Exegesis of Matthew 16:18-19

So does *Sola Scriptura* or the *Bible plus tradition* really matter?

The Issue: One of the major battle cries of the Protestant Reformation and its leaders was *sola scriptura* (or scriptura alone). To Romans Catholics, they believe that the authority of the popes are passed down from Peter to succeeding popes—thus making all popes and their traditions as holy as God's word.

Response: Both Catholics and Protestants believe in the holiness of God's written Word. At issues is whether the popes authority is biblical (passed down Peter) or not. Catholics based this doctrine on a single passage, Matthew 16:13-20. If this passage, Jesus paused to ask his disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter tells Him that He is the Christ, the son of the living God. Jesus tells Peter that only His father in heaven could have revealed this theological truth to him (Peter), then adds this very significant lines:

STUDY VERSE SECTION: Matthew 16:18–19, NIV - [18] *And I tell you that you are Peter* Gk: Πέτρος *(PET-ros)*, lit., *a stone*], *and on this rock* [Gk: *πέτρα (PET-ra)* lit., *a ledge or wall of stone*; most scholars believe that this word, "petra," refers NOT to Peter but to his confession, "You are the Messiah (or "the Christ"), the Son of the living God."] *I will build my church, and the gates of Hades* [both the place and activity of Hell] *will not overcome it.* [19] *I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound* [Gk: δεδεμένον, (de-de-ME-on) is perfect tense, passive, participle, singular nominative, neuter; lit., will have been bound] *in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed* [GK: *λελυμένον (lee-la-MEN-on,)* *in heaven."* [In the simplest understanding, we are to be in harmony with Heaven/Jesus.]

> **1 Corinthians 3:11, NIV** - [11] *For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.*

The Greek text clearly refers to Peter as *Petros* (meaning a small stone) and to "this rock" as *Petra* (meaning a very large ledge of rock.) Protestant scholars believe that the "rock" mentioned by Jesus in this passage was the confession that Peter made ("You are the Christ, the Son of the living God") and not Peter Himself.

Matthew 16:19 does not establish the papacy. The "keys of the kingdom" represent the authority to open the kingdom through the preaching of the gospel. Peter used those keys when he preached at Pentecost to the Jews (Acts 2) and later to the Gentiles (Acts 10).

The "binding and loosing" authority was not unique to Peter, because the same authority was given to all the apostles in Matthew 18:18 and John 20:23. Therefore, the passage speaks of apostolic authority and the church under Christ, not papal supremacy.

Furthermore, Jesus never says Peter's authority would be inherited by successors in Rome. The focus is on Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ and on the gospel message that opens the kingdom, not on the creation of a pope.

The keys gave Peter the privilege of opening the kingdom through the gospel, not the power to become the first pope. The same binding and loosing authority was later given to all the apostles in Matthew 18:18.

Significant Timeline Issues:

Peter was not the first Bishop of Rome nor Pope of Rome. Here's why: the claim that Peter was the first Bishop or Pope of Rome is central to the Roman Catholic tradition, but it falls apart

under scrutiny. Here's a breakdown of the strongest argument to prove Peter was not the first Pope of Rome. (1) The Bible never mentions Peter leading Rome. (2) Not a single historian ever mentions Peter leading the church from Rome in any reference. (3) The timeline doesn't fit. From 30 to 44 AD, Peter leads the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem in acts 2 through 12 period from 40 to 50 BC, Peter is in Antioch and other regions but never roam. The Galatians 211. 50AD on, at Jerusalem council in acts 15 Peter is still in Jerusalem focusing on the Jewish believers and gentile inclusion. If Peter were leading the Roman church, he would have to bend in Rome by this time. In 44 to 47 ad, Peter was allegedly brought to Rome during Nero's persecution to be executed. If true, this means Peter only came to Rome to be martyred, not to lead the church as a Pope. The timeline overwhelmingly places Peter in Jerusalem and Antioch, but not Rome during his ministry (with the exception of him being in Rome for few days before his execution.)

Very Important: When the New Testament speaks of the Churches' foundation it always clearly identifies Christ at that foundation, and no one else (cf., 1 Cor. 3:11; Eph. 2:20; 1 Peter 2:4-8 among many other verses). There are no other scriptures that even hint that Peter—or *any other person*—is the foundation of the church. [1]

1. **Christ BUILDS the church.** *"I will build my church...."*

2. **Christ OWNS the church.** *"I will build my church...."*

3. **Christ EMPOWERS the church.** *"I'll give you the keys..."*

4. **Christ PROTECTS the church.** *"...Hades will not overpower it."*

Assorted Quotes Regarding the Church

"'The Church will stand at the grave of the BBC (quoting Lord Reith, it's founder).' It will! It will still stand when the BBC, CNN, and FOX as well, dwindles and die. The kingdom of God will stand when every organization and institution and empire meets its end. *'Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom* - Luke 12:32).'"

– Dr. Alister Bigg, *Brave by Faith*, p. 42.

