

The Invincible Church

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MATTHEW 16:13-18

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

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

Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, 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."

When a prophet speaks, it is often difficult for people to place him into a category. Is he preaching or teaching? What is he doing? He seems to be preaching, but what kind of preacher says such things? He seems to be teaching, but what kind of teacher instructs in this fashion? At times he is too direct for comfort, and even very harsh, but it seems overly simplistic to relegate this to a character flaw or a lack of compassion. It is not the typical directness of a Christian zealot or the harshness of a non-Christian. It is not the cynicism of the traditionalist, who upholds a human creed more than a divine revelation, or the bitter sarcasm of the idolater, who would sacrifice his own brother on the alter of his preferred theologian. There seems to be more to this person.

The offense that arises from hearing or reading his words, if one is to be honest about it, comes about because he is righteous and accurate in all that he says. He is so right that it leaves no room for dialogue or discussion, crushing man's pride and exposing his shame. The prophet is so righteous and accurate that the hearer's attempt to suppress the erupting guilt turns into anger, and anger turns into hatred and murder. If the call to repentance is rejected and the heart hardens against the message, then religious tradition is donned as a cloak to disguise the evil within, and Christ's righteousness is replaced by human endorsement. Putting off the armor of God and putting on the armor of the devil, one who has heard and refused the prophetic word sets out to destroy God's messenger, for he must be silenced to preserve their peace and sanity.

There is something about the prophet that sets him apart from other speakers. At times it might be difficult to specify the differences, but it seems that he has a different spirit, a greater power, a special boldness, a deeper insight, and a divine mission in what he speaks and writes. He is, to say this one way, as one who speaks with authority. And this

is the impression that the people have of the Lord Jesus. They are perplexed about him – What kind of preaching is this? What kind of man is he?

He does not speak like the scribes, who depend on the sheer number of footnotes in their discourses to assert their conclusions. In every tradition, there are Christians who, boasting of a scholar's mentality, judge what they read and hear by this standard. This tells us more about them than those that they criticize. May revelation and reason be damned. May God himself be beat down and silenced. They respect only human approval and agreement. They would condemn the Lord Jesus himself as uneducated and amateurish, although they are forced to respect him for the sake of appearance. But the people know better – this person's authority goes beyond footnotes. He is certainly no ordinary rabbi.

Does anyone speak with authority today, as one who has received a word from another world, or are we back to making footnotes? Jesus promised to his disciples the power of the Holy Spirit, by which they would become his witnesses. But because of a cessation of faith, the Holy Spirit himself has been excommunicated as a heretic. "Oh, no," they say, "we do not deny it. In fact, everyone already has it!" Well, if all believers already have it, where is it? Since when is the power of the Holy Spirit not associated with miraculous demonstrations? Since when is it reduced to a mere boldness of speech? Wait, do we even have that? Since when is the work of the Spirit reduced to the development of virtues? And do we have that in our churches? Really? Where? What do we attribute to the Spirit of God that cannot be easily imitated by any non-Christian? In Scripture, the power of the Spirit impresses and intimidates the unbelievers. How often does that happen today? No, most Christians do not have this power, but it makes them feel better, and it relieves them of their responsibility, if their doctrine says that they already possess it.

According to the prophet Joel, "God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams....I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy" (Acts 2:17-18). The theology that encourages a cessation of faith in spiritual manifestations cannot make sense of such a declaration. For example, John MacArthur has to push its fulfillment to the Tribulation period in his false dispensational eschatology.¹ Yet is it true that the Canon kills the visions, and the Tribulation kills the Canon? If the Tribulation does not kill the Canon but resurrects the visions, then the Canon has never killed the visions in the first place, so that the former does not necessarily exclude the latter.² Anyway, Joel also says in the same passage, "And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (v. 21). For some reason, no one questions that this always applies. The truth is that they do not have the Spirit's power. They are lying about it. They do not enter themselves, and also forbid others to enter.

There are different maneuvers, but the tactic is the same – things that they do not wish to deal with can always be relegated to a time other than their own. It does not really matter

¹ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Commentary* (Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2005), p. 1437.

² Don Codling, *Sola Scriptura and the Revelatory Gifts* (Sentinel Press, 2005).

when they had happened or when they will happen again, as long as they do not happen now. They are like Martha, who whines with all the piety she could muster, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection *at the last day*" (John 11:24). But Jesus replies, "*I am* the resurrection and the life," and asks, "Do you believe this?" (v. 25-26). Many Christians answer emphatically, "No."

It is futile to cloud the matter with an avalanche of footnotes as to why it cannot be true, with artificial schemes of dispensations as to why it cannot be now, or with a shameless hermeneutic that labels all biblical examples "exceptions," because the Lord Jesus says, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you" (Acts 1:8). They must submit to Scripture's own definition of this power, as to its purposes and effects. If this power, as explained and illustrated by Scripture, does not manifest in their experience (when Scripture assumes that it ought to), then we must conclude that they do not possess it, and that it is still to be sought and attained. Any other conclusion is of human tradition, concerned with protecting its own pride about its self-proclaimed orthodoxy and its authority over the lives of men, rather than with truth, humility, and obedience.

