches, "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment.*"

How do we give God our entire "*emotional focus*?"

1. By forgiving everyone even as God forgives us!

Ephesians 4:32 tells us, "*Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*"

2. By keeping our "*emotional focus*" upon Jesus Christ!

Hebrews 12:2 teaches, "*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfector of our faith, Who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*"

We are to **continually review** Christ's actions and attitudes!

3. By concentrating on God's Word and

allowing the Holy Spirit to produce basic changes in us.

2 Corinthians 3:18 states, "*And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever - increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, Who is the Spirit.*"

Whenever we react to a person's offense with bitterness, we are *measuring ourselves by that person's actions*, and God tells us, "*Measuring ourselves by ourselves, and comparing ourselves by ourselves, we are not wise*" because, whenever we react to an offense with bitterness it causes us to become that person's "*emotional focus*" and fosters an attitude of superiority and unforgiveness.

On the other hand, when no bitterness exists, we are *free to establish an emotional focus on Jesus Christ* and the end result is that we become more and more like Jesus. This fosters, within us, an attitude of humility and forgiveness, instead of "*measuring myself with myself*," we measure ourselves with Christ. When we fail to measure up to **Christ's** standard, we allow the Holy Spirit to develop within us that which is lacking in Christ-likeness.

Photography producing images on sensitized surfaces by the chemical action of light. A **bright** light is not necessary if one only wants a very small portrait, however, for a large, up-close, portrait, a bright light must be used in order for the photographer to see, and clear up, all imperfections in the portrait - before the final portrait shown. Likewise, the larger one desires his Christlike "*message*" to become, the brighter must be God's light on him, in order to be able to detect any flaws in his life!

Our prayer should be, "*Oh, God, let the light of Your Word shine into my life and make out of my life a living example of You!*"

Ephesians 5:8-14 teaches, "*For you were once in darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: 'Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.'*"

HOW TO FOCUS ON YOUR OWN WRONG ATTITUDE AND NOT ON THE ACTION OF THE OFFENDER

1. VIEW OFFENDER AS INSTRUMENT IN HAND OF GOD

We need to allow God to use the offense in our life as a **mirror** to let us see our own wrong attitudes. If we understand that it was God's hand that allowed the offense, how can we **hate** the hand of God and, at the same time, **love** God?

Remember the story of Joseph? His brothers stripped him of the beautiful coat which his father had given to him, threw him into pit, and then sold him as a slave to Egyptians.

Wouldn't you agree that, as a result, Joseph could have been bitter toward them? But, he wasn't, instead, he discovered that God was directing *his* life **by their actions!**

Genesis 50:20 tells us that, years later, he said to his brothers, "*You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good!*"

God give us the same kind of insight Joseph had, so that we will be able to see God's Hand behind the actions of whoever offends us!

If we respond to an *offense*, or an *offender*, apart from the realization that God can use the hurt inflicted upon us, ultimately for our good, the end result will be that the hurt will make us bitter toward the offender, however, if we respond to the offense, *with the realization that God will use the hurt for His ultimate good*, then the hurt, rather than causing us to become bitter, will enable us to be filled with **forgiveness** toward that person.

There is another very interesting story in the Old Testament that bears out this concept of God at work in the offenses and hurts of life. It goes like this:

In 2 Samuel 16:5-14, King David being driven out of Bahurim by Shimei, a relative of Saul, the former king of Israel, and David is being cursed and stoned by this person. David is asked by one of his armed guards, "*Why do you let this dog curse you? Give me the word and I will take his head off!*" David's response to his armed guard was, "***Don't touch him because God has allowed him to curse me this day and the Lord will requite . . . [repay] . . . me good for his cursing.***"

GOD HONORED DAVID FOR THAT INSIGHT!

It may be difficult for us to comprehend, but Scripture teaches that God allows offenses to come into our lives because He has something to say to us and this is the way He can get our attention!

When Jesus Christ was being crucified by those who hated Him, hanging, in agony, on the cross, He said, "*Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing*" . . . **BUT YOU KNOW WHAT YOU ARE DOING THROUGH THEM** . . . They are **YOUR INSTRUMENTS** carrying out Your ultimate will for My life on earth!"

It is not until we are able to view those who offend us as tools in God's hand, tools that He is using to work out His divine intention in our life, that we will be able to turn bitterness into forgiveness!

