

"I Will Build My Church"

Peter's Confession of Christ

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Turn to Matthew 16. This is the primary focus of today's sermon although we will be going back and forth to other scriptures, but you can bookmark this verse for quick reference. We will read verses 13-19 to get the whole context:

Matthew 16:13-19 When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" So they said, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." [You will notice that in giving this answer they are saying that everyone they had talked to said that He was someone from the past.] He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

Here we have a short passage in which Peter, as a representative or spokesperson for the other disciples, recognized under God's inspiration that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God. As soon as he said this, Jesus then says in response that He will build His church. It is as if having confessed this to Jesus, having come to the realization of who He was, then Jesus said "Great, that's what I was looking for and now I can begin to build My church." Then He adds that the gates of Hades will not prevail against it, meaning that now that it has begun it will go on forever until its purpose is accomplished.

We know from secular history, and we can see bits and pieces of it within God's Word, that within a couple of generations the church Jesus founded had been corrupted both from within and without. However, Jesus' word stands true in that He did found that church and it will continue despite death, despite all the machinations of Satan the Devil, and it will continue and does continue to this day. By the beginning of the second century the church that appears under the name Christian is nothing like the one that turned the world upside down after that day of Pentecost in A.D. 31. Mr. Armstrong used

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to quote the Protestant biblical scholar Jesse Lyman Hurlburt who said that when the curtain was raised on the second century, the church that appears as Christian is totally different from the one that Jesus founded.

It certainly seemed that when the corruption set in on the church that it would collapse and die, but the few faithful children of God went underground for the most part. They fled to remote but still peaceful areas of the Roman Empire and even went beyond the empire where they could practice their faith without persecution. The church that was left behind by these faithful people became this corrupted church. This visible, corrupt church appropriated the name "Christian" and took on a form of righteousness that adhered in some ways to the teachings of Christ but as the decades rolled on it found itself unable to even uphold many of those. By the time you get to the fourth century and the time of Constantine and the great councils of that church, they had rejected a major portion of true Christianity but they continued on as the visible church.

This corruption in that visible church became especially evident during the late Middle Ages in the 14th and 15th centuries. Lately, I have been reading a book called *A Distant Mirror: the Calamitous 14th Century* by Barbara W. Tuckman, which I highly recommend. It is an excellent historical survey of the cultures, people, and events during the time of the Hundred Years War. The Hundred Years War was that great war between England and France that just dragged on and on because of the territorial ambitions of the kings of England. One of the major players in this century and in these wars was the Roman Catholic Church. That was the name of the successor of that visible Christian but corrupt church that came out of the second century. Although the church that emerged in that second century was not called the Catholic Church at the time, it eventually took on that name.

By the 14th century, the Catholic Church was a powerful, wealthy, and a temporal institution, meaning it was an institution of this world. It directly governed large territories in Italy known as the Papal States and the church held sway over many European kingdoms including the Holy Roman Empire, which was the heir to Charlemagne's kingdom from the 800s. As the Vicar of Christ, the popes of the time claimed universal rule on the basis of what we have just read here in Matthew 16, particularly verses 18 and 19. This is where the link comes in for what I am going to talk about today, because I want you to see how the Catholic Church twisted what is written here in Matthew 16.

I mentioned that the kings of England and France were the main players in the Hundred Years War. However, there were also many other nobles and pretenders to thrones and they did not want the interference of the Pope and the Pope's delegates—various cardinals, archbishops, and bishops—so this was a time of great contention between

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not only England and France, but also the thrones of Europe and the pope. Various thrones and various kings would try to get the Pope on their side and carry the weight of the church in their arguments and battles against the other side. In reality, none of the contenders wanted the Pope to interfere. They wanted to control him. On the other hand the Pope had his own ideas and ambitions for the church and so he did not want to be controlled, he wanted to control them.

So there are all these powers coming together in a very tumultuous time. This is also the century of the Black Death and marauding bands of soldiers going across England and mostly France. As the title of the book states, it was a time of calamity. Everything was topsy-turvy, upside down with war, famine, pestilence, the church, and all of these things were rolled together in a great big mess.

You can think of this time in terms of the kings versus the popes. The century opened with the French King, Phillip the IV, sending agents, meaning spies or soldiers, to assault the 87-year-old Pope Boniface VIII physically. From there the century went downhill. That was probably one of the better things that happened during the century.

