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WHATSOEVER YOU SHALL BIND ON EARTH

There are two separate statements by Jesus Christ, which in our English translations make the identical statement. So do those two statements mean the same thing? I am referring to something that is stated in Matthew chapter 16, and then again in Matthew chapter 18.

Here are these two statements:

And I will give unto you the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and **whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven**. (Matthew 16:19)

Verily I say unto you, **Whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.** (Matthew 18:18)

Here we have the identical statements in two different verses in the same gospel account. Both are found in Matthew's Gospel. The fact that both statements are recorded in the same gospel account means that Jesus Christ really did make this statement twice, in two different situations.

So do these two statements mean the same thing?

No, they don't mean the same thing!

There are in fact some small but very significant differences in the two Greek texts from which we get these two translations into English. And these differences have an important effect on the applications for these two verses.

Some questions are:

1) **To whom** did Jesus Christ give this authority "to bind" and "to loose"?

2) **Exactly to what** does this authority "to bind" and "to loose" apply?

3) **How** are these two "identical" statements **different**?

To establish the answers to these questions we need to do two things: examine the actual **Greek text** for both quotations, and also examine **the contexts** in which both of these two identical English statements appear.

One potential problem of which we should immediately be aware is this: In English the expression "whatsoever **you** shall bind" could be **either singular or plural**. The expression "you shall bind" could be addressed to one individual, or it could be addressed to a group of individuals. The English pronoun "you" is both singular and plural. To avoid this potential ambiguity, here in the South many people will use "y'all" when wanting to use "you" in the plural. That custom does eliminate ambiguity.

[As a matter of interest: in King James English the distinction between singular and plural "you" was still recognized. So back then singular for "you" was "**thou**" and "**thee**", and the plural for "you" was "**ye**" and "**you**". This covered "you" for both the subject and the object in a sentence. The singular forms were familiar, and the plural forms were formal, the reverse for how this developed linguistically in the German language, where "Du" (rhyming with "you") is familiar and singular, and "Sie" (rhyming with "thee") is formal and also singular. In the process of time all four of these English forms came to be expressed by the one form "you". And that is what we have today. But that leaves us with some ambiguity.]

The point is: while in today's English the pronoun "you" can be either singular or plural, **there is no such ambiguity in biblical Greek**. In biblical Greek "you" singular and "you" plural are different forms of the same pronoun and easily distinguished, like the King James English distinction between "thou" and "ye". This means that in the Greek text it is not possible to mistake "you" singular for "you" plural.

So now let's examine both of these statements in turn.

MATTHEW 16

In Matthew 16:13 Jesus Christ asked His disciples "whom do men say that I the Son of man am?" Simon Peter then said "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God" (verse 16).

In response to this statement Jesus Christ then addressed verses 17-19 to Simon Peter. These three verses are addressed only to Peter! **Nothing in these three verses applied to any of the other apostles!**

Verse 17 is addressed to Peter.

And Jesus answered and said unto him, **blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona**: for flesh and blood has not revealed *it* unto you, but My Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 16:17)

This verse is addressed only to Peter. Now the next verse.

And I say also unto you, that **you are Peter**, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of the grave shall not prevail against it. (Matthew 16:18)

This verse is also addressed exclusively to Peter, and to none of the other apostles. Now we come to verse 19. This verse is also addressed **exclusively to Peter**. This verse is not addressed to, and did not apply to any of the other apostles. It is addressed exclusively to Peter.

This is clear beyond any doubts from the Greek grammar for this verse. There is no ambiguity. Here is this verse with the relevant Greek words included in parenthesis.

And I will give **unto you** (Greek “soi”) the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever **you shall bind** (Greek “deses”) on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever **you shall loose** (Greek “luses”) on earth shall be loosed in heaven. (Matthew 16:19)

The pronoun “you” appears three times in this English translation. Here are the meanings of the three Greek words that are involved.

1) The Greek pronoun “soi” is the dative case (i.e. indirect object) and **second person singular** of the pronoun “su”. So this “you” is speaking to only one person, Peter.

2) The Greek verb “deses” is the aorist active subjunctive **second person singular** of “deo”. So this is also speaking about only one person, Peter.

3) The Greek verb “luses” is the aorist active subjunctive **second person singular** of “luo”. So this is likewise speaking to only one person, Peter.

Thus the Greek text proves beyond any shadow of doubt that Matthew 16:19 was addressed only to the Apostle Peter. It was not addressed to, and did not apply to any of the other apostles. Verses 17-19 are all addressed to the man Peter.

So the point is this:

Matthew 16:19 did not confer any authority of any kind to any of the 12 apostles, other than to the Apostle Peter. This verse was addressed to him alone, and in the first generation of the NT Church it applied to him alone, i.e. as long as he was alive. This verse refers to something that was not shared by Peter with any of the other apostles.

Once Peter had died, Matthew 16:19 obviously no longer applied to him. It would then apply to **one other man at a time**, coming down to our time today, and (with one exception) never apply to two men simultaneously.

THE CONTEXT FOR MATTHEW 16

The context for this statement is a matter of identifying the truth, Jesus Christ's true position and status within God's plan. The context is one of **God the Father having revealed special understanding to one specific person** (verse 17).

In verse 18 Peter is identified with the Greek word "**petros**", and at the same time Jesus Christ identified Himself with the Greek word "**petra**". Now about 50 years ago one traveling evangelist in Worldwide, who didn't understand a word of Greek himself, came up with the explanation that "petra" means "a cliff, a big rock" and that "petros" means "a little rock, a pebble". And in reference to this verse he sometimes referred to "**Pete the Pebble**". That may have sounded funny, but it was totally inappropriate.

