

Text: Matthew 16:18-19

Title: Issues in Matthew 16:18-19

Date/Location: Wednesday April 13, 2022 at FBC

Introduction

There are some difficulties in the passage that bear more examination.

I. What Rock is the Foundation of the Church? v. 18

Which option best fits all of Biblical revelation?

The reason this is confusing to people is because the Lord uses a play on words, and they take the play on words “literalistically” without letting the figure of speech have its own meaning.

- A. Peter himself, the “rock.” Peter is Petros, a word that is a masculine noun and refers to a rock or stone, not a huge boulder. It fits the person it names—Simon Peter. The rock upon which the church is build is a petra, which is a different word, feminine in form, and referring to a massive stone. In any case, it does not refer to Peter because the grammatical gender does not agree.
- B. The disciples corporately. The Lord addresses Peter in the singular, so it cannot be the disciples as a group. Furthermore, the Lord says, “on this rock I will build my church.” This refers to a singular rock, not a group of disciples.
- C. This leaves the third and last option, that the petra boulder is the truth or confession of Jesus as the Christ and Son of God. Jesus may be referring to Peter’s *confession* of Jesus as Christ and Son of God, because the

word *confession* and its general concept is grammatically a feminine noun, matching *petra*. Or, it could be a reference to the *truth* of Jesus as the Christ and Son of God, since the word *truth* is also feminine. The church is built on the one foundation stone, which is Jesus Christ and His salvation. See Acts 4:11-12, 1 Cor. 3:10-12, Eph. 2:20.¹

- D. The small stone (Peter) made confession to a massive truth of the person of Christ, Who is the foundation of the church.

II. The Gates of Hades, v. 18

- A. I spoke on this September 6, 2020, and you can find the message online.
- B. The summary is this: “Taken together, we have learned that: Gates are not offensive. Rather, they hold people out or keeping those inside confined. The gates are the gates of *Hades*, not of Hell. No one in Hades or Hell is ever allowed to get out to afflict the church. The church cannot go and do battle with those places or remove people from them. Finally and importantly, the ‘gates of Hades’ refer to death itself.”
- C. So read it that way:

Death cannot prevail against the church.

Death cannot overpower the church.

Death cannot overcome the church.

¹ In Ephesians 2:20, the “apostles and prophets” refers to the truth God gave them to share with the world, not on them *personally*. Note that the chief cornerstone is Jesus Christ.

- D. No matter how strong death seems, the church cannot be conquered by it. The most dreaded enemy of the living—death—is no match for Christ’s church, even when that enemy is wielded by the hand of Satan. Christ will build His church, and even the death of His people will not stop Him from being successful.
- E. This gives us great assurance, great boldness, and is a call to witness to Life in the midst of a dying world. We have the death-conquering message.

III. Keys of the Kingdom, v. 19

- A. Jesus says that He will give you—singular—the keys of the kingdom of heaven. The singular refers to Peter. Keys are a metaphor for authority or power or ownership, like the keys of a city or the keys of a house or the keys of a car. This fits very nicely with the Lord’s proclamation in Matthew 28:18 that Jesus had all power in heaven and on earth. Then he commissioned his disciples to go and make disciples, giving them access to use that authority themselves.
- B. Then the Lord says what will be the result of that giving of the keys: binding and loosing authority.
- C. There is *one* other verse of Scripture that uses those same two words, and I believe refers to the same thing: Matthew 18:18. That verse is in the corporate (church) part of the process of church discipline—that is, how believers and the church help unrepentant brothers and sisters. The end of that process for an unrepentant person is that the church is to treat them as a tax collector and sinner. It appears to me that this is equivalent of “loosing” the person from the church, i.e.,

removing them from it. Furthermore, this decision to loose—if done in accordance with the Biblical instructions—is confirmed by Heaven. There is agreement *there* for what is done *here*. This is why the Lord says that if two or three are gathered together in the name of Christ and ask something, it will be done by the heavenly Father.

This is not a lightweight prayer-meeting encouragement. It is a heavyweight verse that speaks of the authority of a local church to make very serious decisions. The church has a role in discerning who is in and who is out of the coming kingdom. It polices its membership the best it can so that the church membership will reflect accurately who are true citizens of the coming kingdom.

