

**LET'S AGREE ON THIS**  
**Matthew 18:15-20**  
**Holiday Island Presbyterian Church**  
**September 10, 2017**

**INTRODUCTION:**

**In our scripture for today,  
we seem to have three separate thoughts -**

**First, there is some good advice -  
- biblical advice - on how to deal with confrontation.**

**Second, there is this curious notion of “binding” and “loosing;”  
that seems to indicate somehow the apostles,  
or the pastor, and elder, or any Christian for that matter  
can “bind” or “loose” something on earth  
and it has the same effect in heaven -  
- that they have somehow gained ratification in heaven.**

**And finally, there is another curious piece of scripture  
that seems to say that if two or more of us  
agree on something in prayer,  
that has some sort of power to bring it to pass.**

**You have probably heard a sermon or two on each of those.**

**But what if it wasn't three separate pieces of advice?  
What if the whole thing is just one thought?**

**What if it were one unified piece of scripture  
that we have artificially separated?**

**Let's see what that might mean . . .**

**DEALING WITH CONFLICT:**

**Jesus is instructing His disciples in how to deal with conflict.  
And it is very good advice.**

**If you believe someone has wronged you,  
have the courage and decency  
to go directly to that person  
and try to work it out.**

**Unresolved conflict has a way of smoldering  
like embers left in a campfire -  
- sooner or later it's going to flare up  
and cause a lot of damage.**

**This is probably Jesus' interpretation of Leviticus 19:17 -  
"Do not hate a fellow Israelite in your heart. Rebuke your  
neighbor frankly so you will not share in their guilt."**

**It's a good first step to reconciliation  
to confront the one who has offended you  
because it gets the offense out in the open  
and can be discussed and possibly resolved  
without lingering anger and resentment.**

**Unfortunately, that doesn't always work.  
I've tried it several times where it didn't work -  
- but I can rest easy knowing I tried my best.**

**In order for this to be effective,  
first of all, there must be a genuine redemptive motive,  
not just an act of revenge.**

**This is not an opportunity to give someone a piece of your mind!  
If you charge into the confrontation with a chip on your shoulder,  
chances are really good**

**your opponent will become entrenched in his/her position  
and instead of solving something - you started a war!**

**So what happens if that tactic doesn't work?**

**The next step towards reconciliation is  
you are to approach the person  
with two or three impartial witnesses.**

**The reason for this is two-fold.**

**First, it prevents you from attacking someone else  
over a trivial matter.**

**Second, it protects both of you from misrepresentation.**

**If all of the above fails to resolve the conflict,  
then it is to be brought before the church.**

**I have heard of this actually happening in some churches.**

**In one instance,**

**a young woman had become pregnant out of wedlock.**

**The pastor insisted that she stand up in a worship service  
and confess her sin and ask the Church for forgiveness.**

**She had two choices:**

**- either comply with the demand  
or be excommunicated from the church.**

**She chose to leave the church.**

**I am pretty sure this is not what Jesus had in mind.**

**Remember: there were no churches when this was written.**

**It refers to the community; the gathered body of Christ.**

**And this is the first clue  
that this scripture may not be meant for personal advice.**

**One has to wonder, why would Jesus -  
- who so strongly emphasized love and forgiveness -  
- advocate such stern measures?**

**The answer is that this is advice for the local congregation!  
It is for the emerging church.  
It is to protect the fledgling body of Christ.**

**Jesus knew that if His own disciples were not clear  
about the message and purpose of Jesus,  
there would be others who were confused  
and others who would be opposed to the apostles.**

**This is good, solid advice  
for how the apostles are to deal with trouble-makers  
who are disrupting the body of Christ  
and are causing harm in their actions and words.**

**Now it makes more sense, doesn't it?**

**It is advice about how to deal with unrepentant trouble-makers.**

**In a church I was serving,  
we had a couple of trouble-makers . . .  
. . . I know, it's hard to believe, right?**

**3**

**An elder was in my office one day,  
and he was looking over the books in my library  
and he saw one entitled "*Well Intentioned Dragons.*"**

**He read the description:**

**Every church has them - sincere, well meaning Christians who leave ulcers, strained relationships, and hard feelings in their wake. They don't intend to be difficult; they don't consciously plot destruction or breed discontent among the members. But they often do undermine the ministry of the church and make pastors question their calling.**