In any case, the people tend to identify Christ with one of the prophets in the past. Some say that he is John the Baptist, perhaps because he also comes preaching faith and repentance. Some say that he is Elijah, perhaps because of the amount and magnitude of the miracles that are associated with his ministry, and that he has come to turn the hearts of the people back to God. And some say that he is Jeremiah, perhaps because he stands alone against the religious institutions and traditions of the day, declaring the futility of an external piety that does not arise from an internal reality. As in Jeremiah's day, the people derive their security from temple rituals and human traditions, and with these have rejected God's demands for faith, mercy, and justice.

As positive as these opinions may be, they fall far short of the truth about the person of Jesus Christ. An ordinary preacher could hardly receive greater flattery than to be called an Elijah or a Jeremiah, but to the Lord these would be more like insults than compliments. The truth is, as Peter will declare in a moment, that this is "the Christ, the Son of the living God." He is greater than all the prophets, and the fulfillment of all their prophecies. He stands in a class by himself, and failing to see this, the people lack an existing category with which they could classify him. So it is supposed that they see in Christ something of the spirits of the prophets, but what they fail to grasp and express is that they see in each of the prophets something of the spirit of Christ, who spoke through them concerning himself. Therefore, anyone who says that Christ is nothing more than a prophet, even if the greatest of all prophets, dishonors and slanders the Son of God. There is no salvation and no promise in such a confession. By this standard we judge the peoples and religions of the world.

Jesus does not assume that his disciples share the positive but inadequate opinions of the people, so that he asks, "But what about you? Who do you say I am?" Peter answers, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." To this Jesus responds, "Blessed are you, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven." Cutting through the traditions propagated by society, the confusions amidst the people, the oppositions

from religious leaders, and the questions within the disciples themselves, God the Father sovereignly revealed his Son to the apostles, and here specifically to Peter.

He says that Peter's confession arises from a revelation that comes from God and not from man, one that comes from the spirit and not the flesh. This could mean that Jesus thus far has never claimed to be the Christ, or has never given any indication that he is the Christ, and now the Father has revealed the needed information to Peter apart from any natural means, as well as caused him to assent to this revealed information. Taken by itself, the Lord's statement does not exclude this interpretation. It is certainly possible for God to reveal Christ to an individual apart from a man's preaching. This is not to say that Christ is revealed apart from the "word," only that God would be revealing (or even preaching) his word directly to the man's spirit. Scripture never indicates that this is impossible, even if it would be unusual.

Nevertheless, we see that this is an unlikely interpretation of the verse when we consider what has transpired in the Gospel of Matthew. By Matthew 2, John the Baptist has already pointed out Jesus as the Christ, the one who would baptize his people with the Holy Spirit, and the one whose perfect righteousness is such that he requires no repentance or baptism in water. And a voice from heaven announced, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (v. 17). In Matthew 7, it is supposed by some that they could call him "Lord, Lord," and enter the kingdom of heaven. Jesus implies that some would, but only those who also do the will of the Father (v. 21). Thus he acknowledges that he is the confessional key to salvation, only that he requires a true confession that results in obedience (Luke 6:46). It is also possible to prophesy, cast out demons, and work miracles in his name (Matthew 7:22-23), implying that he is no mere prophet. Verse 29 indicates that he is different from the teachers of the law, but he is "as one who had authority."

In Matthew 8, Jesus calms the storm with a word, so that the disciples exclaim, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!" (v. 27). When the demons see him, they cry out, "What do you want with us, Son of God? Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?" (v. 29). He states in Matthew 10, "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven" (v. 32-33). And even more significantly for our context, he says in Matthew 11, "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (v. 27). Then, in Matthew 12, he calls himself "the Lord of the Sabbath," who is "greater than the temple" (v. 6, 8).

It is unnecessary to multiply examples. It is not that Christ has never taught about himself, or that he has never given any indication as to his nature and identity. The people fail to recognize him for who he is not because there has been no explanation, and not because there has been no demonstration. On the contrary, there have been multiple explicit explanations and numerous spectacular demonstrations. In Matthew 13, Jesus tells us why people do not recognize him, saying, "In them is fulfilled the prophecy of

Isaiah: 'You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving' (v. 14). Or, as Paul puts it, "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14).

So it is not that Christ has not explained his nature and demonstrated his power, but that spiritual perception has not been granted to the people. He says in John 6, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me" (v. 44-45). Therefore, whether with or without explanations, and whether with or without demonstrations, a person comes to Christ when the Father performs a direct work in his heart, causing him to perceive and believe the truth about Christ, that he is the Son of God, and the one who redeems his people through an atoning sacrifice.

This is the basic reason as to why one person believes in Christ and another does not. I can walk up to a person and say, "Repent, and believe the gospel!" And if God enables him to perceive the truth and generates faith in him, then this person will be converted and confess Christ as Lord. It may even be the case that this person has heard the gospel numerous times before, but not until now does God reveal Christ directly to his heart. If so, the person might exclaim, "Why, of course this is so! Of course this Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, who took upon himself human flesh to die for the sins of his people. I thought I was wise – rational, scientific, and all that – but I have been the world's greatest fool until this day. I now see that only an imbecile would deny the truth of the Christian religion." So a person can come to faith through a simple message that contains little explanation or argument.