What was true is that "petra" does indeed mean "a huge cliff", or even "a mountain range", or "a foundation comprised of one huge rock". That is a correct identification for Jesus Christ.

What was not true is that "petros" supposedly means "a small stone or a pebble". "Petros" is not the diminutive form of the noun "petra".

New Testament Greek has the word "**lithos**", which refers to: stones, building stones, small stones (but not pebbles!), stones large enough to stumble over.

The point is that "**petros**" referred to a stone that is **larger than "lithos"**. It does not refer to pebbles or tiny stones. Yes, "petros" is small compared to a cliff or a mountain range, but from a human perspective "petros" still refers to **a good sized rock**, larger than just a stone (or "lithos").

When Jesus Christ gave the apostle the name "Peter" that was not some kind of put-down, as in "Pete the Pebble"! The name "Peter" implied a huge elevation, above all the others who are not "rocks" in the Church of God. A rock is something solid, dependable, reliable. A rock is something to be used in building a foundation, building something that will be permanent. And jokes about pebbles are inappropriate.

Next, because Peter was going to be a rock of stability, **therefore** Jesus Christ gave to Peter, and to none of the other original apostles, "**the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven**" (see verse 19).

Note that the later Scripture in chapter 18 does not refer to, and has nothing whatsoever to do with, the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Whatever authority is conferred in chapter 18, it does not involve the keys of the Kingdom.

This reference to "keys" is extremely significant.

Keys are not given to everybody! If keys were going to be given to everybody, then keys lose their significance. Keys make possible access to something. It follows that **all the people who do not have**

those keys are denied access to something. And with the keys in this verse being given to only one specific man, it means that all other people, including all the other apostles, are denied access to something, unless the one who has those keys (i.e. originally Peter) uses the keys to open up that access for other people.

We'll look at what these verses here in Matthew 16 actually mean after we have examined the account in Matthew 18.

MATTHEW 18

In Matthew 18, in verses 15-20 Jesus Christ explains how to deal with **problems** that may arise **between church members**. Notice that dealing with such problems does not require any "keys". So there is no reference to "keys" in this passage.

Verse 15 presents the situation of one church member being wronged in some way by another church member. To resolve such problems between church members Jesus Christ presented a three-step process.

If step one does not achieve the desired result, then the process moves on to step two. If step two does not achieve the desired result, then the process moves on to step three. If step three does not achieve the desired result, then the instruction is to put the guilty party out of the Church. These steps are outlined in verses 15-17.

Let's look at verse 17.

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 you as an heathen man and a publican. (Matthew 18:17)

What does "tell it unto the church" mean? Up to this point at least four individuals are involved: the innocent party, the guilty party, and at least two witnesses.

So is the innocent party supposed to get the whole church together and tell everyone the whole story? No, of course not.

The next verse contains the statement we are examining. And then the two verses after that actually explain what Jesus Christ meant with the statement "tell it to the church". Jesus Christ meant: **take this matter to the pastor and to the ministry**. Let's look at the two verses that follow verse 18, before we then examine verse 18 itself.

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 for them of My Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 18:19)

For where **two or three are gathered together in my name**, there am I in the midst of them. (Matthew 18:20)

Who does “you” in “I say unto you”, and who does “two of you” in verse 19 refer to ... the members of God’s Church? No, of course not! The “you” and the “two of you” referred to “**two of those original twelve apostles**”. This statement has nothing to do with, and has no application to, unordained lay members of God’s Church. Jesus Christ said these words while looking directly at those twelve original apostles. This statement was directed at them. They were going to be the original leaders of the Church from Acts 2 onwards. And they would have to deal with problems of this nature.

They too would die in due time. But the Church would continue after the original apostles had died. So the responsibility of fulfilling step three for **the problem-resolution process** would then pass on to other leaders. Verse 20 refers to those other leaders who would take over leadership after the original apostles had died.

Verse 20 is not addressed to those original apostles. It is addressed to those who would become the leaders in God’s Church after them, i.e. once the original apostles had all died.

Notice that for the original apostles Jesus Christ said “**two of you**”, and for subsequent leaders in the Church He said “**two or three**”. It is not the whole congregation that is involved in this process. No, it is only two or three ministers who are involved in trying to resolve these problems, and who may have to disfellowship the guilty party, if the problem cannot be resolved.

For this process Jesus Christ explained that **He would be “in the midst of” those two or three ministers** charged with carrying out this problem-resolution process. So instead of giving those “two or three” any keys, which keys they would then have to use in some way, Jesus Christ said that He would guide all such decisions in the problem-resolution process, by being “in the midst of” the men fulfilling this specific responsibility in the Church of God.

Now let’s examine verse 18, which is addressed to the ministers who would have to deal with these problems. Here is verse 18, with the relevant Greek words again included in parenthesis.

Verily I say **unto you** (Greek “humin”), whatsoever **you shall bind** (Greek “desete”) on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever **you shall loose** (Greek “lusete”) on earth shall be loosed in heaven. (Matthew 18:18)

In this verse the pronoun “you” also appears three times in our English translation. Here are the meanings of the three Greek words that are involved in this specific verse.

1) The Greek pronoun “humin” is the dative case and **second person plural** of the pronoun “su”. So this “you” is speaking to a group of people, more than just one apostle.

2) The Greek verb “desete” is the aorist active subjunctive **second person plural** of “deo”. So this is also speaking about a group of people.