Another related Old Testament illustrated would be the book of Job. If the book of Job teaches us anything, it teaches that Satan cannot do anything to a child of God without God's permission. God said to Satan, "*You can only go so far, and no further in Job's life.*" If we accept the concept of God's ultimate control over what happens to us, even offenses, then we, certainly, would be willingly to submit **to** God's control over these offenses, and we would receive God's ultimate benefit from them. God does promise that He will "*work all things . . . (including offenses) . . . together for good.*"

2. THANK GOD FOR "EACH" OFFENSE

It is impossible to be free from all bitterness, to fully forgive the offender, until we can see that the offense has some real benefit for us. God's Word teaches, "*There is no offense in our life which does not have benefit in it for us, if we will respond to the offense in the right way!*"

GOD IS MORE INTERESTED IN OUR RESPONSE TO OFFENSE, THAN HE IS IN THE ACTUAL OFFENSE!

In Matthew 18:7 Jesus said, "*Offenses must come, but woe to the man through whom they come*" In verse 6, Jesus said, "*If anyone causes one of these little ones . . . (a new Christian) . . . who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.*"

We responsible for own responses to people, and circumstances. If our responses are right, then there is no one who can ruin, or damage, God's purpose for our life - no one, **except our self**. We, alone, can damage God's purpose for our lives by responding the wrong way to offenses.

The reason one is "***vaccinated***" when he leaves the United States can be seen as analogous to the reason that God allows certain offenses to take place in our lives:

Whenever anyone leaves the United States and enter into another country, most likely, he would be vaccinated against the possibility of some disease infecting him. He, actually, is given a vaccine where he *contracts* the very disease that he is being vaccinated against, however, the portion of the disease which he is given, is such a *balanced* one that it makes his body **immune** to the disease, should he come in contact.

In much the same manner, God, Who knows our future, allows certain offenses to happen in order to "***vaccinate***" us against . . . make us immune to . . . certain temptations, and trials, that we, down the road, will come in contact with.

In order to "*view an offense we have suffered as an instrument for good, in God's Hand, and in order for us to be able to thank God for each offense*", we must be able to:

3. **DISCERN THE VALUE OF EACH OFFENSE**

(A) *USE THE OFFENSE AS A MIRROR TO REFLECT WRONG ATTITUDES!*

Offenses cannot "***create***" anger, bitterness, selfishness or pride, they can only "***reveal***," or bring out, that these things are within us.

(B) *USE THE OFFENSE TO MOTIVATE YOU TO DEVELOP RIGHT ATTITUDES*

Offenses loom so large in our mind, that we often cannot see the magnitude of **OWN**

offense against God, nor realize its impending consequence, if we respond incorrectly, or in an ungodly manner, **to** the offense. (Read Matthew 18:23-35 again!)

Because attention focused on the offense, which, in reality, is just a little fragment of the whole picture, in terms of God's purpose for our life, we fail to see the offense as **God** sees it . . . from **His** larger frame of reference . . . **His** priorities for our life . . . **His** desire to develop **His** message through our life.

4. ANTICIPATE SUFFERING

One of the reasons we become embittered over an offense is because we have the mistaken notion that Christians will not . . . or should not . . . suffer, and yet, God's Word teaches, "*All that live Godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution,*" 2 Timothy 3:12, "*It is given unto us, not only to believe on Jesus, but to suffer for His sake.*" (Philippians 1:29)

When do not anticipate that Scripture teaches us that we are guaranteed to know some form of suffering in our life, then we have a problem with bitterness.

Visualize with me, if you will, Jesus at the whipping post. Visualize Him being beaten with a cat-of-nine-tails, a whipping that is referred to in history as "*the half way death.*" Visualize Jesus as He is being crucified. See His back with the whelps . . . His skin torn open as the blood oozes out. Can you visualize that?

Who beat Jesus? Scripture teaches us that "*He was wounded for `OUR' transgressions.*" In spite of all the suffering, on the cross as Jesus prayed, "*Father, forgive them!*" - **FORGIVE THEM!**

1 Peter 2:24 tells us that, "*By His wounds we have been healed.*" It is because of Christ's righteous, loving, forgiving, response **that we are healed** . . . made whole!

What significance this statement holds in light of the whole context of 1 Peter, chapters 2 and 3. Let's study this passage of 1 Peter 2 through to 1 Peter 4:

Peter states in 1 Peter 2:12, "*Live such good lives among the unbelievers that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us,*" Peter, then, gives guidelines for what the Christian's attitude should be in verses 13-25:

"Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king. Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. For it is

commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps. 'He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in His mouth.' When they hurled their insults at Him, He did not retaliate; when He suffered, He made no threats. Instead, He entrusted Himself to Him Who judges justly. He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by His wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls."

After Peter, in chapter 2, tells about the kind of example that Christ left for us to follow, Chapter 3 begins to instruct on how we can carry out this example in our own lives.

He first gives practical instruction, in 1 Peter 3:17, is to wives. He states

"Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the Word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear."