I am sure you have heard of the corruption of the Medieval church, the sex scandals that have plagued the Catholic Church since time immemorial. Now in this century it is pedophilia, or pederasty, which is a better word. In early times, it was mostly the popes and cardinals having mistresses and various other sexual scandals such as their mistresses having children, raising them secretly, and then making them cardinals at age six and that sort of thing. This is bad enough but perhaps the greed of the Catholic clergy has been even worse spiritually than those sexual sins. I do not know how you would weigh them, but if you understand the greed of the church at the time, you will come to understand what I mean.

They used the Bible, and particularly these verses in Matthew 16:18-19, as divine sanction for taking money, and as much money as they could, from the people because they felt they had the keys of the kingdom and the power to bind and loose. These were the two elements of their power so if they had the keys to the kingdom and power therewith over the whole church, which they could open and close at their will along with the power to bind and loose, they believed God gave them the authority to allow or disallow anything.

Their belief was that God was bound to honor what they allowed or disallowed because that is what He says in Matthew 16:18-19. They construed these verses as *carte blanche* to do whatever they wanted. If they felt they needed to raise money for a certain thing, they would allow their priests to take up a collection under threat of excommunication or

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anathema. You will probably be surprised at how far they went in this exercise. In addition, there was the practice of selling of indulgences, which is what developed during the Reformation. That was one of the practices that Luther opposed.

Listen to some of the methods the church used to enhance its revenue stream. It seems that all they thought about is money—and how to get it. They received tithes and they received first fruits from church properties. The church had properties all over Europe with fruit orchards and fields where grain or vegetables were grown. The church hierarchy would take a tithe from the people and then they would take the first fruits from their lands. All of this was converted into money and brought to Rome, except in the 14th century when the Roman Catholic Church experienced what was called the Great Schism, which began when the King of France decided that he did not like the Italian Pope so he elected one of his own and established his pope in Avignon, France. Later when the two offices began to lose authority it was decided to create an ecumenical council and a third pope was elected to unite the sides.

We understand from the Bible the principle of tithes and first fruit offerings because we do that ourselves, but the scope of the Catholic Church's appropriation of resources did not end with just the tithes and offerings. The church also received dues from papal fiefs. The Catholic Church as a temporal (worldly) institution not only had church lands but they were also the overlords of various fiefdoms. These were various tracts of lands that were governed by regular people. These could be dukes, counts, earls, or other titled nobles who owned land but owed fealty to the church and had to pay dues on their lands.

Additionally, the church took dues from every church office. If you were a cardinal, archbishop, bishop, or a priest you had to pay a certain due to the hierarchy to keep that office. Every time a person was nominated for an office, the nominee had to pay a fee to be nominated. Once he was appointed over whatever position in whatever town, he owed them another fee. Therefore, he paid a fee to be nominated and another fee to be appointed.

Every time a person asked for a dispensation from a church rule there was a fee imposed. Most dispensations were issued in the area of marriages. The reason they had to ask for a dispensation in terms of marriage, which mostly applied to the nobility, was that there were all sorts of dynastic marriages taking place all over Europe. Europe was made up of a patchwork of various feudal lands and in order to gain more land without going to war one landowner would marry a son or daughter to another landowner's son or daughter making the heir the owner of both of those lands. This increased the family wealth and treasury by increasing the property holdings.

Most all of the royal houses in Europe are connected by blood. However, the Catholic Church would not allow a marriage legally closer than the fourth degree. Because of numerous proposals taking place all the time in Europe the families would ask the pope for dispensation so that couples who were closer in kin than the fourth degree could get married. The pope would get together with his advisers and determine how it would benefit the church if they granted the proposal and allowed the marriage. They would decide what fees could be charged and how they could continue their revenue stream into the future. They would then tell the petitioners that if they gave a certain amount of money now for the dispensation they would allow the marriage but they would also impose another amount to be due when the heir was born and another amount when he came into his inheritance. They would work out the details in an elaborate negotiation in such a way that money would be given for the dispensation and at various times in the future.

It was a wonderful resource for the church from their point of view when a king had to ask this for his son or daughter because this fee for marriage dispensation was based on a sliding scale depending on what position you held in society. If you were a pauper, they did not care because you had no money to give and the local priest could take care of that if he wanted to. However, if you were a noble and had pockets filled with gold, their eyes would light up and they would gladly marry sister and brother for the amount of money that it would bring.

If a judgment was needed on a matter, say a problem arose between neighbors and it could not be worked out, they went to the priest, or bishop or archbishop and asked him to make a judgment between them. Depending on how wealthy one was, he would charge a fee and the pope would get his cut as well.

