

Abstract

This thesis considers Jesus' speech at the revelation to the disciples the evening after the resurrection described in John 20: 21-23. Here Jesus commands the disciples, breathes on them, and offers the Holy Spirit. Then He pronounces a peculiar statement about the forgiveness and retention of sins.

The first part of the thesis presents translation, textual criticism, literary form and genre criticism, structural analysis, context, and intertextual links, followed by my interpretation of the text.

The second part surveys the history of the interpretation of these verses from the early Christian authors, through patristics, the Middle Ages, the Reformation period, the 19th and 20th centuries up to the present day. It considers Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican, and Orthodox views.

Conclusion synthesizes the diverse views through the following questions: Who is challenged in verses 21-23? What is the liturgical significance of verses 21-23? Who forgives in verse 23? What are the conditions of forgiveness? Who is to be forgiven in the verse 23? Is the proclamation of forgiveness just an antithesis of the Reformation? What is the meaning of retention of the sins in verse 23b?