

Exposition of Matthew 16:18



**UPON
THIS ROCK**

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And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. – Mt. 16:18

There is presently a massive effort by the Roman Catholic Church to bring Protestants back to Rome. The last decade of the 20th century has seen the materialization of the ECT (Evangelicals and Catholics Together) document. In the ECT document, prominent Evangelical and Catholic theologians publicly unite in basic essentials of the Christian message. However, this unity is superficial and unreal, as the only thing that unifies them is common language but not common meaning of that language. They agreed on the same terminology but interpreted the terms differently. The document is a triumph for Rome because it gives them the appearance of orthodoxy in the eye of the public. Because of ECT most Christians now believe that Rome is essentially orthodox.

Another avenue for Rome is the Internet. Rome has many websites that attempt to use the Bible to prove their unbiblical dogmas. They understand that most Christians view the Bible as the only authority for doctrine and practice. Although Rome views the Bible as one authority among many others (councils, tradition, papal decrees, etc.), she fully understands that she cannot win Protestants back to her unless she makes her case by using the Bible alone. Hence, Rome attempts to use the Bible to demonstrate that the Bible is not the final authority. She is using the Bible in an attempt to prove all of her other non-biblical dogma's are Biblical. Is this tactic working? Yes, it is winning many Protestants and other non-Catholics to her views.

One major emphasis of Rome is her interpretation of Matthew 16:18-19. She persistently defends her claim to be the apostolic church of Christ spoken of in Matthew 16:18, and that

Peter is the “rock” upon which Christ built his church. Furthermore, they believe Peter is the first in a succession of Popes invested with the keys of the kingdom.

Rome is calling Protestants to submit to that claim. Protestantism acknowledges her as their historical origin, and some believe she is among the original Apostolic Churches of Christ. They only “*protested*” and came out of her because they believed she went into apostasy. Now, there is a growing number of Protestants who are returning to Rome, and accepting her claims.

Matthew 16:18 is at the center of this debate. In the following pages, the interpretation of Rome will be presented fairly and then a more Biblical contextual based response will be given in response to Rome’s interpretation of this text.

The Roman Catholic Interpretation

The following quotations are taken from Catholic websites in order to fairly represent the position of the Roman Catholic Church in regard to Matthew 16:18-19.

[“Scriptural Evidence for the Papacy and the Apostolic Primacy of St. Peter as the Rock \(Matthew 16:18\)”](#)

Matthew 16:18 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it.

Catholics contend that the "rock" is Peter himself, not his faith, or Jesus (although arguably his faith is assumed by Christ in naming Peter "rock" in the first place). This interpretation is found in the Church Fathers at least as early as Tertullian (d.c.230). The next verse (16:19) is in the singular, which supports this view, which is in fact the consensus of the majority of biblical commentators today, according to the article on Peter in the Encyclopedia Britannica (1985 edition). (13)

*It has often been argued to the contrary that Jesus called Peter petros (literally, "stone"), not petra (the word for "rock" in the passage), so that the "rock" wasn't Peter, but this is simply explained by the necessity for a proper male name in Greek to be in the masculine gender. In Aramaic, however (the language Jesus spoke), the name kepha would have been used for both "rock" and "Peter." Matthew could just as easily have used another Greek word for "stone," lithos, in contrast to "rock," but this would have distorted the unmistakable word-play of the passage, which is the whole point!" - **Mirror of Truth** (Roman Catholic Defense of the Faith on the internet)*

*"And what does Kepha mean? It means a large, massive stone, the same as petra. (It doesn't mean a little stone or a pebble--the Aramaic word for that is evna.) What Jesus said to Simon in Matthew 16:18 was this: 'You are Kepha, and on this kepha I will build my Church.'" - **ibid***

These quotations correctly represent the Catholic position. The Catholic argument is quite simple and clear. They believe the original gospel of Matthew was written in Aramaic, and then later translated into Greek. They believe that Matthew originally used the Aramaic term "kepha" which was later translated "petros" in the Greek version. So, in the original Aramaic manuscript Jesus simply said:

"And I say unto you, thou art Peter (kepha) and upon this rock (kepha) I will build my church..."

Since *kepha* means a large rock, they argue there is no difference between the name given to Simon and the rock upon which the church is built. They also argue that at the time of Christ there was no difference between the Greek terms "petros" and "petra". They conclude their argument by pointing to the singular pronoun "thee" in verse 19 and with a note of triumph demand that Christ built His church upon Peter as the first Pope and that the keys belong to Peter and his successors.