If one desired a pardon for any sort of sin, an indulgence or absolution, you needed only to put money in the priest's grimy, grubby hands and it would be given. It did not matter what it was; everything was for sale. They used their church offices and the church's responsibilities and authorities that had been given to the church, or rather *taken* by the church, as license to obtain money. Money was all they really cared about. Beyond this there was the cut that the papacy took of all voluntary gifts. For example if someone had something wonderful happen to them and out of the goodness of their heart they decided to give a gift to the church, the papacy took their 10 percent or whatever portion they deemed appropriate.

Bequests in a will were subject to the papacy's cut as well as any offerings that were given. The church collected a tax on top of the tithes and the first fruit offerings. It was called Peter's pence in England and elsewhere it was called something similar. It was

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like a temple tax and it had to be paid. It took a special tax if the pope authorized a crusade. It sold extra indulgences in the years of jubilee. They would do whatever they could to get money. It was all a big marketing venture to them.

In addition, the church used its powers of excommunication and anathema to extort money on certain things. If two people, we will say two dukes, were fighting each other, the church could intervene, call a truce, bring both sides to the table, and then threaten to excommunicate one or the other if they did not pay up and do what the church said on a certain issue. Another example was given of a bishop who died in debt. Remember he had to pay for his nomination and then pay for his appointment. If he did not pay the fees immediately, it was considered a debt and he would have to pay it off in installments. This bishop died and was still in debt to the church.

The church "needed" that money and had to get it so the church hierarchy would not allow that bishop to be given Christian burial until his heirs had agreed to pay his debts. In order for the church to obtain this agreement from the family, they threatened his ability, under their beliefs, to get into heaven. They said that if the family did not pay his debts, the church would not give him absolution and he would have died un-shriven with no chance of ever going to heaven. The people, because of their superstition, paid.

Having gone through all of these examples, it is evident that these are not the actions of the church that Jesus founded. However, the Catholic Church claims to this very day that it has these powers from Matthew 16:18-19.

The feast of Pentecost, which we are celebrating right now, is an annual reminder of the founding of the church on that day of Pentecost in 31 A.D. and the giving of the Holy Spirit that empowers it to do its work and distinguishes it from any other religious organization. We are going to spend most of our time in Matthew 16:16-19 and see what kind of church Christ really founded, and see what authority He actually gave to the apostles.

First, I want to go to Acts 2 and see the founding of that church on that day of Pentecost in 31 A.D. The whole chapter is about that day, and the days immediately following, so we are going to skip around through this chapter and read various verses.

Acts 2:1-4 When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to

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speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

This is the great pouring out of the Spirit that was done at that time and it shows evidence of it being given to them by speaking in tongues. These were normal tongues as you can see how the crowd responded to their speaking. Each man heard the speaking in his own language and understood. However, some people were thinking they were drunkards the way they were going on.

Acts 2:14-24 But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them, "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and heed my words. For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams. And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; and they shall prophesy. I will show wonders in heaven above and signs in the earth beneath: Blood and fire and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord. And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.' "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know—Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it.

Acts 2:32-41 This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool.'" "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in

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the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call." And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation." Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.

In these scriptures we have the giving of the Holy Spirit, great power and signs, Peter's message that he gave helping them to see the connection between this wonderful outpouring of God's Spirit and God's promise in the book of Joel of giving the Spirit as the last days were upon us, and Jesus' part in this as the Savior and that He rose from the dead and ascended to heaven where He is now given the responsibility of dispensing the Holy Spirit to us, the people whom God shall call.

Then we see as we come toward the end of the chapter that not only is the Holy Spirit given but it immediately produces fruit. It immediately produced a mega-church. Three thousand people plus the hundred and twenty that are mentioned in Acts 1:15. What we have here is a giving of the Spirit in such a big way that it was impossible to miss. In several places here it is called a pouring out, not a dribble, not just a small stream, it is like Niagara Falls. The power of it was so easily seen and the effect of it produced such wonderful things so quickly. It is by this means in the visible, oral occurrence that they could see it and they could hear it and they could feel it in the wind. They could feel the power of Christ dispensing the Spirit to His church at its founding.

In times past, people knew God had given His Spirit to others—the prophets, even to Saul at one point—but it was given out one person at a time. Each person would speak for God and he would sometimes do miraculous things. God's Spirit was given to various individuals at various times in the past, but it had never been poured out like this. It was first poured out on the twelve, then the hundred and twenty, and then to these three thousand. It was an absolutely astonishing miracle.

