



## MARKS OF A HEALTHY CHURCH

Sermon Notes

*Preserving the Gospel*

**Matthew 16:18-19; Matthew 18:15-20**

**February 10, 2013**

“<sup>18</sup> And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. <sup>19</sup> I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”  
**Matthew 16:18-19**

“<sup>15</sup> If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. <sup>16</sup> But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. <sup>17</sup> If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. <sup>18</sup> Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. <sup>19</sup> Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. <sup>20</sup> For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”  
**Matthew 18:15-20**

- This morning as we continue in our study of the Marks of a Healthy Church, I would like to refer back to what we studied just a few weeks ago regarding Christ’s establishment and founding of the Church through Peter.
  - It was here, in Matthew 16:18-19, that Christ, following Peter’s confession, stated, “...on this rock I will build my church...I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”
  - It is here that we are introduced to two concept regarding the authority given to Peter (and then to the other apostles; and eventually to the church):

- Binding and loosing
  - The Keys of the Kingdom
- What is clear, though, is that binding and loosing is directly related to the use or exercise of the Keys of the Kingdom.
- What seems clear, given the full testimony of Scripture, is that the Keys of the Kingdom, are in fact the “keys” that open up the Kingdom of God to men and women.
- So the question is, “What are the Keys of the Kingdom?” Secondly, how does binding and loosing relate to them?
- To get an idea of what the Keys of the Kingdom are, it is helpful to observe and analyze how Peter (and the Apostles) appear to use them. Perhaps the best example of this is at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descended on the Church.
  - In this great passage in Acts 2, when the Holy Spirit descends, men begin speaking in tongues, or discernible languages, and some question what is happening.
  - Then Peter stands and delivers the first sermon of the New Testament Church in Acts 2:14-36.
  - He concludes his sermon by stating: <sup>36</sup> **Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.**”
  - Luke, then writes: <sup>37</sup> **Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”**”
  - And then Peter states, <sup>38</sup> And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”
- It is here that we see the Keys of the Kingdom exercise for the first time in the life of the New Testament Church. For the “Keys of the Kingdom” are as the 17<sup>th</sup> century Baptist theologian John Gill states, “the abilities to open and explain the Gospel truths.”

- This is exactly what Peter did in his Pentecost sermon. He preached Christ through Scriptures, explaining the Gospel truths. What is also interesting here is that the “Keys of the Kingdom” have a direct correlation to **sin**.
- For, Peter said, “<sup>36</sup>**Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.**”
- This led to a conviction among some of the hearers, for Luke says: “<sup>37</sup>**Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”**”
- This conviction and question then allowed Peter the opportunity to open the Kingdom of Heaven to the hearers, for he said, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”
- **To put this in terms of the Keys of the Kingdom, and binding and loosing, Peter is saying, the Kingdom of God is opened to you through repentance of the sin that has been bound.**

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- **And so, this morning, the question before us is: how does this apply to the Church today?**
  - To answer this question, we turn to **Matthew 18:15-20**.
  - This is a passage that is the basis of Church discipline – something that is foundational to the life of a healthy New Testament church. However, we will examine this process, yet this morning we are going to analyze this text, not in light of the “steps” of Church discipline; but, rather **the authority of the Church in this process**.
  - As we read Matthew 18, we can see that there are three steps in Church discipline:
    - **Go to the brother/sister in private;**
    - **Take witnesses;**
    - **Take it to the Church**
  - Let us now take a look at these steps from an exegetical perspective.

