

Have we been taking some scripture verses out of context constantly?

Introduction

Do we use verses from the Bible out of context? I'm sure we do a lot. I know I personally have been guilty of that. Not because I am conscious of it, but because I've heard others using certain verses and thus automatically used those verses in the same way. Chances are that the people who influenced me were further influenced by others, whom they heard.

This brief paper attempts to take a look at 3 of the verses that I've found myself using or hearing without ever having studied the original context that they were intended to be used in, in the Bible. This is the famous Hermeneutical AOI, i.e. Author's Original Intent. At times even I would use these verses only to say "Huh?" and later on ask myself if I really understood those verses.

This study also reminded me again never to take a verse at face value whenever someone quotes it (my years of witnessing to friends who are in Cults taught me this earlier). Always look up verses **in context** in the Bible when anyone quotes a verse, especially if it's me doing the quoting.

A quick word as to why it is important that we never take things out of context and apply it to other aspects of our lives (even when practical experience shows us that it may work). This is simply because we are not at liberty to interpret the Bible anyway we wish. I frequently have very long discussions with my New Age or Mormon friends who have taken one passage out of the Bible and created an entire new Theology out of it that has led them into a damning heresy. Another good example is this one given by Greg Koukl, a woman looking to end her marriage and having an affair with another man could use the verse "Take on the new man" as a proof text that God wants her to divorce her husband and marry the new man. Obviously this is ludicrous. But if we take any verse out of context, how do we know we are not making such a mistake but at a lesser level?

This is not to say that all things taken out of context lead to heresy, but in my experience I'd rather err on the side of caution.

Now let us look at the three verses.

Verse 1

Mat 18:20 *For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst.*

People (including I) would quote this verse over and over again whenever we gathered to pray. And over and over again I would wonder. Why is Jesus saying that "I am in the midst if two or three are gathered?" Does that mean

that He is **not** around if only one person is praying? Obviously Jesus is there too, but then why mention it? Is it just a Greek idiom?

But nevertheless I accepted it mindlessly over the years and would on occasion say this before we prayed.

Verse 2

The other verse that puzzled me was the verse just before the above verse; that is Matt 18:19.

Mat 18:19 *Again I say to you that if two of you shall agree on earth as regarding anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them by My Father in Heaven.*

Again I was always confused. Does this mean that if one person prays for something and no one else is around that it will never happen? But does it also mean that if two people pray agreeing for something that it will **ALWAYS** happen.

Well, I've found that the latter does not work. I've prayed with someone else about lots of things like healing sick friends and the lot and God has not answered that prayer the way we prayed. So "it was not **ALWAYS** done as we asked". Despite what this verse said.

Verse 3

Verse 3 is actually 2 verses that are almost identical to each other except the first one was said to Peter alone and the second one two chapters later was said to all the Apostles together. The verses are:

Mat 16:19 *And I will give the keys of the kingdom of Heaven to you. And whatever you may bind on earth shall occur, having been bound in Heaven, and whatever you may loose on earth shall occur, having been loosed in Heaven.*

Mat 18:18 *Truly I say to you, Whatever you shall bind on earth shall occur, having been bound in Heaven; and whatever you shall loose on earth shall occur, having been loosed in Heaven.*

Many of my friends (and I at times) used these verses to bind Satan, or to bind Demons away. And that used to puzzle me because we never saw the Apostles binding Demons later on in their ministry. Instead they cast them out of unbelievers. But having never really looked carefully at these verses I continued to accept the concept of binding demons, but there was this nagging doubt.

So at the prompting of my gorgeous wife I decided to do a little research.

The first thing we should do is to read all the verses in context.

