

**A SUMMARY OF TEACHING ON THE SUBJECT OF "BINDING AND
LOOSING" AS APPLIED TO MODERN MINISTER'S**

(from various sources)

Since the modern Pastor is often called upon to guide and instruct his flock on matters that are not specifically mentioned in Scripture (due to changes in culture and practice), he needs to have a grounding in the authority that he has been given by Jesus in the area of interpretation and application of God's Word. This is an awesome responsibility, and is never to be entered into lightly. It is to be done reverentially, and with a consistent and proper handling of God's Word as the ultimate authority. Be careful how you administer this authority, because the results of your decisions can change lives, and can have an impact that lasts for generations.

BINDING AND LOOSING — a phrase describing the authority and power that Jesus assigned to His disciples, allowing them to forbid or allow certain kinds of conduct. This phrase occurs only twice in the New Testament. In the first instance (Matt. 16:19), Jesus gave Peter “the keys of the kingdom of heaven” and told him “whatever you bind on earth will be bound [literally, “shall have been bound”] in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed [“shall have been loosed”] in heaven.” This means that Peter was granted the authority to pronounce the freedom or condemnation of a person, based on that person’s response to the gospel. The tense of the verbs “shall have been” indicates that this fact was already established in the will of the Father. In Matthew 18:18 the same words were spoken by Jesus to all the disciples, granting them authority in matters of church discipline.

Matthew 23:1-4

1Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, 2Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat: 3All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. 4For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay *them* on men’s shoulders; but they *themselves* will not move them with one of their fingers. *The King James Version, 1769.*

"Hezekiah, king of Judah, chose a body of men who transcribed the ancient records for preservation, including the proverbs of Solomon (Prov. 25:1). The nature of the scribe’s work had changed by this time. He was no longer an officer of the king’s court; he had become a person who interpreted the Scriptures. The scribes soon became known for their study and knowledge of the Mosaic Law.

After the Jews returned from the Captivity in Babylon, the era of the scribes began. The reading of the Law before the nation of Israel by Ezra (Nehemiah 8–10)

signaled the nation's return to exact observance of all the laws and rites that had been given. Following the Law and the traditions that had grown up around it became the measure of devotion and spirituality.

At first the priests were responsible for the scientific study and professional communication of this legal code. But this function eventually passed to the scribes. Their official interpretation of the meaning of the Law eventually became more important than the Law itself.

This position of strength allowed these early scribes to enforce their rules and practices with a binding authority. **To speak of the scribes as interpreters of Scripture means that they provided rules for human conduct out of their study.**

By the time of Jesus, the scribes were a new upper class among the Jewish people. Large numbers of priests in Jerusalem before A.D. 70 served as scribes. One of these was Josephus, the Jewish historian. Some scribes came from among the Sadducees. Others came from the ordinary priestly ranks. But the largest group of scribes came from among every other class of people, including merchants, carpenters, flax combers, tentmakers, and even day laborers, like Hillel, who became a famous Jewish teacher.

The young Israelite who devoted his life to become a scribe went through a set course of study for several years. Josephus began his preparation when he was 14. Students were in continual contact with the teacher, listening to his instruction.

The disciple-scribe first had to master all the traditional material and the unique method of interpretation of the Jewish Halakah. The aim was to give the apprentice competence in making decisions on questions of religious legislation and penal justice.

The city of Jerusalem was the center of this scribal knowledge and interpretation of the Law. Only ordained teachers could transmit and create the tradition; this was the matter studied to perfection by students often beginning at age 14. When they completed their study at the age of 40, they could be ordained. As members with full rights, they could act as judges, be called rabbis, and occupy positions in administration of justice, government, and education. Sometimes the gospels refer to the scribes as lawyers (Matt. 22:35; Luke 7:30)—a title that identifies them as experts in the Mosaic Law. This Law was regarded as the sole civil and religious authority governing Jewish life.