Here we can augment our study with other passages about church discipline (1 Cor. 5, 2 Thess. 3). With Mark Snoeberger, we agree that this has major implications for the doctrine of church membership without undercutting the unique positions of either the church or Israel in Biblical revelation.²

- D. Notice the plurals in Matthew 18:18 and the corporate nature of verses 19-20 with “two or three.” The Lord expands the binding and loosing authority to more recipients than just Peter. All true disciples are included in their connection to the church via local churches. (Not as vigilante individuals!)
- E. If this much so far is true, then there must exist a corresponding “binding” authority. If loosing has to do with removing someone from the fellowship of the

² <https://dbts.edu/2021/12/20/the-church-and-the-keys-to-the-kingdom/>

church, then binding would have to do with bringing someone into the church. Entry into the church (and into the kingdom) requires a believing response to the gospel of Christ. So, binding must include the gospel and the gospel ministers' authority to proclaim that those who believe in Christ have their sins forgiven and those who do not believe do not have their sins forgiven.

F. I take the language of sins being forgiven and retained from John 20:23 to be connected to this binding and loosing language as well. If one's sins are forgiven, they are "bound" to the church. They are part of the universal church and correspondingly should be joined to a local assembly of believers. They are recognized as such by the whole church. In our polity, a church vote is required to add members, just like it is required to remove members.

If their sins are retained, then the person is not connected to the church—whether initially or after being removed for unrepentant sin. Forgiveness and retention of sin is proclaimed in the gospel.

G. Despite the fact that the binding and loosing authority exists in the church as a corporate whole, Peter *did* have an important role in the progress of the gospel. It is in "binding" that the historical role of Peter is emphasized in the formation of the church. Note his central role in bringing the gospel to the following people in Acts:

1. Jerusalem: Acts 2:14-39; 3:1-4:4; and the following persecutions and preaching of the word in the area.
2. Samaria: Acts 8:14-25. By now, the church had already started to take root in Judea because of Paul's persecution of it (8:1). By Acts 9:31, there were churches throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria.

3. Gentiles: Acts 10:1-11:18; and Peter's own summation of his role in Acts 15:7-9.

We can see Peter exercising the "keys" to the kingdom of heaven.

H. The binding and loosing idea relates the kingdom to the church. The kingdom and the church are two different things, which is most often confused in Christian thought. The Lord said that if you are not born again, you will not see the kingdom of God (John 3:3-5). But being born again is necessary to be part of the church as well.

Peter, the disciples, and their spiritual descendants in true churches throughout the world hold the keys of the kingdom. We were let in with those keys, and now we have access to use the keys ourselves! How it works is that being born again enters you, in this age, immediately into the church. Later when the kingdom comes, you will be swept into it because you are already regenerate. The church is sort of a temporary dwelling place for the people of God in this age until the kingdom comes.

And so, Paul can use the language of the kingdom as he speaks to the church, because the two institutions are connected. They are not the same, but they are connected.

We read then of conditions that will prohibit someone from inheriting the kingdom or make it very difficult: Matt. 18:3 (// Luke 18:17), Matthew 19:23-24 (// Mark 10:23-25, Luke 18:24-25); 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:21, Eph. 5:5. Being wedded to sin instead of the Savior is the major problem: Mark 9:47. These people should not be retained in the church, nor comfortable or welcomed in the church.

We also read of conditions that precede or ensure entry into the kingdom: Matt. 5:20, 7:21, 21:31, Acts 14:22; 1 Thess. 2:11; James 2:5 (connect with poor in spirit, Matt. 5:3); 2 Peter 1:11. Such people are heirs of God and Christ, fellow citizens with the saints, and are members of the church, and therefore of local churches.

- I. While we work for the expansion of the church, we are also working for the expansion of the kingdom (Col. 4:11) and for its purity (Eph. 5:27). The “binding” authority expands the church, recognizing those who are going to enjoy entrance into the kingdom; the “loosing” authority limits its participants and shrinks it for the purpose of purity and clarity of testimony, showing the church’s estimation of who is *not* going to be in the kingdom.

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