The Biblical Interpretation

First, we admit that Jesus probably spoke in Aramaic as implied by John 1:42 and many other references where Aramaic terms are interpreted for readers. However, we deny that the gospels were first written in Aramaic and then later translated into Greek. There is no evidence for such a conclusion and there is sufficient evidence against it.¹

The issue is whether the intent of Jesus was to provide a common identity between “petros” and “petra” or a contrast between “petros” and “petra” in Matthew 16:18. Furthermore, the Great Commission is explicitly inclusive of “all nations” and therefore, the common universal language was Greek not Aramaic. Writing it in Aramaic instead of Greek would be self-defeating in regard to their universal commission.

Second, if Matthew intended for the readers to understand that *kepha* was in the background of his thinking in Matthew 16:18, he could have included it, as John did:

And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone. – Jn. 1:42

Third, most Jews were either bilingual or trilingual in order to do public transactions. The Greek Septuagint version of the Old Testament was popular among the Jews, and Greek was the universal language of commerce within the Roman Empire. Latin was the language of their conquerors – Romans. On the

¹ For example the parenthetical explanation in Matthew 5:41 and John 1:42 makes sense **only** if these gospels were written in Greek to Greek reading people. It makes no sense to explain the meaning of an Aramaic term if this letter is written to an Aramaic audience. Furthermore, there has never been found any copies or fragments of any Aramaic gospel.

cross Pilate fixed a sign written in three different languages (Jn. 19:20). Paul spoke Aramaic, Latin and Greek.

However, Matthew carefully avoided any reference to the Aramaic. Why? We believe that the contextual intent of Matthew was different than that of John. John's intent was simply to tell the reader that Simon's new name meant "a rock." However, the intent of Matthew was to go further than merely defining Simon's new name as "a rock" but to provide a contextual based characterization of that rock. This required Matthew to avoid any mention of the Aramaic *kepha* because the Aramaic term could not convey his intent. His intent could only be conveyed by the Greek grammar.

This interpretation is confirmed by a careful consideration of the Greek grammar. The grammar provides much evidence that a contrast was the intent rather than the Catholic view of common identity.

For example, the first noun ("petros") is without the definite article ("the" in the Greek) while the second ("petra") is with it.² The first noun is masculine gender while the second is feminine.³ The first noun implies a smaller rock than the second noun. The first noun is modified by a *second* person pronoun while the next noun is modified by a *third* person demonstrative pronoun. All of these are contrasting grammatical distinctions, and when considered together, indicate the Holy Spirit wanted the reader to see a contrast between these terms instead of a common identity. Such contrasts cannot be conveyed by the Aramaic *kepha*. The only thing that *kepha* could convey is "a

² It is true that proper nouns may be considered definite even without the definite article. However, this is certainly not the case here as even Roman exegetes admit there is an intentional play on words, and John 1:42 proves it was given to Simon by Christ to characterize him in some way, and this is the only text provided to explain that characterization.

³ The masculine may be called for as a name for a man but if Christ was going to build His church upon Peter He would have made this much clearer by repeating the masculine instead of changing to a feminine.

rock.” Matthew avoided *kepha* for exactly the same reason that Catholics say that he avoided the use of “lithos”

“but this would have distorted the unmistakable word-play of the passage, which is the whole point!” -

Mirror of Truth

Yes, that “*is the whole point.*” However, are we to believe that the whole point consists only in a “play” on words, or is there a point to this “*play on words*”? We believe there is a point to this play on words, and that point is to make a clear contrast between these terms in order to complete a contextual characterization. Catholics believe that the only point being made by the Greek is nothing more than can be found if he had used the Aramaic “*Thou art Kepha and upon this Kepha I will build...*”

If that were his only point, it could have been better expressed by simply saying:

“Thou art Peter (being interpreted “a rock”) and upon YOU I will build my church.”

The Catholic point makes any Greek word play redundant and pointless. Not only so, but the change from a second to third person and from a masculine to a feminine gender does not help convey such a point.

Roman Catholic exegetes clearly see the potential of such a contrast and vigorously attempt to explain away all historical and grammatical contrasts. However, any interpretation that depends upon explaining away the obvious is a weaker interpretation than one which incorporates the obvious. The most obvious contrast that Roman Scholars vigorously attempt to explain away is the historical distinction between “*petros*” and “*petra.*”

*“As Greek scholars--even non-Catholic ones-- admit, the words *petros* and *petra* were synonyms in first*

century Greek. They had at one time meant "small stone" and "large rock" in some ancient Greek poetry, centuries before the time of Christ, but that distinction was long gone by the time Matthew's Gospel was rendered in Greek." – **Catholic Answers**

However, there is more error than truth in this statement. As they admit, in ancient Greece these terms were not synonyms but were contrasting descriptions. However, the Catholic exegete attempts to assert this “one time” distinction was only found in “*some ancient Greek poetry, centuries before Christ, but was long gone by the time of Matthew’s gospel.*” This is pure assumption that cannot be proven. Indeed there is evidence to the contrary.