There could be no doubt that not only was it felt in the winds and seen in the tongues of fire but it was also heard in the speaking in tongues and it was evident in the power of the message of Peter. It was apparent that God had indeed imbued the apostles with divine power to speak His words, just like He had done to the prophets, and that God would use that speaking by the Holy Spirit to call others and to persuade and convert them to His way.

This broad pouring out of the Spirit was proof to Peter and the apostles that Jesus was

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indeed in heaven. Remember, He had promised that if they would tarry there for a little while longer until the day of Pentecost, He would then pour out His Spirit upon them. He had done exactly what He said He would do. They had seen Him going up into a cloud but then He was gone and they did not see Him anymore, but when this happened on the day of Pentecost they were waiting for it.

They knew that He had actually made it to His destination and then He fulfilled the prophecy of what would happen at that point, as He says in verse 34-35, "The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool." Christ indeed had sat down at the right hand of God and God had given Him the power to dispense the Spirit as He had said that He would at the Last Supper where Christ tells them He would not leave them orphans, but that He would send them the Holy Spirit to dwell in them.

They could see and feel and hear what happened there on the day of Pentecost that He was indeed sitting at the right hand of God. This was just a final, perfect confirmation that He was who He said He was; both Lord (as it states in verse 36) and Christ. This means that He was their Master, and not only their Master, but also He was sovereign over everything. God had given Him that power, and He was also the Messiah, meaning the perfect Savior. He had totally completed that mission that He had been given to do. He had come, lived, preached, died, risen again, ascended, and sat down at the right hand of God.

He had done everything perfectly and now He was in the position to found the church and to perpetually supply it with His power. Everything had been done according to His Word.

This was the final verification of what Peter had confessed for all of them in Matthew 16 where he said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." By the power of the same Spirit, three thousand people became disciples and church members that very day. It bore immediate fruit in the conversion of many. Christ instantly presented the apostles with spiritual authority and responsibility over a very large group of people. He also immediately put their skills and training to the test. He tested not only their skills and training but He tested their character too. How were they going to handle this sudden leadership, authority, responsibility, and all the newly converted personalities of all these people with all their different agendas and ideas?

Beth mentioned to me this morning as we were talking about this that it will be the same thing that will happen in the Millennium. The 144,000 are immediately going to have to put all of that training to the test as soon as they are resurrected. Then the same sort of

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thing is going to happen in the White Throne Judgment in an even greater way. Here we will have some time to train on people during the Millennium but suddenly in the White Throne Judgment we are going to be given billions, and we are going to have to apply the training we have been given.

We see the pattern here that God has established that if He has trained you, that time will come when you will be given the work to do. Just as the apostles had the power through God's Spirit to do the work, so will we. If God has prepared you for a place among the 144,000 to help Him in His Kingdom, you will be ready just like the apostles were ready on that day of Pentecost.

We will go back now and look at Matthew 16 in finer detail. This is a section of Scripture that has been twisted for such a long time and it really needs to be explained thoroughly for us to understand it. I will probably say a few things that you may not agree with but I hope you will stick with me because I did a lot of research on this and I feel fairly certain about what I have to say. The point that may raise many an eyebrow about is the answer that Jesus gave about "On this rock I will build my church." As we go through it in sequence I believe it will become easier to understand.

Matthew 16:16 Simon Peter answered [this is in response to Jesus' question "But who do you say that I am?"] and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

This was the answer that launches Christ's response. We have to understand that this all is said because Peter said "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." His confession of this was a milestone. It was a marker along the way to show Jesus that they were of a certain mind now and they could understand what He had to say. So He gives this instruction.

Matthew 16:17-19 Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. [We see that this was a revelation to Christ that God had been working with them and that they indeed had been learning and had grown to this point of being ready.] And I also say to you [this connects it] that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

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These are the pivotal scriptures. The Catholic Church was correct in understanding these things in terms of the church leadership and administration, but as men often do they take the instruction of God and the permissions that He gives and they go all the way to the extreme end. They not only took an inch, they took a mile. In a way, you could say the way this is presented opened the floodgates for them to take what they wanted.

However, that was not Jesus' intent at all. He gave them specific authorities and permissions but as human nature does, they took to themselves positions and powers that He did not give and they perverted those that He did give. We can say then that the Catholic Church interpreted these verses to satisfy their carnal desires for power, prestige, control, and wealth rather than to do God's will. That in itself is proof that they were not converted. Someone who is using God's Holy Spirit properly would not do that. Peter and the other apostles did not do that. It was only later when things were perverted and terribly corrupted that people started taking more than was given.

