The great confession[[1]](#endnote-1)

*Matthew 16:13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” 14 And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” 15 He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” 16 Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” 17 And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. 18 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. 19 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.”*

Matthew sixteen provides for us an insight into the life of Jesus with His disciples. In this passage, He is asking a question that will prompt them to respond to a deeper truth about Him, something that will take them to another level of understanding about His relationship with them. Peter’s response to this question was different than what the others were saying, his natural outspokenness is no doubt used by Jesus to settle the question about His identity. The revelation of Jesus’ identity would be foundational for God’s purposes in history, it is a powerful reminder to us of how the church has been built and how it will forever prevail. Jesus speaking to Peter about the establishment of the church, was not talking about a building or a location of property that people congregate in on Sunday. He was not talking about an organization but rather a living organism. He was talking about the church as a people, the body of Christ as in the following verses.

Romans 12:4 For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, 5 so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Ephesians 1:22 And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. Colossians 1:18 And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.

The Greek word for church is ekklēsia, called out ones, or a called-out assembly. We can say that the church is all believers from all time who make up the body of Christ. To build on this further we can say that the church is a body of called out ones, who are baptized believers, assembling together for worship, growth, fellowship, service, and to carry out the great commission given by Jesus Christ. Matthew 28:18 And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

In the first century church when believers gathered, they sometimes met in temple courts, people’s homes, and even in fields and wooded areas. At some point the church began to meet in public buildings and then built places of their own to gather. Today we gather in buildings that are called churches, and although the building is identified as a church, we understand that it is God’s people who are the church. As you can see in the verses above, Paul used the term church to identify local church assemblies, we might say the church in Apple Grove, or the churches that are in Greenville County. There is nothing wrong with calling a location of God’s people assembling, a church. We understand that the church is made up of believers who are the body of Christ but may identify themselves as a church specifically in Greenville County, or some other location.

“That’s OK, so long as we understand that every time we encounter “church” in the New Testament, it designates the people (ekklēsia), not a building. “According to the Bible, the church is the people of God, the assembly and body of Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.” Various biblical metaphors for the church—the family, the body, the temple, the flock (“congregation” originally meant “gathered flock”), and the nation—all serve to connect our understanding of “the church” to God’s people.”[[2]](#endnote-2) The early church attended the temple and broke bread together in their homes, they multiplied as they shared the gospel with others. Acts 2:46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. Interestingly, the early church was assembling every day, and growing every day. A testament to the evangelistic nature of the early church. They grew closer together, attending meetings and eating together in their homes. They grew closer together, praising God and having an attitude of gladness as well as generosity of heart toward one another. The early church was very interdependent and reliant on each other.

A Cause That Cannot Fail

*Matthew 16:18 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.* Verse 18 provides some clarity on which the church is founded and built upon. The name Peter in this passage is from the Greek word *petros,* a masculine form of the Greek word for small stone, whereas the word Jesus uses for rock is from *petra,* a different form of the same basic word, referring to a rocky mountain or peak. Perhaps the most popular interpretation is that Jesus was comparing Peter, a small stone, to the great mountainous rock on which He would build His church, which is Jesus Himself. So, the phrase “*on this rock*” is a play on words, the name Peter, a small stone, contrasted with “*on this rock*”, literally a large stone, is Jesus referring to Himself. Jesus was emphasizing the certainty of His building the church, no matter how liberal, fanatical, ritualistic, apathetic, dead, or apostate some churches may become, or how decadent the rest of the world may become around the church, Christ will build His church. Every believer, and every biblical church today is a testament to this bold claim. Our hearts should rest assured that we are a part of something much bigger than we are, and every believer should identify themselves as being a part of this great plan with glad hearts as we saw in Acts 2:46.

God’s people belong to a cause that cannot fail, that is especially important for believers to realize and own as being part of the body of Christ. Notice verse *18 ….*. “*the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”* A believer must hope in the actual fact that they are part of this great proclamation and live in this hope. God’s plan is still in place no matter what men have done to try to wreck it, everything is alright and on time, and you are a part of this plan as a member of the body of Christ. Again, in verse 18 Jesus states, *“I will build my church*”, and based upon that statement, the rest of the New Testament expands and builds on that statement or that purpose by giving us letters addressed to churches to substantiate that fact. The rest of the New Testament is a commentary on the four gospels, they are the Books that tell us about life in the local churches, how people’s lives were touched by the gospel, and how the church continued to grow and continues to grow as Jesus said it would. When people realize the importance of connecting the dots between how they live their lives, and how people in the early church lived, it will awaken them to the reality that over the ages the church has been the safe haven for all of mankind’s struggles and problems. The church is the instrument that God uses, along with its faulty, broken, but redeemed people to serve mankind. Peter is led into confessing a great truth that will set the stage for Jesus to introduce to the world His plan for the ages. Our hope stands firm in this promise, the church has stood firm for centuries because of the integrity of this promise. Believer, rest assured that you are a part of this plan, you are not a side note, but you are actually written into the body of this grand plan because you are in the body of Christ. Engage yourself as though you were and start to function within the body of Christ with this great assurance.