As late as 150 BC in the accounts of the Maccabees, the masculine “petros” is used to describe small stones.⁴ The accounts of the Maccabee’s were well read and known in the days of Christ.

Roman Catholic exegetes feel the weight of this response, and therefore try to establish their position by appealing to the context to demonstrate that their interpretation is a better fit.

“Catholics contend that the "rock" is Peter himself, not his faith, or Jesus (although arguably his faith is assumed by Christ in naming Peter "rock" in the first place)....The next verse (16:19) is in the singular, which supports this view” – **Mirror of Truth**
(emphasis mine)

However, the mention of a singular pronoun only brings to light more problems for the Roman Catholic exegete. It is the pronouns of this context that demonstrate the error of the

⁴ 2 Macc. 1:16; 4:41 – the significance of this is the fact that in the Septuagint the masculine “petros” occurs only here. Nearly 100 times the feminine “petra” is found in the Septuagint consistently for large rocks and in particular is a description for God.

Catholic position. When Jesus refers to Peter, He uses a second person pronoun (direct address), but when He refers to the “rock” upon which the church is built, He changes to a third person pronoun (indirect address) proving that the feminine “rock” cannot grammatically refer to the masculine “Peter.”

“YOU (2nd person) are Peter but upon THIS (3rd person) rock...”

Clearly the grammatical antecedent for “**this** rock” cannot be Peter but must refer to the third person singular “**it**” in verse 17 which in turn refers to the content of Peter’s profession in verse 16 – “*Thou art the Christ the Son of the Living God.*”

Mt. 16:16 *And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. 17 And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed **it** [third person singular] unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. 18 And I say also unto thee, [second person singular] That thou art Peter, and upon **this** [third person singular] rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*

1. The Building Context:

It should be easy to see Matthew 16:18 outlines a building context:

There is a builder “**I will build**”.

There is something to build “**my church**” and

There is something to build on “**upon this rock**”.

These points clearly demonstrate a *building* context. The builder is named. The building is named. The foundation to

build upon is named. However, apart from the name given to Simon, there is an obvious missing ingredient in this building context. The missing ingredient is the material out of which Jesus builds His church. How does the noun *petros* supply this missing ingredient?

2. The Characterization

Significantly, the noun *petros* is found without the definite article (“the”) in the Greek text.⁵ This often indicates that the speaker or writer is intentionally trying to emphasize the character or quality of the term. What would be the impact of such a characterization in this building context? Such a characterization would define the suitability for building material.

For example, the characterization would amplify the contrasting word play by distinguishing the kind of rock out of which Jesus builds the church distinguished from the kind of rock He builds the church upon. What contextual evidence is there for such an interpretation?

(1) The preposition “upon” clearly demonstrates that “petra” is the larger kind of rock used for foundations.

(2) The 3rd person demonstrative pronoun “this” demonstrates that the foundation rock (*petra*) is not the same rock as “petros” because “petros” is identified by a 2nd person pronoun rather than a 3rd person. Therefore, “petros” must refer to another type of building rock such as the kind used for the construction of the edifice built upon that foundation.

⁵ It cannot be denied that Jesus gave Simon the name *petros* for intentional characterization in John 1:42 and this is the only context that provides any reason for that characterization.

(3) The historical distinction in meaning between “petra” (large massive rock) and “petros” (smaller part of a massive rock) would indicate that the kind of building rock used for the edifice is smaller in nature to that used for the foundation.

Both “Petros” and “Petra” refer to “rock” but the building context and grammar make them distinct one from the other. In such a building context, both are essential. The church must be built **upon** a more massive rock, but the church edifice itself must also be built out of rock. Only when the two terms are understood in contrast can the building line of thought be completed.