## 1. Go in Private

- This section begins, in **Verse 15**, by the Lord Jesus Christ saying, “If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.”
- From this Verse, we learn that the one offended is called to take the proactive step in addressing the individual who offended him or her.
  - One of the reasons for this is that **often we unintentionally offend others, yet, we never know that we have.**
  - Furthermore, often times when someone is offended, he or she does not go to the one who offended him or her, and then begins to build up resentment and bitterness toward that person [who may not even realize what he or she has done wrong].
- Along these lines, as well, it will give the offender “insight” into the one who has been offended [i.e., the offender will know what areas to be sensitive about in the future with respect to the offended].
- All this being said, it is a sin against the offender when we do not go to him and let him know that he has offended us. This is often difficult for many who are not “confrontational”; yet, this, like so many other commands in Scripture, is not always easy to do, but God will provide the strength to obey His Word.
- Jesus states to “go and **show him his fault...**”
- The root word here for “show him his fault” is the Greek *elencho*, “reprove,” which means “by conviction to bring to the light, to expose.”
  - This is the same root word used in 2 Timothy 4:2: “preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.”
  - Once again, this brings up the issue of Scriptural sufficiency. When we “show someone his fault” we should do so on the basis of Scripture. Scripture should be the standard by which we determine what sin is; and it must be the basis by which we rebuke sin.
  - However, often times, we, in our self-centered, sinful natures, are easily offended by something that may not even be a sin. In other words, before we go to a brother, we need to prayerfully consult the Scriptures to ensure that what our brother has done is, indeed, sin. Otherwise, the problem may rest with us, not them. **This truth gets to the heart of this entire passage, for we are called to determine “what is sin” in the life of the Church.**

- Those of us who are easily offended, may be so because of sin in our own lives.
- We are also to “go and show him his fault **in private**.”
  - This is one of the most difficult aspects of Matthew 18 for most of us. It is often the case that when a brother sins against us, we feel that we are at liberty to tell as many people who are willing to listen about the offense.
  - However, biblically this is a sin – we call it gossip. Few things will destroy a church like gossip and slander. We, as fallen creatures, are experts in masking the sins of gossip and slander.
  - Matthew 18, and the command to “go in private” is one of the most powerful practical steps that a church can take in eliminating the devastating effects of gossip and slander in the local church.
- I believe that going to our brother first **in private** forces us to exam our own motives.
  - The purpose of Matthew 18:15-20 is not to punish, but to awaken and **restore**. [1 Corinthians 5:9-13; 2 Thessalonians 3:15; 2 Corinthians 2:5-8]
  - If our motive for confronting a brother is not loving restoration, then we, ourselves, are in sin. Our purpose must never be to rebuke in order to retaliate or show any sort of righteous superiority.
  - We must continually examine our own motives before confronting a brother. We must guard ourselves against exposing someone’s sin in order to make ourselves feel in some way better than him.
  - In fact, **the truth is that in the course of our Christian lives, we will often sin against others, thus warranting correction ourselves**. Such a truth should always keep us humble.
  - Therefore, when we are confronted by a brother for sinning against him, rather than becoming defensive [as is the normal reaction for all of us], and questioning his motives for confronting us – we must humbly ask ourselves, “Is what he is saying – is the “charge” – true?” If it is, we must humbly repent, in order to restore the relationship.
- Finally, “...**if he listens to you, you have won your brother.**”

- The idea here is that you have gone to your brother **in private**, he listened to what you had to say, and you have restored the relationship [“won your brother”].
- One of the most common results of following Matthew 18 is that the one who was “offended” by a brother may discover that the “offense” was truly not a sin. The “offense” may have simply been a result of a miscommunication. Yet, this discovery would never have occurred had the one “offended” not approached the “offending” brother.
- This may involve mutual repentance, but the beauty is that the relationship is restored.
- **There are certainly few things sweeter than restored fellowship that has been won through this process. Understanding is gained, and often the relationship is better because of this process.**

## 2. Take Witnesses

- It is certainly possible, however, that after approaching a brother in private, and confronting him of his sin, he will not listen to you.
- In the event that he does not listen, **Verse 16** states, “...take one or two more with you, so that **BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED.**”
- In this context, the witnesses are not necessarily witnesses of the offense itself. They may only be able to testify that: (a.) **the offense is, indeed, a sin from a biblical perspective**; and (b.) **they have tried to help the offender recognize the sin and repent of it.**
- Also, by approaching the offender with one or two witness, this keeps those aware of the offense still at a small number.
- Further here, Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy 19:15 concerning the necessity of witnesses in confirming the truthfulness of one’s testimony. The standard of the Jewish court was based upon this passage.
- Therefore, one of the main points here is that the standard of the church should never be less than the standard of the courts.
- This is basis for Paul’s caution against believers taking brothers and sisters to court [1 Corinthians 6:1-11]. The reason for this is because a healthy church should resolve conflicts among believers without resorting to the courts, where those judging Christians might do so apart from Scriptural standards.

