

“Binding” and “Loosing” in the New Testament

Do Matthew 16:19 and 18:18 give churches the authority to make decisions contrary to the Laws of God?

The Roman Catholic Church claims that Jesus gave to the apostle Peter and his future successors the powers of binding and loosing so that whatever they would bind or loose on earth, would be bound or loosed in heaven. They further contend that this authority grants an infallible pope the power to bind and loose contrary to the Word of God—thus making the Word of God void—and that this authority was given to Peter by Jesus Christ as recorded in Matthew 16:19 and 18:18. However, an exegetical study of the Greek does not support such claims.

In *Basics of Biblical Greek Grammar*, William D. Mounce gives a clear and insightful explanation of the underlying Greek text showing that what Jesus taught is entirely different from what many religious authorities assume, teach and practice. He writes, “In some translations of Matthew [16:19 and] 18:18, it sounds like Jesus promised his disciples that whatever they bound on earth would be bound in heaven, and whatever they loosed on earth would be loosed in heaven. In other words, they had the power to bind and loose, and Heaven (i.e. God) would simply back up their decrees. But the matter is not quite so simple; the actions described in heaven are future perfect passives—which could be translated ‘will have already been bound in heaven ... will have already been loosed in heaven.’ In other words, the heavenly decree confirming the earthly one is based on a prior verdict [God had already made—“Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in the heavens” (Psa. 119:89).]

“This is the language of the law court. Jewish legal issues were normally decided in Jesus’ day by elders in the synagogue community (later by rabbis). Many Jewish people believed that the authority of Heaven stood behind the earthly judges when they decided cases based on a correct understanding of God’s law. (This process came to be called “binding and loosing.”) Jesus’ contemporaries often envisioned God’s justice in terms of a heavenly court; by obeying God’s laws, the earthly court simply ratified the decrees of the heavenly court” (p. 121).

Jesus **did not** give His apostles and disciples the authority to make binding decisions regarding anything on earth that had not already been decreed in heaven. Jesus specifically taught that He did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets (Matt. 5:17). Therefore, whatever is bound or loosed cannot be contrary to the laws and commandments of God, the revelation of the prophets or the teachings of Jesus Christ. Christ **did not** give His apostles the authority to loose any of the Ten Commandments or any of God’s laws that are not connected with the priesthood and Temple ritual. However, Jesus **did** give His apostles the authority to loose man-made religious **traditions** of the Jews (Mark 7:1-13; Acts 10:28) as well as pagan religious traditions (I Pet. 1:18; Acts 14:8-18). New Testament teachings that were foreshadowed and prophesied in the Old Testament and were “bound” or decreed in heaven before Jesus Christ came in the flesh are as follows: to love the Lord God with all one’s heart, soul and might (Deut. 6:4-6; Matt. 22:37-40); for Jesus to magnify the Law and make it glorious (Isa. 52:14; Matt. 5-7); for Christ to die for the sins of the world (Psa. 22; Isa. 53; John 1:36; Rev. 13:8); forgiveness of sin, upon repentance, without temple animal sacrifices (Psa. 32:1-2; 51:1-17; Rom. 3:20-24; Heb. 10:1-17); circumcision of the heart (Deut. 10:16; Rom. 2:28-29; Col. 2:2-13); Sabbath and holy day keeping for uncircumcised Gentiles (Isa. 56:1-6), taught by Paul (Acts 13:42-44; Heb. 4:9; I Cor. 5:8); and many others.

Any Christian-professing ministry or church that promotes sin—the transgression of the Law—in its binding or loosing decisions is operating contrary to the Word and will of God. Its decisions are simply **inventions of men** and do not have the authority of heaven behind them. Examples of these are: adding to or taking away from the Word of God (Deut. 12:30-32; Rev.

22:18-19); worshiping other gods or goddesses (Ex. 20:2-3; I Cor. 10:20-21); endorsing the making and worshiping of idols (Ex. 20:4-6; Isa. 42:8, 17; 44:9-20; I Cor. 10:14; 12:2; Rev. 9:20-21; 21:8); worshiping dead “saints” (Isa. 8:19-20); and exchanging the Sabbath and holy days of God for pagan Sunday worship and occult holidays such as Halloween, Christmas, New Years, Lent, Easter, or any other so-called holiday of the religions of this world.

All binding and loosing decisions made by the ministry and brethren of Jesus Christ must be in complete accord with the Word of God and the teachings of Jesus Christ. These decisions are authoritative because they have “already been bound or loosed in heaven.” As Jesus said, “**All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me**” (Matt. 28:18). All binding and loosing **must be based** on the authority of Jesus Christ and the Word of God.