3. The building “rock” characterized?

When the historical and grammatical context is carefully considered there is a clear picture of what kind of building rock “petros” is intended to characterize.

a. A Derived Kind: Grammatically the masculine “petros” is a derivative from the feminine “petra.” The feminine is the source of origin whereas the masculine is the derived product. Another way to illustrate the difference is by comparing a gold nugget being derived from a larger source such as a *mother load*. As the Catholic theologians admit, the noun “petros” has a history for meaning a smaller rock derived from a larger rock - “petra.” In a building context, it would suggest the historical concept where a master builder had a rock cut out of the massive quarry to be used in his building. Contextually, this idea of a derived product from a larger source is clearly spelled out in the verse that immediately precedes Matthew 16:18:

“Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.” – Mt. 16:17

Spiritually, Simon was a derived product from a greater heavenly source. In essence he was a chip off the old rock.

b. A Prepared Kind: The builder would not only have the rock cut at the quarry, but he would have it cut to the precise measurement to fit the exact place intended for it in the structure. This was the job of the Master cutter or rock mason. The rock mason was responsible to make ready such a stone prepared for the use of the Master builder. John the Baptist had been sent ahead of Christ to “*make ready a people prepared for the Lord*” (Lk. 1:17). John the Baptist prepared the material from which Christ used to build His church. Peter was such prepared material, and his name characterized such prepared material. He had received the gospel of Christ and then submitted to John’s baptism (Acts 1:21-22; Lk. 7:29-30). His name aptly characterizes the only kind of material that the Master Builder would use to build His churches – baptized believers.

c. A Representative Kind: In the immediate context it is clear that Jesus was not directing his questions to Peter. He was addressing all his disciples. Impetuous Peter simply responded in behalf of all the rest.⁶ Peter’s response represents all the Disciples of Christ. His response represents the only type of material Christ uses to build His congregations (Acts 2:41-42; 16:30-31; etc.).

It is in this representative capacity that Peter is addressed in verse 19 as “*thee*” in conjunction with the keys (as the plural “you” in Matthew 18:18 proves).

Here is where the Roman Catholic interpretation begins to break down. The keys are not given uniquely to Peter but rather are given to him as a representative of the kind of membership or building material used to build his churches. Hence, the singular pronoun “*thee*” in verse 19 does not support the Catholic position at all.

⁶ All the apostles had already made this profession earlier – Mt. 15:33

4. Christ's Testimony:

Positive proof that Christ never intended to give the keys to Peter as an individual or as an apostle is that only two chapters later the authority of the keys is said to be given to a plural “ye” and “you” which has for its antecedent “*the church.*” (Mt. 18:17-18).⁷

Neither Peter nor the apostles are said to be the final court of appeal on earth but “*tell it to the church and if they hear not the church*” there is no other final court of appeal on earth or any other final authority for discipleship matters on earth.

5. Peter's Testimony:

Who could better determine whether this interpretation or the Roman Catholic interpretation is correct other than Peter himself? How did Peter understand Christ words in Matthew 16:18-19?

It is clear from Peter's own epistle that He repudiated Rome's interpretation and adopted our interpretation to be the correct one. How so? Within five verses in 1 Peter 2:4-8, Peter provides this whole analogy to his readers concerning the material used to build the church and the proper identity of the Petra.

“Ye also, as LIVELY STONES, are BUILT up a spiritual house...” – 2 Pet. 2:5

⁷ The term “church” or Greek ekklesia is term that is inclusive of a plurality. It is common to address a church in the New Testament and then use the plural pronoun to continuing addressing it (e.g. Acts 11:22; 1 Cor. 14:23; 1 Thes. 1:1; etc.). Also, the subject is church discipline in Matthew 18:15-17 and it is the church not its officers that administer discipline (e.g. 1 Cor. 5:5; 2 Cor. 2; 6 “the many”).

The words “*built up*” represent the exact same Greek term translated “*build*” in Matthew 16:18.

Here is a spiritual “house” that is built out of living “stones.” Where did Peter get such an analogy for the church of Christ, if it wasn’t from Christ’s use of Peter’s own name in Matthew 16:18?

Furthermore, Peter identifies Christ not only as the “rock” that unbelieving Jews stumbled over, but the foundation stone upon which the church is built:

“To whom coming, as unto a living STONE, disallowed indeed of men.....Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner STONE...the STONE.....a STONE of stumbling...a ROCK (petra) of offense.” – 1 Pet. 2:4,6,8

The intent of this context is that this “rock” is the object of faith and therefore correlates perfectly with the profession of faith metaphorically described as a “rock” in Matthew 16:16-18. Here Peter speaks directly of building the church as a holy temple out of “lively stones” combined with identifying Jesus Christ is the “petra” all within five verses. This is too clear and decisive to be viewed simply as a coincidence. However, if this is not enough, Peter denies the Catholic view of the primacy of Peter.

“...whom am also an elder...Neither be lord’s over God’s heritage...” – 2 Pet. 5:1,3

Here would be the optimal point to assert his Papal office of primacy if that was intended by Christ in Matthew 16:18-19, and yet he condemns such an idea.