So let's start with Matt 16:

Mat 16:13 *And coming into the parts of Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked His disciples, saying, Who do men say Me to be, the Son of Man?*

Mat 16:14 *And they said, Some say, John the Baptist; some, Elijah; and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.*

Mat 16:15 *He said to them, but who do you say I am?*

Mat 16:16 *And Simon Peter answered and said, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*

Mat 16:17 *Jesus answered and said to him, You are blessed, Simon, son of Jonah, for flesh and blood did not reveal it to you, but My Father in Heaven.*

Mat 16:18 *And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*

Mat 16:19 *And I will give the keys of the kingdom of Heaven to you. And whatever you may bind on earth shall occur, having been bound in Heaven, and whatever you may loose on earth shall occur, having been loosed in Heaven.*

Mat 16:20 *Then He warned His disciples that they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ.*

So Jesus is talking to Peter in verse 16. Peter has just told Jesus that He is the Son of the Living God (remember this implied that Jesus was of the same essence of God, having the divine nature of God...not that that point is pertinent to this discussion – but I run into a lot of non-Christian friends who don't realize the extent of this claim).

Now our Roman Catholic brothers use this verse to tell us that this is were the Keys of Heaven were given to the Office of Peter and Peter's office is the Pope. Thus allowing the Pope to decide who gets into heaven or not. But that is not the point of this discussion, so we'll move forward.

Some of my friends (and as I said, and I), in the past said that this showed us that we can bind things on earth. Like cars and demons, in short good things to us and bad things away from us.

Before we analyze this further let's read the next set of verses in the context of each other.

Mat 18:15 *But if your brother shall trespass against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.*

Mat 18:16 *But if he will not hear you, take one or two more with you, so that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.*

Mat 18:17 *And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he neglects to hear the church, let him be to you as a heathen and a tax-collector.*

Mat 18:18 *Truly I say to you, Whatever you shall bind on earth shall occur, having been bound in Heaven; and whatever you shall loose on earth shall occur, having been loosed in Heaven.*

Mat 18:19 *Again I say to you that if two of you shall agree on earth as regarding anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them by My Father in Heaven.*

Mat 18:20 *For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst.*

Mat 18:21 *Then Peter came to Him and said, Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Until seven times?*

Mat 18:22 *Jesus said to him, I do not say to you, Until seven times; but, Until seventy times seven.*

Binding and Demons

First we notice that none of these verses have anything to do with Demons. So I started a Bible verse by verse search on demons. But I turned up nothing that linked the mentioned action (binding) with the object (demons) despite many types of searches.

These are the main things I searched for: Evil One, Wicked One, Satan, Demon. But in every case there was no reference to any sort of binding of them.

Now with that information and the passage taken in context (as I will expand on in the rest of this paper): I now am logically and Biblically convinced that unless I am grossly mistaken, and someone can show it to me in the Bible, we can say that there is NOWHERE in the Bible any Biblical precedence for us personally “binding” demons (although there is a verse about binding a strong man and taking over his house...but that’s the opposite of this).

So that means that all the prayers we hear about Binding demons are really taking these two verses out of context. Does that mean we can’t bind demons?

Well Jesus and the Apostles ‘cast’ demons out of numerous people who were not saved. The demons were subject to the power of Jesus (prior to the Holy Spirit being indwelt in the Disciples) when the Disciples called on His name. But there is never any binding of demons, especially when it came to any interaction between demons and the early Christians.

So where do we get this theology about this extra-biblical practice. To tell the truth, I don’t know. Suffice it to say that I **personally** cannot anymore accept a biblical theology of binding of demons without some positive biblical proof that we are supposed to do it.

However does this make it “wrong” to bind demons? Certainly not. The real questions though are “Is it effective?” and “Do I have any authority to bind demons?”

I chatted with our Pastor Bill Buchholz (at Family Community Church) and he clarified it quite well:

I think the binding you are speaking of is a matter of semantics. Essentially where Light is darkness flees. So when we pray in Jesus' name and submit an issue or individual to His will, Satan is subject to God's choice of options to deal with that situation. Whether we declare something as bound does not make it bound... What God has decided moves spirits (good and bad) in the heavenlies. That's where our power comes from.

We would do well to learn from the archangel Michael. **As big as he is, he chose to let God do the binding while he was busy resisting the devil** and taking something from him that God had already determined He was not going to let Satan have access to.

Jude 1:9 (NIV)

But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not dare to bring a slanderous accusation against him, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!"