Our strength is never in our numbers or in our prosperity, but in the invincible power of our God...The Church represents the highest priority of God's agenda, and it is His blueprint for completing His work on the earth. We have embarked upon an enterprise that has God's highest priority: Success is inevitable if we stay with God's plan for the church."

- Dr. Paul Powell

That very church which the world likes best is sure to be that which God abhors.

- Charles Haddon Spurgeon

It is our earnest prayer that when the chronicles of this great church are written, it will record a people intimately a part of His story in this place, walking together as family and dear friends. We look forward to standing with literally thousands of people whose eternal destiny and lives were changed through the ministry of our church—all meeting together for the first time with Christ outside the Eastern Gate of Heaven. Our prayer is that our lives will eternally cast glory and honor to the name of our dear Savior, Jesus Christ. May the dreams and plans recommended here be quickly caught and not easily forgotten.

- SRBC Building Committee (that built the present Worship Center)

The True Church can never fail. For it is based upon a Rock. (sic)

- Dr. T.S. Eliot

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1 Ridenour, Fritz, *So What's the Difference*, Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2001. Pp. 38-39.

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The "shall have been" translation reflects the Greek future perfect periphrastic construction (δεθήσεται and λυθήσεται), which uses the future tense of "to be" combined with a perfect participle.[1] The perfect participle—not the future tense—carries the past aspect you're noticing.

This construction has been interpreted to mean either "will be [what] has already been bound/loosed [by God]" or "will be bound/loosed once for all," though both readings give too much significance to the perfect participles, which refer to states of affairs that don't necessarily preexist Peter's actions.[2] The more precise explanation is that the perfect participles represent coordinated action—"What you bind/loose on earth will have been [at that precise moment also] bound by God."[2]

Scholars debate what this construction emphasizes. Some stress the past aspect of the perfect to argue that decisions on earth "have already been made" in heaven, suggesting the church moves guided by divine inspiration.[3] However, more recent analysis shows the perfect tense often lacks past time sense but rather emphasizes the present and future aspect.[3] The perfect tense implies a definitive action by God—not one in process—that remains significant throughout time, and since the kingdom transcends time, the future perfect periphrastic may indicate that Peter's binding and loosing correspond to Jesus' ultimate action in heaven.[1] The translation choice reflects this grammatical ambiguity: "shall have been" attempts to capture both the future orientation and the perfect participle's stative quality simultaneously, though in Hellenistic Greek this construction was often roughly equivalent to a simple future passive.[3]

END NOTES

1. Philip Kariatlis, *Church as Communion: The Gift and Goal of Koinonia* (ATF Press, 2020), 61.
2. John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2005), 680–681.
3. Kermit Zarley, *Solving the Samaritan Riddle: Peter's Kingdom Keys Explain Early Spirit Baptism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2015). [See here, here, here.]

Alternate Translations Worth Reading:

Matthew 16:19, NASB97 [not NASB95] - [19] "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."

Matthew 16:19, YLT99 (literal) - [19] and I will give to you (plural) the keys to the acquire entrance to the heaven, and whatever you authorize upon the earth shall have already been authorized in the heaven, and whatever you legitimize upon the earth shall have already been legitimized in the heaven.'

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Cf., Matthew 16:19

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Clearest and Most Concise Statement
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Those who have visited **Caesarea Philippi** or studied its history know that Jesus stood before a massive rock face filled with niches and carvings dedicated to various pagan deities. It was in the shadow of these false religions that Jesus declared, "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 16:19).

The "keys" are not symbols of papal authority but of gospel authority. A key opens a door. Through the preaching of the gospel, Peter would be used by God to open the door of the kingdom first to the Jews (Acts 2) and later to the Gentiles (Acts 10). The gospel is God's message, not man's invention. We do not possess a gospel of our own creation; we simply proclaim the gospel God has already established in heaven.

This understanding helps explain Jesus' statement concerning "binding" and "loosing." The idea is not that Peter or the church determines truth and then heaven ratifies it. Rather, the church declares on earth what God has already determined in heaven. Many Greek scholars note that the force of the language may be rendered:

> "Whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."

In other words, heaven does not follow the church's decisions; the church faithfully announces heaven's decisions. The apostles were not authorized to create doctrine but to proclaim and apply the truth God had already revealed.

Because of the complexities of the Greek used here, caution must be taking when in a non-academic setting. In the simplest of terms, the "keys" in Matthew 16:19 represent the authority to proclaim God's gospel, not papal supremacy. Peter used those keys by opening the kingdom through the preaching of Christ to Jews in Acts 2 and Gentiles in Acts 10. Likewise, "binding and loosing" does not mean Peter could legislate for heaven. The Greek construction clearly indicates that what is bound or loosed on earth has already been bound or loosed in heaven. The church does not tell heaven what to do; it declares what heaven has already said. That's authority by proclamation, not authority by sovereignty. One must remember that this passage was originally written to those fluent in both Koiné, Hellenistic and Ancient Greek and were well versed in the known syntactical understandings of that day.[2]

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[2] Robertson, A. T. (1933). *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Mt 16:17). Broadman Press.