"Christ allows their office as expositors of the law; *The scribes and Pharisees* (that is, the whole Sanhedrin, who sat at the helm of church government, who were all called *scribes*, and were some of them Pharisees), they *sit in Moses' seat* (v. 2), as public teachers and interpreters of the law; and, the law of Moses being the municipal law of their state, they were as judges, or a bench of justices; teaching

and judging seem to be equivalent, comparing 2 Chr. 17:7, 9, with 2 Chr. 19:5, 6, 8. They were not the itinerant judges that rode the circuit, but the standing bench, that determined on appeals, special verdicts, or writs of error by the law; they sat in Moses's seat, not as he was Mediator between God and Israel, but only as he was chief justice, Ex. 18:26. Or, we may apply it, not to the Sanhedrin, but to the other Pharisees and scribes, that expounded the law, and taught the people how to apply it to particular cases. *The pulpit of wood*, such as was made for Ezra, *that ready scribe in the law of God* (Neh. 8:4), is here called *Moses's seat*, because Moses had those in every city (so the expression is, Acts 15:21), who in those pulpits preached him; this was their office, and it was just and honorable; it was requisite that there should be some at whose mouth the people might *enquire the law*, Mal. 2:7. Hence he infers (v. 3), **"Whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do As far as they sit in Moses's seat, that is, read and preach the law that was given by Moses" (which, as yet, continued in full force, power, and virtue), "and judge according to that law, so far you must hearken to them, as remembrances to you of the written word."** The scribes and Pharisees made it their business to study the scripture, and were well acquainted with the language, history, and customs of it, and its style and phraseology. Now Christ would have the people to make use of the helps they gave them for the understanding of the scripture, and do accordingly. As long as their comments did illustrate the text and not pervert it; did make plain, and not *make void, the commandment of God*; so far they must be observed and obeyed, but with caution and a judgment of discretion."

The development of a specific application of the Law is called in Hebrew a "halacha". In order for the modern Pastor to develop "halacha" that apply to the situations that he is confronted with today; the following concepts must be kept in view at all times:

A) No "halacha" must ever contradict a plainly stated precept of God's Word.

For example, numerous modern "liberal" theologians have stated that homosexual behavior is allowable, as long as it is done in a "loving, committed relationship". However, this flies in the face of the revealed Word of God which plainly states that homosexuality is an abomination to God, and that those who engage in such activity will never inherit the kingdom of heaven. This is a case where "political correctness" and personal agenda has resulted in a truly faulty "halacha".

B) All "halacha" must be administered by the Pastor in the love of Christ, and to glorify HIM, not ourselves.

The complaint that Jesus had against the Scribes was not that they administered the Law of Moses; it was the arrogance, pride, and hypocrisy with which they did so. Pastors should never allow the people in their congregation to begin to treat them

as "guru's", the source of all wisdom. Our handling of God's Word is a privilege that we have been given by grace, not a right that we have earned by our intelligence or skill. All of our decisions should promote the glory of God, and should always be consistent with a humble, pure, and holy Christian life.

C) Participants in a "halacha" should understand that a proper "halacha" IS BINDING, and that they are responsible for carrying it out.

If the "halacha" has been properly arrived at, the Pastor has the authority to make it binding upon those involved. Although the Pastor has no earthly authority to enforce it, his authority is seen in heaven, and the people involved will be held to it. For example, if a couple seeks permission to marry, having been previously divorced, and the Pastor determines that they are NOT in a position to marry, and forbids them to marry; they might go to another Pastor, or to a Justice of the Peace, and marry anyway. The Pastor cannot legally stop them, but their knowledge of his "halacha" will be held against them in terms of heavenly judgment, especially as it concerns the blessings of God being on their marriage. This can have long-reaching consequences, especially if children result from the marriage. Although the grace of God is always available to the repentant, willful disobedience of a properly given "halacha" is rebellion, and would be considered a sin as such, needing true repentance in order to be overcome.