

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Binding and Loosing

When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. (Matthew 16:13–19, KJV 1900)

After Jesus reminds Peter that his confession did not grow out of Peter's intellect or spiritual superiority, Jesus adds two key principles to this lesson. First, it is not Peter, but the Person and character of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the truth of Peter's confession, regardless of whose lips and heart make that confession, that forms the foundation, the "Rock" for a New Testament church. *...upon this rock I will build my church....* Peter is not the Rock. He was merely the person who gave voice to the truth of the Rock on this occasion.

...the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Jesus did not say the gates of hell would not try to overcome His church. He also did not say that His church would—or should—maintain a quiet passive existence in the presence of sin in the world around her. In fact, by using the term "gates of hell," we at least have an indication that the Lord's church is to take the offensive, to take the battle to the gates of the adversary and storm the adversary's fortress. "Gates" are not an attacking army's offensive weapon. They are rather the defending force's wall of resistance or defense. In this analogy, we get the distinct thought that the Lord's church takes the offensive, and storms hell's gates. This is not the typical idea that most Christians have of a New Testament church, but perhaps we need to revise our view of church to make it more assertive against sin and the forces of evil in this dark, broken world.

The first line of offensive assault against sin for a faithful New Testament church must appear in the godly, dedicated lives of her members. One of the New Testament's most frequent analogies of godly Christianity is that of an army under a commander, engaged in battle with an adversary. Soldiers in an army do not dance into the battle on their own terms. They are under the commander's directions and are required to follow those commands faithfully. A first century Roman soldier who disobeyed his commander in battle was subject to the death penalty. The use of this analogy by New Testament writers is a powerful lesson to show us

the gravity of our life and personal conduct. The godly Christian life is not one self-indulgent feast after the other. It is quite truly warfare.

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled. (2 Corinthians 10:3–6, KJV 1900)

In this lesson, Paul emphasizes the military character of the Christian life. He also helps us locate the primary battleground of our war. *...Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.* Notice the theme of words that point us to our battlefield; "imaginations," "knowledge," and "thought." Folks, we either win or lose our personal Christian warfare inside our minds. We cannot prevail in our lives in this world while we live in defeat within our minds. Paul's use of "imaginations" and "high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God" also directs us to Satan's primary strategy in our minds. When someone turns from their faith, most often, if you can get them to talk at all to you, they will reveal one unfounded imagination after the other. Satan loves to plant the seeds of imagined wrongs against us in our minds, preferably wrongs supposedly committed by other believers, other soldiers in King Jesus' army. The more he can get us to focus on other believers, especially make us think they have wronged us, the more he prevents us from looking by faith to the Captain of our salvation.

And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth

shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. This verse has been subjected to endless wrestling over the centuries. The language is still to Peter. The singular second person pronouns that appear consistently in the sentence affirm the point.¹ The context affirms the point. Jesus is telling Peter that he shall occupy a unique and important role in the future of His kingdom. However, receiving the “Keys” to a building does not convey ownership or lordship over it. In most of the businesses where I worked during my career, I received a set of keys that allowed me to enter the facility whenever I needed to be there to perform my duties, even when I needed to work after regular hours. However, I assumed no ownership of the facility. I only had legal and useful access to the office for purposes of doing business. In this sentence, Jesus did not convey ownership of His kingdom to Peter. He clearly retained it. This sentence gives no credence to the claim that Peter became the first pope of the church or that he became Jesus’ surrogate master on earth over the Lord’s church.

Two passages will serve to guide us to the correct New Testament application of this passage and of the analogy of “Keys.”

Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered. (Luke 11:52 KJV)

And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth. (Revelation 3:7 KJV)

The Luke passage exemplifies a “key” that the leaders of Judaism in the first century possessed, but they selfishly took that key away from the people who desired to use it for God’s intended purpose and for God’s glory. Jesus specifically described this key as “...the key of knowledge.”

The Revelation passage stands in vivid contrast. Jesus, the Author of this message to the Philadelphia Church, categorically states that He retains possession of the “...key of David,” and He

¹ Our contemporary English uses one word form in second person pronouns for both singular and plural, “you.” King James grammar, consistently affirmed by New Testament Greek scholars, presents us with a unique form of our own English language that recognizes first century Greek grammar. “Thee” word forms (Such as “thee,” “thy,” “thou,” or “thine”) are singular second person pronouns. “You” word forms (Such as “Ye,” “You,” or “Your”) are consistently plural second person pronouns. In the sentence in question, Jesus consistently uses the singular second person pronoun form.

makes it clear that He does not intend to relinquish that key to anyone, Peter included.