On the other hand, I can sit for many hours with another person, and set forth the whole of the Christian faith to him in a systematic fashion, providing rational justification for every claim and every premise, now defending this assertion, now refuting that objection, until I have seized total victory over his obstinacy, and until his mind and body come to a point of exhaustion. And still, he could fail to perceive the truth about Christ, and thus fail to believe and confess him. The defect is not in God, in me, in the message, or in the presentation, but in the unbeliever. I can put Christ before his face, and he would fail to perceive him. I can put the gospel in his ears, and he would fail to grasp it. Oh, stupid non-Christian! Who will deliver you from your mental retardation? The unbeliever is a broken, defective, stupid person.

That said, we must not conclude that all our preaching and argumentation are worthless. Human responsibility is determined by divine command, and not by the anticipated effect of our action. Paul writes, "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow" (1 Corinthians 3:6-7). He does not conclude from this that he should stop planting and that Apollos should stop watering. No, we are directed by the command and not by the effect. And God commands us to preach the word, to defend sound doctrine, and to refute those who oppose. Whatever their effect may be in a particular instance, sound

preaching and argumentation honor God, and he often uses them to effect his purpose, or as means by which he changes the heart of man.

So preaching and argumentation are most necessary, but it is God who determines the effect. Although Peter has been presented with explanations and demonstrations concerning the truth about Christ, he has not always perceived and confessed this truth. It is not until the Father directly reveals Christ to him that the truth finally dawns in his heart like the sunrise dispels the darkness of the night. "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6).

Peter does not make his confession apart from explanation and evidence. In fact, there has been plenty of explanation and evidence, and they logically necessitate the confession. However, although the confession is rational, man is not always rational. Before God's revelation causes the realization to dawn in his heart, Peter has been unable to perceive the truth even when the explanation and evidence about Christ are presented to him over and over again.

Therefore, although truth and reason are on our side, because God hardens the foolish and irrational reprobate, no argument can convince him. And because God preserves the elect, whose mind has been enlightened to perceive and believe the truth, no objection can dissuade him. It is not that man's efforts are meaningless, but that man's efforts in themselves do not produce the effect, whether faith or unbelief. Rather, God often uses man's efforts to bring about his purpose, whether to convert or to harden, although he is able to produce the same effect apart from such efforts. This is crucial for our understanding and application of verse 18. We shall see that this truth should not lead to a feeling of futility and despondency, but a sense of confidence and invincibility.

But before we proceed to verse 18, we should return to examine Peter's confession in verse 16: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Whereas Jesus explains the metaphysical and epistemological aspects of the confession in verse 17, verse 16 addresses the intellectual aspect of the confession, that is, its doctrinal content. This doctrinal content is crucial to what Jesus is about to say regarding the church, because it is verse 16 that provides a basis for verse 18. Also, because of its extensive doctrinal content, the confession (v. 16) limits the applicability of the prediction (v. 18), and thus offers us a specific idea as to the kind of church that Jesus promises to construct and perpetuate. So, we will make four observations about the confession.

First, Peter directs the confession to "you" – that is, Jesus, who asks the disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" The entire confession hangs on this, since it identifies the person about whom the confession is made. The "you" that Peter is speaking to is the Jesus of Nazareth that Matthew has been writing about since the beginning of his Gospel. He was born of a woman, has a physical body and a human nature. He has been teaching, healing, and making contact with men and women. In other words, the "you" that Peter speaks about, and that he calls the Christ, is not a cosmic Christ, or some abstract idea of Christ, but a historical person. The word stresses the historicity and humanity of Christ.

As we will see in a moment, the confession indicates that he is more than a human person, but whatever else he might be, it does not take away from or contradict the fact that he possesses a human nature. Because the confession is directed toward a definite historical "you," it applies to only the Jesus of the Gospels. Anyone else who claims to be the Christ is an imposter, and any doctrine about Jesus of Nazareth that contradicts the Gospels is a falsehood.

Second, Peter's confession says that this person, Jesus, is the "Christ." By that time, the Jews have burdened the idea of the Messiah with a number of false expectations and human traditions (Matthew 16:23). Nevertheless, it is understood that all Old Testament predictions concerning a Messiah would converge on this person. Therefore, when Peter calls his master the Christ, he acknowledges that everything that is written in the Old Testament about the Messiah is fulfilled in this Jesus of Nazareth (Luke 24:27, 44). Among other things, this means that he would be the supreme King and Prophet, and the Savior of God's people. A fuller study of the Messiah comes under the doctrine of christology. Here we are only pointing out the substantial doctrinal content of Peter's confession.

Third, Peter's confession says that the Christ is "*the Son* of the living God." He does not mean that Jesus is God's son in an ordinary sense, or in the sense that any believer could be considered God's child, or in the sense that any creature of God could be considered his offspring. Rather, Peter calls Jesus "the Son" in relation to his unique identity as "the Christ." And Matthew uses the term to designate the second member of the Trinity, as in "the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (28:19; also see 3:17). As the Gospel of John says it, Jesus is "God the One and Only...who came from the Father...who is at the Father's side" (John 1:14, 18).

