

The meaning of Binding and Loosing

Introduction

There is a lot of confusion on the meaning of *binding and loosing* found in the book of Matthew by the Roman Catholic Church and many other Churches practising spiritual warfare. "*I bind you, Satan!*" is uttered in thousands of prayers every day. Spiritual warfare books that teach Christians how to bind Satan are hot sellers. Not only is Satan himself subject to continual verbal binding, but a whole host of demons and principalities and authorities of the heavenly realm are also assaulted which if not scriptural, is probably doing more harm and no good. Those who teach and practice binding and loosing as verbal warfare against evil have several Bible passages they say supports this practice. The two most prominent ones are found in (Matthew 16:19 and Matthew 18:18) and (Matthew 12:29 and Mark 3:27) are used backup their argument, which relate to binding the strong man.

If we were to translate these passages in Matthew very literally (though awkwardly in English), it would read, "...*whatever you loose on earth shall having been loosed in heaven.*" This shows that the apostles were not to decide a matter thus binding heaven to their decision. It means that their decision will be in line with what God's mind was already on the issue. Would God allow sinful man to decide His laws and follow them? What a recipe for chaos! Passing on an issue of doctrine or ethics also does not mean shooting a verbal barrage at Satan or any other spiritual entity. It is also quite different from *loosing* the money needed or that wanted job as some now pray.

It is a known fact that the true meaning of bind and loose is the authority to declare what God's mind is on a matter of doctrine or practice. This is what the early Church did in Acts 15. To bind means to forbid or be unlawful and to loose is to allow or be lawful. The future tense (shall having been bound or loose) shows that this authority is only valid when used in submission to Christ's Word or teaching. It does not give ANY Church as the Roman Catholic Church claims the authority to make up new teachings later in Church history. Binding in this context also has absolutely nothing to do with speaking words to Satan or demons.

Of course, the crucial issue is whether this is what Jesus meant by these teachings. What did He mean by the terms bind and loose? These words were commonly used by Jewish rabbis to permit and prohibit and so New Testament scholars agree that binding and loosing when used in this way, still retain the same basic meaning that they had in the Jewish culture of the first century.

If we now look at (Matthew 12:26-29), which at least addresses the issue of Satan and demons. Jesus first shows the illogic of the Pharisees by saying, that if Satan were casting out Satan, his kingdom could not stand. He then goes on to say that it is by the Spirit of God that he drives out demons, which he can do because He is the stronger man. Matthew 29 is the verse here which some claim as support for binding Satan through direct verbal assault. In this verse Jesus uses a metaphor to illustrate His mission. No one can enter a man's house and take his goods unless he has first conquered him. Jesus is saying, if I am not the Messiah, *stronger than Satan*, how could I spoil him? [Luke 11:21-22](#) records the same illustration but does not use the term *bind*, but says the **stronger man** "...*overcomes him, he takes away his armour in which he trusted, and divides his spoil.*"

Bind as used in (Matthew 12) is **metaphorical terminology**, not a magic word that will stop the activity of evil spirits. That Luke's account does not even use the word bind shows this. Bind is incidental to the picture of a strong man's house being plundered. Whether victory is accomplished by binding, overpowering, disarming, etc., is not as consequential as the fact that it is a *stronger man* who must do it. The meaning is that Jesus is stronger than Satan and that the casting out of evil spirits in His ministry proves that fact. The goods that are plundered are people, previously held in bondage. The coming of Jesus and the binding of Satan liberates the souls of people who were subject to slavery their whole life. The Bible does not leave us in the dark as to how this is accomplished. It is **not** done by people constantly shouting, "*I bind you Satan*" into the heavenlies! [Hebrews 2:14-15](#) says, "*We are people of flesh and blood. That is why Jesus became one of us. He died to destroy the devil, who had power over death. But he also died to rescue all of us who live each day in fear of dying.*"

Did the apostles ever say, "*I bind you, Satan?*" Not once is such an utterance recorded in the New Testament. It is not credible to assume that they understood Jesus' teaching as an instruction to '*bind Satan*' through prayers and verbal declarations and then never follow the instructions personally. The Church today should not understand and practice the teachings of Jesus differently than the Church of the 1st century. If it does, the authority of Scripture is depreciated. So in this document we will endeavour to further explain and verify the proper meaning of binding and loosing. Note that the Roman Catholic Church base their whole Papal system on Matthew 16:19 with Peter supposedly being the first Pope with special authority. Note what the Commentaries below have to say on this false claim. What ever authority was given to Peter was also given to the other Apostles in Matthew 18:18 and so Peter was not given anything exclusive anyway. See also [Catholic Church error and was Peter the first Pope](#).