Peter categorically denies every claim that Rome makes in Matthew 16:18-19. Peter categorically affirms the Baptist interpretation of Matthew 16:18-19.

Furthermore, it is James rather than Peter that presides over the church in Jerusalem in Acts 15. If Peter was the “first” Pope

as Rome demands, than why is James in the preeminent position of leadership? In addition, the church at Rome was under the apostolic authority of Paul rather than Peter (Rom. 15:15-16). Neither Peter nor Paul constituted the churches⁸ (Rom. 16:10-11,14-15) at Rome. Peter was instrumental in its foundation on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:11) and Paul was instrumental in its growth by his writings and presence during his imprisonment.

It is interesting to note that Peter uses one term (lithos) in 2 Peter 2:4-8 for two distinct subjects.”⁹

⁸ Romans 16 demonstrates there were several congregations at Rome unto which Paul wrote.

⁹ What is of keen interest in this context is the fact that the same Greek word translated “stone” (Greek “lithos”) identifies two different kinds of stone (1) church members (2) Jesus Christ. However, Peter uses the disputed Greek “petra” in this same context exclusively for the Person of Christ as the proper object of faith.

The Testimony of Rome

For their rock is not as our Rock, even our enemies themselves being judges. – Deut. 32:31

Rome provides ample evidence that Christ is the “rock” upon which the church is built rather than Peter.

1. Catechism of the Catholic Church

Indeed, this interpretation is confirmed by Catholics themselves in the **Catechism of the Catholic Church**. Sections 424 and 442 make this very clear:

424 Moved by the grace on the Holy Spirit and drawn by the Father, we believe in Jesus and confess: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Mat 16:16) On the rock of this faith confessed by St. Peter, Christ built his Church. (Mat 16:18, St Leo the Great - Sermo 4,3; Sermo 51,1; Sermo 62,2; Sermo 83,3)

442 ... And in the synagogues immediately [Paul] proclaimed Jesus, saying, 'He is the Son of God.'" (Acts 9:12) From the beginning this acknowledgment of Christ's divine sonship will be the center of the apostolic faith, first professed by Peter as the Church's foundation. (cf. 1Thess 1:10, Jn 20:31; Mt 16:18)¹⁰

¹⁰ Source: Catechism of the Catholic Church, published by Ligouri Publications, English translation copyright 1994 by the United States Catholic Conference, Inc.--Libreria Editrice Vaticana, bearing the Imprimi Potest of Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, pages 106, 111-112.

Hence, their own catechism supports our point of view. What about the Catholic argument concerning the singular pronoun “thee” in verse 19? Doesn’t this pronoun prove that Peter holds the keys and therefore has a special place of authority? This second person singular pronoun harmonizes perfectly with the Biblical position once the building context is made clear.

2. Quotations from the Vatican Council in 1870

Catholics usually argue that all the Church Fathers believed that Peter was the rock Jesus built His church upon. However, there is a speech by Bishop Strossmayer's presented in The Vatican Council Of 1870 and a paper presented at this council by Archbishop Kenrick that demonstrates differently. Strossmayer’s speech is taken from the 1913 Catholic Encyclopedia online at New Advent.

“St. Cyril in his fourth book on the Trinity, says, 'I believe that by the rock you must understand the unshaken faith of the apostles.'

St. Hilary, Bishop of Poitiers, in his second book on the Trinity, says, 'The rock (petra) is the blessed and only rock of the faith confessed by the mouth of St. Peter;' and in the sixth book of the Trinity, he says, 'It is on this rock of the confession of faith that the church is built.' 'God,'

says St. Jerome in the sixth book on St. Matthew, 'has founded His church on this rock, and it is from this rock that the apostle Peter has been named.'

After him St. Chrysostom says in his fifty-third homily on St. Matthew, 'On this rock I will build my church—that is, on the faith of the confession.' Now, what was the confession of the apostle? Here it is—'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.'

Ambrose, the holy Archbishop of Milan (on the second chapter of the Ephesians), St. Basil of Seleucia, and the fathers of the Council of Chalcedon, teach exactly the same thing.

Of all the doctors of Christian antiquity St. Augustine occupies one of the first places for knowledge and holiness. Listen then to what he writes in his second treatise on the first epistle of St. John: 'What do the words mean, I will build my church on the rock? On this faith, on that which said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.' In his treatise on St. John we find this most significant phrase—'On this rock which thou hast confessed I will build my church, since Christ was the rock.' The great bishop believed so little that the church was built on St. Peter that he said to the people in his sermon, 'Thou art Peter, and on this rock (petra) which thou hast confessed, on this rock which thou hast known, saying, Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God, I will build my church—upon Myself, who am the Son of the living God: I will build it on Me, and not Me on thee.' That which St. Augustine thought upon this celebrated passage was the opinion of all Christendom in his time."

