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Isaiah chapter 51 **English Standard Version**

1“Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness, you who seek the LORD: look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug. **2**Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you; for he was but one when I called him, that I might bless him and multiply him. **3**For the LORD comforts Zion; he comforts all her waste places and makes her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the voice of song. **4**“Give attention to me, my people, and give ear to me, my nation; for a law will go out from me, and I will set my justice for a light to the peoples. **5**My righteousness draws near, my salvation has gone out, and my arms will judge the peoples; the coastlands hope for me, and for my arm they wait. **6**Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath; for the heavens vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and they who dwell in it will die in like manner; but my salvation will be forever, and my righteousness will never be dismayed.

Psalms chapter 138 **English Standard Version**

1Of David. I give you thanks, O LORD, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing your praise; **2**I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness, for you have exalted above all things your name and your word. **3**On the day I called, you answered me; my

strength of soul you increased. **4**All the kings of the earth shall give you thanks, O LORD, for they have heard the words of your mouth, **5**and they shall sing of the ways of the LORD, for great is the glory of the LORD. **6**For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly, but the haughty he knows from afar. **7**Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life; you stretch out your hand against the wrath of my enemies, and your right hand delivers me. **8**The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands.

Romans chapter 11

33Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

34“For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?”

35“Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?” **36**For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

Romans chapter 12 **English Standard Version**

1I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. **2**Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

3For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. **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. **6**Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; **7**if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; **8**the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

Romans 11:33

ESV

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

What does Romans 11:33 mean? Paul has just concluded a long and complicated discussion of God's unique relationship with Israel as a nation and with her people as individuals. He has compared and contrasted God's actions toward Israel with His actions toward the Gentiles. He wrapped it up in the previous verse by declaring, in essence, that both groups have lived in disobedience and that God will show mercy to people from both groups in response to their faith in Christ.

Now Paul delivers a poem, structured much like a hymn, expressing his profound reaction both to God's ways and to His mercy to sinful human beings.

Paul starts by marveling at the depth of three of God's characteristics. He is stunningly rich or wealthy. Earlier in Romans, Paul has written about the riches of God's kindness and patience (Romans 2:4), the riches of His glory (Romans 9:23), and His riches—of mercy—for the world (Romans 11:12). In each case, God's riches are described as graciously shared and never-ending.

Next, Paul is awed by the depth of God's wisdom, likely in the expression of His love and power in making mercy available to all people through faith in Christ. This is followed by God's deep knowledge, perhaps a reference to His "foreknowledge" of all who will come to Him through faith in Christ (Romans 8:29; 11:2).

Paul's next two lines begins with "how." How unsearchable or unfathomable are God's judgments, Paul wonders. In other words, human beings simply lack the capacity to understand why God decides what He does. God's ways are said to be inscrutable, like a code we can't break.

One reason God retains the right to do as He will when it comes to showing mercy or not to human beings is that we do not have the capacity to understand His choices. His thoughts, His ways, His decisions are beyond us. We are left to simply yield to Him and to worship Him.

Romans 11:34**ESV**

“For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?”

What does Romans 11:34 mean? Paul's hymn of praise and adoration for the God who is beyond us continues here. He asks two questions, quoted from Isaiah 40:13, to illustrate just how little God needs from us.

First, who has known the Lord's mind? The answer is so obvious that Paul does not bother to respond. Nobody has ever known God's mind. As beings created by Him, we lack any capacity to fully grasp His thoughts (Isaiah 55:8–9). To assume that we could possibly know anything about God's thinking processes beyond what He has revealed in His Word is foolish arrogance. To recognize His mind as unknowable to us is cause for worship.

The second question is as ridiculous as the first. Who has been God's counselor? Who has God gone to for counselling, or moral support, or for relationship advice? Who has He asked for ideas about creation or the care of His creatures? God doesn't need us to help Him think things through, no matter how eager we sometimes feel to do exactly that. As we begin to understand the difference between His vast mind and our own, the only response that makes sense is to worship Him and accept His decisions as right and true.

Romans 11:35**ESV**

“Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?”

What does Romans 11:35 mean? Paul's hymn about how God is vastly unknowable began with a declaration about the depth of three things: His riches, wisdom, and knowledge. That poem continued with three questions about what we can know of God and what He needs from us. The first two of those questions were in the previous verse.

