

Introduction

This is one of the most debated passages in Christian theology.

Many have misunderstood or misapplied Jesus' words in Matthew 16:18, thinking He meant to build His Church upon the person of Peter. But when we examine the full context of Scripture, and compare it with the rest of the New Testament, we discover a much deeper and richer truth.

The Passage in Context

Matthew 16:16–18 (NIV):

“Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.’

Jesus replied, ‘Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.

And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.’”

The Greek behind this text helps clarify the meaning. The name “Peter” comes from the Greek Petros, meaning “a small stone” or “a piece of rock.” But the word Jesus uses for “rock” in “on this rock I will build my church” is petra, which refers to a massive, immovable rock a foundational stone.

Jesus was not saying He would build His Church on Peter the man, but on the truth of the confession Peter had just made: “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

Christ Is the True Foundation

This interpretation is not only linguistically accurate, but also aligns with the broader teaching of Scripture:

1 Corinthians 3:10-11 (NIV):

“By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care.

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.”

Paul is clear: Christ is the only foundation upon which the Church is built. No apostle, pope, or church leader can claim that role.

Even Peter Points to Christ as the Rock

It is vital to notice that Peter himself never claimed to be the rock. In fact, in his own epistle, he refers to Jesus as the living Stone, the cornerstone, and the true foundation:

1 Peter 2:4–6 (NIV):

“As you come to him, the living Stone rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house... For in Scripture it says: ‘See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.’”

Here, Peter refers to Isaiah 28:16, a prophecy about the coming Messiah. The “cornerstone” is a metaphor for Christ as the foundation of God’s redemptive work.

Theological Significance

Understanding this passage correctly is vital for maintaining the centrality of Christ in the Church. When we say the Church is built on Christ, we affirm: Christ's deity and authority (Colossians 1:17-18) The sufficiency of His sacrifice (Hebrews 10:10-14) His role as the head of the Church (Ephesians 1:22-23)

To place any person even an apostle in that role is to diminish the preeminence of Christ and introduce a dangerous theological error.

This is why followers of Jesus are called Christians, not “Petrians” or any other derivative. Our identity and salvation rest on Christ alone.

Beware of False Foundations

Anyone claiming to be the rock, or the sole mediator between God and man, is taking a role that belongs only to Jesus Christ. Scripture warns us:

1 Timothy 2:5 (NIV):

“For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus.”

To assume this title or role is to stand in opposition to Christ, which is the spirit of antichrist (1 John 2:18-22).

Final Call: Have You Built on the Rock?

The question is not just theological it's personal:

Have you placed your faith in Jesus Christ?

Have you repented of your sins, been baptized, and received the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38)?

If not, today is the day to make that decision. Build your life not on tradition, or religion, or personalities but on the unshakable Rock who is Jesus Christ.

“On This Rock I Will Build My Church” — What Rock Was Jesus Referring To?

Maranatha!

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