Although it is probable that Peter does not understand the full meaning of his confession at this point, it is not an anachronism to understand "the Son" in this confession as first, an acknowledgement of the deity of Christ, and second, an acknowledgement of the doctrine of the Trinity. This is because, although Peter might have an imperfect understanding of the confession – or, more precisely, his understanding might fall short of the full meaning properly given to the words of the confession – this limitation does not apply to Matthew. By the time Matthew pens 16:16, he already understands the deity of Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity, and he sees no need to adjust the term here, or to harmonize 16:16 with 28:19, since "the Son" refers to the same thing in both places.

When we put together the fact that Peter is making the confession to the historical and human person of Jesus, the fact that he at the same time confesses the deity of Jesus ("the Son"), and the fact that this person is "the Christ," this must mean that the Christ predicted by the prophets is to be an incarnation of deity. And such is the nature of Jesus of Nazareth – he is the Christ, both God and man. There is no doubt that it is Matthew's intention to convey this doctrine, because even at the beginning of his Gospel, in connection with the human birth of Jesus, Matthew records that he would be called "Immanuel," which means "God with us" (1:23).

Fourth, Peter confesses the Christ as something that is consistent and inseparable with his existing belief in "the living God." This is an Old Testament designation for the God of the Jews, that is, the Christian God.

For the sake of both convenience and accuracy, unless the context of a discussion somehow requires the distinction, we should not refer to the God of the Old Testament as the God of the Jews rather than the God of the Christians. This is because God, whether in the Old or the New Testament, has always been a Christian God, and only a Christian God. He revealed and preached the Christ no later than Genesis 3:15. Since this Christ is the Jesus of Nazareth of the New Testament, God has been a Christian God, and has revealed himself as such, and the Bible has been a Christian Bible, and has revealed itself as such, since the very beginning – and that was even before the Jewish people came into existence.

Moreover, those Jews who were saved received their salvation not because of their natural heritage, but because they believed in the promise concerning a redeemer, who would make atonement for sin. This is the promise that was made in Genesis 3:15, and that had been added to and expanded upon throughout the history of revelation. Therefore, all redeemed Jews are Christians. The Jewish part is irrelevant, just as a Chinese Christian is saved only because he is a Christian, and a Chinese non-Christian is damned only because he is a non-Christian. We do not even need to mention the Chinese part, just as we do not even need to mention the Jewish part when we mention a Jewish person who is saved through faith in Christ. Only Christians are saved, whether Jewish or non-Jewish.

That is, although historically believers were first called "Christians" in Acts 11:26, theologically they have been Christians since Genesis 3:15. For this reason, at least when we are speaking theologically, it is not an anachronism to call Old Testament believers Christians. Thus Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, David, Elijah, Jeremiah, and such men, were all Christians. And for all we know, a man like Cain was a non-Christian. It is not an anachronism for the writer of Hebrews to say, "[Moses] regarded the disgrace *for the sake of Christ* as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt" (Hebrews 11:26). Moses was a Christian. His faith was not in a generic deity, or even a Jewish God, but an explicitly and exclusively Christian God, a Christian Messiah, and a Christian revelation and religion.

Therefore, when Peter confesses "the living God," he confesses the Christian God. The Christian God is the only God, or in other words, only Christians have the correct understanding of the one true God. Thus this part of the confession excludes and condemns all non-Christian religions, including Judaism, that is, any so-called Jewish faith that is not in fact Christian, and that does not affirm what Peter now confesses about Jesus of Nazareth. One can claim to believe in the promised Christ, but when the fulfillment of the promise has arrived and this person rejects him, it shows that he does not in fact believe in the promise. Whatever he thinks he believes, he has in mind something else, something other than the true content of the promise. Such a confession

has no corresponding saving promise, so that its end is damnation, and this is the downfall of the Jewish faith.

It is irrational and inaccurate to accuse this position of anti-Semitism. First, truth is truth, regardless of whether it seems to be "anti" anything. It is foolish to cite racial or cultural prejudice as an argument against a theological doctrine when we are considering its veracity and not the motive for supporting it. Second, since God made the Christian covenant with Abraham, so that it might be propagated through the Jewish people to the whole world, in this sense the Christian faith is "of the Jews" (John 4:22). Therefore, there is a stronger warrant to accuse non-Christian Jews of anti-Semitism than they have to accuse Christians of anti-Semitism.

If they are against Christianity, or if they are against the idea that only Christianity can save and that any "Jewish" faith cannot, then *they* are in fact the true anti-Semites. *They* are against the Jewish faith and the Jewish people. *They* are against Abraham, his God, and his Christ. As Jesus says, "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad" (John 8:56). He was a Christian, so that for a Jew to be a non-Christian is to reject the faith of Abraham. If they are disturbed that Christianity seems to be anti-Jewish, then let them first cease their hypocrisy in being anti-Christian. What, are the Jews a people, and we Christians are not? We are "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, an people belonging to God" (1 Peter 2:9).

We mentioned the issue of Peter's imperfect understanding. Verses 21-23 show that, at this point, Peter has not grasped the full meaning and implication of the confession. If Jesus is the Christ, the fulfillment of all messianic prophecies, then it follows that he would also fulfill the mission of the Christ as foretold in the Old Testament. Jesus apparently thinks so, so that once the revelation that he is the Christ has been given to the disciples, he "began to explain...that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life" (v. 21). Jesus considers the confession inclusive of or the basis for the doctrine of the atonement.