This is the third one, perhaps pulled from Job 41:3: Who has given a gift to God that God needs to pay back? In other words, who could ever give to God anything valuable enough that God would be in their debt? Paul is underlining the hard truth that God simply *does not need us*. He needs nothing from us, and does not require our existence. He will exist in completeness for eternity no matter what we do or don't do in response to Him. He owes us nothing.

That's not necessarily a comforting thought. This, however, is reassuring: the God who owes us nothing has given to us every good thing (James 1:17). Even better, the God who owes us nothing has given Himself to us in the form of Christ Jesus. In the context of Romans 11, He has shown us baffling mercy instead of the punishment we deserve for our sin, based only on our faith in Christ.

Romans 11:36

ESV

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

What does Romans 11:36 mean? Paul concludes Romans 11 and his hymn about God's vastness with this verse. Paul declares in no uncertain terms that the universe belongs to God, and we're simply living in it, and part of it.

Paul builds on the question he asked in the previous verse: Who has given anything to God valuable enough that God owes him something back? The answer is nobody. God doesn't owe us anything. In this verse, Paul explains why. Everything that is in the universe came from God to start with. He is the Creator and the source of all that is good. How could we ever give Him anything He doesn't already have?

Second, all things are through God. This means that not only is God the source of all things, He holds them together. He sustains everything that is. He is active and present in the work of keeping the universe running. All things that exist continue through Him.

Third, all things are to Him or for Him. In other words, everything that exists has been made for God's purposes. They all reflect glory back to Him. Nothing exists that doesn't serve His great plan and purpose for all things.

Paul finishes his hymn with statement of great worship: To God be glory forever. This is both a statement of fact and a prayer for its fulfillment. Glory will flow to God forever, and Paul affirms that is exactly as it should be in the form of a prayer. He ends this section of his letter with a formal "amen," meaning "so be it" or "let it be so."

Romans 12:1**ESV**

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

What does Romans 12:1 mean? A new section of Paul's letter begins with Romans 12. He has concluded the section dealing with the doctrine of salvation and what it means to come to God through faith in Christ. Now he begins to describe how those of us who are in Christ should live. How should we respond to God's great mercy to us?

Paul launches into an appeal to his spiritual siblings: his brothers and sisters in Christ. Though he is the apostle sent by Jesus Himself to take the gospel to the world, Paul is also "one of us." He is a sinful human being saved by the grace of God through faith in Jesus. He calls God Father, as we do, making him our brother.

Paul urges us to recognize that God has shown us enormous mercy, described in detail earlier in this letter. The hymn in the previous four verses made it clear that God owes us nothing. Instead of death, though, He has given us life and purpose in Christ. He has forgiven our sins and shared with us the riches of His glory. We deserved none of that. How should we respond?

Paul writes that as the Jewish people offered killed animals as sacrifices to God, Christian should instead offer ourselves, our bodies, to Him as *living* sacrifices. In other words, the only rational response to God's mercy in giving us eternal life is to give Him our lives as a sacrifice to use for His purposes right now.

Animal sacrifices under the old covenant sacrificial system had to be set apart from the herd for that purpose and chosen with care to make sure they were acceptable—unmarked and unharmed. As living sacrifices, God has already set us apart for His purposes and declared us acceptable because He see us in our position in Christ. In other words, we do not have to wait to be better people before we offer our bodies and lives to God. As people in Christ, He will receive the sacrifice of our everyday lives right now.

This life of worship, then, is the appropriate response to the mercy God has already given to us.

Romans 12:2**ESV**

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

What does Romans 12:2 mean? Paul is urging Christians to respond to God's mercy, His forgiveness of our sin, and His inclusion of us in His family. The appropriate reaction would be offering to Him our entire lives as a form of living, breathing sacrifice.

Next, Paul writes that we must no longer be conformed to the world. The word "world" is often used in the New Testament to refer to the "world system," or the way that every human being lives by default. John described this worldly way of living as "the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life" (1 John 2:16). By instinct, all of us chase those things in pursuit of happiness and meaning.

Paul tells us to abandon the chase for pleasure, possessions, and status—to stop living like everyone else. Instead, he urges us to be transformed from the inside out. Specifically, he writes that we must be changed in how we think, to have our minds renewed so that we can begin to understand God's will for our lives.

God may continue to provide us with pleasure, possessions, and status in various forms, but he urges us to learn how to look at life with a new question: What does God want for me? What is truly a good, acceptable, and perfect use of my life for His purposes and not just for my own?

Romans 12:3**ESV**

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

What does Romans 12:3 mean? Paul has written that those of us who have received God's awesome mercy in Christ should change the way we lead our lives. In fact, he has urged us to sacrifice how we use our bodies and our minds.