If you care to look up these verses in commentaries to cross check what I am saying here, you will find that most of them run from several to many pages of detailed and sometimes picayune arguments on both sides of the issue. The reason for this is because the grammar is a bit tricky. Even the Greek scholars are unsure. They struggle to understand because there are some 1900 or more years of opinions and ideas pertaining to these verses. They are especially struggling against the great powers and influence of the Catholic Church, so they try to take a stand that may or may not be totally honest.

I have tried to be very honest in the way I have looked at this and I hope you will understand the point of view. The arguments are not as arcane as the question of how many angels can dance on a pin, but it might seem that way if you do not like those kinds of picky arguments over grammar. You will see hints of this as we go through these verses. Nevertheless, even though these commentators go to these extremes, the instruction is fairly simple and clear if we come at it with God's Holy Spirit and without prejudice. If we just read what it says we will understand it a lot better. Taking verses 16 and 17 together:

Matthew 16:16-17 Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven."

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The controversy starts with Peter's answer to Christ's question. It is a good and right answer and that is why Jesus calls him blessed for making this response to Him because it was so clear that God had revealed this to him. A person who was not being worked with by God would not come to this conclusion. Remember John in I John says whoever does not confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not one of us, he is an antichrist. What we see here is that Peter confesses to Jesus that He was God who had come in the flesh, and that He was who He said He was as evidenced by His work.

Peter's response was not a momentary flash of inspiration. Instead, what we have here is an admission that he had been thinking this through, taking what he had seen and heard throughout Christ's ministry, and came to a very thoughtful conclusion that Christ was the Messiah. Not only did he realize that Christ was the Messiah but also that He was the Son of the living God. Jesus recognized that God had opened Peter's mind to these facts over a long period of time and that Peter had numerous chances to run away from the idea and away from Jesus, but he had stuck to it, persevered, and he had stayed with Jesus, and he was now committing himself. He realized he could not run away from the Messiah, the Son of the living God. We will see in a minute in John 6 that he actually says, "Where will we go?"

Another proof that this thought had not just immediately struck Peter out of the blue is that from the first time we see Simon Peter in the scriptures it is mentioned that they said, "We found the Messiah." We will see this in John 1:35-42. This is the earliest occasion we see the apostles still there with John the Baptist.

John 1:35-42 Again, the next day, John stood with two of his disciples. And looking at Jesus as He walked, he said, "Behold the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. Then Jesus turned, and seeing them following, said to them, "What do you seek?" They said to Him, "Rabbi" (which is to say, when translated, Teacher), "where are You staying?" He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where He was staying, and remained with Him that day (now it was about the tenth hour) [about 4:00 in the afternoon]. One of the two who heard John speak, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his own brother Simon, and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus. Now when Jesus looked at him, He said, "You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas" (which is translated, A Stone).

In Aramaic this word is *cephas* and John says here it is translated "a stone." The first

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time that we see Peter and Jesus together there is this admission by Andrew that they had found the Messiah. Andrew said this directly to Peter so they were already thinking that Jesus was the Messiah way back at this point. Secondly, at this same occasion where Peter meets Jesus, Jesus calls him a stone. These things go together; Jesus is the Messiah and Peter is the stone.

Back to Matthew 16: What happened with Peter happens with all of us. The revelation of Christ is a matter of learning, experience, and consideration of the facts over a period of time. Immediately upon meeting Jesus he considered Him the Messiah, but he did not confess it publicly to Jesus until Matthew 16, which was quite a bit later. It was something he had thought about, weighed the pros and cons, questioned whether He was fulfilling prophesy, and then came to a very deep and spiritually correct conclusion.

Further in Matthew 16:16 Peter states not only that He was the Messiah but that He was the Son of the living God. It would have been easy for him to say "You are the Messiah," because there were a lot of pretend messiahs that had been around and the Jews were looking for a messiah, but they were looking for a physical messiah, a leader who would take up arms and kick the Romans out and restore Israel as chief of the nations. They were looking for what we are looking for in His second coming. It was easy for a Jew of this time being excited about kicking the Romans out and restoring the kingdom to Israel to get behind a military leader or someone who said he would do it and proclaim him the messiah and it was not long thereafter that he was probably hanging beside the road crucified by the Romans.

But, Peter adds here that not only was He the Messiah, our Savior, but that He was the Son of the living God. That was much different than the common idea of what messiah would be, which is why Jesus says "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven," because no one can know the Son unless the Father reveals it to him. Likewise, no one can know the Father unless the Son reveals Him. This was something the Father had done (John 6:44), to draw him to Christ and to realize who He really was.