Now we have a choice in our application of Jesus’ words to Peter. Did Jesus give Peter the key of knowledge with instructions that Peter use it to share that knowledge with others? Or did Jesus give Peter the key of David, contradicting the Revelation passage that states that He yet holds that key in His own possession? The questions answer themselves when we examine the two verses.

The “Kingdom keys” that Jesus gave to Peter, then, are the keys of knowledge regarding God’s kingdom on earth. Peter’s loosing and binding was to occur on earth. By communicating this God-given knowledge to others, Peter was loosing and binding, approving and disapproving ideas and behaviors related to Jesus and to His kingdom here on earth.

When I perform a marriage ceremony, I spend a significant time with the couple prior to the ceremony, getting to know them, and working to help them know each other better than they may have known prior to my time with them. In the actual ceremony, I work to frame words that uniquely address this couple and their personal relationship. In short, I work to give them the “Keys” to a God-honoring, peaceful marriage that shall last for the remainder of their natural lives. I occasionally tease these couples. In the ceremony, I work hard to “Tie the knot” of the marriage as tightly as I can possibly tie it. I remind them that they not only are making a binding contract with each other, but they are also making a far more binding contract with God. This is a serious event, and they need to enter into it with due gravity and with a dedication, first to God, and then to each other to ensure that they both honor the contract they make. Simply stated, I tie the knot by giving them the keys of knowledge. My tease reminds them that the remainder of their lives shall test that knot. By their interactions with each other, they will either pull the knot tighter, or they will slowly pick and pull at the knot to eventually untie it. I can’t control what they do after the ceremony. That behavior is their personal responsibility under their personal contract with God and with each other.

Let’s examine just a couple of events in Peter’s life that might indicate how he used the keys of knowledge that Jesus gave to him.

In the second chapter of Acts, we read about the first Pentecost holy day that the Jews in Jerusalem celebrated after Jesus’ crucifixion, burial, resurrection, and ascension. It was—no surprise—Peter who stood up and preached such a powerful sermon on that day to the people gathered in the temple on that day, many of whom had been present—if not actively participated—when Jesus was arrested and crucified. And his sermon, by God’s power, convicted many of them to the point that they turned away from their religious devotion to Judaism and embraced the truth of the gospel

that Peter preached. Peter gave them the “Keys of knowledge,” and they used them. Three thousand people used those keys in one day as the result of one sermon that Peter preached. In this event, we see the second part of Jesus’ words to Peter fulfilled. What Peter “loosed” on earth in his preaching, Jesus “loosed” in heaven, demonstrated by the power of Peter’s preaching on those who heard. What Peter “bound” on earth, Jesus “bound” in heaven, demonstrated by the faith, repentance, and baptism that they people obeyed as they came to understand the “Keys of knowledge” that they received in Peter’s preaching.

A few years later (tenth chapter of Acts), the Lord reminded Peter that he had not yet used all the keys given to him. Although Peter was the Lord’s apostle to the Jews, he took the keys of gospel knowledge to a Gentile Roman soldier, Cornelius. When Peter preached to Cornelius and to his household (His family and servants), they believed Peter’s words. They accepted the “Keys of Kingdom knowledge” that Peter gave them, because of heavenly power that accompanied Peter’s words, and they were baptized, receiving every special blessing that the Jews in Jerusalem received on that first Pentecost after Jesus’ ascension.

If we accept our charge of “Kingdom knowledge” responsibly, we fulfill Jesus’ ongoing promise of building His church and empowering her so that she continues to assault the “...gates of hell,” and to proclaim His powerful truth. We lose that power when we fail to use these keys as He has commanded. The Lord didn’t give Peter these keys for Peter’s personal use and enhancement. They remained “...keys of the kingdom of heaven.” We do not receive the keys of kingdom knowledge in our lives to hoard and to keep the treasures of the kingdom to ourselves. The Lord gives us these keys with the primary assignment that we embrace this knowledge by applying it to our own lives first, and then by freely sharing it with others.

When we preach the gospel of the kingdom of heaven today, when we use the “Keys,” we do not experience all of the power that appeared on Pentecost. That day, and a few occasions afterward, including the Cornelius event, was special. Even the apostles didn’t routinely experience Pentecost power every time they preached. However, we do perpetuate the dynamics and power of the Lord’s kingdom when we labor to share the keys of knowledge with God’s children, rather than hoarding the keys for our personal gain or possession.

What have you done with your “Kingdom keys” recently?

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church
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Worship service each Sunday

10:30 A. M.