Our goal should be to come into alignment with the revealed Logos of God so that the Rhema that He is speaking into our hearts and minds will be spoken into whatever situation we are faced with. At that point, we will be free to accept the results of that dispensation of Grace as God chooses to release and reveal it and can be confident that He is in control; so we have nothing to be afraid of.

Much of the "binding" done these days is by Christians who are afraid to rest in, and trust, the sovereignty and omnipotence of Almighty God. I don't think it's as much an issue of heresy as it is of unnecessary noise.... Reminds me of our dog, Sophie.

She's so old, blind, and deaf, that now when she goes into our backyard she always barks several times as she walks around, hoping to scare anything away that might be there because she can't see it. When she was younger and her wits were all still active, she did not need to "bind" her enemies.... She was confident she could fight them off, or at least get our attention in time to get back in the house if necessary, to be safe.

Finally, we do bind the devil when we resist him. We rend him powerless over us by an act of our will to use our minds and bodies for the glory of God....¹

¹ Further on that topic I asked Bill about discerning if a problem is due to demons or ourselves or other humans, he said: “It's pretty simple. If you resist the devil and whatever manifestation of evil is still present, then you are dealing with issues that are natural, not supernatural.” In otherwords, if you have done your “binding” by resisting temptation and bad things are still happened, then it is a natural issue, not a supernatural issue.

So I logically conclude that: We do not have the authority to bind Satan, so while not sinful, it probably isn't very effective. Resist the devil and his temptation and he will then flee you.

And finally, as I've mentioned, my personal preference is to always try and err on the side of caution.

So then what are these passages talking about?

Well let's leave Peter's part alone first and focus on Matt 18 where Jesus is talking to all the disciples.

Look at it again and see if we can summarize all the steps:

Mat 18:15 *But if your brother shall trespass against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.*

Mat 18:16 *But if he will not hear you, take one or two more with you, so that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.*

Mat 18:17 *And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he neglects to hear the church, let him be to you as a heathen and a tax-collector.*

Mat 18:18 *Truly I say to you, Whatever you shall bind on earth shall occur, having been bound in Heaven; and whatever you shall loose on earth shall occur, having been loosed in Heaven.*

Mat 18:19 *Again I say to you that if two of you shall agree on earth as regarding anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them by My Father in Heaven.*

Mat 18:20 *For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst.*

Mat 18:21 *Then Peter came to Him and said, Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Until seven times?*

Mat 18:22 *Jesus said to him, I do not say to you, Until seven times; but, Until seventy times seven.*

Here's what I see:

1. This passage is talking about brothers who sin against you.
2. Here are the steps when this occurs
 - a. A brother sins
 - b. Talk to him alone
 - c. If no response and he does not repent, take another brother (or two or more – why is this important?... you'll see). If he does repent (as we will see later you HAVE to forgive him even as much as 490 times and more).
 - d. If the brother however does not repent when you go with someone else, take the situation in front of the church.
 - e. If still no response then he is effectively a heathen.

f. But wait the passage isn't over.....Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven....

Wait a minute, why switch subjects here. Is this a different conversation? Is this a different topic? Not really...why not? Because the "two or three just" referred to in verse 18:16 is about to be referenced again. And in verse 18:21 Peter is again talking about the very same subject...forgiveness of a brother who sins. This all looks like once continuous event and it logically makes sense in that context.

Now all of a sudden things start to fall in place. The next verses are:

Mat 18:18 *Truly I say to you, Whatever you shall bind on earth shall occur, having been bound in Heaven; and whatever you shall loose on earth shall occur, having been loosed in Heaven.*

Mat 18:19 *Again I say to you that if two of you shall agree on earth as regarding anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them by My Father in Heaven.*

Mat 18:20 *For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst.*

So this is not talking about praying, it's not talking about asking God for something, it's not talking about any of that stuff that we (me included) kept thinking it was talking about. It is simply talking about Church Discipline and only Church Discipline. For example

f.-continued: So Jesus tells them about this Church discipline he says: If you kick someone out of church on earth because he refused to repent, he will be loosed in heaven.