Adding the statement that Jesus was the Son of the living God made clear to Peter that Christ was not just another prophet like David who would raise an army and take the Jews to victory, but rather He was God in the flesh, the Son of God. Peter realized that Jesus was not a normal man and that the power he had seen was something only a Son of God would have. Peter surely had been rethinking a lot of the Old Testament prophecies that the Jews were hanging onto as far as the messiah coming and realized this was different; not only was He the son of David, a physical savior, He was the Son of God, a spiritual savior. He was coming to an understanding that this was going to be

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a different kind of messiah than they had envisioned.

Interestingly though, in the next few verses when Jesus tells Peter He has to go to Jerusalem and die, Peter rebukes Him. Then Jesus has to tell him "Get behind me Satan" because he is thinking human thoughts and not the thoughts of God. Peter did not have it fully formed yet but he had come to the point where he understood that Jesus was not just a messiah, He was *the* Messiah, the Son of God. Not just a man but more than a man; He was God's real, actual, divine son.

Also note that he adds "living" to the mix. You can call anything god, but Peter says "You are the Son of the living God." A lot of nations had gods of stone, wood, precious metals, and so forth, and they called them gods, but they were just idols and could not do anything. But the real God was alive, active, dynamic, and the One who always lived. Peter was making a distinction here by using the adjective "living," showing that he recognized in Christ the reality, the dynamism, and the eternity, the ever-living quality of the true God.

Now go to John 6 where this is confessed another time. These are the scriptures after Christ has talked about eating His flesh and drinking His blood, and many of them began to question and some went away.

John 6:63-69 It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life. But there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him. And He said, "Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father." [This fits in precisely with what I just read in Matthew 16:16] From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. Then Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also want to go away?" But Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Here is another example of Peter saying virtually the same thing as he says in Matthew 16 but it is in the context of the Spirit giving life and it was this idea that Peter recognized and therefore made his confession so pointedly to Jesus. In Matthew 16:17 Jesus states that Peter is blessed because God has been working with him and has revealed this to him.

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Matthew 16:18 And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

As I mentioned before, Jesus' instruction here is a direct consequence of Peter's confession of Christ, but unlike what the Catholic Church said, it is not the grand reward and commission to Peter that they have made it out to be. It is an honor, but it is the giving of a huge responsibility. It does give him some authority, but it is mostly a huge responsibility in administering the church. One thing that it absolutely is *not* is a granting to Peter and his successors the title "Vicar of Christ."

The word "Vicar" is a derivative of the word 'vicarious,' meaning something done or given in place of another thing such as a vicarious sacrifice. The Vicar of Christ means the one in place of Christ. That is blasphemy. That is not what Jesus granted to Peter at all. It is not a position passed along to other bishops of Rome. Peter was never bishop of Rome in the first place. There was no office passed along at any point in the true church like the office of Pope. There was a leader in the true church obviously, but not somebody with that type of position or authority as the Catholic Church prescribed to its leaders.

We can understand this as Herbert Armstrong taught, that here in verse 18 Jesus declares "you are Peter" and then He turns and refers to Himself as "upon this rock I will build my church". This is a possible way of looking at it but it does stretch the Greek grammar a bit and especially when we understand that this statement was probably 99% likely to have been spoken originally in Aramaic. I will show you this shortly.

I will also mention that this was the preferred interpretation that the rock should be Christ. That was the preferred interpretation of Augustine back in the 4th century so it has been around a long time. However, it is not necessary here and the reason is because there are plenty of places in the Bible where Jesus is called the rock. With regard to the grammar, in the Greek where He states "you are Peter" that is the word *petros* and *petros* is masculine. Then His statement "on this rock" is *petra*. In Greek when using the word rock you would use *petra* because the normal Greek word for rock is a feminine noun. In order for it to be a man's name you have to change the ending to *petros*. The Greek grammar is that it has to be *petros* and *petra* in order to be correct because Peter is masculine and a rock in Greek is feminine so it has to be *petra*.

Mr. Armstrong often said that a *petros* was a small rock and a *petra* was a huge massive crag. That is true in a sense. *Petros*, though, was only used as a surname and not as a name for a rock you would find on the ground, or a rock you could climb on the side of a

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mountain. Normally in Greek, if you were talking about a small rock, you would say a *petra*, and if you were talking about a rocky crag you would also say *petra*. That is just how the Greek grammar works. It would go for both. Although in later Greek it came to be that when they wanted to talk about a small rock they would use *petros* but at the time when this was given *petra* was the normal Greek term for a rock, small or large. So the *petros* and *petra* explanation given by Mr. Armstrong is not entirely in line with the Greek grammar usage at the time.