Archbishop Kenrick (1806-1897)

This next item is from a speech prepared by Archbishop Peter Kenrick of St. Louis, also to be given at the first Vatican Council (1870), in opposition to the declaration of papal infallibility as dogma. Debate was ended before Archbishop Kenrick could deliver his speech, but it was printed and distributed to the bishops at the council.

"[p. 107] The rule of Biblical interpretation imposed upon us is this: that the Scriptures are not to be interpreted contrary to the unanimous consent of

the fathers. It is doubtful whether any instance of that unanimous consent is to be found. But this failing, the rule seems to lay down for us the law of following, in their interpretation of Scripture, the major number of the fathers, that might seem to approach unanimity. Accepting this rule, we are compelled to abandon the usual modern exposition of the words, "On this rock I build my church."

In a remarkable pamphlet "printed in fac-simile of manuscript," and presented to the fathers almost two months ago, we find five different interpretations of the word rock, in the place cited; "the first of which declares" (I transcribe the words) "that the church was built on Peter; and this interpretation is followed by seventeen fathers—among them, by Origen, Cyprian, Jerome, Hilary, Cyril of Alexandria, Leo the Great, Augustine.

"The second interpretation understands from [p. 108] these words, 'On this rock I build my church,' that the church was built on all the apostles, whom Peter represented by virtue of the primary. And this opinion is followed by eight fathers—among them, Origen, Cyprian, Jerome, Augustine, Theodoret.

"The third interpretation asserts that the words, 'On this rock,' etc., are to be understood of the faith which Peter had professed—that this faith, this profession of faith, by which we believe Christ to be the Son of the living God is the everlasting and immovable foundation of the church. This interpretation is the weightiest of all, since it is followed by forty-four fathers and doctors; among them, from the East, are Gregory of Nyssa, Cyril of Alexandria, Chrysostom, Theophylact; from the West, Hilary, Ambrose, Leo the Great; from Africa, Augustine.

"The fourth interpretation declares that the words, 'On this rock,' etc., are to be understood of that

rock which Peter had confessed, that is, Christ—the church was built upon Christ. This interpretation is followed by sixteen fathers and doctors.

“The fifth interpretation of the fathers understands by the name of the rock, the faithful themselves, who, believing Christ to be the Son of God, are constituted living stones out of which the church is built.”

Thus far the author of the pamphlet aforesaid, in which may be read the words of the fathers and doctors whom he cites.

From this it follows, either that no argument at [p. 109] all, or one of the slenderest probability, is to be derived from the words, “On this rock will I build my church,” in support of the primacy. Unless it is certain that by the rock is to be understood the apostle Peter in his own person, and not in his capacity as the chief apostle speaking for them all, the word supplies no argument whatever, I do not say in proof of papal infallibility, but even in support of the primacy of the bishop of Rome. If we are bound to follow the majority of the fathers in this thing, then we are bound to hold for certain that by the rock should be understood the faith professed by Peter, not Peter professing the faith.”

The Keys of the Kingdom

The official position of the Roman Catholic Church is that Jesus gave Peter the keys of the Kingdom as the first pope. They interpret the keys as Papal legislative authority to decree new revelation and rule over the church as the vicar of Christ.

The Symbol of the Keys

The metaphor of a “key” or “keys” is a universal reference to authority. It symbolizes the position of power or authority given to someone.

The only man who has been given all authority is Jesus Christ (Mt. 28:18). His complete authority as King is symbolized under the representation of a singular “key” as in the “*key of the house of David.*”

Isa 22:22 *And the key of the house of David will I lay on his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.*

Re 3:7 ¶ *And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things said he that is holy, he that is true, he that has the key of David, he that opens, and no man shuts; and shuts, and no man opens;*

When a variety of different areas are under consideration, the plural “keys” are used:

I am he that lives, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for ever more, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death. – Rev. 1:18

However, when this symbol is used to describe the authority given to men it only represents delegated and limited authority.

For example, Governmental authority is established by God for the purpose of executing righteousness as defined by God – Rom. 13; 1-5

For example, the wife is to subject herself unto her husband's in all things that are "in the Lord."

For example, the children are to obey the authority of their parents "in the Lord."

Christ gives no man authority to disobey Him or to violate His Word.

