

BINDING AND LOOSING:

Keys of the Kingdom of God

What Did Jesus Say?

Introduction

With His finger Jesus scratched a message on the loose ground, but the scribes and Pharisees missed His point. Jesus then stood to reinforce His meaning to these religious leaders with an oral plumb line—He administered justice for the woman caught in adultery by employing the Law of Moses in a revolutionary way.

Jesus, as a rabbi, applied the Law to the situation by first appealing to the conscience of the accusers:

He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.

Then He applied the Law to the character of the woman:

Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more (John 8:1-12).

What wisdom! What an unexpected application of the law!

This story illustrates only one example of how Jesus radically changed the order of the religious system of His day. But even more extraordinary than the bold use of a rabbi's power to interpret the Law—Jesus had the boldness to *extend to His followers* the capacity

and authority to do what only rabbis like Him had privilege to do: He gave them the authority to bind and loose.

Today the Church employs the terms “binding” and “loosing” most often in prayer or ministry to people who seek freedom from the influence of the devil.

This study will examine Scripture to address relevant questions such as:

- Why did Jesus refer to binding and loosing as keys to the Kingdom?
- What did these terms mean in the way Jesus used them?
- What capacities do followers of Christ today have to bind and loose?
- What boundaries should we observe so as to not go beyond the Scripture in applying these terms?
- What does binding and loosing have to do with forgiving or retaining sin?
- And finally, did Jesus give His church the authority to bind and loose spiritual powers and principalities?



Section One

Christ Gives Authority to Bind and Loose

Section One Main Points:

- Jesus radically changed the order of the religious system by giving His followers the authority to bind and loose (forbid or permit; retain or forgive).
- To “bind and loose” originally meant to make governmental decisions.
- Jesus used the governmental term *ecclesia* (translated as *church*) to establish His means of governing His kingdom through His followers who gather to make decisions (discernment and declaration).
- Binding and loosing must be accomplished through:
 - Agreement within ecclesia.
 - Alignment with God’s will in Heaven.

Jesus Grants Authority to His Disciples

In two instances Jesus clearly granted the capacity to bind and loose as He spoke of the authority that would enable his disciples to make decisions on an ongoing basis in His church. Matthew records the first case in chapter 16, where we find Jesus in the midst of a private conversation with His disciples asking them a challenging question:



Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said,

"Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven." "I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. **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 16:13-19 NASB95 – bold face the author’s

The second case Matthew narrates in chapter 18, where we also find Jesus in discourse with His disciples, this time answering their questions:

If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that **BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED**. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. 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. Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.

- Matthew 18:15-20 NASB95, caps and bold face the author's

To the ancient mind, these words of Jesus were not tame, but radically bold! Jesus introduced two revolutionary concepts to His disciples: the authority to bind and loose, and the understanding of *church*.

Authority to *Bind and Loose*

First of all, until this time only rabbis had authority to bind or loose. For example, the Mishnah records rabbinic rulings

If a person made a vow to abstain from meat, he is **loosed** to eat broth.” Another example reads, “Rabbi Yehudah **bind** it . . . If a person made a vow to abstain from wine, he is **loosed** to eat a cooked dish which has the taste of wine. (Nedarim 6:5-7, bold face mine).

Jesus introduced two radical concepts:

- 1) Authority (keys) to bind and loose**
- 2) The Kingdom Church (*ecclesia*)**

Jesus, the Rabbi, granted the rabbinical capacity and authority to bind and loose to His disciples—to ordinary followers! Just as He adjudicated the matter of the woman caught in adultery (John 8:2-11), Jesus granted His disciples the authority to find scriptural solutions for problems the early church would encounter after His death.

Authority to His *Church*

Not only did Jesus extend new authority to ordinary followers, but He took another radical step by employing an aggressive, invasive, decision-making, moving-out word. He used the governmental term, *ecclesia* (the Greek word translated as *church*).

Ecclesia, or “called out ones,” in New Testament times described civil assemblies. When a community needed to make a decision, the people of influence would gather, much like a city council, to represent the public. These respected persons would apply their wisdom to the matter, make decisions for the benefit of the whole, and then declare their decisions publicly.