

## The King's Contract

### Matthew 18:18-20

#### Introduction

Matthew 18 is a kind of “HOW To” chapter! How does one become great (vv.1-6;10-14)? Jesus speaks of humility honesty forgiveness and restoration as the tools that will be necessary in God's Kingdom. Jesus speaks about-“How to escape hell” (vv.7-9)—control what you do—control what you see! How do we exercise Church discipline (vv.15-20)? Jesus gave the procedure in verses 15-17; if your brother sins against you, go to him in private and attempt to reconcile the matter (v.15); if this fails take someone with you (v.16) and if this fails take the matter before the church (v.17a) and if this fails dismiss the unrepentant brother (v.17b). Now in this passage Jesus gives us a promise—the authority of heaven itself will this kind of church decision (vv.18-20). Church discipline can be done the right way—or the wrong way! We are to make every effort to do God's will God's way! Discipline done in the wrong way with the wrong spirit can do great damage. People or churches can become self-righteous or smug or legalistic. Discipline done right can bring peace, righteousness and restoration.

Is there a guarantee that discipline done right will always bring about the desired outcome—peace harmony and holiness? **King Jesus is in effect making a contract with the Church—if we agree with Jesus about the importance of humility, honesty, forgiveness, harmony and holiness in the Body—the congregation—the fellowship—Jesus is with us. If we agree with Jesus about the importance of fellowship, relationship, the horror of sin and our obligation to confess our sin, repent of our sin, the obligation to forgive and restore, Jesus will back up our decision in heaven with God the Father.**

J.P. Morgan was one of the richest men in the world. He was once asked, “What is the best collateral for a loan?” Without hesitation he replied, “The man's character.” The reason you can trust God's Word is because you can trust God's character. The reason you can believe God's promises is because you can believe God's Word.

No church is fit to discipline its members unless it is willing to discipline itself. If a parent asks a child not to lie or steal or cheat it makes sense that the parent set a good example. If a government asks its citizens not to lie or cheat or steal you would think they should set a good example. Is there one standard of conduct for those in authority and those in submission? Is there one standard for saints and one standard for churches?

#### **We Agree To Exercise Love In Relationship To Authority (v.18)**

*Matthew 18:18 (NKJV) 18 “Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.*

Jesus assures the disciples these decisions are supported in Heaven.

## **The King's Contract**

### **Matthew 18:18-20**

The word 'bind' (*deo*) means literally to tie off, it can mean prohibit or not allow. In the books of Romans and Corinthians Paul speaks of a woman being 'bound' to her husband. We can only permit or allow in our churches what God permits or allows in heaven. In other words, the way we know God's will or God's love or God's character or God's heart on any matter is know God's Word. **A church cannot make rules or punish people if that church does not recognize and embrace God's rule. The church cannot recognize or approve what God fails to recognize or approve.** All churches must be under the authority of God—and by definition God's Word. We must not allow what the Bible forbids and we must not forbid what the Bible allows. Jesus has made it clear that he does not allow people **to abuse children** or to cause others to stumble or sin. Jesus has also made it clear **he does allow honesty, humility, love and forgiveness in relationship.**

Here Jesus gives the disciples and therefore the church the authority to permit what God permits and to forbid what God forbids. Many people have read these verses outside their context (church discipline) and come up with bizarre interpretations. These passages do not teach that the church has the divine right to forgive sins apart from the sacrifice of Jesus on Calvary's cross, or forgiveness apart from genuine repentance or forgiveness apart from Christ. **This is not a get out of hell free card. This is not a go to heaven free card.**

The Church cannot absolve people of sin—apart from the gospel of grace or sell grace or merchandise grace. The church cannot make up rules and then expect God to abide by man made rules—that contradict or condemn the Bible. The text does not teach that you can bind devils or Satan in the spirit realm. Mark 16:17 certainly refers to "casting out demons" and Jesus did give the Apostles authority over unclean spirits. The power was given to cast out unclean spirits out of afflicted people in Jesus' name. Christians are never told to bind the devil. We are told to 'resist the devil' (James 4:7) and give no place to the devil (Eph.4:27). If we can bind demons—how long are they bound and who keeps letting them escape? Many people have a distorted view on how to deal with demons. The way to deal with demons is to make sure Jesus Christ is Lord of your life. When Michael the archangel had a run in with Satan he did not 'bind' him under his own authority (Jude 1:9). "Yet Michael, the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, "The Lord rebuke thee".

