

In this passage the Lord declares that He will found His church upon Peter's great confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. The deity of Christ is the foundation upon which every true Christian church must stand. If the leaders of a church cease to profess and to declare this great central truth, it can no longer properly be called a Christian church.

When Jesus said "Thou art Peter," He used the Greek word petros which means a little rock. When he continued, "upon this rock I will build my church," He used a related but different word, petra, which means a large rock or cliff. Peter is a little rock, deserving much praise for his recognition of the importance of the great rock. That rock is the deity of Christ. Jesus Christ is the rock upon which the true church of God must be built.

If studied as a whole, our passage clearly indicates the real nature of the church. It is composed of all who believe in the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is composed of those who believe in His vicarious sacrifice and His bodily resurrection, which the Lord went on to predict in verse 21. It is composed of the people who are using these great truths in order to open the gates of the kingdom of heaven to all who will accept them by faith, and therefore will be saved through the Lord Jesus Christ. ~~The gates of hell shall not prevail against the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.~~ The gates of hell shall not prevail against the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, if this church keeps its emphasis upon the great central truths of the Scripture, and makes its primary activity one of showing individuals how they may be saved through Christ and born again into his kingdom.

The passage in Matthew 16 at which we have been looking clearly shows the power and responsibility of the church. In verses 18 and 19 Jesus said: "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it, and I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

The full meaning of this statement is not obvious at first sight. What does it mean to say that the gates of hell shall not prevail against the church? Do we think of the gates of hell as an army that is fighting against the church? It would be a very strange figure for that. Do we think of the gates of hell as something that is threatening to overrun and destroy the church? Certainly it is true that Satan is constantly doing all he can to interfere with and wreck the church of God. However, to call this "the gates" would be to use a very strange figure. It is quite clear, when we think about it a little, that the phrase, "the gates of hell" is not a reference to something that is attacking the church, but to something that