- Yet, there is still a possibility that the individual does not repent. If this occurs, then the offended is to take the final step in Matthew 18: tell it to the Church.

### 3. Take it to the Church

- **Verse 17** states, “If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”
- Ultimately, the sin which was initially rebuked in private now becomes public. NOTE: The usage of the term “church” here, *ekklesia*, is a reference to the local body of believers; the assembly or congregation.
- Even here, though, the church must hold out, initially, that the individual will repent. Again, the purpose of making the sin public is not to humiliate or shame the offender; rather, it is **to restore**.
- However, even then, after telling the offense to the entire church, the offender may not listen. If the offender does not listen to the church, then, Scripture states that the church should “let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”
- The term Gentile, to the Jewish hearer, would have meant a non-Jew who was outside of the covenant community. The term “tax-collector” often referred to a Jew who was a traitor; one who was “an outcast...by choice.”
- The removal of the unrepentant sinner from the congregation is the final step in the church discipline process. In simple terms, to treat an unrepentant sinner as a Gentile or tax collector is to **treat him as an unbeliever**.
- It does not mean that you go out of your way to criticize or shame the individual. It means, in practical terms, that **you are to evangelize the individual, for the assumption becomes that since the individual rejected all biblical appeals to repent, that he is not a true believer**.
- Another practical effect is that the individual is not to participate in communion, for the Lord’s Supper table is for believers.
- But if the individual repents before the church, he is restored.
- In his *Treatise on Religious Affections*, Jonathan Edwards wrote: “Fallen human nature is fertile ground for a fleshly religiosity which is impiously ‘spiritual’ but ultimately rooted in self-love. High emotional experiences, effusive religious talk, and even praising God and experiencing love for God and man can be self-centered and self-motivated. In contrast to this, experiences of renewal which are genuinely from the Holy Spirit are God-centered in character and based on worship, an appreciation of God’s worth and grandeur

divorced from self-interest. Such genuine experiences create humility in the convert rather than pride, and issue in a new creation and a new spirit of meekness, gentleness, forgiveness, and mercy. They leave the believer hungering and thirsting for righteousness instead of satiated with self-congratulation.”

The German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his work *Life Together* wrote:

“Sin demands to have a man by himself. It withdraws him from the community. The more isolated a person is, the more destructive will be the power of sin over him, and the more deeply he becomes involved in it, the more disastrous is his isolation. Sin wants to remain unknown. It shuns the light. In the darkness of the unexpressed it poisons the whole being of a person. This can happen even in the midst of a pious community. In confessing, the light of the gospel breaks into the darkness and seclusion of the heart. The sin must be brought into the light. The unexpressed must be openly spoken and acknowledged. All that is secret and hidden is made manifest. It is a hard struggle until the sin is openly admitted, but God breaks the gates of brass and bars of iron (Psalm 107:16).

Since the confession of sin is made in the presence of a Christian brother, the last stronghold of self-justification is abandoned. The sinner surrenders; he gives up all his evil. He gives his heart to God, and he finds the forgiveness of all his sin in the fellowship of Jesus Christ and his brother. The expressed, acknowledged sin has lost all its power. It has been revealed and judged as sin. It can no longer tear the fellowship asunder. Now the fellowship bears the sin of the other. He is no longer alone with his evil for he has cast off his sin from him. Now he stands in the fellowship of sinners who live by the grace of God and the cross of Jesus Christ... The sin concealed separated him from the fellowship, made all his apparent fellowship a sham; the sin confessed has helped him define true fellowship with the brethren.”

