

The Power of the Keys

The expression “power of the keys” is argued by Roman Catholicism to be derived from Jesus’ statement to Peter in Matthew 16:19; *“And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”* It is their contention that Jesus is here conferring on Peter supreme authority to rule the church, to define dogma, to legislate, and to dispense from laws. This Catholic doctrine comes not from the Word of God itself, but from the church fathers, and Scholastic Theologians that agree with their interpretation of this text.

It is further averred by Roman Catholics that Jesus has entrusted to Peter alone, a unique mission of feeding Christ’s sheep, pronouncing doctrinal judgments, making disciplinary decisions and possessing the power to *“bind and loose.”* This *“binding and loosing,”* that Jesus spoke of in Matthew 16:19 is purported to mean that Peter and all future ‘pontiffs’ have the inherent power to grant or refuse absolution (forgiveness of sins). The question before us is whether or not these assertions are true or false. It is of course not our intention to demean or belittle individual members of the Roman Catholic Church, but to expose the doctrine that they have for so long believed to be true as untrue.

Matthew 16:13-20

In the context of this passage we find Jesus and the twelve in the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, when Jesus asks them all a question as to who men are saying He is. Various answers are given by the disciples to which Jesus asks them who they personally believe Him to be; and Peter alone answers that He is the Christ. Jesus then praises Peter’s answer, telling him and the others that it was God the Father who had revealed this to Peter. Not through some miraculous vision, or special revelation given only to Peter as Catholicism falsely assumes, but through the Old Testament

Scriptures, as well as the teachings, and signs and wonders that Jesus performed during His ministry (John 1:12; 3:1-5; 5:17-16; 8:28; 10:25, et al). Peter’s conclusion was not instantaneous to him alone but was arrived at through a combination of his own intelligence, and correct reasoning which admitted that the prophecies of the Old Testament were being fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth.

Jesus then proceeds to say, *“But I also say unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it”* (vs. 18). We can all agree to some of the elements of this passage, namely; (1) that Jesus is about to build His church, (2) Jesus is the builder of that church, and (3) The foundation of Christ’s church will be upon a great rock. What that rock is, is where the dispute comes into play.

Roman Catholicism claims that it must refer to Peter, thus giving him first place in what they term the “college of the Apostles.” More detail as to who the rock is or is not, will be spent in another tract, but for now we are focusing upon the ‘keys.’ Assuming that Peter is the rock upon which the church would be built, it is claimed that it naturally follows that Jesus would give the power of the keys to Peter alone. Catholicism says the “power of the keys” designates specific authority to govern the house of God, which is the church. They further aver that Jesus confirmed this mandate after His resurrection when He said to Peter, *“Feed My lambs.....feed My sheep”* (John 21:15-17).

Nature of the Keys of the Kingdom

The expressions *“keys of the kingdom”* and *“bind and loose,”* as found in Matthew 16:19, have been misinterpreted by the Catholic Church as appropriating special authority to one person where there is none! Catholicism has for centuries pulled the proverbial wool over the eyes of billions of people concerning this text. It was never in the mind of Christ nor was it God the Father’s will to put into the hands of men the power to decide whose sins will be forgiven or retained, thereby

binding men’s decisions upon God. What blasphemy!

There is no doubt that we can agree that the keys themselves are a symbol of superintendence, thereby consigning privilege and authority. However superintendence does not create a king out of a steward or servant. Peter’s receipt of the keys from the king (Jesus Christ) simply assigned him the responsibility inherent in the keys. God alone is the true king of spiritual Israel, the church of Christ (Isaiah 22:21-25; Revelation 3:7; 9:1; 20:1ff). For Paul the Apostle reminded the Corinthian Christians as well as us today to, *“Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful”* (1 Corinthians 4:1-2). Speaking for himself and all the apostles, including Peter, they were ALL stewards, on an equal plane, of the mysteries of Christ.

Catholicism demands that Peter alone has been given supreme authority over the other apostles, which in turn is to be passed down to subsequent ‘pontiffs.’ We forever reject this claim as a doctrine of the prince of darkness and meant to enslave the minds of all who fail and refuse to study for themselves the truths of God. The keys are simply a symbol of God given authority and privilege to impart the gospel truth. The only primacy that Peter has been given is being the first entrusted with the keys. As we turn to Acts chapter two as the apostles are baptized of the Holy Spirit and endued with power from on High, Peter implements the use of the keys in the first gospel sermon (Acts 2:22-41). Because he was the first to make the great confession that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the promised Messiah, the Savior of the world (Matthew 16:16), he is given the privilege of being first to open to the Jews first the opportunity to be added to God’s kingdom.

The only ‘primacy’ given to Peter as the first confessor of Christ, was being the first to announce the terms of entrance into the church. In his sermon on Pentecost before the Jews, Peter was the first to enunciate the universality of Christianity, Christ’s lordship, the nature of the

kingdom of God, and the terms of entrance for both Jew and Gentile. In contrast to the Scribes and Pharisees whose traditions hindered others from accepting God’s revelations concerning His Son and the new kingdom, Peter now projected a totally new light on the subject. *“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he is become so, ye make him twofold more a son of hell than yourselves”* (Matthew 23:15ASV).