3) The Greek verb “lusete” is also the aorist active subjunctive **second person plural** of “luo”. So this is likewise speaking to a group of people.

These three uses of the second person plural “you” in Matthew 18:18 make clear that this verse is addressed to more than one person; it is addressed to all of the apostles. And so in the Greek text these two verses (i.e. Matthew 16:19 and Matthew 18:18) are not completely identical. One verse is addressed to only one man, while the other verse is addressed to a group of men.

THE CONTEXT FOR MATTHEW 18

The verses before verse 18 deal with resolving problems amongst church members. An elaboration for verse 18 is presented in verses 19-20. The verses that then follow this discussion again deal with resolving problems amongst church members (i.e. Peter forgiving his brother who has in some way “sinned against him”).

So **the whole context** before and after verse 18 discusses the matter of **seeking to resolve problems** between church members. And verse 18 is the explanation for what is to happen in **step three** of the three-step problem-resolution process outlined in verses 15-17.

Here in chapter 18 Jesus Christ was speaking to His twelve apostles. The plural “you” in verse 18 is addressed to **all those original apostles**. They were the ones who would have to deal with such problems between church members.

Right, now we can compare the statements in Matthew 16:19 and Matthew 18:18. Now we can examine the differences between these two statements.

COMPARING MATTHEW 16:19 WITH MATTHEW 18:18

Here are some things to consider:

1) Matthew 16:19 is addressed exclusively to Peter. This instruction did not apply to any of the other apostles. Matthew 18:18, on the other hand, is addressed to all of the apostles.

2) In Matthew 16:19 Jesus Christ gave “the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven” to the Apostle Peter, and to no one else. In that whole context nothing is said about Jesus Christ being “in the midst of them”. The keys to the Kingdom of Heaven **open up access** to the Kingdom of Heaven. But in order to do so, **those keys must be used**, otherwise they serve no purpose. And the only person who can use those keys is the one to whom those keys have been given (i.e. Peter in the first generation of the NT Church). People who have not been given those keys cannot possibly use them.

Let me repeat that: **people who have not been given the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven cannot possibly use those keys!**

3) By contrast, the entire context of Matthew 18:18 says nothing about keys. In other words, **keys are not needed for the conflict-resolution process**. Rather, the conflict-resolution process requires guidance, not keys. And so in this context Jesus Christ refers to providing the needed guidance by being "in the midst of them".

4) The context of Matthew 16:19 is one of God the Father having given **divine revelation** to one specific individual (verse 17). The purpose of that divine revelation was **to establish the truth of God**, to distinguish it from "what do men say" (verse 13). This context is not about having reasoned out answers based on examining all the available facts. No, this context is about God the Father having given specific understanding to one individual ... Peter.

5) In the context of Matthew 18:18, on the other hand, no divinely revealed understanding of something that was previously unknown is stated or implied. Rather, in this context Jesus Christ said He would provide guidance in correctly applying the understanding which the apostles already had. That guidance referred to examining and correctly evaluating all the facts that applied to a specific conflict between two church members. To do this no new understanding would be required.

6) Where Matthew 16:19 implies that Peter himself was expected to make use of the keys given to him, Matthew 18:18 implies that a group of apostles would reach a judgment to deal with a problem situation. The group would discuss amongst themselves all the relevant details, and they would reach this judgment by being guided by Jesus Christ in their evaluation of all the relevant facts. But no keys are involved in that process.

7) The context of Matthew 16:19 is about **establishing correct doctrines** in the Church, **by one man receiving divine revelation**. The context of Matthew 18:18, on the other hand, has nothing at all to do with establishing any doctrines, or coming to understand any new truth. This context in Matthew 18:18 is purely about guidance for how to resolve conflicts between church members.

8) The wording in both verses "**whatsoever you shall bind** on earth shall be bound in heaven: and **whatsoever you shall loose** on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (with "you" being singular in Matthew 16 and plural in Matthew 18) conferred **authority to make binding decisions**.

However, this authority to make binding decisions applies to **two completely different areas** of responsibility.

9) Matthew 16:19 gave the Apostle Peter the sole responsibility for making **binding decisions regarding the true doctrines** of the Church of God. "The keys of the Kingdom" open up understanding of correct teachings. These teachings must first be understood correctly, before they can be applied in our daily lives, and in our understanding of God's plan of salvation for mankind. The keys involve one man being given specific understanding by God the Father.

However, such specific understanding is only given by God if the man to whom those keys have been given actually uses those keys. “Keys” are plural, referring to multiple keys, and not just to one single key. Now here is an important point to understand.

Consider an analogy:

Let’s suppose that **the keys** that have been given by God to one man (i.e. to Peter to start with) **are capable of opening 1000 different doors**. But they can only be opened one at a time. And the man to whom the keys have been given stands at a quarter mile distance from a long wall that stretches from the horizon on one side to the horizon on the other side (somewhat like the Great Wall in China), and every 20 or 30 yards there is a door in this wall, to make up that total of 1000 doors. And the keys this man has been given can open every single one of those doors in that seemingly endless wall.

But the doors don’t open with a remote control! He has to physically go up to each door, insert one of the keys he has been given, and open that one door. He may have to review all the keys he has been given before finding the correct one that fits the particular door towards which he has approached.

Opening one door after the other is a laborious process. And it takes time, a lot of time. It is also an exhausting process, which can absorb many years of the life of “the key man”.