The Application of the Keys

Woe to you, lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge: you entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in you hindered. – Lk. 11:52

Before the Lord gave the keys to His church there was a previous custodian of the Keys of the kingdom who had abused them and as a consequence those keys were taken from them and given to church.

The Previous Custodian of the Keys

The Spiritual leadership of Israel, especially those who ministered in the house of God had been given this authority.

1. They sat in the seat of Moses

Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat:

All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. – Mt. 23:2-3

The “*seat of Moses*” was another metaphor for the position of authority. Jesus recognized that the spiritual leaders of Israel had legitimate authority to administer the laws of God (“they bid you observe”) and that God’s people were bound to obey (“that observe and do”). They had the authority to make disciples and all that is included in the process of discipleship. The counter part is Matthew 28:19-20.

The fuller context of Matthew 23 is a denouncement of their improper use of the keys of the kingdom and why the keys would be taken from them as well as the presence of God from their temple.

2. They had the Key of Knowledge

*Woe to you, lawyers! for you have taken away **the key** of knowledge: you entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in you hindered.* – Lk. 11:52

They had been authorized to teach God’s people the Law of God (Lev. 10:10) and make them understand its meaning (Ezra 8:8). This aspect of the keys has its counterpart In the Great Commission aspect “*Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you*” (Mt. 28:20).

3. They had the Key to the door of Heaven

*But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! **for you shut up the kingdom of heaven** against men: for you neither go in yourselves, neither suffer you them that are entering to go in.* – Mt. 23:13

Jesus is referring to their abuse of this key. Instead of using it to open the door of heaven to men they abused it so that it closed the door of heaven against men.

This aspect of the keys has its counterpart in the Great Commission aspect “Go preach the gospel” (Mt. 28:19; Mk. 16:15) and preaching repentance unto all nations (Lk. 24:47).

The Jewish leadership perverted the gospel of Christ instead of preaching it as did all the prophets (Acts 10:43). When the gospel is preached the door of heaven is opened unto men who receive it (Acts 2:41) but when it is perverted in “another gospel” of justification by works (Gal. 1:8-9) then the door of heaven is closed and those who embrace that perverted gospel are made a twofold more child of hell than those who preached it to them, as they are still lost but now think they are saved.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, you make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves. – Mt. 23:15

When the gospel is preached correctly then remission of sins is granted through faith in the gospel:

And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. – Lk. 24:47

When the hearers refuse to repent and believe the gospel then their sins are retained:

He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him. - Jn. 3:36

However, remission or retaining sins is dependent upon correctly preaching the true gospel of Christ. The former

custodians of the keys abused this power by preaching “another gospel” that could not save them or their hearers,¹¹

4. They had the Key of Discipline

They answered and said to him, You were altogether born in sins, and do you teach us? And they cast him out. – Jn. 9:34

They had authority to excommunicate from the house of God. This aspect of the keys has its counterpart in Matthew 18:15-18 where it is the explicit authority of the church rather than the apostles or ordained office.

*And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto **the church**: but if he neglect to hear **the church**, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. 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.* – Mt. 18:17-18

The antecedent for “ye” in verse 18 above is “the church” in verse 17. The singular noun “church” is inclusive of a plurality of members. In 1 Corinthians 5 it is the church that exercises the authority of excommunication (1 Cor. 5:5) and it is the majority of the membership that determines this action (2 Cor. 6:2).

5. They had the key of Ordination

¹¹ This is what Jesus means in John 20:23. The power to remit or retain sins was given in connection with the commission to preach the gospel (Lk. 24:47). When the gospel was preached correctly remission of sins were permitted to all who repented and believed. By refusing the gospel their sins were retained and the gospel preacher could declare they were retained (Jn. 3:36).

Qualification and ordination to the public ministry in the house of God was committed to the Levites in the Old Testament. God set forth the qualifications in Numbers chapter four and the Levites were charged with applying these qualifications.

The apostle Paul sets forth the qualifications for the public ministry in the house of God in 1 Timothy 3:1-15 and in Titus 1:5-13.

6. This kingdom authority is taken from them

*Therefore say I unto you, **The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.** – Mt. 21:43*

In the context of Matthew 21 the ordained leadership of Israel confronted Christ and challenged his authority to do what they knew God had authorized them to do in Israel:

*And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said, **By what authority do you these things? and who gave you this authority?** – Mt. 21:23*

Jesus refuses to answer them directly but then answers them in two parables at the close of which they understood his answer:

And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spoke of them. – Mt. 21:45

His parables demonstrated their disobedience to God and the abuse of their delegated custodial authority over the Lord's

vineyard (visible professing kingdom). They had abused the keys of the kingdom or authority in the professing kingdom and it would be taken from them and given to Gentiles (“nation” ethnos) as that would be the final character of “the church.”