The Great Confession

*Matthew 16:13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” 14 And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” 15 He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” 16 Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” 17 And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. 18 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.*

It is obvious to us that Jesus is the foundation in which the church must be built, Jesus is essentially saying, you are a little stone, but I will build my church on the solid rock of the truth you have just confessed. What was that truth………vs 16*“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”* Peters’ confession leads to numerous citations of this truth in the Bible. For instance: No one can build on any other foundation because there is no other foundation to build upon, *1 Corinthians 3:11 For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.* He is not only the foundation but the Chief Corner Stone. *Ephesians 2:19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. 22 In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.* Here the church is brought into the body of Christ as “*members of the household of God”,* “*built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone”.* The church has only one true foundation, which is Christ, but not without the apostles and prophets unique foundational teachings and leadership in Christ.

The first part of the great confession is a biblical view of Christ, “*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”* We could call this a biblical Christology. By this we mean a biblically proper view of Christ or the teachings about the person of Christ. From this statement we could say that we believe in the preexistent eternality of Christ, we believe in the virgin birth of Christ, we believe He was eternal God in the flesh, fully God and fully human in His incarnation. We believe that He was and is the great, “I AM” John 8:56–59. These things we affirm and believe as a foundational truth of the church, the view that Jesus Christ is all He claims to be. This is a magnificently firm foundational truth for all who seek salvation for their souls, or for those who seek soul care as believers.

The foundation of the church is not a personal relationship to Christ that is majoring on the personal. What I am saying is that the church does not exist for you and me, it exists to bring glory to God through the finished work of Christ on the cross, so that the church formed may become more like Him. The church is the body of Christ that reflects His image in its new nature, 2 Corinthians 3:18, 5:17, 2 Peter 1:3, 4. This is important for us to recognize in our needs-based thinking today, where the church is looked upon as meeting our particular needs. Yes, it is a place where we fellowship and break bread and grow together, it is where we grow and change and help one another, but the primary reason the church exists is for God’s glory. *Ephesians 3:20 Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.* The church is not built on a view that it exists for something other than Jesus Christ’s purpose, God’s glory! Believers and counselors alike should find their focus in the church centered on God’s glory, not themselves, not their circumstances in life, but God’s glory.

The church is not a place where you primarily come to get a motivational boost, it is not a group of people who are seeking help for their addictions, it is not a place to lift your personal self-esteem, it is not an assembly of those who like to feel spiritual or a mindless group of people who like to go through mechanical rituals and ceremonies. The church is an assembly of people who confess that Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God, that He is the only hope of salvation, that He is worthy of our worship, the center of our adoration, the focus of receiving glory. The church worships and glorifies God, nurtures disciples, makes disciples, models mercy and Christlikeness in every part of its function and existence. It is *“the household of God”* the “*church of the living God”* that acts as a “*pillar and buttress of the truth”.*1 Timothy 3:15. Because Jesus is the Christ, *"you are the Christ, the Son of the living God,”* the church exists. This is Jesus, the One that Peter would elsewhere confess as having “the Words of eternal life”, *John 6:65 And he said, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.” 66 After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. 67 So Jesus said to the twelve, “Do you want to go away as well?” 68 Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, 69 and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.”* Believers have nowhere else to turn to for help through the struggles of life. We have no other sufficient resource to turn to, Jesus words are superior and all sufficient “*words of eternal life”.* Peters’ confession in John 6 reinforces the source of sufficiency of the words of Christ for all of “*life and godliness”* as Peter would remind us later in 2 Peter 1:3,4.

The Great Revelation.

*Matthew 16:15 He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” 16 Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” 17 And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.*

The only way that Peter could have said what he said is because God revealed it to him. Jesus reveals for all to hear that this revelation is beyond a human source, this is not something that came from Peter. *16 ….. “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.* “God the Father had opened Peter’s eyes to the full significance of those claims and revealed to him who Jesus really was. In other words, God had opened Peter’s heart to this deeper knowledge of Christ by faith. Peter was not merely expressing an academic opinion about the identity of Christ; this was a confession of Peter’s personal faith, made possible by a divinely-regenerated heart.”[[3]](#endnote-3) This kind of message still resonates within the church today, “*no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit.” 1 Corinthians 12:3.* Confessing the identity of Christ places every believer under the direct authority of His person and His kingdom purposes.

This revelation has the highest possible authority. It was not a result of human discovery or of human disclosure. The Greek word for *revealed* has the meaning of removing a veil or covering, exposing to open view what was before hidden. It means to take off the cover. The significance of this is extremely important to the church because it reveals the authority in which the church has been founded. The same kind of authority that the church has to function as a light to the world and as an authoritative living organism. This should encourage us to think about how we function as a church, as a light to the world and as an equipper of believers. Peter’s confession is full of fruitful theology and application. The church as a body of believers not only has been revealed in Christ but reveals Christ. The church is a reflection of the revelation of Jesus as the Christ, the church is and should be becoming more like Christ. This is God’s eternal purpose, Romans 8:28,29.

In what ways is the church functioning in such a way that God’s eternal purpose is being reproduced in every believer/member? Peter’s statement about Christ, and then Jesus’ confirmation, should challenge us to think about the importance of the church reflecting Christ, not only as a whole body but as individuals within the body of Christ.

1. You are free to distribute this paper as a homework assignment or use its contents for other useful means, as long as it is not altered, and credit is given to the author Brad Hilgeman. <https://christinyoucounseling.com> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. https://tabletalkmagazine.com/posts/is-the-church-a-people-or-a-place-2020-04 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. *The MacArthur Study Bible* (Mt 16:17). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)