**He looked up at me with a shocked look and asked:**

**“You mean they have a book about this?”**

**Unfortunately, there are dozens of books on the subject.**

**So it seems we have discovered**

**that while this is good personal advice**

**it is directed more to protecting the body of Christ  
from well-intentioned dragons.**

**BINDING AND LOOSING:**

**That leaves us with another curious piece of scripture.**

**Jesus said:**

**“Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”**

**Surely no intelligent, thinking Christian**

**would ever think that something we do here on earth  
would cause heaven to have to ratify it?!?**

**Even the most literal, fundamentalist, Shiite Christian**

**would have to admit**

**that heaven does not bend to our will!**

**There is a simpler meaning -**

**- especially when placed in context**

**with the scripture that came before it.**

**It means that when dealing with a recalcitrant sinner,  
one who is causing problems in the Church -  
- and one who refuses to mend his/her ways -  
- if those with the authority to act  
- ask that person to leave the Church  
- it has already been ratified in heaven.**

**It depends upon a couple of things.**

**First of all, that the other steps have been closely followed.  
Second, that the decision is made after much prayer and  
listening to the Holy Spirit  
And the decision is made by those  
who are given authority in the church ‘  
to make those decisions.**

**Only then can we say that what has been bound on earth  
has also been bound in heaven.**

### **WHERE TWO OR MORE AGREE:**

**Which brings us to the third section of the scripture:**

**19 “Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about  
anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in  
heaven. 20 For where two or three gather in my name, there am I  
with them.”**

**These two verses, Verses 19-20  
are actually a continuation of what came before.**

**To isolate these two verses  
and try to use them as a tool to bind God to our will  
is a grievous error!**

**I have heard some very passionate prayers  
that included the phrase:**

**“ . . . and we just agree, O Lord . . . ”**

**Well, you can agree all you want,  
but that does not obligate God to comply with your agreement!**

**If, as I am suggesting, these three parts of this scripture  
are actually a single piece of advice for the body of Christ,  
then this last part must also apply to the Church -  
- rather than to individuals.**

**The Greek phrase, “*peri pantos pragmatos*”  
is better translated to mean that where two or more agree  
“on judicial matters”**

**It means where two or three -  
*who have been granted the authority*  
to make such decisions in judicial matters of the Church  
agree on a course of action -  
- that has been faithfully executed . . .  
. . . has been approved by God.**

**You may be surprised to find  
that the Presbyterian Book of Order  
has a whole section on Church discipline.**

**It is 62 pages long  
and very detailed in how discipline is to be applied in the Church.**

**Remember, Reformed Christians have marked  
the presence of the true Church wherever:  
the Word of God is truly preached and heard,  
the Sacraments are rightly administered, and**

**ecclesiastical discipline is uprightly ministered.**

**CONCLUSION:**

**I think Jesus was able to look  
at the opposition his teaching was causing  
and to extrapolate the problems the disciples would face  
as Jesus' message was spread across the world.**

**I believe these verses -**

- while they may offer good advice on conflict resolution -**
- were meant for the body of Christ - the Church -**
- and not for personal gain.**

**I've seen recalcitrant members of the local church  
really harm the church; destroying the peace -  
and no one was willing to confront the person causing harm.**

**Most of the time,  
they tried to hide behind the phrase:  
"Judge not lest ye be judged."**

**In reality, it was the members influence  
and/or the amount of their pledge  
and the threat of losing them and their influence and money  
that prevented the church from acting.**

**If you look at these verses as a whole,  
you can see they are meant to protect the individual  
and to protect the community - the body of Christ.**

**The main purpose is to protect congregations  
from violent disruption  
or a slow erosion from unresolved issues.**

**I thank God for several things:**



**If there are issues like this in this Church,  
I am unaware of them.**

**If an issue arose that could cause harm to this Church  
I believe the leadership of this Church  
is made up of Godly people  
who would deal with the person in a Godly manner.**

**Let's pray that peace and prosperity remains in this Church.  
We face an unsure future -  
- and we'll make some tough decisions.**

**And God will surely lead us through it all!**

**PRAYER:**

**Give us the courage to examine ourselves before passing judgement  
on anyone else, O God. And lead us into an ever closer relationship  
with You and each other. May peace be ours. In Jesus Name, Amen**