

# PETER'S UNIQUE ROLE IN ESTABLISHING THE CHURCH

Matthew 16:13-20; Mark 8:27-30; Luke 9:18-21  
Yeshua §85

When I was in fifth grade, I begged my mom to go to school early so that I could play basketball with the sixth-grade boys. It was a big deal to get picked by the sixth graders and when I did, I knew my role. When we were on offense, I would stand to the side of the basket and if they passed it to me, I would bank it off the backboard for a score. I don't know that I contributed too much more than that, but that was my role.

In our study this morning we discover that Jesus gave Peter two important roles in establishing the early Church.



It was when Jesus and His disciples were in Caesarea Philippi at the foot of Mount Hermon. This was Gentile territory. They were gathered at the massive cliff that dominated the southern slope of the mountain. Here was the Cave of Pan, a stronghold of demonic activity. Both this region and this specific place were called *the Gates of Hades* or as we would say it in English, *the Gates of Hell*.

It was here, when questioned by Jesus, that Peter declared, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Jesus responded to Peter saying:

MATTHEW 16:17-18 (ESV)

<sup>17</sup> ... "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. <sup>18</sup> And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

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The *rock* upon which Jesus will build His church could not be Peter.<sup>1</sup> It could refer to Peter's confession. A better explanation is that it was the rock (*petras*) on which they were standing. They were standing on a rock long associated with the forces of spiritual darkness. They were standing in Satan's territory and it's in the middle of Satan's territory that Jesus will build His Church.<sup>2</sup>

It was a declaration of war.

Through the Church, Jesus will take the battle to Satan and Satan will not be able to stop it. The Church is the aggressor; the Church is the invader, not the other way round.

Now that Peter and the disciples are convinced Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus began to reveal more about the Church. Though Peter was not the first pope, he will play an important role in establishing the Church.

Peter will be given authority to open the doors of the Church to Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles.

## KEYS OF THE KINGDOM

MATTHEW 16:19 (ESV)

Still speaking to Peter, Jesus said:

<sup>19</sup> *I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven,*

Jesus was referring to an Old Testament concept (Isaiah 22:20-22). When used symbolically in the Hebrew Scriptures, the word *key* represents authority, including the authority to open and close doors.

In context, Jesus was talking about the *keys* of the *kingdom of heaven*. As Jesus began to explain on the Day of Rejection, the Church is the *mystery* form of the *kingdom of heaven*. Jesus gave Peter unique authority in the Church to open the doors of the Church. As I understand it, this involved determining when initial inclusion in the Church (Body of Christ) should be extended to the Jews, the Samaritans and the Gentiles.

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<sup>1</sup> In verse 18, Jesus used a play on the word *rock*; the place they were standing was full of rocks. The name *Peter* is from the Greek word *petros*. *Petros* is a masculine noun; it refers to a stone that can be held in one's hand. *Rock*, as in the phrase, "and on this *rock* I will build my church", is *petra*. *Petra* is a feminine noun; it refers to a huge rock. It is the word that would be used to refer to Half Dome in Yosemite. *Petra* is a completely different word than *Petros*, not simply the feminine form of *Petros*. Therefore, the rock to which Jesus referred could not be Peter because they are two different words and because they are two different genders..

<sup>2</sup> Notice the Church is future. The Church was born on Pentecost 33AD. It did not exist in the Old Testament contrary to Reformed, amillennial, replacement teaching.

This is a new concept to most of us. We are not talking about attendance at a local church worship service. We are not talking about membership in the local church as we practice it at Grace. We are talking about the spiritual reality of being united with all other true believers in the Body of Christ. As we will see, this is a specific work of the Holy Spirit whereby He unites the individual believer with all other believers. This did not happen automatically in the opening days of the Church; it required Peter's approval. As the Gospel spread from the Jews to the Samaritans to Gentiles it needed to be verified that the *content* of the Gospel preached to each group was true (1 Cor. 15:3-4) and that the *requirement* of the Gospel was understood, that is, that it is by *faith* and faith alone in the finished work of Christ that one is saved.