Introduction to Matthew 16:19

We have used the Good News Bible for the initial translation including the surrounding verses to get the full picture, followed by King James which illustrates where the translation inaccuracies came from. Next is the ISV which is very clear, and then some translations which are partially accurate. Note the translation of the key words shown in *italics* for some translations and that some translations accurately illustrate that things that were bound or loosed were first done so in heaven and is not giving Peter or anyone else special authority as Catholics claim.

([Matthew 16:13-19 GNB](#)) “Jesus went to the territory near the town of Caesarea Philippi, where he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” “Some say John the Baptist,” they answered. “Others say Elijah, while others say Jeremiah or some other prophet.” “What about you?” he asked them. “Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” “Good for you, Simon son of John!” answered Jesus. “For this truth did not come to you from any human being, but it was given to you directly by my Father in heaven. And so I tell you, Peter: you are a rock, and on this rock foundation I will build my church, and not even death will ever be able to overcome it. I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of heaven; what you prohibit on earth will be prohibited in heaven, and what you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven.”

([Matthew 16:19 King James Version](#), misleading translation) “And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

([Matthew 16:19 International Standard Version](#), good understandable translation) “I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you prohibit on earth will have been prohibited in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth will have been permitted in heaven.”

([Matthew 16:19 Modern King James Version](#), improvement over King James) “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.”

([Matthew 16:19 “Young’s Literal Translation”](#)) “And I will give to thee the keys of the reign of the heavens, and whatever thou mayest bind upon the earth shall be having been bound in the heavens, and whatever thou mayest loose upon the earth shall be having been loosed in the heavens.”

Explanations by Commentary

As there is such a large degree of confusion on this subject, I have chosen not to continue with further in depth meanings myself. Instead, several respected commentaries have been used which were written by people holding doctorates in theology. We will then conclude with a summary.

We will start with [John Wesley's Explanatory Notes on the Whole Bible](#)

Mat 16:19 - I will give thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven - Indeed not to him alone, (for they were equally given to all the apostles at the same time, Joh_20:21-23;) but to him were first given the keys both of doctrine and discipline. He first, after our Lord's resurrection, exercised the apostleship, Act_1:15. And he first by preaching opened the kingdom of heaven, both to the Jews, Act_2:14 &c., and to the Gentiles, Act_10:34 &c. Under the term of binding and loosing are contained all those acts of discipline which Peter and his brethren performed as apostles: and undoubtedly what they thus performed on earth, God confirmed in heaven. Mat_18:18

Albert Barnes' Notes on the Bible commented the following:

Mat 16:19 And I will give unto thee... A key is an instrument for opening a door. He that is in possession of it has the power of access, and has a general care of a house. Hence, in the Bible, a key is used as a symbol of superintendence an emblem of power and authority. See the Isa_22:22 note; Rev_1:18; Rev_3:7 notes. The kingdom of heaven here means, doubtless, the church on earth. See the notes at Mat_3:2. When the Saviour says, therefore, he will give to Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven, he means that he will make him the instrument of opening the door of faith to the world the first to preach the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles. This was done, Acts 2:14-36; 10. The “power of the keys” was given, on this occasion, to Peter alone, solely for this reason; the power of “binding and loosing” on earth was given to the other apostles with him. See Mat_18:18. The only pre-eminence, then, that Peter had was the honour of first opening the doors of the gospel to the world.

Whatsoever thou shalt bind... - The phrase “to bind” and “to loose” was often used by the Jews. It meant to prohibit and to permit. To bind a thing was to forbid it; to loose it, to allow it to be done. Thus, they said about gathering wood on the Sabbath day, “The school of Shammei binds it” - i.e., forbids it; “the school of Hillel looses it” - i.e., allows it. When Jesus gave this power to the apostles, he meant that whatsoever they forbade in the church should have divine authority; whatever they permitted, or commanded, should also have divine authority - that is, should be bound or loosed in heaven, or meet the approbation of God. They were to be guided infallibly in the organization of the church:

1. By the teaching of Christ, and,
2. By the teaching of the Holy Spirit.

This does not refer to persons, but to things - “whatsoever,” not whosoever. It refers to rites and ceremonies in the church. Such of the Jewish customs as they should forbid were to be forbidden, and such as they thought proper to permit were to be allowed. Such rites as they should appoint in the church were to have the force of divine authority. Accordingly, they commanded the Gentile converts to “abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood” Act_15:20; and, in general, they organized the church, and directed what was to be observed and what was to be avoided. The rules laid down by them in the Acts of the Apostles and in the Epistles, in connection with the teachings of the Saviour as recorded in the evangelists, constitute the only law binding on Christians in regard to the order of the church, and the rites and ceremonies to be observed in it.