We should seek to be used by God for His purposes and to see the world through the lens of what He wants instead of just what we want.

Now Paul writes that this begins with seeing ourselves as we really are. By nature, human beings inflate our perception of ourselves. We are ever at the center of our own mind's eye, always measuring everything we see and hear against the standard of our own perspective.

Paul writes that one of the ways our minds must be transformed is in developing the ability to see ourselves accurately. We must develop "sober judgment," or an objective eye. We need to be honest with ourselves about what we're good at and what we're not.

Paul does not say we must all learn to think of ourselves as terrible and worthless. Instead, he wants us to step away from the funhouse mirror that causes us to see ourselves as big and powerful and important. It takes faith to see ourselves objectively in this way, Paul writes. Why faith? He will go on to show that we must see ourselves truthfully so that we can trust God to do through us what He has gifted us for.

In other words, God has work for each of us to spend our lives doing in service to His church. An inflated view of ourselves will only get in the way of the truly powerful things God intends to do through us.

Romans 12:4

ESV

For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function,

What does Romans 12:4 mean? Paul is describing how living sacrifices live. He has urged Christians—all who have received God's mercy because of their faith in Christ—to offer their everyday lives to God as an ongoing act of worship. Previous verses made clear that this will require transformation of our minds and perspective so that we can see and understand what God wants and be used by Him to get it done.

Now, though, Paul begins to get into what our specific jobs in this sacrificial lifestyle might be. It turns out that God's purpose for Christians is that we will spend our lives serving each other in specific ways. His analogy here applies broadly to each local congregation, but it also includes the worldwide church in general.

Paul uses the familiar analogy of a human body, something he develops in more detail in 1 Corinthians 12:12–31. Bodies are a unified whole, containing one person. But that unified body is made up of many different parts that serve wildly different functions from head to toe. Paul will show in the following verses that the church, meaning all Christians, is similar in that we are the body of Christ.

Romans 12:5

ESV

so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

What does Romans 12:5 mean? Paul is describing how Christians who have been shown mercy by God—which means all saved believers—should live now. What kind of a life makes sense? The prior verse described a human body. It is just one person, but it has many different parts that serve different functions.

Now Paul says that we, as the collective group of Christians, are also a kind of body. We are Christ's body on earth, often referred to as "the church." We are countless different parts in many different places with vastly different jobs, but together we are, by analogy, one unified "being," a single entity with what should be a united purpose.

Paul writes something else about us as part of the body of Christ. None of us exists outside of the body. No Christian is an unattached Christian. We are all members of each other, connected to each other with the purpose of serving each other. This is what God intends to do with us on this side of eternity.

Romans 12:6

ESV

Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith;

What does Romans 12:6 mean? Paul is building a metaphor to describe the first purpose of every Christian. He is showing what it looks like to sacrifice our bodies and minds in service to God as a response to His great mercy to us.

All Christians together are meant to operate as a single human body. Since we are all in Christ, by definition, we are Christ's body on earth. We are to function in the world as a single entity. That does not mean, however, that God intends for each of us to be exactly the same. We are not robotic. We serve wildly different functions just as all the different parts of a human body serve different functions. Our job is to serve our function, in service to each other, in the power of God. Paul describes our differing functions in the body with the word "gifts." In the church, we usually call these the "spiritual gifts." These gifts are given to each believer through the Holy Spirit to use in our specific service to and in the church. We might describe each of these gifts as the supernatural ability to perform or fulfill a specific function that our fellow members in the church truly need.

Spiritual gifts should be understood to be different than talents or abilities, as the list of gifts Paul provides in the following verses will make clear. Three other lists of spiritual gifts are found in the New Testament (1 Corinthians 12:8–10, 28–30; 1 Peter 4:11; Ephesians 4:11).

Paul writes in this verse that God intends for us not just to have these gifts of grace but to actually use them. He begins by saying those with the gift of prophecy should use it in proportion with their faith. In other words, proclaiming a prophecy from God to the other members of the church is an action that requires faith that the message has been given by God.

Beliefs differ about some of the spiritual gifts listed. Prophecy is one of those, sometimes referred to as the "sign gifts." Some believe the gift of receiving and delivering messages from God to the church was intended only for the era before the Bible was completed and available to churches. Others feel prophecy and other sign gifts continue to be given to individuals today.