The Bible does teach that sometimes Satan is allowed to bind us, and throw us into prison. Jesus wrote a love letter to the church at Smyrna through the beloved Apostle John in the book of Revelation. To the church under persecution he wrote (Rev.2:10); "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and you shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." I did find one reference to binding the devil. "I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan and bound him for a thousand years" (Rev. 20:1-2).

## **The King's Contract**

### **Matthew 18:18-20**

The Rabbi's of Jesus day often talked about things being bound in heaven or loosed in heaven to indicate what was allowed or forbidden in light of God's Word. "A Jew of that day would have understood that Jesus did not mean that men could bend heaven's will to their own but that God had an expressed principle with which the church must conform" (J. MacArthur p.137). **God is not bound to obey the Church, the Church is bound to obey God. In other words, when the Church follows Jesus' pattern of confrontation, forgiveness and reconciliation we receive heaven's approval and authority!**

If you tell a person "Jesus loves you", you have full assurance that God will back your statement in heaven. If you tell a person that Jesus died on the cross for your sins, He is willing to forgive you, give you a new heart, a new life, and a future hope in heaven, you know that God is honor bound to act on your statement. Paul said that if Jesus' death on the cross could save you, how much more could the resurrection of Jesus from the dead keep you in a perfect position to inherit all things in Christ Jesus. If a person refuses to accept Jesus as his or her Savior, we can as a Church with equal confidence declare, "you are still in your sins". You have not been forgiven. There is no other name given under heaven whereby a man or a woman must be saved! If a person does not come to Jesus they have not met the conditions of forgiveness (see MacArthur pp.137-138).

I have had many conversations with people involved in the kingdom of the cults, the occult and false philosophical systems. Some have claimed to be 'saved' and on their way to heaven. When a person denies Jesus, denies He is the unique Son of God, denies His death on the Cross for sins, and denies his physical, literal, bodily resurrection from the dead, I can say with absolute confidence, "you are not saved. You remain in your sins. You have not repented of your sin, and trusted Christ alone for your redemption. How can you be saved? You have denied the Savior's identity, His mission, and destiny. I beg you to believe in Jesus and be saved!

The context of binding and loosing here more likely refers to the people being disciplined earlier in the text (vv.15-17). Jesus is in effect promising to act directly on the church's behalf to bring about the **right result**. We promise to work towards a loving reconciliation. "Christ is saying, 'I permitting and prohibiting those things that I have either authorized or forbidden in My Word. You exercise My authority and heaven itself backs you up'" (Jay Adams, Handbook of Church Discipline" p. 114).

### **The Father And The Son Agree To Back You Up (v.19)**

*19 "Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven.*

Jesus repeats the earlier expression "again I say to you". This speaks of the authority of Jesus to make good what He is saying. You can have full faith and confidence that Jesus Christ will make good His word. Some suggest that in the context the two who agree are the ones agreeing to the

## The King's Contract

### Matthew 18:18-20

course of discipline. Some have suggested that where 'two or more are gathered' you in effect have 'church' or ecclesia or the assembly. **Again the church does not have the authority to ask—things contrary to the Word of God the Character of God or the Gospel of God. The Church has all the authority genuinely given to it by Christ. Families have authority given it by God. Governments have authority given it by God.**

I have heard people teach this verse means 'that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven'—and that anything—means anything! You mean anything—even if it contradicts the nature of God—the character of God or the Word of God? Clearly it cannot mean that. If a child says "I want an automatic weapon so I can go and shoot my friends and neighbors" what responsible parent would honor such a request? Would you give a hypodermic syringe to a baby or a poison to a child? Have you ever asked God for something foolish or selfish or wicked—even with people present who were willing to affirm your foolish request?

Are we given permission for foolish, dangerous, wicked requests? Clearly that is not the case. Jesus is not teaching that God's will can be twisted or bent to accommodate greed, or selfishness or foolishness or whim or curiosity! This verse cannot mean you can have whatever you want—contrary to the Word of God or the Will of God or the character and nature of God. That is absurd. It flies in the face of everything the Bible teaches. "Such an interpretation is tantamount to magic, in which God is automatically bound to grant the most foolish or sinful request, simply because two of His children conspire to ask Him for it" (MacArthur p. 138).