The point here is that, as far as the Kingdom of God is concerned, **there are far more doors** that need to be opened than any one single man could possibly cover in a lifetime. There is not enough time for any one single man to open all 1000 doors. So some doors will remain shut even though “the key man” is diligently opening as many doors as possible. So when one “key man” dies, then there are always still many more doors that also need to be opened ... by the next “key man”, and then by the “key man” after him, etc. And the process of opening all 1000 doors will not be completed before Jesus Christ returns.

But here is something that is extremely important to grasp:

While God the Father provides the keys that will open all 1000 doors, **God leaves it up to the man who has the keys, to select for himself which doors he will open with those keys**.

“A key man” is never a robot, any more than the Apostle Peter was a robot. It is not a case of God saying: I want you to open that particular door over there first! That’s not how God works in New Testament times. God provided the burning bush, but Moses himself had to decide that he would approach the bush to see why it didn’t turn to ashes (see Exodus 3:2-4).

Likewise, the man who has been given the keys must himself decide which doors he is going to approach and attempt to open. God can make use of the man’s specific interests to get his attention, but ultimately the man himself must walk up to that specific door and seek to open it.

That's the principle of "ask ... seek ... knock" in Matthew 7:7-8. The "key man" himself must want to see a specific door opened. And when he shows a serious interest in a specific door, then God makes sure that he has the key to open that door.

In other words, when he shows an interest and a desire to open that door, then God gives him "divine revelation", which then opens that door for that man. That's like Peter understanding that Jesus Christ was and is "the Son of the Living God".

However, it can sometimes also be the case that for certain doors **the "key man" is not really interested** in seeing those doors opened. Like the rest of us, the "key man" also has some personal opinions, prejudices and limitations. And so, if he is pressured to approach a specific door, he may do so reluctantly. He really ought to examine that particular door, but his heart isn't in that examination.

A variety of factors can be involved in a situation like this, things like the "key man's" own background, his personal experiences, his level of understanding certain issues, etc. For example, he may be completely uncomfortable in examining the OT Hebrew text or the NT Greek text, and he is totally at the mercy of "scholars" who tell him their opinions for the Hebrew or Greek text.

In that situation deceptive and devious mistranslations into English (e.g. mistranslating the Hebrew word "heylel" into English as "lucifer", etc.) would be difficult for him to evaluate. God is aware of personal issues like this. And so if the "key man" in this situation is pressured to look into the linguistic issue of "heylel" in Isaiah 14:12, he might be reluctant to get involved, knowing his own limitations. And so he avoids this issue and instead focuses on other questions. And that's okay.

But guess what? In that situation God is also not going to open that door for him. His own personal limitations or bias or opinions may (not necessarily "will", but "may") mean that this is one specific door that will not be opened during his tenure as the "key man"; there are plenty of other doors to examine. And God doesn't stop using him as a "key man".

The "key man's" attitude in this scenario is not at all like Jonah's attitude, where Jonah flat-out refused to carry out a clear instruction from God. In the situation we are considering **there is no specific priority from God** that says "this technicality about Hebrew 'heylel' must now be opened", or "this technicality about Hebrew 'chag' vs. 'mow'ed' must now be opened" to the people of God's Church. There is a lot of latitude regarding which doors are opened during the tenure of which "key man". So certain doors need not be approached by certain "key men"; those doors can at some later point be examined by other "key men". That is like Jehu only being anointed at a later time on Elisha's instructions, even though God gave the actual instruction much earlier to Elijah. (More on this on the next page.)

I mention this matter because it is not good for us to become critical of the "key man" in such situations. It is not for us to decide which doors must be opened at a specific time. We need to leave that process up to God, and instead beware of not becoming self-righteous.

At any rate, with the large number of potential doors that need to be opened, and the rather limited number any one "key man" can deal with during his life, it means that **there are very many doors**

which the “key man” will never get around to approaching. So those doors remain for the next “key man” to approach and to deal with.

For example, I am confident that in the past century Mr. Herbert Armstrong was the man to whom God gave “the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven”. And Mr. Armstrong then opened a considerable number of doors. And all of us benefitted from the doors that were opened by Mr. Armstrong; it helped us to better understand the Bible.

Did he open all doors? No, he didn’t. But then neither did the Apostle Peter, the original recipient of those keys, open all doors. Did that make Peter less of a servant of God? No, it didn’t. We need to recognize that no single servant of God is capable of opening all the doors, for which doors the keys have been given to him. There are always more doors left for the next “key man” to unlock.

As already indicated, that is like the Prophet Elijah. God told Elijah to anoint Jehu to be king over Israel (see 1 Kings 19:16). But that is a responsibility which Elijah never got around to fulfilling. And so after the death of Elijah it was the Prophet Elisha who eventually had one of his young men go and anoint Jehu as king (see 2 Kings 9:1-3). So should we therefore become critical of Elijah ... because he didn’t get around to carrying out one specific instruction? Hardly!

My point here is that there is always more that any one of God’s servants could theoretically have done. So if one “key man” didn’t unlock certain doors that we (in hindsight!) may consider important (e.g. the truth about the Jewish calendar, facts about some of the annual observances, etc.), does that entitle us to be critical of that particular “key man” for not examining those specific doors? I don’t think so.

So much for Matthew 16:19.

10) Matthew 18:18 conferred authority to make **binding decisions in regard to the affairs of God’s Church**. Such decisions require cooperative efforts amongst several individuals. And this authority was conferred on all of the apostles. The matter of conflict-resolution amongst church members is an example of **one specific area** dealing with the affairs of the Church of God.