According to The People's New Testament (1891) by B. W. Johnson

Mat 16:19 - I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of the heaven. That is, of the church. The office of the keys is to open the doors, or close them. On Pentecost, Peter first opened the doors and declared the conditions of which men could have their sins forgiven, be bound or loosed, and thus enter into the church. Seven years later at Cæsarea he declared the same conditions to the Gentiles. While Peter took the lead the keys were given to all the apostles, and to no other mortal. See Mat_18:18, and Joh_20:19-28. All that is here said to Peter is said to all the apostles.

Meaning by Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset and David Brown Commentary

Mat 16:19 - And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven--the kingdom of God about to be set up on earth and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven--*Whatever this mean, it was soon expressly extended to all the apostles (Mat_18:18); so that the claim of supreme authority in the Church, made for Peter by the Church of Rome, and then arrogated to themselves by the popes as the legitimate successors of St. Peter, is baseless and impudent.* As first in confessing Christ, Peter got this commission before the rest; and with these "keys," on the day of Pentecost, he first "opened the door of faith" to the Jews, and then, in the person of Cornelius, he was honoured to do the same to the Gentiles. Hence, in the lists of the apostles, Peter is always first named. See on Mat_18:18. *One thing is clear, that not in all the New Testament is there the vestige of any authority either claimed or exercised by Peter, or conceded to him, above the rest of the apostles--a thing conclusive against the Romish claims in behalf of that apostle.*

And the final by Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Bible

Mat 16:19 - **The keys of the kingdom** - By the kingdom of heaven, we may consider the true Church, that house of God, to be meant; and by the keys, the power of admitting into that house, or of preventing any improper person from coming in. In other words, the doctrine of salvation, and the full declaration of the way in which God will save sinners; and who they are that shall be finally excluded from heaven; and on what account. When the Jews made a man a doctor of the law, they put into his hand the key of the closet in the temple where the sacred books were kept, and also tablets to write upon; signifying, by this, that they gave him authority to teach, and to explain the Scriptures to the people. - Martin. This prophetic declaration of our Lord was literally fulfilled to Peter, as he was made the first instrument of opening, i.e. preaching the doctrines of the kingdom of heaven to the Jews, Act_2:41; and to the Gentiles, Act_10:44-47; Act_11:1; Act_15:7.

Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth - This mode of expression was frequent among the Jews: they considered that every thing that was done upon earth, according to the order of God, was at the same time done in heaven: hence they were accustomed to say, that when the priest, on the day of atonement, offered the two goats upon earth, the same were offered in heaven. As one goat therefore is permitted to escape on earth, one is permitted to escape in heaven; and when the priests cast the lots on earth, the priest also casts the lots in heaven... That binding and loosing were terms in frequent use among the Jews, and that they meant bidding and forbidding, granting and refusing, declaring lawful or unlawful, etc...

Introduction to Matthew 18:18

This is the second and final mention of binding and loosing in the book of Matthew and the entire Bible. In the following scriptures, Jesus is talking to all his apostles, and the authority of binding and loosing which was first bestowed upon Simon Peter in Matthew 16:19, is now being given to all the apostles. We will again take the surrounding verses so we can see the context of what is being said here. First is the Good News Bible followed again by the King James on the key verse.

(Matthew 18:15-20 GNB) "If your brother sins against you, go to him and show him his fault. But do it privately, just between yourselves. If he listens to you, you have won your brother back. But if he will not listen to you, take one or two other persons with you, so that 'every accusation may be upheld by the testimony of two or more witnesses,' as the scripture says. And if he will not listen to them, then tell the whole thing to the church. Finally, if he will not listen to the church, treat him as though he were a pagan or a tax collector. (18) "And so I tell all of you: what you prohibit on earth will be prohibited in heaven, and what you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven."

(Matthew 18:18 KJV) "Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

Only one explanation by commentary has been included here, as all the other commentaries said to refer to the notes given on Matthew 16:19. The only difference shown now is that the authority first given to Simon Peter has now being given to all Jesus' apostles.

Albert Barnes' Notes on the Bible commented this:

Mat 18:18 - **Whatsoever ye shall bind...** - See the notes at Mat_16:19. These words were spoken to the apostles. Jesus had before addressed the same words to Peter, Mat_16:19. *He employs them here to signify that they all had the same power; that in ordering the affairs of the church he did not intend to give Peter any supremacy or any exclusive right to regulate it.* The meaning of this verse is, whatever you shall do in the discipline of the church shall be approved by God or bound in heaven. This promise, therefore, cannot be understood as extending to all Christians or ministers, for all others but the apostles may err.

Summary

After reading all of the above commentaries, it is clear they conclude that they define the kingdom of heaven as that of the true Church on earth, the house of God where the Gospel will come, of which Peter is the steward bearing the keys. The fact that Jesus gave Simon Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven first means Peter will be used to open the door of faith to the world, the first to preach the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles. Peter had made a confession that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of the living God. His confession of the Divinity of our Lord was the first made by man. Therefore, Peter was given the keys of the kingdom of heaven, i.e. God chose him among all the apostles, that the Gentiles should first hear the word of the Gospel and believe. All this assumes of course, that Peter's use of the keys will be in accordance with the teaching and mind of Christ.