When Peter verified these things, he then exercised his authority by affirming that particular group (Jew, Samaritan, Gentile) met the requirements for membership in the Body of Christ, the Church. This was a means of protecting the Church. It took place only once for each of the three groups.

At the time of Jesus, humanity was divided into three groups: Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles. Before sending the disciples out on their first preaching tour Jesus instructed, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (Matt. 10:5-6). Peter was given the authority to open the doors of the Church to all three groups.

The Church is the Body of Christ and the means of entering the Body of Christ is Spirit baptism. Spirit baptism and water baptism are different experiences. Spirit baptism is one of the many unique ministries of the third member of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. It is the work of the Holy Spirit by which He unites a believer with the Body of Christ and all its members. The Holy Spirit baptizes us into the Body of Christ at the same time He indwells. Water baptism is the public testimony of the believer's faith in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 12:13, the Apostle Paul explained that it is through the baptism of the Spirit that each believer enters the Body of Christ, the Church.

*1 CORINTHIANS 12:13 (ESV)*

*For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.*

Now, at the moment we trust in Jesus and His finished work on the cross and resurrection, we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and baptized by the Holy Spirit

into the Body of Christ, the Church. Today that is true for every Jew, Samaritan and Gentile who believes.

But it was not so initially in the early days of the Church.

Peter first opened the doors of the Church to his fellow Jews on the Day of Pentecost, 33AD. Peter's powerful sermon brought many to faith. Luke records,

*ACTS 2:37-41 (ESV)*

*37 Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" 38 And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." 40 And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." 41 So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.*

On Pentecost 33AD the Church was born. Peter preached the true Gospel of Jesus Christ – crucified, buried risen again; and he exhorted the people to *believe* in order to be saved. Peter opened the doors of the Church to Jews. From that moment to the present, every Jew who trusts in the Lord Jesus Christ as the resurrected Messiah is indwelt and baptized by the Holy Spirit which unites them with all other believers in the Body of Christ, the Church.

After Stephen's murder, persecution broke out against the Church in Jerusalem scattering believers throughout Judea and Samaria. The Apostle Philip went to Samaria. Dr. Luke tells us:

*ACTS 8:4-8 (ESV)*

*4 Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. 5 Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. 6 And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. 7 For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. 8 So there was much joy in that city.*

As we will see in a moment, the Samaritans believed in Jesus as the Risen Messiah; but they did not receive the Holy Spirit. They were neither indwelt nor baptized by the Holy Spirit; therefore they were not yet members of the Body of Christ, the Church. Luke tell us:

*ACTS 8:14–17 (ESV)*

*14 Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, 15 who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, 16 for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 17 Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.*

These Samaritan believers had been water baptized, but not Spirit baptized. When Peter came and verified the Gospel *content* and *requirement* as true and the faith of the Samaritans as genuine, he then affirmed that the Samaritans met the requirements for inclusion in the Body of Christ, the Church. In this way Peter opened the doors of the Church to the Samaritans. The Holy Spirit indwelt each believer and simultaneously baptized each believer into the Church, the Body of Christ. From that moment to the present, every Samaritan who trusts in Jesus Christ as the resurrected Messiah becomes a member of the Body of Christ through Spirit baptism.

Finally, it was Peter who had the authority and privilege of opening the doors of the Church to the Gentiles.

Peter was sent by God to the home of a Gentile named Cornelius. Cornelius was a Roman centurion. This was at the time when there was still controversy in the Church over the means of Gentile conversion. Through this encounter, Peter came to understand that Gentiles were saved by faith alone. After preaching the Gospel to Cornelius and his guests, Dr. Luke records:

*ACTS 10:44–48 (ESV)*

*44 While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. 45 And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. 46 For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, 47 "Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" 48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.*

Peter verified these Gentiles were genuinely born again and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. In so doing, Peter opened the doors of the Church to the Gentiles. From that day to the present, every Gentile who trusts in Jesus Christ as their resurrected Messiah becomes a member of the Body of Christ.

Jesus prophesied that Peter would play a unique role in establishing Jesus' Church in the midst of Satan's territory; Peter would open the doors of the Church to the Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles.

