

How to use Power? – Matthew 18:15-20

The text for meditation for this morning is from verses 15-20 from chapter 18 from the Gospel of Matthew, which I read before. **We begin in the name of the Father, and of the Son +, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen**

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Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

The kingdoms of this world are built and kept and defended by strength, and power, and might. That is not a criticism, it is just the way it is. To build a kingdom, you need power. Money buys power but it is power that you need. Kingdoms are built by coercion, force, and leverage; by strength, battle and bloodshed.

We see this playing out in the world today, be it in Ukraine, Iraq and Syria, Afghanistan, North Korea, Africa, other places of the world and even in the United States of America. Kingdom building is dirty business. You need to use every dirty trick to find, exploit, and take advantage of all of your enemy's weaknesses. When he makes a mistake you squeeze him, pressure him, and advance against him.

You do whatever it takes for there really are no rules, there is no fair play, it is just power. And if at all possible, throw around the name of God. People do not generally follow kings who say, "God is NOT on my side;" therefore, tack His name onto whatever you do. If you have to break the rules, then make it clear that you are breaking the rules of man in order to follow the will of God. Because, really, there are no rules, there is no fair play, it is just power.

We all understand the concepts of power, and how those who have it tend to use it to lord it over others. There is an old proverb which says, "Power corrupts", and that "absolute power corrupts absolutely". Sadly, we have see the truth of that proverb all too often. We see it in the realm of politics, where elected officials use the power granted to them to serve themselves, often forgetting about the citizens for whom they are to be working.

They forget the words of our epistle lesson today, which reminds us, ***"Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God."***

We see it in business, when someone is given a promotion, and suddenly acts in a totally different way, with a totally different philosophy than he did when he was one of the underlings. We see it with the dictators of this world from the right wing or left wing, does not matter, they are so corrupted by the power that they have that they cannot use it properly, only destructively.

In our text today, Jesus talks about the power—the power that has been given to the church,

the power to forgive and to retain sins. We call that power, The Office of the Keys. In the catechism, we are taught that **“the office of the keys is that special authority which Christ has given to His church on earth to forgive the sins of repentant sinners, but to withhold forgiveness from the unrepentant as long as they do not repent.”**

In our text today, Jesus speaks of that power when He says: **“Truly I say to you, whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”** By the command and power of God, His church has power, the power to forgive sins and thereby open the doors of heaven to people, or the power to close heaven by not forgiving them. But how does the church exercise that power? That is really the point of our text today. It is one thing for us to have the power to forgive and retain sins. It is another to use that power properly.

What Jesus wants us to do is to use that power to reach out to the lost and erring, especially the fallen church member who is caught up in a sin that keeps them from true repentance and a right relationship with God. He wants us to use the power He has entrusted to us, do what we can to win back that sinner.

He wants us to use that power as He Himself uses it: with love and patience that seeks not the condemnation, but the salvation of all who turn to Him with repentant hearts.

I think most people are familiar with the words of our text as the steps of excommunication. It is sad, but true, that there are those times when the church must exercise discipline. We, as God's people must take sin very seriously. Of course, we all sin, and we all need to be reminded of the terrible consequences of those sins. **The wages of sin is death**, Scripture declares. Hopefully, when we have sinned, we go to God with truly repentant hearts and ask for His forgiveness.

But there many also be those times when we have not repented, when we have turned a blind eye to our sins. We know something is wrong in the sight of God, but it is more convenient or pleasing or acceptable to us simply to go on in that sin. It may be as simple as having insulted a friend, or talking behind someone's back, and deciding that we really do not owe them an apology.

Or it may be that we are having an affair or are involved in some other sexual sin. It may be that we are addicted to drugs or alcohol. It may be that we are bearing a grudge, or that we lying to everyone around us.

Whatever the sin is, we need to acknowledge it before God that He may take it away, for try as we might we cannot ignore the clear words of Scripture: **If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.**

But what happens when someone does not repent? What do we do when someone sins against us or blatantly defies God's Word? We cannot simply ignore sin. In the Old Testament

lesson, Ezekiel was reminded to be a watchmen, to warn people of the serious consequences of sin. We have that same obligation.

This is where Jesus calls upon us to use the power He has given to His church ***“if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. “But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. “And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer. “Truly I say to you, whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”*** But does this mean we simply have the power to get rid of the sinner, to kick them out of the church and wash our hands of them?

Unfortunately, it seems that there are times when God’s church is more content in simply pointing out sin in an effort to get rid of people. There are those times when Christians are more interested in judging than forgiving. Yes, no doubt, we must confront sin. But the purpose of doing so is for two reasons: One, in order to lead the erring back to repentance and faith; and secondly to prevent them from leading others into sin.

I remember hearing about a church that was excommunicating people for almost any sin at all. It almost got to the point that whenever someone sinned, they were excommunicated. But truthfully, if that were the case, who could ever belong to the church?

That church was abusing the power that had been entrusted to it. It forgot how to use the power it had been given, for if we are to that power properly, we will always be acting in love and patience, trying to win back the sinner into God’s family of grace.

It is said that with great power comes great responsibility. God has given His church great power — power to forgive or to retain sins. We have the power to open the doors of heaven or to lock them. But we must use that power as God has intended—not as a weapon, but as a means of leading the sinner back to repentance.

We have the power to proclaim God’s law, which can cut through the most stubborn of hearts and move them to repentance. And then we can wield the power of the gospel. We have the great joy of sharing with sinners the wonderful good news: that Jesus Christ, the true God of heaven and earth came into our world to live for us, to die in our place on the cross and to bring us forgiveness as He pays the price for our sins.

We can share with them the wonderful good news of the Saviour who rose from the dead, and

even now is alive to bless, direct, guide and strengthen His people. And what a joy it is to see God's Word at work! What a blessing it is to see the sinner turn from His sin and live. And when they have turned from their sin, even if they have been excommunicated, we must show the same love and forgiveness God Himself has for them, as we blot that sin from our memory, and truly treat them as if that sin had never happened.

God wants all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. He also says that there is joy in heaven over one sinner who repents. Yes, He will judge the sinner, but He is always ready and willing to forgive those who come with sincere, repentant hearts and seek His forgiveness through faith in Christ. And He who has given His church power over sin wants us to that power the same way—for the salvation of the lost and reclamation of the sinner.

It's a great power that God has given to us, this power to forgive or retain sins. God grant that we may also use it wisely, as we seek in love and compassion to reach out to the sinful world with the love of the dying and rising saviour, who is our forgiveness and life, too. Amen.

Dear believers in Christ; that the Triune God; **Father, Son and Holy Spirit** pour out His richest blessings to all of you and fill you with peace. Amen