Peter becomes alarmed and rebukes Jesus for saying something like this, but Jesus responds that Peter has in mind the things of men rather than the things of God. That is, at that moment he considers the messianic mission from the perspective of men's priorities and traditions rather than what the messianic prophecies in fact describe. Peter may have in mind the promise that the Christ would save his people. This is true as far as it goes, and even with only this broad promise in mind, he perceives that Jesus of Nazareth is the one who would fill the role. However, it is another matter as to the exact nature and method of this salvation, and what the process of deliverance entails. Although the Old Testament is clear and specific, the people do not always understand: "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:46-47).

A minimalist interpretation of Peter's confession would be erroneous. Again, Jesus considers it inclusive of or the basis for the atonement. Moreover, the placement of verses

21-23 implies that it is Matthew's understanding that the confession of "the Christ" ought to include a proper understanding of his mission as well, and that is to make atonement for those whom God has chosen to save. Matthew intends for the work of atonement to be included in and applied to Peter's confession of the Christ.

Therefore, Peter's confession in verse 16 refers to a faith that affirms at least these major doctrines: the God of Christian Theism, including the Trinity of God, a Christ who would lead and save God's people (according to the biblical messianic prophecies), the deity of this Christ (the Son of the Trinity), the humanity of this Christ (the incarnation of the Son as a historical person), the work of atonement that this Christ would perform to deliver his people through his death and resurrection, and that this Christ is the Jesus of Nazareth of the Gospel of Matthew.

When we come to verse 18, there is the temptation to bypass the controversy surrounding the first half of the verse and straightway proceed to the second half, since the main purpose of our discussion is Jesus' promise regarding the construction and perpetuation of the church, and an overemphasis on the debate on the first portion of verse 18 is likely to detract from it. Nevertheless, to not deal with the first part at all might permit doubt as to the proper application of the second part. Therefore, we will now direct our attention to the first part of verse 18, not to answer all questions regarding it, but only to establish a sufficient basis for the second part.

So, Jesus says, "I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church." The general meaning is in fact clear enough, and the promise regarding the church is not obscured by the various interpretations given to the statement. The debate regarding the exact meaning of this verse would not have such significance attached to it if not for the abomination of Catholicism, which abuses the passage so as to attribute a supreme authority to Peter, and which invents the idea of an apostolic succession so that this authority might pass on, and which then claims for its pope the role of successor to the seat of Peter.

Protestants sometimes prefer to think that the "rock" refers to the confession that Peter has made, and that any believer should and would make, so that the foundation of the church is not Peter, but a true confession regarding Christ. In this view, the "rock" is a doctrine and not a person; or, even if it is a person, it is Christ and not Peter. This is an attractive interpretation, and it is true in the sense that it is supported by other portions of Scripture. However, our present concern has to do with the meaning of this passage in Matthew, and not just a general doctrine about the foundation of the church.

It is true that in this verse the Greek uses one word for "Peter" (*petros*) and another for "rock" (*petra*), and on this basis, some contend that Jesus distinguishes the two, so that in fact he does not say that he would build his church on Peter. This argument is convenient but inconclusive. This is because there are plausible reasons as to why the Greek words could differ even if Jesus is referring to the person in both instances. It is sometimes pointed out that, although Matthew writes in Greek, if Jesus is making the statement in Aramaic, then he would be using the same word for both "Peter" and "rock." But this is

irrelevant since Matthew indeed writes in Greek, and we must derive our doctrine from the actual written revelation rather than our own speculation.

The common word for "stone" or "rock" is *petra*, and is in the feminine. As it must be changed to the masculine when applied as a name to the male person, Peter, this could explain why *petros* is used instead. Moreover, *petros* and *petra* do not always differ in meaning, but *petra* could also refer to a stone or rock, so we cannot conclude that two different words are used in the text because Jesus intends to distinguish between "Peter" and "this rock." And whether or not "Peter" and "rock" mean the same thing, it seems unnatural to distinguish the two when Jesus says, "You are Peter, and on *this* rock I will build."³ In addition, the fact that Jesus uses the second person singular pronoun "you" throughout verses 17-19 reinforces the interpretation that he is addressing Peter in the entire passage, including his reference to "*this* rock."

That said, it remains that this passage does not provide any support to Catholicism. In the first place, it does not provide Peter with supreme or unique authority. Although Jesus employs the second person singular pronoun in verse 19 when he speaks of the keys of the kingdom and the power to bind and to loose, when he repeats the authorization in 18:18, there he speaks to a number of disciples (18:1) and employs the plural pronoun. There the authority to bind and to loose is not even limited to the apostles, but is granted to "the church" (18:17). Also note John 20:23, where Jesus speaks to a group of disciples, and not just to Peter or any single apostle.

