



## Spiritual Warfare

### Part 8: Wrong Warfare - Binding Satan

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No analysis of modern spiritual warfare methodology would be complete without a look at the practice of “binding Satan.”<sup>1</sup> To say that this practice enjoys popularity in charismatic circles is to state the obvious, but of all the false practices of modern spiritual warfare teachers, this one is popular in both charismatic and non-charismatic circles.

As with the other practices we have examined, we want to allow Scripture to be our measure of truth as we seek to bring our beliefs and practices under the authority of God's truth. When we do this, we find there is **no biblical teaching and no example** in Scripture for binding Satan.

#### **What Is This “Binding” Thing?**

If you have had even a minimal exposure to Christian teaching, teachers, books, or people outside of this local fellowship, you have likely encountered the practice of “binding Satan.” It happens during prayer meetings, Bible studies, private devotional times, and even from pulpits during a Sunday service.

*“The practice of binding Satan and/or the demons and evil spirits is not only something which Christians do during public and private deliverance sessions, but it is often a personal activity exercised on a regular basis by a growing number of Christians.”<sup>2</sup>*

It is believed that by binding Satan, his activity is limited, hindered, or prohibited in the sphere in which he is bound. For instance, a person might pray that Satan will be bound from blinding a person to whom they wish to present the gospel with the belief that this will improve the likelihood that

the person will trust Christ as Savior. Someone might pray that Satan would be bound from a certain event (concert, worship service, etc.) and thus prohibited from having any influence or power over that event. Or someone might pray that Satan be bound from a geographical location (a new house, a neighborhood, a church, bedroom, or workplace) with the belief that uttering such a prayer cripples Satan's ability to interfere, enter, or have power.<sup>3 4</sup>

The prayer might be anything from an innocent desire expressed to God to a direct command to Satan. I have heard people pray both ways. I used to know a man who, innocently enough, would humbly ask God, “Lord, would you bind Satan from having any influence here?” On the other end of the spectrum are the nearly insane rantings of televangelist Robert Tilton directed toward the demonic forces that he believes are attacking his followers in TV-land:

“Satan, you demonic spirits of AIDS<sup>5</sup>, and AIDS virus--***I bind you!*** You demons-spirits of cancer, arthritis, infection, migraine, headaches, pain - come out of that body! Come out of that child! Come out of that man. . . ***Satan, I bind you!*** You foul demon-spirits of sickness and disease, Infirmities in the inner ear and the lungs and the back. You demon spirits of arthritis, sickness, and disease. You tormenting infirm-spirits in the stomach. ***Satan, I bind you!*** You nicotine spirits--***I bind you!*** In the name of Jesus!”<sup>6</sup>

1 So far we have looked at the common, but mistaken, practices of “praying a hedge of thorns” and renouncing generational curses and demons. Previous articles in this series are archived at [www.kootenaichurch.org](http://www.kootenaichurch.org).  
2 Thomas Ice and Robert Dean, *Overrun By Demons: The Church's New Preoccupation With The Demonic* (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 1990), 100.

3 Ibid.

4 If this is starting to sound eerily similar to the spiritual worldview of those who advocate renouncing generational curses, you are on to something. A similar view of the demonic rests at the foundation of both of these practices.

5 We will examine the belief that all illnesses and infirmities are the result of demonic oppression or possession in a future article.

6 Robert Tilton, *Success-N-Life* program (ca. 1991), video on file at the Christian Research Institute. Hank Hanegraaff, *Christianity In Crisis*

Even the very conservative teacher Bill Gothard advocates the practice of binding Satan by the name and blood of Jesus Christ. In his book *Rebuilders Guide*, Gothard offers “*The Prayer to Bind Satan and Build a Hedge of Thorns*,”: “*Heavenly Father, I ask You to rebuke and bind Satan in the name and through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.*”<sup>7</sup>

Gothard cites **Mark 3:27** and **Jude 9** in support of the practice<sup>8</sup> and offers the following: “Before we attempt to reclaim a loved one who has come under Satan’s power, we must first bind Satan. Otherwise, he works through that loved one to create a reaction toward every attempt of restoration.” What will happen if you don’t bind Satan before trying to restore a loved one? Gothard answers, “*Attempting to spoil Satan’s house without binding him will only result in arguments.*”<sup>9</sup>

My point is not to pick on Bill Gothard. Frankly, I could quote a number of rather conservative teachers who would parrot that advice. The teaching has crept into every nook and cranny of the Church.