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Then, in <b>Verse 18</b>, the Lord says, “Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.”</li></ul>
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- **The examination of this passage will now be our focus for the remainder to our time this morning.**
- Leon Morris wrote, “...the probability is that we should understand the ‘binding’ and ‘loosing’ as declaring forbidden or permitted. That would certainly fit this context, where the church in the last resort has to say whether what the offender has done is forbidden to the Christian or whether it is permitted... This was very necessary in a situation where the Jewish Scriptures were accepted as the Scriptures of the believers, but where the Jewish interpretation was rejected, as were many Jewish practices that those who performed them alleged were based on Scripture.”



- It is crucial to see that the verbs translated “shall have been bound” and “shall have been loosed” are in what is known as the future perfect future perfect passive. Therefore, the most literal translation of this passage would be read as: “**...whatever you loose on earth shall having been loosed in heaven.**”
  - Morris continues: “Jesus is not giving the church the right to make decisions that will then become binding on God. Such a thought is alien from anything he is teaching. He is saying that as the church is responsive to the guidance of God it will come to the **decisions that have already been made in heaven.**”

Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of The New Testament, under the entry (to bind), states, “. . . by a Chaldean and rabbinic idiom to forbid, prohibit, declare illicit: Matthew 16:19; 18:18.”

For example, the Theological Dictionary of The New Testament states under the entries for [“bind” and “loose”] (the Greek words for binding and loosing used in Matthew 16:19 and Matthew 18:18), “Jesus does not give to Peter and the other disciples any power to enchant or to free by magic. The customary meaning of the Rabbinic expressions is equally incontestable, namely, to declare forbidden or permitted, and thus to impose or remove an obligation, by a doctrinal decision.” The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament

A. T. Robertson also comments on Matthew 16:19 [equally applied to Matthew 18], “To ‘bind’ in rabbinical language is to forbid, to ‘loose’ is to permit. Peter would be like a rabbi who passes on many points. Rabbis of the school of Hillel ‘loosed’ many things that the school of Schammai ‘bound.’ The teaching of Jesus is the standard for Peter and for all preachers of Christ. Note the future perfect indicative..., a state of completion. All this assumes, of course, that Peter's use of the keys will be in accord with the teaching and mind of Christ.”

- In short, the idea here is that the church will gather collectively, examine the offense of the offender, then examine the Scriptures to determine whether or not God has declared such offense as a sin. **If the church collectively determines, through careful examination of the Scriptures, that the offense is, indeed, a sin, then it will “bind” the sin [forbid it]; otherwise, it will “loose” it [permit it].**
- Matthew 18:18-20 states that the decision made by the church in the matter at hand, whether the offense/sin is ‘bound’ or ‘loosed’, reflects the will of God in heaven.

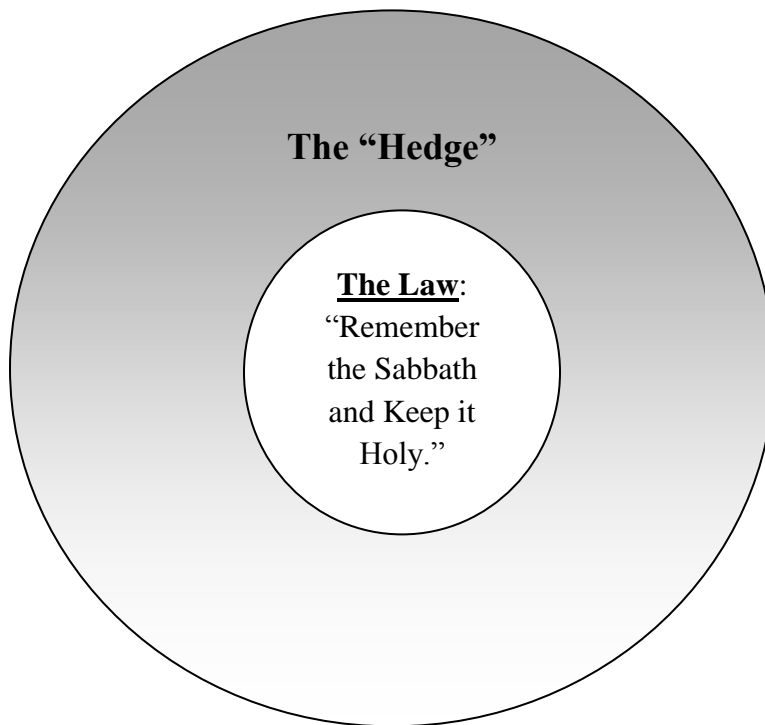
“When a church is united in its application of discipline it can rest confidently in God's promise that he will provide wisdom and guidance for making the correct decision. Thus, the verdict of heaven, so to speak, is consonant with that of the church, before which the matter was adjudicated.” Sam Storms