I mentioned this was also probably originally spoken in Aramaic. That would have been the normal way they would have spoken to one another, especially in private. They were all Jews from that area and basically the language all the Jews spoke was Aramaic. Some knew Greek but Aramaic was the *lingua franca* of the area. What makes this interesting is that Aramaic does not have two different words for the surname and the actual rock. When Jesus said this, He used the word *cephas* for Peter's name and He also used *cephas* when He referred to "this rock." There was not a differentiation between Peter's name and the rock He was speaking about. They were the same word. He said "You are *cepha* and on this *cepha* I will build my church." There is nothing from the Aramaic that can help us understand what the Greek actually says, but the Greek tells us because of its rules of grammar that *petros* is masculine referring to a man and *petra* is feminine and the normal word for rock.

Another point to consider is that Christ was a male; why did He not say "you are *petros* and on this *petros* I will build my church," if He meant Himself? In that way if He wanted to continue the pun then He could have done it, but He did not. Here in Matthew's writing it was changed from the exclusive masculine reference to masculine initially and feminine in the last reference to make it correct in Greek.

Turn to I Corinthians 10:4 and we will see that it is not necessary for this verse to say that the rock is Christ. In this scripture it tells us very clearly that the rock is Christ.

I Corinthians 10:4 [talking about the fathers in the wilderness] and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock [this is *petra*] that followed them, and that Rock [*petra*] was Christ.

We have in this instance a specific mention that the *petra* was Christ. It is very clear in Paul's writing here that he considered Christ to be a rock, the Rock, so it is not needed necessarily back in Matthew 16:18 for this doctrine to apply because we have it in other places. Turn to II Samuel 22:2 where David writes:

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II Samuel 22:2 And he said: "The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer.

All the way back to the time of David we have the idea that the Lord, Yahweh, was a rock. Of course, that same Yahweh became Jesus Christ. Here again we have proof that "the rock" is one of His titles, so we do not necessarily need it explained in Matthew 16:18 to prove the doctrine. You can go to Psalm 31:3 as well as Isaiah 17:10 and they both say much the same thing, that the Lord is the rock. The idea appears numerous times in the Bible.

The simplest explanation using the grammar, not only from the Greek but also from the Aramaic, is that He is indeed speaking about Peter. Although many of you have different Bibles, most of the time that reference to the "rock" there in Matthew 16:18 is left uncapitalized and that is probably the simplest way to read the scripture. He says then that He would build His church on that rock.

What was Jesus before He started His ministry? He was a carpenter. He understood construction and that is the analogy He is using here when He states "You are Peter"—the first one who has confessed this properly, the first one God has revealed this to, and then in order to construct His church He will start with Peter, because he was the first and on him He would build His church.

One of the arguments against Christ being the rock is that the builder is not the building in normal construction. The builder does not build himself into the building. The builder stands outside the building and builds it. However, in this case there is a slight difference because Jesus lives in us. He lives in this building. In fact, that is what He is building. He is building us into a building, a church, a temple in which He is going to live, but He had to start with some piece of material, and that material he started the building with was Peter.

Go to Ephesians 2 and you will see that the apostle Paul uses this same analogy connecting it with another doctrine of the church.

Ephesians 2:19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,

Paul is saying here that the Gentiles and others had been added to the building under the New Covenant.

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Ephesians 2:20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone,

We can say from reading this that Jesus was indeed built into the building, but maybe a better way of putting it is that He is the one that holds everything together. The prophets are a part of the foundation. Also, the apostles, including Peter, are in the foundation and it is Jesus Christ, the builder, who holds it all together.

Now go to Revelation 21 in the prophecy of New Jerusalem:

Revelation 21:14 Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

We see that indeed Jesus did build His church on the apostles and he started with Peter, because Peter was the one who confessed it first. It is almost a matter of timing and priority, because Peter was the one who confessed this He said "blessed are you Peter" the first who confessed this and He was going to start building His church with him. That is the easiest way to understand this. In so doing it does not say that Peter is given honor beyond what he should. It is simply saying he gets honor from being the first and he is the start in Jesus' building of His church. We see that as it happens, not only did He start with Peter, but Peter was the one who started things for Christ in many, many occasions.