Additional areas to which the principle of Matthew 18:18 also applies would include:

- where to establish congregations
- the hiring of staff for the Church
- format for Church Services and Bible Studies
- selection of sites for keeping the Feast of Tabernacles
- managing the Church’s financial affairs
- the publication of church literature

- the management of church properties

- additional social activities and clubs for church members

- youth programs for the Church

- which men to ordain into the ministry

- holding fast to the teachings of the “key man”, etc.

In other words, Matthew 18:18 applies to **managing the physical affairs of the Church**. But Matthew 18:18 has nothing at all to do with establishing the teachings of the Church. That should be clear because **the men in this group have not been given any keys**, which are essential for establishing a correct understanding of the Scriptures. The men in this group are to “hold fast the form of sound words”, which have been taught by “the key man”, who happened to be the Apostle Paul for Timothy’s time (see 2 Timothy 1:13).

DIVINE REVELATION: THROUGH ONE MAN OR THROUGH MANY?

As far as giving the keys to correct understanding to His people is concerned, God has usually worked through **only one man at a time**, though **occasionally** through **two men** simultaneously.

To be clear, by “God working through one man at a time, or occasionally through two men” I am not referring to men whom God may send as messengers. There can certainly be several different “messengers” alive and doing God’s work at the same time. Messengers hadn’t necessarily been given any special keys. They simply delivered messages from God to the people of Israel, without establishing any specific teachings.

In the context of this article I use the expression “God only working through one man at a time, or occasionally through two men” to refer to men who were used by God as **spiritual leaders** for God’s people, thus on a higher level than only being messengers. I am thinking of **leaders** who, in a way, had also been given **certain keys**.

For example:

1) Once God had called Moses, then **Moses was the only man God worked through**, as far as receiving divine revelation from God is concerned. While Aaron was an assistant to Moses, God never at any time gave Aaron some revelation, thereby bypassing Moses. In fact, when on one occasion Aaron and Miriam said “**has the Eternal indeed spoken only by Moses?** Has He not spoken also by us” (see Numbers 12:2-10), it turned out very badly for Miriam and Aaron. God’s answer essentially was: **yes, Moses really is the only one I have spoken through at this time**. God was angry with Aaron and Miriam, and God struck Miriam with leprosy.

2) After the death of Moses, **Joshua** was the one man that God worked through. But as long as Moses

was alive, Joshua was not the one God used to deal with the people.

3) When God worked through the Prophet **Samuel** to lead the people of Israel (i.e. before they asked for a king), then Samuel was the only one through whom God revealed information and instructions (see 1 Samuel 3:19-21). And that continued to be the case throughout King Saul's reign, up to the time of Samuel's death.

4) When God worked through the Prophet **Elijah**, then Elijah was the only one to stand against the pagan priests. And even though in the latter part of Elijah's ministry Elisha was also a servant of God, yet God did not work through Elisha until Elijah had died.

5) Only then did God work through **Elisha**.

6) After the Babylonian captivity God worked through the team of **Joshua** and **Zerubbabel**, one being the spiritual leader, and the other the secular leader.

7) A generation or two later God worked through **Ezra** (spiritual leader) and **Nehemiah** (the secular leader).

There were also times in the Old Testament (e.g. during the period of the Judges) when God worked simultaneously with certain men who were living in different parts of Israel, and who basically stayed in their own local areas. But none of those men had been given specific "keys".

Basically God has always used one man as a spiritual leader, sometimes with some assistants, to deal with the people of Israel.

Coming to the New Testament, we see the one exception to God working through only one main leader at a time.

After Jesus Christ's resurrection the gospel was to be preached to "all nations" (see Matthew 28:19). That was going to be a huge task. Where Jesus Christ had originally given "the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven" to Peter, this responsibility was then divided into two parts: the message going to all the Israelites, and the message also going to all the non-Israelite nations. As Paul put it:

But contrariwise, when they saw that **the gospel of the uncircumcision** was committed **unto me**, as ***the gospel*** **of the circumcision** *was* **unto Peter**; (Galatians 2:7)

Note!

When Paul said that "**the gospel of the circumcision**" was committed to Peter, then Paul was referring

specifically to Matthew 16:19. That responsibility for “the gospel of the circumcision” required Peter to have access to “the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven”. And likewise, when it tells us that “the gospel of the uncircumcision” was committed to Paul, then it likewise required Paul to have access to “the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven”.

The two men (i.e. Peter and Paul) responsible for the gospel going to two different groups of people (i.e. to Jews and to non-Jews) both needed to have access to those keys. All the other ministers under their authority didn’t need to have those keys, but these two men needed personal access to those keys, in order to make binding doctrinal decisions. **These two men would be establishing the doctrines that would be taught in their areas of responsibility**. And the Jerusalem Conference in Acts 15 was to ensure that the same doctrines were being taught in both areas of responsibility.

So while God did use two men simultaneously in the top leadership position in that early NT era, they actually worked amongst different people (though Paul late in his life wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews, to people who were a part of Peter’s area of responsibility). And in the space of more than two decades their paths did not cross very often.

So basically God was in the early NT again working with only one man at a time in each of those two areas, which man was responsible for the correct doctrines being taught. The epistles of Paul show Paul fulfilling that responsibility to watch over the teachings that were accepted in the areas of his responsibility.

Coming to the 20th century.

Until his death in 1986 all of the teachings accepted and taught in God’s Church were the responsibility of Mr. Herbert Armstrong. He was used by God the Father to open many doors, i.e. to restore many true teachings into God’s Church in our age. Matthew 16:19 applied to Mr. Armstrong.