- Finally, Jesus concludes this section in **Verses 19-20**: “Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.”

- The idea, here, in this context, is that when the church collectively agrees, on the basis of Scripture, that one's offense is sin, then the Father and the Son are in agreement with the Church.
- John MacArthur explains, "When the church acts in God's behalf and in accordance with His Word in matters dealing with sin, He acts in their behalf by confirming and empowering their faithful decisions and actions."

## APPLICATION

- The applications of Matthew 18:15-20 are many; however, specifically related to this morning, the main application I want to emphasize is that the practice of Matthew 18 **demands that the Church understand what is sin and what is not sin in accordance with the Scriptures.**
- This is one of the primary ways the Gospel is preserved in the local church. Sadly, so many churches (GRBC included) fail to understand what true sin is. We are often no different than the Pharisees who created **a hedge around the Law.**



- The "Hedge" was created by the rabbis in order to "protect" the Law. They reflected a "higher" standard that the rabbis believed would keep people from breaking the Law. The "hedge" were those extra-biblical rabbinical traditions that were **based on the Law/Scriptures**, but reflected the particular views of the rabbis. They then held people to the standard of the Hedge rather than the Law.

- If we are not careful we do this today.
  - **We look to the Scriptures and it says that women should be the keepers of the homes, therefore, we say they should never work outside the home. “After all,” we think, “if they do not work outside the home, there will not be a concern about them fulfilling this commandment.”**
  - **The Bible says, in the Shema (Deuteronomy 6) that we should diligently teach our children to love the LORD, therefore, we declare that homeschooling is the right way, because if they are not in some other form of school (public or private), then we will be able to do this easier [again, like the Pharisees, notice the “higher” standard we place on others].**
  - **We declare that it is a sin to drink alcohol, because if you never drink, you will never get drunk.**
  - **We declare that you should never work in your job on Sunday, because if you don’t you will not “break the Sabbath or the LORD’s day” (unless our electricity goes out!).**
  - **Here at GRBC, we assert (whether we articulate verbally or not) that 5-point Calvinism is “essential” because if you are a 5-point Calvinist, you are the furthest from being an Arminian as possible.**
- NOTE: One of the greatest sins in the local church today is to declare something to be “sin” (even without formal declaration) that is not “sin.”
- This is exactly what the Peter condemned at the Council of Jerusalem. Consider the words of Luke in Acts 15 (and the background to the Council of Jerusalem):

<sup>1</sup> But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved....<sup>5</sup> But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, “It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses.”

<sup>6</sup> The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. <sup>7</sup> And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. <sup>8</sup> And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, <sup>9</sup> and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. <sup>10</sup> Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? <sup>11</sup> But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.”

Acts 15:1,5, 6-11

- Later, Paul condemns the people in Galatia for, once again, holding to a “hedge.” He calls this “another gospel.”

“<sup>6</sup>I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—<sup>7</sup> not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.” Galatians 1:6-7

- May we, therefore, embrace the Gospel, declaring sin to be sin and “loosing” that which is not sin.
- This takes great humility for a church to do this, for we have to each acknowledge our own personal “hedge” (which may be biblically-based) and embrace the Gospel alone.
- There is a popular quote (often attributed to Augustine) from the German Lutheran theologian Rupertus Meldenius that states:

“In essentials unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity.”