

Binding and Loosing

By Jesus’ time, the language of binding and loosing was commonly used to signify restricting or permitting a given action according to the Torah. Jesus mentions binding and loosing twice in the book of Matthew—each time giving his disciples the authority to do these things.

In both instances, Jesus gives His disciples authority to govern the church by restricting or permitting certain behaviors with divine support. In the first passage (Mt. 16:13-19), Jesus seems to give Peter authority to set the church’s teaching and practice—which the disciples did in Acts 15:1–20 in establishing requirements for Gentile believers (see Acts 15:10). In the second passage (Mt. 18:15-19), Jesus’ words appear to grant believers authority in matters of church discipline. These texts align with the known understanding of the terms binding and loosing, as the disciples had to work out which elements of the Torah were applicable (or not) in the newly revealed kingdom of God.

The terminology reflects legal decisions, not personal requests. Instead of talking about prayer or spiritual battle issues (as is often applied), Jesus is speaking about legal decisions concerning disciplinary issues within the body of believers.

Granting authority to bind and loose is not the same as giving the disciples license to decree as they saw fit. Rather, Jesus trusted His disciples to accurately continue His teaching. As both passages in Matthew refer to the context of “the church,” the disciples have authority to bind and loose not as individuals, but as leaders of the church. (adapted from *Lexham Bible Dictionary* and *Matthew Presents King Messiah* (B. Kasden))

Memory Verse #38: “Lord, how many times shall my brother sin against me and I still forgive him...”
Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you up to _____ times, but up to _____ times.”

In His Dust: Talmidim _____ in _____. “...if a person is caught in any wrongdoing, you who are _____ are to _____ such a person in a spirit of _____...” (Galatians 6:1).

Lesson notes & questions:

Lesson Reflections (review before Apply nights):

- What is at least one new thing I learned about loving God or my neighbor?
- Which topics would I like to know more about or need clarification?
- How does the Holy Spirit want me to apply the lesson’s Scripture to my discipleship?

“Go make disciples...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Mt 28:19-20)

APPLY!

- Share any “Lesson Reflections” with the group. Recite this lesson’s Memory and In His Dust verses; discuss what they mean to you.
- **Lost Sheep - Matthew 18:12:14**
 - How should the parable of the Lost Sheep inform our view of church discipline?
 - What truths about pastoral care are underlined in these verses? Is pastoral care only a job for the pastor? How does pastoral care apply to you?
- **Church discipline - Matthew 18:15-19**
 - Repeat the four steps in your own words.
 - What light does Jesus shed on how mistakes by fellow-believers should be handled?
 - What is the ultimate goal of Church discipline?
 - How would you respond biblically to the following statement: “the church has no right to tell me what to do in my private life.”
 - List sins or transgressions that would be matters for discipleship but not matters for church discipline?
 - What does Jesus mean by telling his disciples to treat an unrepentant church member as a pagan/Gentile or tax collector? What might be equivalent terms in our culture?
- **Forgiveness - Matthew 18:20-22**
 - What did Jesus mean by “seventy-seven” or “seventy time seven”?
 - Why is forgiveness such an important ingredient in your discipleship?
- **Parable of Unforgiving Servant - Matthew 18:23-35**
 - What is the main point of the parable of the Unforgiving Servant?
 - If you aren’t showing mercy to others, how might that be an indication you are not being shaped by the gospel?
- **Personal application:** Make a list of your top five hurts. Who must be forgiven to relieve these burdens? How can forgiveness be initiated? Who might help? Try to resolve these before the next time you take Communion so you can participate with a heart free from grudges and reflect the greater forgiveness of God towards you.
- **Spend the last five minutes in prayer pairs.**
 - Seek His will for our church, our community, and our society.
 - Praise for answered prayers, growth, and how God is working in your life.