Therefore the ‘keys’ simply represent general teaching authority given first to Peter and then to the rest of the Apostles, and finally to all Christians. The ‘power of the keys’ has nothing at all to do with an inherent power given exclusively to one person, or hierarchy of persons to do as they please. It is this abuse of the text and acceptance by the masses that has allowed the Catholic Church to perpetrate a multitude of inhumanities upon whomever they would; thus giving Christianity a black eye. When men fail to properly interpret the Scriptures, and twist them to their own design, not only does it fail to glorify God, but leads multitudes down the broad path of eternal destruction (2 Peter 3:16; Matthew 7:13-14).

When Jesus issued first and foremost the keys of the kingdom to Peter, He established the Apostles mission to institute Christ’s church upon a solid and international foundation by liberating all men from the temporary religion of Israel. It is sad when men take to the extreme, things that God established with precise limits. Had Jesus meant to initiate a hierarchical religious system of councils, and orders, overseen by a supreme head of the visible church, and acting as Christ’s head upon which all authority resides; He would not have been so ambiguous. Instead, Jesus would have spelled it out, affirming, *“And on YOU (Peter) I will build My church.”* Mark in his gospel account of the Peter’s confession, leaves out the statement of Jesus. A gospel account that Bible Scholars agree was written under the oversight of Peter. So why did not Peter make sure that his supposed ‘pontifical primacy’ be included if it were indeed true? Without a doubt it was through divine design

as a witness to all men that the Catholic doctrine of Peter's primacy and the power of the keys is absolutely false.

The Nature of Binding and Loosing

Now that it has been confirmed that the 'power of the keys' has nothing to do with a special and inherent gift given only to Peter and his supposed successors, let us turn our attention to the remainder of that verse. "...and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:19). As we have already pointed out, the 'keys of the kingdom' have to do with the responsibility of teaching God's gospel to others. Peter was given the first opportunity to do so, and then the other apostles, Paul, and all Christians – past, present and future. Since keys possess the ability to lock and unlock, in the same aspect they also bind and loose.

Catholicism believes that "binding and loosing" has to do with the God given ability of the priesthood to retain or remit sins of all Catholic followers. One proof text is John 20:23 that says, "whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained." It is believed, and we agree, that this passage goes hand in hand with Matthew 16:19 concerning "binding and loosing." However, we do not agree that Jesus meant to delegate upon men the authority to forgive sins, or retain sins, of which God would be required to accept. That is not what the Scriptures are teaching.

Since it has been established that the keys were to be used by Peter and all disciples to open to everyone the opportunity to enter the kingdom of God (church of Christ) by the teaching of the gospel message, then common sense should tell us that that same message is what will do the actual binding or loosing. These two terms from Jewish rabbinic usage assume an opposite meaning. In the case of binding, one is 'prohibiting' something from being done, while loosing refers to the permission to do something. "Binding" and "loosing" can also refer to obligation and liberty

by "binding" something that one is obligated to do to please God, or "loosing" by eliminating obligations, thereby establishing liberty or freedom.

When Jesus told Peter that he would be given the first opportunity to bear the keys of the kingdom, he was told "*whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven*" (Matthew 16:19). The tenses of this statement have been considered future perfect passive which means that Jesus would have literally said, "*What you bind on earth shall have already been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have already been loosed in heaven.*" Keeping in mind that Peter and the Apostles were inspired men of God, which gave them a supremely close relationship with God, they were able to know what was permitted and not permitted (John 14:26; 16:13).

When Peter took his leading position in history by declaring to all as a wise steward of the keys, he bound baptism upon all as a term of entrance into the international kingdom of God, and loosed the old obligation of circumcision (Acts 2:38; 15:7ff). Afterward Philip took up the keys (gospel of Christ) and pronounced upon the Samaritans the obligations [binding] requisite to entering the kingdom of God (the church of Christ), faith, repentance, confession in Christ, and baptism (Acts 8:12-13; Luke 13:3; Matthew 10:32-33). Once his function was completed as the chronologically first key holder, the kingdom was then opened to everyone, thereby giving authority for teachers, evangelists, elders, deacons, members to lead men and women to the kingdom that had been opened by Peter. Later when Saul of Tarsus obeyed the gospel and began preaching the word of the Lord, he too used the keys of the kingdom (gospel of Christ) to bind and loose upon all who would hear (Acts 13:5, 14; 14:1, 21, 25; 16:10; 17:1-2, 10, 17-31; et al).

Conclusion

The honor of being a "bearer of the keys" and the power of the keys to 'bind' and 'loose' has been

given to every child of God. Unlike what Catholicism falsely teaches about Peter and the keys, he held no special ability to maintain the keys except for being given the authority to use them before anyone else. The Old Testament priesthood as described in the covenant given to the Israelites is no longer in force today. That priesthood has given way to a spiritual priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:4-5, 9; Hebrews 13:15ff; Revelation 1:5, 9). The keys of the kingdom were for the kingdom of heaven, not to hold authority over a kingdom of the world. Catholicism is wrong in its interpretation of Scripture concerning the primacy of Peter, the keys of the kingdom and the power of the keys.

The authority or power to bind and loose is inherent in all Christians as commanded in Christ's Great Commission, "*Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be condemned*" (Mark 16:16). The command to believe and be baptized is an obligation upon all men and women, which God has bound in heaven and on earth. Anyone refusing to obey God's command will be condemned. Jesus also commands all disciples to, "*Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you...*" (Matthew 28:19-20). It is the church of Christ who has been given this authoritative function to 'bind' and 'loose' with the power of the keys of the kingdom!

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