Spiritual warfare teacher Mark I. Bubeck,<sup>10</sup> while telling a story about a suicidal “Christian” who called him in the middle of the night for advice, records the following about that conversation: “*I prayed with him, **binding up all of Satan’s powers that were seeking to destroy him.** . . .*”<sup>11</sup> In the same book, while giving a list of dos and don’ts for dealing with the demonic in confrontation warfare, Bubeck instructs us, “*Do **bind all powers** of darkness working under any wicked spirit to him, commanding them all to leave when he does.*”<sup>12</sup>

Like Bubeck, Neil T. Anderson’s entire approach to spiritual warfare is based on the presumed authority of the believer over the devil. Anderson teaches, “*God has granted us the authority to **bind what shall be bound in***

*heaven’ . . . The effectiveness of **binding the strongman** (see Matthew 12:20 [sic]) is dependent upon the leading of the Holy Spirit and subject to the scope and limits of the written Word of God.*”<sup>13</sup>

True to his style, Anderson offers a formulaic prayer which supposedly binds Satan from interfering with loved ones: “*We agree that every evil spirit that is in or around (name) be bound to silence. They cannot inflict any pain, speak to (name)’s mind, or prevent (name) from hearing, seeing or speaking. Now in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ I command you, Satan, and all your hosts to release (name) and remain bound and gagged so that (name) will be able to obey God.*”<sup>14</sup>

If you ever tune in to CBN (Christian Broadcasting Network) in hopes of being exposed to sound theology, you’ll be sorely disappointed. During one broadcast of *The 700 Club*, Pat Robertson advocated “binding Satan” in order to deal with satanic attack within one’s home. During the “Bring It On” segment, Robertson was asked this question by “Gilbert”: “*Our household has been under attack lately by the devil. Are we supposed to rebuke the devil in Jesus’ name or just look to God to take care of the matter for us?*”<sup>15</sup> Robertson responded by saying, “*I think you need to wage spiritual warfare and you need to understand what you are doing. But, uh, I, . . . I, . . . I, think we should say, if you want something to say, is, ‘I bind you, Satan and the forces of evil, and, uh, In the name of Jesus, I bind your power’, which means you nullify the power of what he’s exercising against you. . . . That is the way you deal with this situation.*”<sup>16</sup>

### **Proof Texts To The Rescue!**

When this instruction on binding Satan is offered, a few standard Bible verses are cited. Here they are:

**Matthew 12:29: “Or how can anyone enter the strong man’s house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his**

(Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 1993), pg. 257. Emphasis mine.

7 Bill Gothard, *Rebuilder’s Guide* (United States: Institute in Basic Life Principles, Inc., 2005), pg. 119. He further suggests that you pray, “*I ask You to build a ‘hedge of thorns’ around my partner, so that anyone with wrong influence will lose interest in him (or her) and leave.*” Like others, Gothard distorts and misuses **Hosea 2:5-7** to promote the practice of hedge-praying. See part 6 in this series.

8 These verses, as we will see, offer no justification at all for this practice. The subject of “Rebuking Satan” will be handled in a future article.

9 Ibid., 154. Gothard then quotes **Matthew 7:3-5**; **Mark 3:27** and **Ephesians 6:12** in support of this claim. What do those verses have to do with this assertion? Your guess is as good as mine.

10 He was featured heavily in part 7 of this series for his absurd teaching on generational curses.

11 Mark I. Bubeck, *The Adversary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975) 91. Emphasis mine.

12 Ibid., 125. Emphasis mine.

13 Elliot Miller, *Spiritual Warfare and the “Truth Encounter,”* Christian Research Journal 21, No. 2 (1999): 13. Taken from “Twenty Five Most Popular Questions,” Freedom in Christ website, <http://www.ficm.org>. I searched and could not find this on Anderson’s website any longer.

14 Neil T. Anderson, *The Bondage Breaker* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1990), 227. as quoted in Elliot Miller, *Spiritual Warfare and the “Truth Encounter,”* Christian Research Journal 21, No. 2 (1999): 14-15.