I Peter 2:4-5 Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

This scripture states that we are all living stones, which Christ uses in building the church, and we are fitted into a perfectly engineered edifice, a temple for God to dwell in. It was an image that stayed with Peter to the very end. How could he miss it? It was his own surname that Christ Himself had given him stating "you are a stone."

Continuing on in the last part of Matthew 16:18, the reference to the gates of Hades could be better translated as the powers of death. It has nothing to do with the heaven and hell doctrine. The church does not have the authority to keep somebody from the afterlife in one form or another. In fact, what it really means is that though death is the

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enemy of most institutions and of people, it has no claim on God's church because God is eternal and He is going to grant eternal life to the members of His church. Even though the members die physically, the church continues on because Christ continues on until He brings total victory at His coming.

Next in Matthew 16:19 He states He will give the keys to heaven and whatever is bound on earth will be bound in heaven and whatever is loosed on earth will be loosed in heaven. This could be expounded on with multiple grammar references but it is really quite simple. The reference to the "keys to the kingdom" is an image that goes back to the Old Testament. You can refer to Isaiah 22:20-22 where Eliakim the son of Hilkiah was given the job of steward in the king's house and the badge of his office was a set of keys. So Eliakim was given the authority to run and maintain the king's house, to open and shut doors, to allow entrance or deny entrance to the people who would come to the palace. Jesus is giving His apostles authority, as stewards, to organize and maintain the physical organization of the church. They are His stewards and He is giving His apostles the opportunity and authority to be doorkeepers regarding who may fellowship with the church and who may not.

We can look at this in a positive way and a negative way. The positive way is that the apostles and therefore the ministry under them are given the authority to determine if a person is ready for baptism. Then using the authority of a steward they can open the door to these people. On the negative side the ministry is given the authority to shut the door on certain ones who will harm the church or who have been in the church and are causing division. The ministry then has authority to disfellowship or not grant entrance to those who would be trouble to the church. We see Peter doing both of these things in Acts 10:44-48 where he grants entrance to the Gentiles using his authority as an apostle to do so.

Acts 10:44-48 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word [those he was speaking to in Cornelius' household]. And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God [a mirror of what happened on the first Pentecost]. Then Peter answered, "Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days.

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Peter used his authority as steward of God's house to open the door to the Gentiles. You can also refer to Acts 8:14-23 where you will see Peter closing the door to Simon Magus and telling him to depart and take his filthy money with him. These are two examples of the authority being used both positively and negatively. It is not only the idea of the administration of the church but determining who can come into the church and who must leave the church.

The binding and loosing is a tagged on part of the responsibility. To bind means to forbid and to loose means to allow. The controversy on this saying is that it is written in a strange tense. It is written in the periphrastic future perfect tense, which should be translated "whatever you bind on earth shall *have been* bound in heaven," rather than the future tense, which is mostly translated as "shall be bound." Now listen to the difference "whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven" or "what you bind on earth shall *have been* bound in heaven."

Jesus grants the apostles the powers of judgment to make decisions concerning whether things should be forbidden or whether they should be allowed. It does not mean that their decisions are infallible, but that they should be based on what *God has already forbidden or allowed*.

Therefore, these are not matters of doctrine that they can bind or loose but judgments based on doctrines, and God will back them up because He has already bound them in heaven. He is saying here He is giving the apostles the authority to think these things through and base judgments that are not particularly handled by God's Word on the principles of what is in His Word.

An example of this is the decision Mr. Armstrong made about smoking. There is nothing in the Bible that says that you shall not smoke, but Mr. Armstrong used the authority Christ had given him as an apostle to come to a biblically based decision regarding that and God would back him up, and did, and has through the church.

Make a note of Matthew 18:18 because Christ says the same thing there in terms of offenses in the church. He gives the authority to bind and loose in those occasions. This is another time when a minister would have to make a judgment based upon what is given in God's Word.

I hope we can see that what Christ gave the apostles, particularly Peter, was simple authority and responsibility, not a grand office or position of power. However, He was granting him some honor for being the first and for being one of the apostles on whom the church would be founded, but this is not the way the Catholic Church has interpreted

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this through the ages.

We will finish in Acts 4:29. This is just after the apostles had been questioned by the Sanhedrin.

Acts 4:29-33 Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus." And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness. Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all.

We should not let it get too far from our minds that it was through the power of God's Spirit that the apostles were able to do such a powerful work in those first years of the church. That same Spirit in the same power and magnitude is available to us today to do a similarly powerful work in these last few years before the return of Christ. We can thank God and rejoice that Jesus has continued to build His church and work through it and in us and eventually glorify us as His first fruits.