Peter first opened the kingdom of heaven to the Gentiles when he preached to Cornelius at Cæsarea. Peter also opened the kingdom of heaven in his sermon at the great Pentecost. It is important to note, while Peter took the lead, the keys were later given to all the apostles and to no other mortal. This promise was first made to Simon Peter (Matthew 16:19) and then to the other apostles (Matthew 18:18) and cannot be understood as extending to all Christians or ministers.

Now, as for those that teach binding or loosing applies to that of demons or Satan, it should also be noted that binding and loosing does not refer to persons, but to things - "whatsoever," not whosoever. It refers to rites and ceremonies in the Church. Among the Jews binding and loosing means that of *forbidding* or *allowing*. And so as directed by the Holy Spirit whatever they bound, that is, declared to be forbidden, and unlawful, was just that, and that whatever they loosed, that is, declared to be lawful, and free of use, should also be so. Accordingly, they bound some things, which before were loosed, and loosed some things, which before were bound.

For instance, they prohibited or declared unlawful the use of circumcision, which after the death of Christ, they declared to be no longer of use as circumcision is now that of the heart and not the flesh. (Romans 2:28-29) They bound or forbid the observance of days, months, times and years; i.e. the keeping of the various ceremonial holy feast days, new moons and ceremonial sabbaths which were only for the Jews. This included the first day of the New Year, and of every month, the Day of Atonement, Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles, the Jubilee year and ceremonial sabbatical years. (Galatians 4:9-10) These days did not include the Sabbath of the Lord which is one of the Ten Commandments. They loosed or declared lawful and free both civil and religious conversation between Jews and Gentiles where before the Jews had no dealings with the Gentiles. They would not enter their houses, or keep company, have conversation or eat and drink with them. But now it was determined and declared that no man should be called common or unclean and that in Christ Jesus and in his Church, there is no distinction of Jew and Gentile. (Acts 10:28) These things now by them, being bound or loosed, pronounced unlawful or lawful, are confirmed as such by the authority of God, and are likewise to be considered the same by us.

It was *clear* and *commonly understood* by the Jews at that time, that binding signified a declaration for anything that was unlawful to be done; and loosing signified, on the contrary, a declaration that anything may be lawfully done. Our Saviour spoke to his disciples in a language which they understood, so that they were not in the least at a loss to comprehend his meaning. The fact that it may not be clear to us is no reason why we should conclude that it was obscure to them. Also, these phrases of binding and loosing occur nowhere in the New Testament but in Matthew, who is supposed to have written his Gospel first in Hebrew, and then it was translated into Greek.

Today many Christians fearlessly overstep their bounds and go "*where angels fear to tread.*" These Christians with their *over-stated* power and authority do what even the archangel Michael dared not do. Man's verbal barrages do not disturb Satan, but it does displease God. Those who would use *extra biblical* spiritual warfare techniques to place themselves in rulership over principalities and powers in the heavenlies are taking over God's rightful place of authority.

The false teachers described by Peter and Jude took it upon themselves to do this and God's word rebukes them for it: "...*These false teachers are bold and arrogant, and show no respect for the glorious beings above; instead, they insult them. Even the angels, who are so much stronger and mightier than these false teachers, do not accuse them with insults in the presence of the Lord.*" [2 Peter 2:10-11 GNB](#). This warning is repeated in [Jude 1:8-9 GNB](#), "*Not even the archangel Michael did this. In his quarrel with the Devil, when they argued about who would have the body of Moses, Michael did not dare condemn the Devil with insulting words, but said, The Lord rebuke you!*" We also find in [Zechariah 3:2 GNB](#), an angel would not rebuke Satan, but left it to the person who had the authority. "*The angel of the LORD said to Satan, May the LORD condemn you, Satan!*"

The response of some spiritual warfare teachers to these scriptures has been, "Yes, *but we are higher than the angels, the angels cannot do this but we can.*" Yet [Hebrews 2:6-7 GNB](#) says, "*Instead, as it is said somewhere in the Scriptures: 'What are human beings, O God, that you should think of them; mere human beings, that you should care for them? You made them for a little while lower than the angels; you crowned them with glory and honour.'*" Saying we are higher than the angels ignores the clear teachings of the passages in Jude and 2 Peter. Jude clearly states that those who *revile angelic majesties* are wrong for doing so, and if the archangel Michael did not dare do this, even more should we refrain from doing so. It is amazing what contemporary teachers will do to get away from obeying the Scripture. They are rebelling against God in their zeal to fight Satan.