15 [http://www.cbn.com/media/player/index.aspx?s=vod/BIO\\_010510\\_WS](http://www.cbn.com/media/player/index.aspx?s=vod/BIO_010510_WS)

16 Ibid.

house."<sup>17</sup>

**Matthew 16:19:** "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."

**Matthew 18:18:** "Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."<sup>18</sup>

You notice immediately the mention of "strong man" and "bind" and "binding in Heaven" and "binding on earth." These phrases are all that is needed by some to build this entire theology of spiritual warfare that involves formulaic prayers to bind Satan. However, a proper interpretation of each passage in its context yields an entirely different understanding of Jesus' words. Let's take a look at each one.

### **Matthew 12:29 AND CONTEXT**<sup>19</sup>

**Matthew 12:29,** "Or how can anyone enter the strong man's house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house."

As the teaching goes, Satan is the strong man, and sinners are his possession. In order to rescue loved ones from his grasp and influence, we must first "bind Satan" so that he cannot resist our effort to "plunder his house." When verse 29 is all that is read, then it is easy to see how people could be led to the false conclusion that this passage is describing the modern practice of binding Satan. In reality, nothing of the sort is being described.

The context of **Matthew 12** has *nothing to do* with our practice of spiritual warfare at all. This is a record of an historical event in the life of the Lord Jesus in which He healed a demon possessed man. The crowd began to wonder if Jesus was who He claimed to be: the Son of David (**12:23**). That was the proper conclusion, but not the one that the Pharisees wanted the people to reach. In an attempt to dissuade the crowd from concluding that Jesus was the Messiah, they offered an alternate explanation of His ability to cast out demons: "This man casts out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of demons" (**12:24**).

To point out the lunacy of such a suggestion, Jesus pointed out that everything He did as demonstration of His Messianic credentials was directly *opposed to Satan*. Why would Satan cast out Satan (**12:26**)? Why would he fight against himself by empowering Christ to wage war against Satan since, clearly, everything that Christ did opposed Satan's works and power? How

17 **Mark 3:27** cited by Gothard is parallel to **Matthew 12:29**.

18 New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update.

19 For the sake of space, I will not quote the entire context which properly includes **12:22-42**. However, I would strongly encourage you to read the verses yourself and follow along in the text as I explain the passage.

could such a kingdom stand (**12:25**)?

Surely Jesus must be stronger than Satan, if He was able to come into this world and war so effectively against his kingdom and plunder his captives. Jesus was not *empowered* by Satan, but was *overpowering* Satan. That is the meaning of verse 29. True, Satan is the strong man in the verse, **but** the binding is an analogy to show Christ's strength over Satan, not a command or example that we are to follow! Jesus is not instructing us on how to handle Satan. Jesus is refuting the claim that His power came from the devil!

The central issue of the passage is "By whose power did Christ perform His miracles—God's or Satan's?" Jesus offered a simply analogy. It must be by God's power, since only God is strong enough to destroy and plunder Satan's kingdom.

**Matthew 12:29** is not a universal command to all believers on how to effectively deal with the "strongman," but an historic illustration of Christ's personal power over Satan. Any use of that verse to support the practice of "binding Satan" is at best an inexcusable abuse of Scripture!

### **Matthew 16:19 AND CONTEXT**

**Matthew 16:19,** "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."<sup>20</sup>

As the teaching goes, Jesus is giving instructions on how to "build His church" (v. 18) which can only happen if we bind Satan on earth so that he will be bound in Heaven (heavenlies). This is taken as a mandate for believers to bind Satan with the accompanying promise that when we do, he will be bound by Heaven.

A quick look at the context reveals that these words were uttered in response to Peter's great confession that Jesus is "**the Christ, the Son of the Living God**" (**16:16**). It is in response to Peter's confession of Christ that Jesus utters the words in verse 19.

We also notice that, again, the context has nothing whatsoever to do with spiritual warfare. Jesus was not giving His disciples instruction on how to conquer Satan. That notion is completely foreign to the text. Spiritual warfare is not mentioned, nor even alluded to. Rather, it is *assumed* that this type of "binding warfare" is required for the church to be built.

Since Jesus is responding to Peter's confession, whatever the "binding" and "loosing" refers to, it must have to do with Jesus building his church (v. 18).