When Peter's behavior is challenged by believers in the Book of Acts, he does not appeal to apostolic infallibility, but provides a sound explanation (Acts 11:1-18). There he is in the right, and the matter is settled in peace. Does the pope defend his claims and his actions? And does his explanation prove him right? Then, when Peter plays the hypocrite among the Galatians and behaves in a manner contrary to the gospel, Paul rebukes him to his face and in public (Galatians 2:11-14). If the pope is only as good as Peter, then when he makes claims and performs actions that are contrary to the gospel, do we not have the right to rebuke him to his face and in public according to Paul's example? And if we consider the pope part of the church in the first place (although we do not), when he fails to repent, do we not have the right to excommunicate him in the name of Christ (Matthew 18:15-20)?

Even if "this rock" refers to Peter, the person cannot be considered apart from his confession. It is to the Peter who makes the confession of verse 16 that Jesus makes his statement. So when it comes to apostolic succession, what is there to succeed, and who is the successor? As we have shown, Peter never had a supreme and unique authority for the pope to receive and wield. And even if he had such an authority, does it properly belong to the pope?

To begin with, Scripture does not teach the Catholic doctrine of apostolic succession. Even if it does, the entire New Testament stresses an inheritance that is transmitted and identified through common faith, and not through geography, ethnicity, heredity, or any

³ William Hendriksen, *Matthew* (Baker, 2002), p. 645-647.

natural or human connection. But the Catholic doctrine contradicts Peter in his teachings on the nature and makeup of the priesthood (1 Peter 2), the nature, extent, and effect of the atonement (1 Peter 2), the tasks and powers of elders (1 Peter 3), and the possibility and means to the attainment of assurance (2 Peter 1). Moreover, Peter's doctrine includes an endorsement of Paul's letters as well as the rest of Scripture (2 Peter 3:14-16), and this permits us to point out that Catholic theology contradicts Paul's doctrines on the atonement, justification, sanctification, glorification, the sacraments, marriage, and an almost endless list of other biblical doctrines.

No wonder many biblical commentators conclude that the pope is the anti-Christ, as he is also anti-Peter and anti-Paul. For this reason, although we deny the Catholic doctrine of apostolic succession, even if there is such a thing, we deny that the pope is the proper and rightful successor to the seat of Peter, since he contradicts Peter's teachings, and contradicts the teachings of those whom Peter endorses. On the other hand, since my doctrine agrees with Peter and those whom he endorses, if anyone now fills Peter's seat and office, I do, and not the pope. Let all Catholics, then, bow their knees to me – or any believer who affirms Peter's faith – and not the pope. But unlike the pope, I would say with Peter, as would any Christian, "Stand up, I am only a man myself" (Acts 10:26). As it is, by their own standard, all Catholics are subject to us so-called Protestants, for we are the true heirs of Peter's confession and authority.

In any case, this verse is in the Bible not to fuel a debate on Catholicism, but it provides a positive contribution to our understanding of the faith. It is easy to see in what sense Christ builds his church on Peter. As the early chapters of Acts indicate, after the ascension of Christ, Peter assumes a leadership role in gaining a foothold for the Christian faith in the world and in breaking through to both the Jews and Gentiles with the gospel (Acts 2, 10, etc.). In this manner, what Jesus says to him in our passage – "on this rock I will build my church" and "I will give you the keys of the kingdom" – have been fulfilled.

We can safely regard Peter as the foundation of the church in this sense. But when speaking from a broader perspective, Paul writes that the church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone" (Ephesians 2:20). The statement hardly needs explanation, but it is devastating to Catholic doctrine. Jesus is the cornerstone, the point on which and from which the foundation is built. The apostles and prophets form the rest of the foundation because they have been sent to do his bidding, to establish the church through their words and deeds.⁴ As important as he is, Peter is considered only a part of the foundation along with the other apostles and prophets.

Again, even if the church is built on Peter in a sense, it is not built on just any Peter, but a Peter who makes the confession in verse 16, so that the confession is necessary for the promise that Jesus makes in verse 18. Of course Peter is also necessary, since he is one of the chosen instruments by which Jesus would build the church. And as Jesus builds the church, he perpetuates the fruit of Peter's labor. That is, he continues to establish and

⁴ Vincent Cheung, *Commentary on Ephesians*.

develop a worldwide community of believers who affirm the same thing as expressed by Peter's confession in verse 16 – but also by all other apostles and disciples in the rest of the New Testament – that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Therefore, even if we concede that "the rock" of verse 18 refers to Peter, the foundation of the church is still Christ, or the right confession about Christ (Ephesians 2:20; 1 Peter 2:7). And as Paul writes, "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:11). This is a sufficient basis for us to proceed.

One tragic consequence of the controversy is that it has caused some believers to focus on the first part of verse 18 to the neglect of the second part. Winning the debate against false interpretations of the verse is a pitiful achievement compared to grasping the true significance of Christ's promise concerning the church. For this reason, now that we have laid the foundation, we will direct our attention to the second part of verse 18, where Christ says, "I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it." Or, as the KJV and ESV read, "*the gates of hell* shall not prevail against it." The expression represents the forces of Satan, including the power of death.

The statement in itself could be considered an unconditional declaration of intent. It is not a proposal to be approved, a possibility to be realized, or a reward to be earned. He says, "I will do this. It will happen." There is no chance that it would fail to occur. He declares it to his disciples as something for them to believe and recall, so that he also intends for it to be a promise, and it is entirely appropriate to think of it as such. The fact that it is unconditional means that it will happen for sure; nevertheless, it does not mean that its fulfillment will benefit every individual no matter what. The promise concerns the "church," and not to every person who claims to be a part of it. We will say more about this important point later.