Romans 12:7

ESV

if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching;

What does Romans 12:7 mean? Paul has described an amazing thing every Christian is meant to do. In fact, this is the first thing Paul describes when launching into how we should live in response to God giving us mercy in Christ. Every Christian receives God's Holy Spirit when we come to faith in Christ. The Spirit brings with Him spiritual gifts that God intends for us to use to serve each other in the church. Each of us is given different gifts to use for different

purposes, but our universal command is to *use* those gifts according to the will of God.

Paul lists two more of those gifts in this verse. The first is the gift of serving. This gift of service, sometimes called "helps," is the ability to step in and meet the practical needs of individuals or the church as a whole. People with the gift of service often don't realize that it is, indeed, a gift. They assume that everyone can zero in on what another person needs help with and to provide that help at the right time and in the right way. They're wrong, though. The body of Christ could not function if those with the gift of service neglected their role in the church.

The second gift mentioned is teaching, and its one that most of us think of as a primary role in the church. It is the supernatural ability, in the Spirit, to make clear to a diverse group of hearers what God's Word means. The early church relied heavily on Spirit-gifted teachers to help believers understand the truth, just as we do today.

Romans 12:8

ESV

the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

What does Romans 12:8 mean? Paul is urging those who have received God's mercy through faith in Christ—all Christians—to use the spiritual gifts they have received through God's Spirit to serve each other in the church. So far, Paul has listed the gifts of prophecy, service, and teaching. He seems to be saying that each of these are given to different people, not that every person would have all these gifts.

The gift of exhortation is the Spirit-enabled ability to build someone up by challenging him or her to do better. This passage includes strong exhortation from Paul himself. The church needs exhorters to keep all of us on the right path and moving forward.

Contribution, sometimes called the gift of giving, has to do with money. It is the ability to see the financial need and to step in to help meet that need. As Paul writes here, it requires generosity. Giving generously does not require that someone be wealthy. Often Christians of very limited resources are the most generous in the church as they are led by the Holy Spirit to exercise this gift.

Paul lists leadership as a separate gift from teaching, though often in the church we expect the same person to have both gifts. This often isn't the case. Sometimes called the gift of administration, this is the supernatural ability to call others to follow in the best direction for the group. Paul urges those with this gift to use it with zeal or enthusiasm. Spirit-gifted leaders help to set the energy level for the entire group.

Finally, Paul lists the gift of mercy. This is a powerful gift when exercised in the Holy Spirit. It involves the ability to reflect the mercy God has shown to us on a personal level. Someone with the gift of mercy does not express to others that their wrong choices are okay, but that they are forgiven and accepted in Christ. Another view of this gift is that it involves ministering to the less fortunate. In either case, Paul urges this gift to be exercised with genuine cheerfulness.

Matthew chapter 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.” **20** Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

Matthew 16:13

ESV

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”

NIV

What does Matthew 16:13 mean? Jesus and His disciples have crossed the Sea of Galilee once more (Matthew 16:5) but this time they travel together 25

miles north of Galilee to the district of Caesarea Philippi. The town, at the base of snow-capped Mount Hermon, had previously been dedicated to the worship of Baal and then to the Greek god Pan. Now it had been enlarged and renamed by Herod the Tetrarch in honor of the Roman Caesar, with "Philippi" added to keep it from being confused with the coastal town of Caesarea. The region was now populated mostly by Gentiles. Jesus may have travelled there to be away from Galilee and to focus His attention on His disciples.

Christ begins this exchange by asking His disciples about what they've heard from others about who the Son of Man is. "Son of Man" is the name Jesus most often used for Himself. The name not only emphasized His humanity, it was a clear reference to a prophecy about the Messiah in Daniel 7:13–14. Daniel describes one like a "son of man" who was given "dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him" (Daniel 7:14).

Matthew 16:14

ESV

And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

What does Matthew 16:14 mean? Jesus and His disciples are away from Galilee to the north. Jesus asks them who the people say that He is. Jesus seems to be probing to see if the people, and His own disciples, understand Him to be the Messiah.

The disciples respond that the people are divided in their opinions of who Jesus might be. Based on His teaching and miraculous healing abilities, many think Jesus represents the return or resurrection of one of Israel's prophets of old, like Elijah or Jeremiah. Others, including Herod Antipas (Matthew 14:2), believe Jesus to be John the Baptist somehow. Jesus has described John the Baptist as the fulfilment of the promise that Elijah would return (Matthew 11:13–14).