The focus and key to the passage is in the term "bind" (*deo*, Gk.) and "loose" (*luo*, Gk.) As Ice and Dean note, "That was a phrase used in Christ's day by Israel's religious leaders regarding

20 For the sake of space, I will not quote the entire context which properly includes **16:13-20**. However, I would strongly encourage you to read the verses yourself and follow along in the text as I explain the passage.

what was forbidden (bound) and what was permitted (loosed).<sup>21</sup> These words need to be understood in the first century Jewish context in which they were spoken. These words meant something to Peter and the original readers and it had nothing to do with hindering or limiting Satan's activity through a magical formula uttered in prayer.

In connection with the use of these words in **Matthew 16:19** and **18:18**, the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* says, "Jesus does not give to Peter and the other disciples any power to enchant or to free by magic. The customary meaning of the Rabbinic expressions is equally incontestable, namely, to declare forbidden or permitted, and thus to impose or remove an obligation, by a doctrinal decision."<sup>22</sup> Peter, as a representative of the Apostles, was given a certain degree of authority, to make doctrinal declarations and obligations in the church.<sup>23</sup>

Greek New Testament scholar Dr. A.T. Robertson explains the significance of the tense of the verbs that are used: "Note the future perfect indicative (ἔσται δεδεμενον, ἔσται λελυμενον [estai dedemenon, estai lelumenon]), a state of completion. All this assumes, of course, that Peter's use of the keys will be in accord with the teaching and mind of Christ."<sup>24</sup>

A literal, but awkward, translation into English would read, ". . . **whatever you bind on earth is that which shall already have been bound in the heavens, and whatever you loose on earth is that which shall already have been loosed in the heavens.**"<sup>25</sup> Peter was to forbid on earth, in the church, only that which Heaven had forbid. He was to allow on earth, in the church, only that which Heaven would allow.<sup>26</sup>

This is how the phrase was used in the first century Jewish community. This is how Jesus used the phrase. It has nothing at all to do with spiritual warfare or anything we do to Satan. It was a rabbinic phrase that had to do with being given the authority and responsibility to declare on earth those things that Heaven determined to be allowed (loosed) and forbidden (bound). To use this passage to teach a spiritual warfare methodology whereby Satan's activity is curtailed by our "binding prayer" is an

inexcusable abuse of Scripture.

### **Matthew 18:18 AND CONTEXT**

**Matthew 18:18, "Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."<sup>27</sup>**

"Binding" and "loosing" are used in exactly the same way in this passage as they are in **Matthew 16:19**. It is the same idea, but here the practical application is to the practice of church discipline. "Jesus is saying that believers can have confidence that when they justly excommunicate someone on earth, they are fulfilling the will of God which has already been determined in Heaven. This should give them confidence in what they are doing. So in this context binding and loosing carry the idea which corresponds to our modern judicial language of declaring someone guilty (binding) or innocent (loosing). . . . In both passages neither word is referring to the contemporary idea of binding Satan or the demonic. Instead, these references refer to carrying out God's heavenly will upon earth as it has already been determined in Heaven."<sup>28</sup>

Like the others, this passage has nothing at all to do with spiritual warfare and binding Satan. Such flagrant abuse of Scripture ought to make the child of God nauseated!

### **The Problems are Legion<sup>29</sup>**

There are a number of practical and common sense problems with this practice. First, spiritual warfare teachers who advocate binding Satan based upon these passages utter nary a word about the "loosing" part of the verses. Yet the same passages that supposedly give authority to bind Satan mention loosing as well. In their theology, what could this possibly refer to? Does it refer to having the authority to loose Satan? What fool, having bound him, would then, in prayer, turn him loose? I have heard many Christians pray for Satan's binding, but I have never heard one pray, "I loose thee, Satan, in the name and blood of Jesus Christ, so you can return to your normal activities of deception and destruction." Yet if the passages cited give authority to bind the devil, what is the loosing in these passages intended to do?