There are three major points that we can derive from Jesus' statement. After that, to properly grasp and apply these points, we will have to keep in mind all that we have said in connection with verses 16 and 17, chiefly, the doctrinal content of Peter's confession, and the sovereignty of God in the matter of faith and unbelief, that is, in causing a man to affirm or reject such a confession.

First, Christ makes a promise regarding the construction of the church. He says "I" will build – he will do it, not men. The construction of the church will not depend on human ability or come under human authority, but Christ will build his church by his own power and wisdom. He will use human instruments as he sees fit, but the effects of these human instruments are still produced by divine power. And he calls it "my" church. He takes ownership of it. He assumes personal responsibility and takes a personal interest in it. He takes personal offense at any unruly conduct within the church, as well as any persecution directed against it. As for the "church" itself, it is a worldwide community of believers who affirm that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the living God," and who suffered death to atone for the sins of his people. He promises to establish a community of people who are united and governed by such a confession.

Second, in connection with the next point, there is the assumption that there would be opposition from the enemy. The forces of Satan will attempt to destroy the church. In fact, Scripture does not say that the demonic spirits have anything to do other than to usurp the purposes of God and to spread rebellion against him. And they usually attempt to achieve this by attacking and tempting his people. So, how much of the forces of hell are dedicated to the destruction of the church? "The combined strength and cunning of all the powers of hell" is the likely answer. And, what tactics and methods will they use to achieve their purpose? "Everything they can without any mercy, hesitation, or integrity" is the simple reply. If it seems that the powers of hell have been restrained throughout the centuries, that is a testimony to Christ's faithfulness to his promise. And as we will discuss, even the attacks that occur serve the purpose of the promise.

Third, Christ promises the perpetuation of the church – "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." The "gates of hell," of course, represent not only direct attacks from demonic spirits, but also all the forces that fall under their category and their control, and this includes all non-Christians. As John writes, "We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one" (1 John 5:19). He makes a sharp distinction between Christians and the rest of the world. Christians are the children of God, but non-Christians work for the devil.

This is a "we" against "them" situation (Matthew 12:30). Unbelievers ridicule such an attitude as unenlightened and counterproductive, but tout tolerance, dialogue, and cooperation. I say, rubbish! It is a tactic of the enemy to undermine our vigilance. But the very suggestion is in fact implicit surrender – if the non-Christians could snuff us out, would they really offer peace? Rather than detecting this sign of weakness for what it is and pursuing our enemy to the ends of the earth, it is astounding how many Christians have accepted this indoctrination – it is spiritual castration. And then, as the men of Judah betrayed Samson to the Philistines (Judges 15:12), these traitors turn around and persecute those who refuse to make covenant with the enemy. But whether we are facing demons, or unbelievers, or professing believers who betray the cause of the gospel, Christ promises that all the powers of hell will not overcome the church.

God's people have always been opposed by Satan's forces. It began with the temptation that led to the fall of Adam and Eve, soon after followed by the murder of Abel by his brother Cain. And even then, God had said to the serpent, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel" (Genesis 3:15). This is not entirely unlike how Jesus promised his disciples, "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Indeed, the latter is the fulfillment of the former. The promise is that we will face opposition and persecution, but we will never be defeated. The promise is absolute and unconditional. It is simple – exegetically, there is nothing more that I must say – but the implications are far-reaching.

The Book of Acts records a variety of attacks that Satan and non-Christians launch against the church. For the sake of convenience and learning, we may place them under

several categories. Although these categories partially overlap, so that an example of opposition may come under two or more categories, it is helpful to list them to bring awareness to the different kinds of attacks that Christians have faced since the first century.

There are at least three reasons to increase awareness of persecution. First, becoming conscious of the great variety and number of attacks against the church helps Christians realize the extent of the wickedness of Satan and non-Christians. Second, it helps Christians gain appreciation for the necessity and the power of Christ's promise for the construction and perpetuation of his church. Third, it helps Christians to detect these attacks, so they may confront and address them. The third point is just as important as the first two, since some of these attacks are subtle, and since some attacks occur with such frequency and constancy that believers have become accustomed to them, so that perhaps they are no longer recognized as satanic assaults against the faith.

Theological opposition attacks Christian doctrines. Although all attacks are in fact attacks against Christian doctrines, theological attacks are more based on religious disagreements than anything else, as when the Jews opposed the Christian faith by saying, "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved" (Acts 15:1). Whether directly or indirectly, obviously or subtly, opposition against the Christian faith comes from all non-Christian religions, such as Catholicism, Islam, Buddhism, as well as all lesser known religions that are against the doctrines of Christ.

Philosophical opposition comes from an allegedly rational viewpoint. We recognize an overlap with the theological, since some philosophies are inseparably integrated with religions. One example may be the opposition to the resurrection of Christ by the people of Athens. Christianity replies, "Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?" (Acts 26:8). The opposition is indeed puzzling. There is no rational argument against the resurrection. We may subsume scientific opposition under the category of philosophy. All the theories of science, and not only the theory of evolution, are based on irrational thinking, since its method entails the triple fallacy of empiricism, induction, and experimentation.