Does that mean you can go to hell if you get excommunicated? I don't think we can make that case. But we certainly *can't* make the case that this verse is talking about demons. Simply because it's still talking about Church Discipline. My point is that while we may be confused as to it's actual meaning, we can't logically or hermeneutically apply it to a random issue of Demon possession or oppression because this passage has nothing to do with that at all. (Note my Mormon friends use this random assignment methodology to prove that Baptisms for the dead are Biblical using another passage – we must be careful of that sort of error).

My best take on this is that perhaps this means that if the Church excommunicates you for your sin God will remove his grace from these individuals and they will have a rotten rotten time, until such a time as they confess these sins and return to the body of Christ (if they really were saved to begin with - that is).

When I discussed this with my father-in-law (Pastor Lynn Kent of Greater Portland Bible Church), he said:

I do believe it comes down to an authority issue in the church. I read "binding" as something that is official or legal, like a contract or license. Jesus has granted binding authority to church leaders for the advancement of His kingdom and correction of His people. It's authority that should be used carefully but also boldly when necessary. I see the "2 or 3" agreement as a kind of check and balance, similar to the prophets being subject to [other] prophets in I Corinthians 14².

g. Back to our verses.

Mat 18:19 *Again I say to you that if two of you shall agree on earth as regarding anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them by My Father in Heaven.*

Now in context 18:19 means that this is saying that if two people in the church agree to the Church's disciplinary action, it will be done in Heaven.

h. Similarly verse 18:20 in context

Mat 18:20 *For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst.*

So in light of Church Discipline, this verse is really talking about Christ's approval and agreement of their actions and not really Christ's presence in their everyday prayers. Which makes wonderful logical sense now that it's in context. It also means that if one person in the Church decides to kick you out it is meaningless and Christ won't honor that. It has to be the body of the Church under the authority and if you will the "legal" agreement of the Church.

This then makes great sense and immediately explains why we can stop worrying about the things that didn't make sense and used to bother me (and others), that is it resolves the following:

- i. The absurdity of the idea that Christ would not listen to the prayer of only one person or wasn't present when only one person was alone.
- ii. The silliness of the fact that Christ did listen to both single people and groups anyway, so why state it at all.
- iii. In addition we know of many places in the Bible where only 1 person prayed for something and it happened.
- iv. However having said that, we should never imagine that it is unwise or unnecessary for us to gather as many brothers and sisters together to pray for us or for something. This is also because God is glorified by each person who comes to Him in supplication. Thus the more who pray, the more Glory is given to God when their prayers are answered.

² *1Co 14:32* And spirits of prophets are subject to prophets.

1Co 14:33 For God is not a God of disorder but of peace, as in all the assemblies of the saints.

v. There are also the following verses to keep in mind.

James 5:14 *Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord.*

James 5:15 *And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven.*

Thus in conclusion, while it makes sense and I would encourage you to pray in groups, the particular verses of Matt 18:20-21 do not apply and should not be applied to that situation.

- i. Now we go to verse 18:21 and we immediately see that it continues on the very same topic of a brother sinning. This also reinforces that this entire passage is talking about the same thing and is not three different subjects randomly tossed together.

Mat 18:21 *Then Peter came to Him and said, Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Until seven times?*

Peter then says in effect: OK OK I get the part that we kick him out if he doesn't confess and ask for forgiveness. But what if this joker sins against me over and over again and keeps asking for forgiveness, what then? Can we at least kick him out after the 7th time? Jesus then answers: Well as many times as he asks for forgiveness you should forgive him, and not kick him out of the church. Which seems to mean that if you go to him after he trespasses and he is genuinely sorry and says so. If we see that he is contrite, we **have** to forgive him. (Note: this does not mean trusting him immediately, we must wait until he re-earns his trust, this only means we must forgive him).

Alternatively it could mean that though you kick the brother out of the church, you as an individual must still forgive him. Because God is the one who extracts the punishment, not you.

