

Binding and Loosing

This article is from the “Edifying the Body” section of the Church of God Big Sandy’s website, churchofgodbigandy.com. It was posted for the weekend of Aug. 3, 2019. A version of the article was published in *The Journal: News of the Churches of God* on July 30, 1999.

By Dave Havir

BIG SANDY, Texas—A misconception is causing much trouble among the Churches of God. Many people do not understand “binding” and “loosing” from Matthew 16:19.

Because of this misunderstanding, people are putting the words and ideas of men above the words and ideas of the Holy Bible.

Apparently many of these people are sincere. Nevertheless, even sincere mistakes can be serious mistakes.

Upon what rock?

During His life Jesus asked the disciples who people said He was (Matthew 16:13-14). Then He asked the disciples who they thought He was (verse 15). Peter’s response: “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God” (verse 16).

Jesus told Peter the Father in heaven had revealed that information to him (verse 17).

Then Jesus told Peter (in verse 18): “You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church . . .”

Upon what rock was the church built?

- Upon Peter? Was Peter the first pope, as the Roman Catholic Church teaches?
- Upon any one man? Look around and you will see many men among the Churches of God who behave with authority like the pope. Does any man among the Churches of God have the authority of the pope? (Notice the reference to Acts 15 later in this article.)
- Upon a group of men? Look around and you will see a few examples of councils or boards among the Churches of God that behave with authority like the pope. Does any group of men among the Churches of God have the authority of the pope? (Notice the reference to Acts 15 later in this article.)
- Upon Christ? Yes, upon Christ! The words Peter spoke in verse 16 are indeed correct: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Binding and loosing

In verse 19 Jesus continued His talk with Peter. He talked about giving Peter the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Then He talked about binding and loosing.

Notice the King James wording about binding and loosing: "And whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

Jesus said the same words to the disciples in Matthew 18:18.

Let me you give three options to consider in analyzing the concept of binding and loosing.

- Option No. 1: When a man or a group of men makes a proclamation on earth, God is required to bind or loose that proclamation in heaven—no matter what it is.
- Option No. 2: When a man or a group of men makes a proclamation on earth, God has already bound or loosed that proclamation in heaven—no matter what it is.
- Option No. 3: When a man or a group of men makes a proclamation, it is bound or loosed on earth only if it has already been bound or loosed in heaven.



Following is a simple test with four questions. The test is multiple choice. Each question has three options. Choose the answer that most accurately reflects the truth about the historical statement.

An ancient change

1. Centuries ago the leaders of the Roman Catholic Church changed its doctrine about the Sabbath.
 - a. God really didn't want the change, but He was stuck with it and had to bind it.
 - b. God wanted the change and inspired the pope and cardinals to proclaim the change.
 - c. Christians need to compare the proclamation back to the Bible to see if Scripture supports the proclamation from men with religious titles.

Déjà vu

2. In the early 1990s, the leaders of the Worldwide Church of God changed its doctrine about the Sabbath.
 - a. God really didn't want the change, but He was stuck with it and had to bind it.
 - b. God wanted the change and inspired the pastor general and advisers to proclaim the change.
 - c. Christians need to compare the proclamation back to the Bible to see if Scripture supports the proclamation from men with religious titles.

Contradicting variations

3. Throughout the years the leaders of the Worldwide Church of God occasionally changed the administration of its teaching on “divorce and remarriage.” Oftentimes a new policy contradicted an old policy.

- a. God really didn’t want each of those changes, but He was stuck with each variation and had to bind each variation as it occurred.
- b. God wanted each of those changes (no matter how contradictory) and inspired the pastor general and advisers to implement each of the variations.
- c. Christians need to compare each proclamation back to the Bible to see if Scripture supported each proclamation from men with religious titles.

Flip-flopping

4. Historically the leaders of the Worldwide Church of God flip-flopped its doctrine about a woman’s use of cosmetics.

- a. God wasn’t really interested in flip-flopping this doctrine, but He was stuck with each change and had to bind each change as it occurred.
- b. God wanted each flip-flop of this doctrine and inspired the pastor general and advisers to implement each flip-flop.
- c. Christians need to compare each proclamation back to the Bible to see if Scripture supported each flip-flop from men with religious titles.

Bound in heaven

This little test crystallizes some obvious conclusions:

- God is not trapped by the statements of men.
- God does not inspire every proclamation of apparent leaders.
- God expects saints to prove which proclamations are from God.

Following a proclamation that is bound or loosed only by men is not the same as following a proclamation that is bound or loosed by God.

The King James translation does not help to make Matthew 16:19 as clear as it could be. Notice some clearer versions.

The Amplified Version of the Bible quotes Matthew 16:19 this way: “. . . Whatever you bind—that is, declare to be improper and unlawful—on earth must be already bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth—declare lawful—must be what is already loosed in heaven.”

The Williams translation of the Bible quotes Matthew 16:19 this way: “. . . Whatever you forbid on earth must be what is already forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth must be what is already permitted in heaven.”

What about Acts 15?

Some people claim that Acts 15—the account of the Jerusalem conference about circumcision—proves that apparent leaders make the decisions of binding and loosing for the people of God. Is that really what it says?

- It is important to realize the decision in Acts 15 was not made by physical people.
- It is also important to realize this decision was not a spur-of-the-moment decision by God. When God made a promise to Abraham, He fully intended to open the door of salvation to the gentiles. God had a timetable.

Some people use Acts 15 to support their view of the existence of one special leader.

They claim James was the chief apostle.

There are two problems with this theory.

- First, the New Testament model does not conclusively show that James was a one-man ruler. Peter and Paul had major roles (Galatians 2:7-8). James, Peter and John were listed as pillars (verse 9).
- Second, Jesus Christ is our Apostle (Hebrews 3:1).

Some people use Acts 15 to support their view of a special group of leaders. They claim a chosen group of leaders has the authority to make binding decisions for saints.

There are two problems with this theory.

- First, Acts 15 was an example of servants acknowledging God's will. Misapplications of Acts 15 are often about rulers justifying themselves in determining and enforcing man-made policies.
- Second, Acts 15 was about God giving blessings to gentiles in general (Galatians 3:14), liberty for saints (Galatians 5:1) and unity among the Body of Christ (Ephesians 2:19-22). Misapplications of Acts 15 are often about men using policies and procedures to divide saints and to control their perceived portion of the flock.

Can you see the tragic irony?

Pray for our friends

Among the Churches of God are many intelligent and sincere saints who still become mesmerized by people with religious titles.

- Without realizing it, many saints put a man or a group of men into the role of the Old Testament Levitical priesthood.
- Without realizing it, many saints put a man or a group of men into the role of the vicar of Christ (as practiced by the Roman Catholic Church).
- Without realizing it, many saints put a man or a group of men into an exaggerated role of binding and loosing on earth.

Sometimes it's difficult to help our friends who hold to these concepts, but at least we can pray for them.