

**Wednesday of Judica, A ✕ D 2010**  
**Matthew 18:15-20**

*In the Name of the Father and of the ✕ Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

1 Why two keys? Why binding and loosing? Why forgiveness alongside condemnation? Does Jesus seem like a jerk to give to St. Peter and the other apostles the authority to bind sin, to give them the two-fold authority to forgive sins or to withhold forgiveness, to bind your sins to you or to unchain them from you? Wouldn't a loving God just forgive everyone? Why not just one key? Why not just give to the apostles and their successors the authority to forgive sins? They go hand-in-hand. The authority to forgive sins requires the authority to withhold forgiveness; the authority to loose sins requires the authority to bind them. Forgiveness is only a gift if there's an alternative. Forgiveness is only free if you don't deserve it.

2 That's the rub. People don't want forgiveness. They want permission. Forgiveness means you have sins. Forgiveness means you deserve condemnation. Forgiveness implies there's something from which you need to be set free. Permission would let you get away with some sins, persist in some sins, continue to do what you have been doing. If you want permission, you won't get forgiveness. That's why there are two keys.

3 So you confessed, "I believe that when the called ministers of Christ deal with us by His divine command, in particular when they exclude openly unrepentant sinners from the Christian congregation and absolve those who repent of their sins and want to do better, this is just as valid and certain, even in heaven, as if Christ our dear Lord dealt with us Himself." Jesus gives this authority to the men He places into the Office of the Keys to forgive or retain sins so that He might deliver His forgiveness to you.

4 The depth of God's forgiveness is measured in the alternative. Withholding forgiveness has a goal: repentance. Binding sin has a goal: repentance. Refusing admission to the Lord's Supper has a goal: repentance. Casting someone out of the congregation has a goal: repentance. There is nothing a pastor hates more than withholding forgiveness. There is nothing your Lord hates more than withholding forgiveness. Mercy is His proper work, His natural disposition. Wrath is foreign to Him, it is His alien work. Want proof? He held nothing back to save you. Rather than lose you eternally, He gave His Son over to death and condemnation.

5 Forgiveness is full and free and furious. You can't have partial forgiveness. You cannot get some of your sins forgiven and keep some others to yourself. That's displayed on the cross. Jesus died for the sins of the whole world. He took the sins of the whole world away. He gave His whole life, the whole of Himself. And He wants you completely, not partially. There are no fractions to forgiveness.

6 Until you know what you deserve, you won't know what God offers instead. The binding key is to teach you that you are a beggar. You have no rightful claim to what God offers. What you rightfully deserve is death and hell. Forgiveness is a gift, not a reward, not something you're entitled to. So Jesus created the Office of the Keys and perpetually puts men

into the office to deliver this gift. Everything I do is for the goal of delivering Jesus' gift of forgiveness because everything God does is for the goal of delivering His gift of forgiveness.

7 Do you lament your sin? Come receive His gift of forgiveness. Do you struggle against your sinful flesh? Come receive His gift of forgiveness. Do you wrestle against doubt? Come receive His gift of forgiveness. Do you feel tempted to doubt whether God really counts you forgiven? Come receive His gift of forgiveness. Do you wish you could be more in touch with God? Come receive His gift of forgiveness. Do you want to hear the voice of God? Come receive His gift of forgiveness.

8 There are two keys so that God can use only one. There is hell so that God might give you heaven. There is wrath so God might lavish mercy upon you. There is forgiveness here for you.

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Pastor Jeff Hemmer