This transfer of custodianship of the keys in the kingdom was comprehensive. It was not merely a new custodian of the keys but a complete change in contrast to what occurred at Mount Sinai. At Mount Sinai, there was instituted a new house of God with a new public ministry with new public ordinances ratified by a public sacrifice and then publicly accredited by the shikinah glory as a covenant administration (Ex. 40:35). Likewise, with the coming of Christ all of this was replaced with something new. There was a new mountain (Calvary) with a new public sacrifice that gave public ratification to a new covenant. There was a new public house of worship and new public ministry with new ordinances given a new commission. Hence, a whole new public administration within the professing kingdom of God was established by Christ in His public ministry.

The Use of the keys

*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. – Mt. 18:18*

The use of the keys is described under the metaphors of “bind” and “loose.” These were common rabbinical terms to describe their use of authority within the professing kingdom of God.

To “bind” something was to declare it to be observed as lawful or approved, whereas, to loose was to free one from responsibility for observance or to release them.

Significantly, Jesus uses the periphrastic future perfect which denies legislative authority but only supports administrative authority. This is authority to administer what God has already determined in heaven to be lawful and to loose or release that which God has already determined in heaven should be loosed from observance.

In other words, they have authority to teach and command what God's Word has already established to be the faith and practice. God's Word has been already established forever in the heavens:

For ever, O LORD, your word is settled in heaven.-
Psa. 119:89

The Gates of Hades

And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. – Mt. 16:18

Jesus was near Caesarea Philippi when this discourse occurred (Mt. 16:13). Near Caesarea Philippi was Mount Hermon, and at the foot of Mount Hermon there was a cave from whence the Jordan River originated from a spring. The temple of Pan was built in the mouth of this cave and over the cave's entrance the words "the Gates of Hades" were inscribed.

Pan was another name for the Old Testament Baal, who was based upon the legends of Nimrod. Nimrod was the founder of state organized rebellion against God. He was the builder of Babel, the ancient source of Babylon and the mystery religion. Organized state religion had always been the persecutors of God's people from time of Genesis. Throughout the Old Testament organized state religions (pagan) persecuted the Jews. During the New Testament organized false religion persecuted Christ and His followers. From the time of

Constantine, organized state religion persecuted and attempted to destroy New Testament congregations.

According to the Pan myth, Pan would enter and exit from hades from this cave at the foot of Mount Hermon.



This is an Artist Rendition of the temple of Pan built into the cave at the foot of Mount Hermon at the time of Christ.



This is the Cave as it is today

Pan (Baal/Nimrod) represented all organized state false religions from Genesis to Revelation 17-18. Christ's point for using the phrase "gates of hell" was to assure His disciples that persecution by organized false religion would never destroy His church institution.

Conclusion

Who better than Peter should understand and realize what Christ intended in Matthew 16:18-19? Peter's interpretation and application of building the church in 1 Peter 2:4-8 is identical with Christ's in Matthew 16:18-19.

Every point of the Catholic interpretation of Matthew 16:18-19 is categorically denied by Peter. On the other hand, every point of my interpretation is confirmed by Peter.

If the Catholic position were correct, then, the question of the context in Matthew 16:13-19 would have been, "*Who do men say that Peter is?*" However, the question is not about Peter but about Christ. The confession of Peter is not only the answer to this contextual question but it provides the only BASIS for salvation which must be the FOUNDATION or beginning point upon which Christ builds His church. Any other foundation or beginning point is unreasonable, as it would give prominence to Peter over Christ. Finally, Christ makes it clear in Matthew 18:17-18 that he gave the keys to Peter only in a representative capacity, only as he characterized the members of the congregation. Christ denies the power of the keys belong to Peter or any other individual but rather final authority in matters of discipleship belongs to the church – "tell it to the church" (Mt. 18:17).

The authority to "loose" and "bind" on earth is authority to administer God's Word in keeping with God's will. This is the responsibility and authority of the congregational body of Christ whenever and wherever it meets. This idea is inherent in the original use of the Greek term *ekklesia* as a democratic administrative body to carry the laws of the land in Greek city

kingdoms. This secular usage is preserved in Acts 19:39. The church of Christ is authorized to carry out the business of the kingdom of God as summarized in Matthew 28:19-20.

For their rock is not as our Rock, even our enemies themselves being judges. – Deut. 32:31

For who is God, save the LORD? And who is a rock, save our God? – 2 Sam. 22:32

For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. – 1 Cor. 3:11