Second, we never have a single example anywhere in the Bible where an apostle or a prophet bound Satan. We never hear Jesus utter these words. We have a number of prayers recorded in the New Testament and not once do we read of them "binding Satan." Certainly if this practice were necessary for the advancement of the gospel and the success of the preaching enterprise, it would have been done before Paul's missionary journeys, in response to persecution, or prior to gatherings of the

27 For the sake of space, I will not quote the entire context which properly includes **16:15-20**. However, I would strongly encourage you to read the verses yourself and follow along in the text as I explain the passage.

28 Ice and Dean, 102.

29 Pun intended.

21 Ice and Dean, 101.

22 Vol. 2: *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. 1964- (G. Kittel, G. W. Bromiley & G. Friedrich, Ed.) (electronic ed.) (60). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

23 We see this in practice in **Acts 15** at the Jerusalem Council where the issue of Gentile salvation and circumcision were determined by the Apostles as they did declare the mind of God on a doctrinal issue and thus permitted certain things and forbid others.

24 Robertson, A. (1997). *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Mt 16:19). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems.

25 Ice and Dean, 102.

26 This, in no way, supports the notion that Peter was to function as the first Pope with the type of papal authority assumed by the Roman Catholic Church. This very same authority is given in the context of the individual local church in its practice of church discipline in the next passage we will look at, **Matt. 18:18**. Every believer is to declare on earth what has been determined in Heaven. We know what these things are because the will of God has been revealed to us in Scripture through the Apostles.

early church. Yet we read nothing of it. Nothing.

Simply put, we have no commands, no teaching, and no examples of it. There are no chains, ropes, cables, or handcuffs in the armor of God (**Ephesians 6:10-17**).

Third, Scripture describes Satan as “roaming about,” not bound by believers. Peter warns Christians in **1 Peter 5:8** to “**be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.**” If Satan can be bound by merely uttering the phrase, “I bind Satan. . .” then this warning is meaningless. Indeed, with all the binding going on today in Christian circles, one has to wonder in what sense he is prowling around seeking someone to devour.

Fourth, the only time that Scripture says that Satan is bound is during the 1,000-year millennial reign of Christ after this present age.<sup>30</sup> That binding is not said to be the work of believers, but of an angel on behalf of Jesus. He is bound for a specific period of time (1,000 years) which ends his present deceptive activity entirely (v. 3). This event is not something presently taking place, but something yet future. During the present age, Satan roams to and fro throughout the earth, deceiving and engaging in all his activities (**Job 1:7**).

Fifth, this practice doesn't even pass the “common sense test.” For instance, how long does this binding last? Apparently, the binding is not permanent, since it needs to be done before every service, special event, or witness encounter. It must not be universal, either, since binding Satan from one person does not seem to prohibit him from attacking or influencing someone else.

For as much as Satan is bound, he seems to be awfully productive and active. Is someone loosing him? Are demons setting him free? If so, we should just bind all demons and Satan, from everything, everyone, everybody, and every event. There, problem solved. Does anyone really think this will work? This whole practice begins to look very silly and useless very quickly.

To even begin to answer any of these questions, and explain how and why and where this works, requires that people go *outside Scripture* and invent answers from their own imagination. None of the above questions can be answered from the Bible!

### **Isn't It All Very Harmless?**

At this point someone might object that the whole practice seems really very harmless, and what does it really matter if someone does this? Really the question should be, “Is anything actually going on when people pray or command that Satan be bound?”

There is nothing in Scripture to suggest that this does anything at all. If it is a completely ineffective, meaningless mess of hocus-pocus (as I contend that it is), why would you do it? It is useless. Nothing happens! The clear truth is that the Bible does not teach or model the use of this technique at all. It is an unproven (and dangerous) assumption that extra-biblical practices can be used to wage spiritual warfare. We are told to do God's will God's way, not

to invent our own means out of whole cloth.

**2 Corinthians 10:3-5** tells us how spiritual warfare is to be waged—it is a *truth war*. Disobeying God's instruction and adopting manmade means is not waging war the way our Commander has instructed us. It is disobedience.

### **Conclusion**

This practice is not taught in Scripture, and we have no reason to believe that it actually accomplishes anything at all. Advocates of “binding” methodology must answer this question: “Do I practice this because these passages, taken in their contexts, clearly teach this practice, or do I practice this because I want to believe it actually does something?” I suspect it is the latter, for it is certainly not taught in Scripture.

Without Wax-



30 **Revelation 20:1-10**