Now, coming back to Peter's first exposure to this, two chapters earlier in Matt 16? What was the context there? It seems from the passage that Jesus was also talking about the Church. Because look at the passage again:

Mat 16:18 *And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*

Mat 16:19 *And I will give the keys of the kingdom of Heaven to you. And whatever you may bind on earth shall occur, having been bound in Heaven, and whatever you may loose on earth shall occur, having been loosed in Heaven.*

Christ says: Upon this rock (meaning Christ Himself) I will build my Church..... Our Lord is talking about His Church. He is telling Peter about the authority the church will have.

Also very key to this is what happens later to Peter and I believe it sort of ties this all together.

Act 5:1 *And a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession.*

Act 5:2 *And he kept back part of the price, his wife also knowing, and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles' feet.*

Act 5:3 *But Peter said, Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart for you to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back part of the price of the land?*

I think this means Ananias did not have the Holy Spirit in him (similar to Peter who Jesus rebuked before the Holy Spirit came down on all believers).

Act 5:4 *While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own authority? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men, but to God.*

Act 5:5 *And hearing these words, Ananias fell down and expired. And great fear came on all those who heard these things.*

Act 5:6 *And the younger ones arose, wound him up, and carrying him out, they buried him.*

Act 5:7 *And it was about the space of three hours afterward, when his wife (not knowing what was done) came in.*

Act 5:8 *And Peter answered her, Tell me whether you sold the land for so much? And she said, Yes, for so much.*

Act 5:9 *Then Peter said to her, How is it that you have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door and they will carry you out.*

Act 5:10 *Then at once she fell down at his feet and expired. And the younger ones found her dead, and, carrying her out, buried her beside her husband.*

Act 5:11 *And great fear came on all the church and on as many as heard these things.*

It is quite possible that Peter at this point skipped the part of going alone then with one person and goes right to asking them in front of the entire church. At which point he “looses them in heaven” and they die on the spot on earth.

You see it is possible that while the rest of us and the apostles needed to have two or three to be gathered to do this, Peter had been given the express permission to make that decision alone (with scary immediate consequences). But even if you did not grant that point to me (and just assume that Luke, the author of Acts merely didn't see fit to report that aspect) we still have to conclude the following points:

In summary

1. There is no binding of demons anywhere in the Bible. Demons are only cast out of unbelievers. And once they are cast out, these unbelievers better become believers or they will be possessed by multiple demons the

next time around. (Luke 11:24) Binding demons it would seem to our chagrin is at best a vain and biblically unsubstantiated exercise and at worst, scripture twisting (though non-heretical). To really bind the demons you must resist temptation and then let God rebuke him.

The passages **Mat 18:18** and **Mat 16:19** are talking about Church Discipline only and nothing else as far as we know. Too many times we seem to be vainly binding demons, when the reality is that our own sin nature, self love, ego and arrogance and pride are the cause of many of our problems as we give in to temptation and don't resist it.

The additional danger here of course besides taking the Bible out of context, is that we may never deal with the real issues of our own self and instead blame demons all over the place.

2. **Mat 18:19** The passage that talks about two or three agreeing together is also talking about Church discipline and not general prayer.

All prayer by those who are saved is acknowledged by God and answered according to his Sovereign will ('yeah', 'nay' or 'not yet') and is not being referred to in this passage. So while it is not evil or anything, if you think about it, it seems nonsensical and biblically unsound to apply this passage to prayer. (Whoops... I guess I better stop saying this myself before I pray in a group). While quoting this verse out of context may be inconsequential, it is possible that continuing to do such stuff habitually with other Bible passages will lead us at some point to real heresy. Personally I always want to be safe and never play lightly or fast and loose with the Word of God **ever**.

3. **Mat 18:20** The passage that talks about God being present when two or three are gathered is again talking only about Church Discipline and about the Church acting as the office of God, not about God's presence or absence when less are gathered. The same argument can be used as in item 2 above about not quoting Bible passages out of context.

I hope this little exercise has been of profit and will encourage you to read more of your Bible (even if it is only to prove me wrong).

If you find that I have made a logical or Biblical error (which I have done before), or that I have missed out important Bible verses that are directly applicable to this topic, please be kind enough to contact me at my email address below.

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Sincerely,

Neil Mammen

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