Peter, then, goes on to give practical instruction to husbands as he states:

"Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers."

Finally, beginning with verse 8, Peter's instructions address everyone as he states:

"Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. For, 'Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech. He must turn from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.' Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. 'Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.' But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with

gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit."

1 Peter 4, follows with the instruction:

"Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because He who has suffered in His body is done with sin. As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God."

This passage teaches that because Christ was willing to suffer to bring about healing to others, we, too, in our endeavor to follow His example, should be willing to suffer to bring about healing to others. If, by our willingness to suffer injustices, God can bring about healing . . . *spiritual healing* . . . to others, are we willing to so suffer?

God never promised us that life would be "*fair*," however, He **did** promise, "*that all things would work together for good*," and God commanded for us "*to be conformed to the likeness of His Son, Jesus Christ*."

The next step we must take in order to focus on our "*attitude*" toward the offense, rather than the offense *itself*, is that we:

5. MUST DEDICATE HIS BODY TO GOD AS A LIVING SACRIFICE

Because there is such a feeling of ownership when it comes to one's body, or one's life, one becomes very fearful when he is told to dedicate "*his body*," "*his life*," to God as a living sacrifice. However, one should rest in the knowledge that if he, in fact, dedicates his body, and life, to God, that God, in fact, will take care of **His** property and not allow anything to happen to it that will bring it permanent harm, because no one, or nothing, will be able to get at one's life to damage God's property, unless God has some special purpose in one's doing so, that will bring him some ultimate benefit, or "*good!*"

OUR FEARS ARE THE RESULT OF OUR NOT TOTALLY DEDICATING OURSELF TO GOD!

Romans 12:1-2 states,, "*Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - His good, pleasing and perfect will.*"

WHAT IS OUR ATTITUDE TOWARD SOMEONE WHEN HE OFFENDS US?

Do we react with anger, and bitterness, toward the person who has offended us, or do

we go to that person and ask him to forgive us for our unChrist-like attitude?

If we are serious about being a disciple of Jesus Christ, we are to go to the person who has offended us and, if we indeed have a wrong attitude toward him, we should with, our wrong attitude in focus, rather than what he did to offend us, say to him, "*Because I have been wrong because of my wrong attitude (Name the wrong attitude) will you forgive me?*" When we sincerely do this, God will then give us a new kind of love for the person who has offended us.

**WE ARE NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR WHAT OTHERS DO,
WE ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR OUR ATTITUDES
TOWARD WHAT OTHERS DO!**

Are we willing to suffer unjustly, and, rather than respond to the person who has offended us with anger and bitterness, respond with sincere Godly love? If we are willing to do this, God will, in His time, bring deep conviction upon the one who has offended us!

In the Sermon-on-the-Mount, Jesus said, "*I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.*"
(Matthew 5:44).

God help us to see that those who offend us are in need of healing! God help us, with the power of His grace, to be willing to suffer, if need be, to bring about their healing. It was because Peter, in Acts 16:16-18, upon seeing the need of the young girl who hackled him "*many days,*" was willing to co-operate with God, that God was able to meet the need in her life.

As we demonstrate God's forgiveness to someone who has offended us, and as they witnesses that our response to their offense is one of openness and love, we will be afforded a golden opportunity to display Christ's love in such a way that it will better enable them to comprehend just what kind of unconditional love God has toward them.

In Matthew 5:11-12, Jesus also said, "*Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*"

The requirements Jesus gives for the "*Binding and Loosing Ministry*" . . .

- 1. "*Who Do you say I am?*" - We must acknowledge Jesus as God
= Matthew 16:15-19**
- 2. Jesus Christ must be "*Glorified*"
that is, He must rule and reign in our lives. = Matthew 17:2**
- 3. One must have a "*servant's heart*" =
- Jesus left the closeness with His Father and descended**

to a needy world below to serve. = Matthew 17:14

- 4. One must have *faith* = Matthew 17:17-21**
- 5. One live under the authority of those over him - Matthew 17:24-27**
- 6. One must be dependent upon God as a little child
- Matthew 18:1-4**
- 7. God must have top priority - Matthew 18:8-9**
- 8. One must never treat others with contempt - Matthew 18:18:10**
- 9. One's main interest in life must be to "*seek and to save the lost*"
- Matthew 18:11-14**
- 10. One must seek reconciliation with others - Matthew 18:15-17**
- 11. One must join with others in prayer - Matthew 18:19-20**
- 12. One must FORGIVE OTHERS! - Matthew 18:21-35**

Then, and only then, will the glorious promise of Matthew 18:18, be fulfilled on the believer's life:

Jesus promised:

"Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."