The disciples' response suggests the people who closely followed Him believed Jesus to be a powerful prophet of God. They saw in Him the fulfillment of prophecy. It's unclear what form, exactly, any of these separate groups expected the Messiah to take. The general assumption, in that era, was that Messiah would be a conquering warrior or political leader. Perhaps some thought the Messiah would be a prophet or would come to power after the return of the prophets. Very few, however, understood Jesus in the way Peter's view implies (Matthew 16:16).

Matthew 16:15**ESV**

He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

What does Matthew 16:15 mean? Different groups in Jesus' era held their own opinions on the concept of a Messiah, or a Promised One. Jesus has asked His disciples about the people's view of "the son of man," which His disciples understand as a reference to Jesus Himself. This question might have been aimed at those following Him around Galilee to hear Him preach and see His miracles. Luke's details from this conversation include Jesus asking, "Who do the crowds say that I am" (Luke 9:18)?

According to the disciples, there are a few common opinions. Some think Jesus is one of the prophets of old, returned in the fulfilment of prophecy. Others think Him to be John the Baptist resurrected—despite that Jesus and John lived at the same time and were about the same age. John had recently been executed by Herod Antipas (Matthew 14:1–12).

Yet, the opinion of the crowd is not really the point of Jesus' question. He seems to have asked only to set up the idea found in this verse. This pointedly separates popular opinion from personal belief: the emphasis is on *this group*, not the overall public. Who do these closest followers think Jesus is?

This is a key moment in Matthew's narrative. Until Jesus' core followers truly understood His identity, they would not truly understand the gospel. Once they fully knew who He was, they could begin to represent Him to the world (John 16:12–15). Peter's response in the following verse reveals He understands who Jesus is (Matthew 16:16–17), though almost immediately he will also reveal the limits of his understanding (Matthew 16:21–23).

Matthew 16:16**ESV**

Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

What does Matthew 16:16 mean? Jesus asked the disciples who the people say He is (Matthew 16:13). They understood the crowds of followers to believe Jesus to be a powerful prophet, maybe even one returned from the dead, or

John the Baptist. To contrast that view, Jesus asked the disciples who *they* say He is (Matthew 16:15).

Peter answers on behalf of the group. Once more, this indicates he has become the informal leader of the Twelve (Matthew 10:1–4). Peter's answer is simple, straightforward, and emphasizes the center of Jesus' identity: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Despite often acting like a man "of little faith," according to Jesus (Matthew 14:31; 16:8), Peter has perceived and believed an essential truth about Jesus. The word Christ means "Messiah" or "Anointed One." Peter doesn't stop with recognizing that Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promises for a Savior, he also declares that Jesus is the Son of God, acknowledging that Jesus is, in fact, divine.

Peter and the other disciples still lack complete understanding of why Jesus has come to earth. Peter will shortly prove this and earn a devastating rebuke from Christ (Matthew 16:21–23). Still, this group of close followers is relatively spot-on in their knowledge of who Jesus is. Jesus will make it clear that God the Father has given them this faith.

Matthew 16:17

ESV

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.

What does Matthew 16:17 mean? This is an enthusiastic response to Peter's answer from the prior verse (Matthew 16:13–16). Christ asked the disciples who they say that He is. Peter responded simply and profoundly, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." Peter's answer showed that he understood Jesus to be both the promised Messiah and to be divine. This is exactly what men like Peter should have thought, and Jesus praises him for that confession.

Peter has been labeled "blessed" for understanding and believing this to be true. Jesus uses the equivalent of Peter's family name, Simon Bar-Jonah, which would literally mean "Simon, son of Jonah." Making specific reference to Peter's father emphasizes the point Jesus immediately makes about that knowledge. It did not come from Peter's earthly father. He also did not come to this conclusion about Jesus out of his own cleverness or careful study.

Rather, Peter's conviction that Jesus is the Christ was given by Jesus' Father in heaven. God revealed to Peter and the other disciples that Jesus was His Son. God still participates in revealing the truth about Jesus to those who believe in Him (John 6:44; 16:7–11).

Matthew 16:18

ESV

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.

What does Matthew 16:18 mean? This verse is often misunderstood because it is often misused. As with other verses, this is partly due to translation. The words written in Greek show a relationship not so obvious in English. Here, Jesus is responding to Peter's declaration that He is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. He declared Peter blessed for understanding this and insisted this understanding was given to Peter by God the Father (Matthew 16:13–17).