Did he open all the doors he could theoretically have opened? No, he didn’t. No man before Mr. Armstrong, going all the way back to the Apostle Peter, has ever managed to open “all the doors” for which the keys had been made available to him. But the important thing here is:

During Mr. Armstrong’s time **nobody else opened any doors** to true understanding! None of the men who were evangelists during Mr. Armstrong’s time were ever responsible for establishing new doctrines that were right before God!

Oh yes, some of those men were responsible for certain teachings being accepted in God’s Church. But **those “certain teachings” were wrong before God**! And yes, in some cases Mr. Armstrong allowed himself to be talked into accepting those “new truths” put forward by other men, who had been his students.

The wrong things that were accepted in the Church during Mr. Armstrong’s time did not originate with Mr. Armstrong as a result of a lengthy and in-depth personal study. No, they were things that the men he

had ordained talked him into accepting. That included beliefs like: he (Mr. Armstrong) was the end-time Elijah and leader of the two witnesses (originated by Hermann Hoeh), and the false ideas about church government (originated by those young evangelists).

Yes, the Church did accept some wrong teachings and beliefs during Mr. Armstrong's time. But in most cases those false teachings didn't originate with Mr. Armstrong; they were due to ideas that other people had put into his mind.

The situation back in the 1950s and 60s was this:

Matthew 16:19 applied only to Mr. Armstrong, and not to any of the young men he ordained as evangelists. Matthew 18:18, on the other hand, applied to all the men he ordained as ministers, as well as to Mr. Armstrong himself.

However, all those men who were ordained by Mr. Armstrong did not understand this distinction. Rather, they saw themselves as also having a part in Matthew 16:19. **They thought that they too could discover "new truth"**, a prerogative of Matthew 16:19. This thinking on their part created serious problems for God's Church.

It was that idea, that they too could come up with new truth, that led to erroneous teachings being introduced into God's Church (e.g. the church government ideas they promoted, etc.). That was simply not God's way of revealing new understanding. Introducing new understanding into God's Church is the prerogative of Matthew 16:19, and it requires "the keys" which Jesus Christ gives to only one man at a time.

Another point to consider:

There are many doors that Mr. Armstrong never examined, and therefore never attempted to open. As already stated, no man can examine all the doors that need to be opened.

Now the subject matter that applies to **various doors that Mr. Armstrong himself never tried to open**, by not doing an in-depth personal study of the relevant Scriptures for those doors, would also not have been fully understood by Mr. Armstrong. This was another source of certain Scriptures not being correctly understood during his time. So was Mr. Armstrong's understanding flawed or incomplete in some specific areas?

Yes, it was!

But that is also true for me and for you.

At this point in time my understanding and your understanding is still incomplete and to some degree

flawed in certain areas. Which areas? I don't know! Otherwise I would be seeking the answers in those areas. But this simply means that **more doors still need to be opened**.

It has to be true that my understanding and your understanding at this point in time is still incorrect to some degree. That is why the end-time Elijah still has to "**restore all things**" (Matthew 17:11). He will have to unlock the remaining doors for God's people to have access to all the truth of God that Jesus Christ intends to be made known before the millennium will start.

So here is an important point to understand.

THINGS THAT MR. ARMSTRONG COULD NOT BIND OR LOOSE

Here I will use Mr. Armstrong as an example. However, the following point applies to all the men who have been "key men" in God's Church over the past approximately 2000 years, i.e. all the way back to the Apostle Peter.

The statements "whatsoever you shall bind" and "whatsoever you shall loose" sound like pretty all-inclusive statements. So **is every doctrinal decision Mr. Armstrong made "bound in heaven"?**

No, it is not!

How can we know which of Mr. Armstrong's doctrinal decisions are bound in heaven, and which ones are not bound? Likewise, how can we know which of Mr. Armstrong's decisions "to loose something" are loosed in heaven and which ones are not loosed in heaven?

Let's go back to our analogy of the keys one specific man is given, which keys have **the potential to unlock 1000 different doors**.

Let's say that over the course of time **100 doors have already been opened** with those keys by leaders from the time of the Apostle Peter on down. All subsequent leaders after Peter, as well as other ministers and all church members, have the benefit of access to those 100 doors which have already been opened. That represents a certain level of understanding. Then the "key man" at that point in time dies, and in due time God gives the keys to a new leader.

Now the new "key man" is diligent and in his lifetime he earnestly approaches 20 new doors, and he is given the correct understanding by God, so that then **he is able to open those 20 new doors** for the people in God's Church to understand.

Okay, so now he has access to 120 open doors, i.e. the understanding gained from the 100 doors that were opened before his time, plus the 20 doors he has been used by God to open.

So he is faced with 120 open doors, and 880 doors that are still locked.

Now this "key man" makes doctrinal decisions. He makes decisions regarding how to explain certain Scriptures, and decisions for how those Scriptures apply to the Church's overall understanding of God's plan. But the doctrinal decisions he makes may fall into two different categories. Those two categories are as follows:

1) He makes doctrinal decisions for the 20 doors he has been used to open. When new understanding has been revealed as a result of another door being opened, then that commonly involves changing or modifying a doctrinal position that had previously been accepted as correct. With the doors he has been used to open, this "key man" had made an in-depth study of all the relevant information. And, most importantly, **he had used one of the keys** given to him to open each particular door.

2) However, it can also happen that **the "key man" makes doctrinal decisions that involve doors that are still locked**. He has not perceived that his decisions in these instances involve doors that are still locked. He hasn't yet recognized the doors in front of him. He doesn't realize he is making a doctrinal decision about something where he only has access to incomplete understanding.