Jesus prophesied a second role Peter would play in the establishing of Jesus' Church that is recorded in the second half of Matthew 16:19.

## LOOSING AND BINDING

MATTHEW 16:19 (ESV)

*I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."*

Jesus gave Peter the authority to bind and to loose. In Matthew 18:18 that authority was also given to the other disciples.

This concept of binding and loosing has been pulled out of context by our Pentecostal and Charismatic brethren who teach that the believer has the authority to "bind" Satan through prayer. The Bible does not teach this; the believer does not have the authority to bind Satan, only God does. God will bind Satan in the Abyss during the Millennial Kingdom (Rev. 20:1-3). The believer is to *resist* Satan, not bind him.

Actually, the terms bind and loose are fairly common in rabbinical writings. They are used in two ways. When used in a judicial sense, *to bind* meant *to punish*, and *to loose* meant *not to punish*. When used in a legislative sense, *to bind* meant *to forbid*, and *to loose* meant *to permit*.

To bind or to loose deals with the exercise of authority. The Pharisees claimed this authority for themselves; they forbade things permitted by the Mosaic Law (i.e. doing good on the Sabbath) and they permitted things forbidden by the Mosaic Law (i.e. depriving parents through the practice of Corban). God did not give them this authority.

Jesus gave Peter (and later the disciples) the authority to exercise discipline and the authority to legislate policy for the early Church with what sounds like the promise that heaven would back up whatever decision Peter made.

But that's not exactly what Jesus said.

Let's read Matthew 16:19 again:

MATTHEW 16:19 (ESV)

*I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth **shall be** bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth **shall be** loosed in heaven."*

Actually, what Jesus said was this:

MATTHEW 16:19 (ESV)

*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."*

Jesus used a very unusual and awkward construction. Jesus was promising Peter divine guidance as he exercised his authority to bind and loose. When Peter and the other Apostles faced situations requiring binding and loosing, they could rest assured that God would communicate clearly His will so they could be confident their decisions were in line with God's will. One Greek scholar writes:

*In this syntactical form the saying becomes a promise not of divine endorsement, but of divine guidance to enable Peter to decide in accordance with God's already determined purpose.<sup>3</sup>*

In Acts we see Peter exercising this authority in a Judicial manner in the case of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5. We see Peter and the Apostles exercising the authority to bind and loose in a Legislative manner at the Jerusalem Counsel which settled the issue of the requirements for Gentile salvation (Acts 15).

Following Peter's confession, Jesus revealed His plan to build His Church and take the fight to Satan. Jesus also revealed that Peter would play a unique role in establishing the Church. To Peter, Jesus gave the authority to open the doors of the Church to Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles. And Jesus gave Peter authority to decide on both Judicial and Legislative matters for the early Church with the assurance that he would receive divine guidance in every matter of binding and loosing. The early Church was blessed as Peter obediently served and exercised the authority entrusted him by Jesus.

Just as Jesus gave Peter and the disciples unique roles in establishing His Church; Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, has given you a unique role to build up His Church.

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<sup>3</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 626–627.

## AS A CHRISTIAN, YOU HAVE BEEN GIVEN A GRACE-GIFT TO BUILD UP YOUR CHURCH FAMILY

(1 CORINTHIANS 12:7-11)

*7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 8 For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apports to each one individually as he wills.*

Are you a born-again Christian trusting in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sin and life with God? Then this describes you: you have received a grace-gift!

Who gave this grace-gift to you? The Holy Spirit!

Why did the Holy Spirit give you a grace-gift? For *the common good* which, in this context, is the common good of your church family!

So to put it all together:

**You are grace-gifted by the Holy Spirit to build up Grace Community Church!**

Peter had a unique role to play in the Church and you have a unique role to play in the Church. I encourage you to fulfill your role as did Peter! Start serving and along with serving, study out what the Bible teaches about grace-gifts by taking our class on Spiritual Gifts or reading Bill McRae's book on Spiritual Gifts.

God's gifted you and we need you!