The expression 'anything that they ask' is interesting in the original language. The word 'ask' makes reference to a petition or a request. Like a child would ask his or her father, a citizen or her king. "About anything" is the Greek expression *peri pantos pragmatos*—*Jesus uses the language of a Judge. The expression could be rendered "about any judicial matter" which nicely fits the context.*

The expression 'if you agree' comes from the Greek word very much like our English word symphony—or harmony—the idea of multiple voices or instruments coming into harmony. When instruments or voices come together they must harmonize. Again the meaning seems to be if the two witnesses 'agree' (harmonize)—that this person's sin—has been recognized, confessed, repented, the person loves the Lord—loves the person wronged, the Father hears them. The opposite would also be true—if the witnesses agree—the person has refused recognition of sin, refused repentance, refused reconciliation, the Father agrees and recognizes that failure on the part of the person to be reconciled. **When a person fails to repent, fails to forgive, fails to be reconciled, you can be sure the Father in Heaven is not pleased!**

What exactly is being 'asked'? For love and peace and harmony and holiness! Here asked is a euphemism for 'pray'!! We pray. We pray about everything! Remember the context. Someone has sinned. There is a desperate need to make this right. There is a desperate need to know the mind of God and the heart of Christ. What better way to find out than to search the Scriptures

## **The King's Contract**

### **Matthew 18:18-20**

and pray! Our Father in Heaven hears our prayers. Psalm 65:2; "O You who hear prayer, To You all flesh will come."

The prayers here are the 'few' who are involved in the process of loving discipline. God will answer prayers, giving the answer they need as they weigh through the issues involved in the broken relationship. Again, the context seems to be broken people need help in getting back together. When husband leaves his wife—or a wife her husband or children their parents—or friends forsake friendship—how can we make it right?

God is the living God. Those who use this verse as a magic incantation to attempt to manipulate God or God's Word will find themselves sorely disappointed. Since God knows everything and has the infinite capacity to respond in absolute wisdom and exercise power and love and mercy—we must pray!

### **We Agree To Seek Outcomes Based On The Nature And Character Of Christ (v.20)**

*20For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."*

Like the previous verses this verse has also been grossly misinterpreted. This verse is often used to support the idea of the presence of Jesus in the worship service or the prayer meeting to the small group Bible study. Certainly Jesus is present with His people. But Jesus is also present with the individual believer in the hospital bed or the jail cell. Jesus is present with the believer in the prayer closet. **The context is discipline in the church or the assembly. The two or three witnesses are the loving men and women who agree or disagree that a person's sin has been forgiven or not forgiven. Remember Jesus is assuring disciples He Himself is with them.** Jesus is in effect saying—"I'll be there for you. I love you. I am committed to honesty, humility and love in relationship." When people so love Jesus and act like Jesus they take on His character. Such sweet commitment to peace, to restoration, to forgiveness, to harmony and holiness takes on the sweet aroma of the presence of Christ. Like cologne or perfume that spills in a drawer full of clothes, all the clothes take on the fragrance. The person hurt, and the person who hurt—witness the fragrance and character of Christ.

When we say "the name" of Jesus that means all that the name implies. The name of Jesus means "Jehovah is salvation". Jesus understands that people hurt each other. There is understanding in the name of Jesus. There is recognition of injury in the name of Jesus. There is healing in the name of Jesus. There is love in the name of Jesus. There is power in the name of Jesus. When people are willing to put aside their differences and love each other for the sake of Christ—Jesus says, "I'm there."

Churches can be rich or poor. Dead or alive. Powerful or powerless. Effective or ineffective. I read a story that took place several years ago in Cheyenne Wyoming. A tornado tore through town and destroyed a church. The local paper made this statement: "We are pleased to announce that the cyclone which destroyed Cheyenne Community Church yesterday did no real damage to

## **The King's Contract**

### **Matthew 18:18-20**

the town.” How sad. When Jesus is present in the church—and the church is present in the community—sinners are forgiven; people are healed in relationships; marriages are healed; families are healed; drunks stop drinking and abusers stop abusing; dealers stop dealing; thieves stop stealing and liars stop lying. The most powerful churches are the one's where Jesus is present. Jesus is present to love the people who are loveless; forgive people who are guilty; and restore people who are broken.

## **Conclusion**

In this passage Jesus makes a contract—a binding contract. He encourages us that what we permit and what we forbid in context Jesus will honor. Remember the context? Who is the greatest in God's Kingdom? The person who humble, honest and serves. The person who hates offenses. The person who takes sin seriously and relationship seriously. The person who takes forgiveness seriously. Jesus promises to be present in the process of discipline—**and when the participants share Christ's values, His goals, His perspective, His love, His concern, Jesus promises to answer our prayers. When we ignore discipline, if we pretend offense does not matter, ruined relationships do not matter, forgiveness does not matter, no such promise for the presence of Jesus exists. This passage of Scripture is a great warning and a great promise. “When discipline has been properly and fully pursued in obedience to Jesus, then we may be assured that the outcome is correct” (Jay Adams, *ibid.* p.113).**