This is typically a case of:

"We don't know that there is something that we don't yet know."

As an illustration of this situation consider Joshua and the Israelites after they had crossed over the River Jordan. The following events are recorded in Joshua chapter 9.

The inhabitants of Gibeon pretended to be from a distant nation and wanted the Israelites to make a peace treaty with them (verse 6). Now the Israelites were not supposed to make any treaties with any of the Canaanite inhabitants of the land that God was giving to the Israelites.

But the Gibeonites managed to deceive the Israelites into believing that they were from a distant land. And so the Israelites made a treaty with those Gibeonites.

The key verses in our context are:

And **the men** took of their victuals, and **asked not *counsel* at the mouth of the LORD**. And **Joshua made peace with them**, and made a league with them, to let them live: and the princes of the congregation swore an oath unto them. (Joshua 9:14-15)

Joshua was God's leader at the time. And Joshua made peace with them. **He wasn't supposed to do that**! The problem was that Joshua and the Israelites didn't approach God for an answer to this specific situation. **All the physical evidence** presented by the Gibeonites (i.e. very old clothes and shoes and

wineskins, moldy old bread, etc.) **seemed to make it obvious** that the Gibeonites surely must have come from a very distant land, rather than from a small town just over the next hill. So Joshua did not seek God's advice.

Yes, in this instance the Israelites bound themselves by an oath. But that didn't make their decision right before God. The point here is: Joshua made a wrong decision because **he had not examined all the facts**. He didn't ask God for advice. And there are key questions he could have asked those Gibeonites but didn't, which questions would have exposed their deceitful presentation (e.g. how could the news of what had happened in the past few weeks possibly have become known so quickly in a really far away country? Exactly who would have carried that news to that far away nation? With such a long journey and nothing but moldy bread, how is it that these Gibeonites weren't on the brink of dying from starvation? etc.).

Now my point here is this:

With some "doors" the "key man" personally examines all the evidence and makes a thorough search for the truth. He then receives God's guidance which gives him a correct understanding, and he makes the correct decisions, which decisions will be "bound in heaven".

With some other "doors" the "key man" does not bother making a really thorough study into all the available facts. Like Joshua, **he assumes that what he already knows is the truth**, and that there isn't some "door" that still needs to be opened with "the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven". And as a result he reaches a wrong conclusion, and makes a wrong decision, as did Joshua in the above example.

So coming to Mr. Armstrong's doctrinal decisions:

1) For all the subjects and Scriptures Mr. Armstrong himself examined without a preconceived opinion, where he correctly understood the relevant Scriptures, where he thoroughly and correctly evaluated all the evidence, and then established a teaching for the Church of God, that produced correct teachings and explanations for the Church, and **they are bound in heaven**.

2) For those subjects and Scriptures where Mr. Armstrong, for a variety of reasons, did not understand a Scripture correctly (e.g. how to count for Pentecost, the consequences for the distinction between the Hebrew words "chag" and "mow'ed", etc.), or where he did not really carefully examine all the evidence pertaining to a specific subject, or where he accepted an explanation put forward by someone else, then that established a teaching in the Church of God that was **not bound in heaven**! When he himself did not carefully examine all the available information correctly, then God did not divinely reveal the truth to him, and then he did not use any of "the keys" that God had potentially put at his disposal.

In this NT age God does not give divine revelation for a very specific subject to anyone who himself is not putting out earnest and diligent effort to understand, and who doesn't ask all the possible questions related to that specific subject. **God does not inspire answers to questions that have not been asked**. That's Matthew 7:7 again.

Consider again Jesus Christ's statement to Peter. In Matthew 16:19 Jesus Christ first said: I'll give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. The next part of this statement then shows what Peter was to use those keys for. **Those keys would enable Peter to make doctrinal decisions that would be accepted by God in heaven**. Peter would have to ask God the right questions, in order to receive the keys for very specific subjects.

The binding and making loose are direct consequences of having received those keys. Without those keys any binding or making loose will not be right before God, and it will not be accepted by God in heaven. And God will never give the "key man" the right keys when the "key man" himself only asks all the wrong questions.

Let me repeat that:

When we only ask God the wrong questions, then we don't receive the right answers for the correct questions.

Let me give you one example:

In Luke 17 Jesus Christ explained that some people will be **taken to the place of safety**. That's in verses 34-36. Let's look at verse 36.

Two *men* shall be in the field; **the one shall be taken**, and **the other left**. (Luke 17:36)

The situation here is that two people **both expect to be taken** to the place of safety. But **only one is taken** to the place of safety, and the other person is not taken.

In response to this information the apostles asked Jesus Christ a question.

And they answered and said unto Him, **Where, Lord?** And He said unto them, Wheresoever the body *is*, thither will the eagles be gathered together. (Luke 17:37)

Here the apostles asked the wrong question!

They asked: where is the place of safety? That was the wrong question, one which Jesus Christ was not about to answer in plain language. What difference does it make where the place of safety is going to be? It doesn't make any difference one way or the other. It is immaterial where the place of safety will be, because God will have to take people there. And so Jesus Christ only gave a somewhat cryptic clue as an answer to their question.

Yes, they asked the wrong question. The right question they should have asked, but didn't ask is:

“Why, Lord?”

Why is only one taken to the place of safety, when both should theoretically have been taken? **Why** is the other person left behind? **What** is it that the people who are not taken lack?