Roman Catholics point to what Jesus says here as evidence that Jesus established Peter as the first holder of a special office in the church on earth. They believe Peter to have been the first Pope, that Jesus gave him a spiritual authority over the other disciples and all believers in this moment. According to that claim, the "rock" Jesus will build on is Peter, himself.

However, there is an element of wordplay involved here. As written in Greek, Peter's name is *Petros*, meaning "a rock" or "a stone," and the word Jesus uses for the foundation is *petra*, which means "rock" in the sense of a substance or material. Jesus does not say "you are *Petros*, and on this *Petros* I will build..." nor does He say, "you are *petra*, and on this *petra* I will build." Rather, He says "you are *Petros* [a stone], and on this *petra* [rock] I will build my church." The rock on which God will establish His church is in the confession Peter has just made: that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16).

Peter certainly becomes the leader of the disciples and first spokesman for Christ in the earliest days of the church. Under the power of the Holy Spirit, Peter preaches the initial sermon as the church is born and 3,000 people come to faith in Christ in a single day (Acts 2). Peter, though, is far from infallible and his faith falters on several occasions, both before Christ's death and resurrection (Matthew 16:23) and during the time of the apostles (Galatians 2:11–14).

However, the church—the collection of all people who come to faith in Christ as Savior—exists only because of the central truth that Jesus is the Messiah, the

Son of the living God. That is the power that keeps the gates of hell from overcoming those who are in Christ, His people, the church. Peter plays a vital role for a time, but eventually disappears even from the story of the church's beginnings after Acts 16. Just as was promised, the foundation of God's new covenant is not centered around any fallible person or place, but in the hearts and minds of each individual person (Hebrews 8:6–13).

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.”

What does Matthew 16:19 mean? Jesus is still responding to Peter's simple acknowledgement that Jesus is the Christ—or Messiah—and the Son of the living God. Jesus has said Peter is blessed to understand this, an understanding given to him by God the Father. Jesus then tells Peter that He will build His church on "this rock," meaning the truth Peter just declared, or the declaration of that truth itself (Matthew 16:13–18).

Now Jesus gives authority to Peter to act on His behalf. He has done this before in sending out the twelve to represent Him in Israel (Matthew 10:5–15). Jesus will give this same authority to all twelve disciples both before and after His resurrection (Matthew 18:18; John 20:23).

Jesus describes the authority He is delegating to them as the "keys to the kingdom of heaven." He says that whatever they bind or loose on earth will be bound or loosed in heaven. Only the most trusted servant in the household would be given the keys to the doors of the estate. In handing them over, the master of the house would be sharing His authority to open and close, to lock and unlock, the entrance to His home.

Peter and, eventually, the rest of the apostles, are being assigned a crucial role in introducing the gospel to the world. In Christ's name, they will declare He is the Messiah and that faith in Him is the only entrance into His kingdom. In His name, they will also exercise discipline within the church, setting the standard for both what is true and how that truth will be practiced. When the apostles declare something bound or loosed in Jesus' name, the power that resides in heaven will respond and make it so.

What Jesus is not doing is freeing the disciples to act on their own wisdom and will as they lead His church in the coming years. He is giving them responsibility, authority, and supernatural power to lead the church according to *His* will and *His* teaching.

Matthew 16:20

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Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

What does Matthew 16:20 mean? Christian teachers in the modern world exhaust significant time, energy, and resources to declare the gospel. They loudly and persuasively tell all who will hear that Jesus is, in fact, the Christ and the Son of the living God. Peter and the other apostles will spend the remainder of their lives after the resurrection of Jesus travelling far and wide to declare that Jesus is the way of salvation for all who believe.

In this moment, however, Jesus forbids them from telling anyone directly that He is the Christ. Jesus is not unsure whether He will fulfill His mission as the Savior. Nor is Jesus trying to keep people from knowing who He is. He has publicly displayed all the promised signs of the Messiah and taught as the Messiah. Many have acknowledged His identity (Matthew 9:27; 12:23; 15:22).

So why should the disciples be told not broadcast far and wide exactly who Jesus is? Jesus is sensitive to the weaknesses of the people. If enough became convinced that He was the Messiah—before His prophesied death and resurrection (John 12:32–34)—they would attempt to start a revolution against Rome, to make Him king of Israel (John 6:15). That would be based on a misunderstanding about what the Messiah had come to do on earth. He does not want that.

For now, Jesus seems most interested in allowing Israel's religious leaders and the people to decide for themselves who they will say that He is, based on His displays of God's power and His teaching. The floodgates of evangelism will open when the time is right (Acts 1:8).