It makes no difference **where** the place of safety is going to be. There is nothing we or anybody else can do about that. But it makes **a huge difference** to know **why** some people will not be taken to the place of safety. This occasion occurred more than 50 years before God revealed information about the Laodicean era in the Book of Revelation.

And if the apostles had asked “**why** is one not taken, Lord?”, Christ might have revealed some key statements about the end-time Laodicean attitude 50-60 years before the Book of Revelation was written. As it is, only the Apostle John heard about the Laodicean era; all the other apostles died before this information was revealed. But had they asked the right questions at that opportunity, this information might also have been revealed to them. And that understanding should then have influenced their preaching as well.

Anyway, as far as the “key man” doing his own diligent research in order to receive understanding from God is concerned:

The criterion in this process is not that the “key man” says that he has made a thorough investigation of a specific subject, or even that the “key man” himself actually believes that his investigation was thorough. The criterion is that **he really has evaluated all the available evidence with an open, enquiring mind**.

For example:

While Mr. Armstrong himself believed that his personal research into “the calendar question” was thorough, the evidence in Mr. Armstrong’s own writings says otherwise. Not only was Mr. Armstrong’s research into the calendar question shallow (his most authoritative resource in his whole research was “The Farmer’s Almanac”); **his research into this subject was in fact super-shallow**!

(Comment: The only “calendar research” Mr. Armstrong ever did was to determine which of two new moons **in the Jewish calendar** should be counted as the first new moon of one specific year: the new moon in March or the new moon in April. But he never at any time questioned the Jewish calendar itself. He never at any time looked at the workings of the Jewish calendar. He had no understanding of the rules that are used to determine the dates in that calendar. So it was impossible for him to judge whether those rules are right and acceptable before God or not.)

Accepting the present Jewish calendar for determining the dates for all of God’s annual observances was Mr. Armstrong’s equivalent of Joshua believing that the Gibeonites came from a far-away nation. And by not doing any real research into the Jewish calendar itself (which would have been extremely difficult in the 1930s), it means that Mr. Armstrong’s acceptance of the Jewish calendar was the

equivalent of Mr. Armstrong making a doctrinal decision (i.e. keeping God's Feasts and Holy Days on the wrong dates is a doctrinal decision) that involved **a door which had not yet been opened**.

With his background, and considering the time when he looked at the calendar (i.e. in the 1930s), it was going to be a case of the calendar question representing a door that Mr. Armstrong was never going to be prepared to evaluate for himself. And back in the 1930s he (or any of us for that matter) would not have known what facts to look for.

So Mr. Armstrong's acceptance of the Jewish calendar is an example of a doctrinal decision by a "key man" which was not bound in heaven. That is today abundantly obvious, because **the Jewish calendar violates biblical principles and clear Scriptures**.

And Mr. Armstrong certainly could not make doctrinal decisions that would be bound in heaven for **any area** where he himself had not used "the keys" that were made available to him.

This should not detract from all the doors that were opened by Mr. Armstrong. He restored many correct teachings into the Church of God in the 20th century. In fact, during the 20th century Mr. Armstrong was the only "key man" who was used by God. We need to focus on the doors he was used by God to open for the people of God, rather than focusing on the doors that Mr. Armstrong did not attempt to open. No servant of God has ever opened all the doors he could theoretically have opened.

So Matthew 16:19 is not a carte-blanche unconditional statement. It only applies when the "key man" correctly applies the keys that have been given to him. Anyway, we've now answered our original three questions:

Question #1:

To whom did Jesus Christ give this authority "to bind" and "to loose"?

Answer:

A) To the leading minister in God's Church alone in each time period God gave the authority to establish doctrines and to make binding decisions in this regard. This applies to only one man at a time. This is Matthew 16:19.

B) To the ministry as a whole God gave the authority to make binding decisions for all the physical activities and responsibilities within the Church. But this authority excluded any responsibility for establishing the doctrines of the Church, or for restoring lost understanding. This is Matthew 18:18.

Question #2:

Exactly to what does this authority "to bind" and "to loose" apply?

Answer:

A) The authority in **Matthew 16:19** applies to God's chosen leader to make doctrinal decisions that would apply to the teachings of the Church, and to reveal new understanding. This authority negates any validity for the existence of any "doctrinal committees" in the Church of God, consisting of men to whom God has not given "the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven", as far as doors that are still locked are concerned. Keep in mind that Jesus Christ gave those keys only to Peter, and not to any of the other apostles at that time.

B) The authority in **Matthew 18:18** applies to the ministry in general and is for the purpose of ensuring the smooth functioning of all of the Church's non-doctrinal affairs. This authority refers to administrative decisions.

Question #3:

How are the "identical" statements in these two verses **different**?

Answer:

A) All forms of the pronoun "you" in Matthew 16:19 are in the singular form, and this pronoun applies only to one God-appointed leader at a time during the past approximately 2000 years. It is always only one leader at a time, to whom God has delegated authority to correctly understand and apply the teachings of the Bible, and to whom God gives "the keys".

B) All forms of the pronoun "you" in Matthew 18:18 are in the plural form, and this pronoun applies to the ministry in general over the past 2000 years. This authority to make binding decisions is for the purpose of ensuring the smooth operation of the affairs of God's Church.

In conclusion, the authority conferred by Matthew 18:18 is on a far lower level than the authority conferred by Matthew 16:19. And it is only the authority conferred in Matthew 16:19 that provides access to "the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven". And when men who have been given only the authority in Matthew 18:18 attempt to claim the authority conveyed in Matthew 16:19, then that inevitably results in problems for the Church of God at large.

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