Historical opposition is the attempt to distort history in order to discredit the gospel. The attacks that come under this category would include baseless and unreasonable claims concerning who Jesus really was, what he really did, and what he really said. This occurred immediately after Jesus' resurrection, when the Jews bribed the Roman soldiers to lie about what happened to the body. Textual opposition might also be included under this category, and that is when the attempt is made to distort the text of Scripture in order to discredit the faith or undermine people's confidence in it.

Cultural opposition refers to the attacks against Christianity that stem from a difference in the ethical climate between the church and the world. Ethical opposition, then, maybe included under this category, although it could also belong to the theological and philosophical. Coming under the cultural and ethical might include attacks relating to how we view our work, the place of entertainment, our standards regarding language,

etiquette, religious differences, friendship, marriage, sexuality, and also things like art and music. That is, when the world produces works of art and music that are against the standards and the teachings of Christianity, that should be considered opposition against the existence and commission of the church.

Again, it is not our aim to place every kind of opposition in a category so well-defined that it does not overlap with other categories. Rather, the purpose is to alert ourselves to the fact that the forces of hell are constantly attacking the church from many sides, and that these attacks assume many different forms. This awareness increases our vigilance in confronting these attacks, and our confidence in the promise that the church will never fall, as we perceive that Christ has been preserving his own against all the forces of hell since the beginning. It is not that we have not been attacked, or that so far there has been no strong opposition, but that Christ has been true to his promise all along.

Then, in connection with the different categories of attack against our faith, we may enumerate the different manifestations of satanic opposition. We will distinguish between two major types of manifestations, and divide the second type into several categories.

The first type may be called supernatural manifestations, since demonic involvement is more obvious with them. One example comes from Acts 16 in which a woman with a spirit of divination harassed Paul and his companions. The biblical and apostolic method for dealing with an obvious manifestation of demonic power is to confront it as such and seize authority over it by force. And thus Paul said, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" (Acts 16:18).

The other method for dealing with demonic manifestations is apparently to convince ourselves that they no longer occur, naturalize the manifestations and rename them as neurological disturbances, and hand them off to non-Christian psychiatrists, perhaps to drug them or to lock them up in mental institutions. Bravo! What a way to fulfill the Great Commission. Oh, would to God that we could also lock up those who think that these manifestations still occur today. Then this ostrich policy, this theology of denial, this defiance against Christ, this cessation of faith, would not look so bad.

The second type may be called natural manifestations, where demonic involvement is less obvious. These may be further divided into several categories. Again, they are not exact, but the distinctions are made to increase awareness.

Political persecution occurs when the civil authority of a people ratify and enforce legislations that hinder or even criminalize the affirmation, propagation, and application of the Christian faith. This kind of persecution occurs even when it is claimed that there is religious freedom for the people, because there is often some legislations that threaten believers against preaching and practicing their faith truly and fully. Perhaps there is nowhere in the whole world where Christians are completely free from political persecution.

Ecclesiastical persecution is similar to political persecution, only that it is carried out by the religious authority of a people rather than the civil authority. Religious leaders would sometimes use the means available to them to silence or punish dissenters. When biblically authorized leaders exercise their power to discipline individuals in biblically approved manners for the sake of the doctrinal and moral purity of the church, the honor of God, and the salvation of the offender, then it is the proper use of church discipline, and does not amount to ecclesiastical persecution. But we are referring to a use of authority by unauthorized individuals or for unauthorized reasons, such as to protect their own control over the people or to preserve unbiblical doctrines and traditions. This kind of persecution can take the form of an official rebuke, a "blackballing" or defrocking of a minister, or even a conspiracy to murder the troublemaker.

Social persecution can occur in many settings, including the workplace, the school, the family, or a circle of strangers or friends. The actual persecution can take the form of ostracism, slander, insult, loss of employment or expulsion from school. Note that the last two examples have similarities with political and ecclesiastical persecution. A more general manifestation of this kind of persecution is a broad disapproval and mockery of the Christian faith in society. This type of persecution occurs constantly and almost universally.

Intellectual persecution refers to any opposition against the Christian faith that appeals to the minds of believers and unbelievers. This does not mean that it is a rationally sound opposition, although it is often presented as such. In fact, elsewhere we have demonstrated that intellectual oppositions against the Christian faith are never rationally sound, but always fallacious and misleading. Among other things, these can assume the forms of assertions, arguments, and narratives. Many false assertions are made against the Christian faith, and some people believe them without question. Sometimes arguments are made against Christianity in educational institutions by professors and instructors, but they are always easy to refute.

It is important to increase awareness on the use of narratives as a weapon of attack against the Christian faith, since this method is more subtle. Although history can be distorted in the attempt to discredit the faith, I am here referring to fictional narratives. For example, a non-Christian author can produce a novel, a play, or a movie in which the Christians are hateful hypocrites and the non-Christians are self-sacrificing heroes. One can make anyone say and do anything in a work of fiction. This is often an effective method to influence careless individuals, who as long as they are engaged and amused, tend to forget the fictional nature of the work they are viewing, and the relative omnipotence of the author in designing the characters and the plots. Fiction thus effectively bypasses their ordinary defenses to instill in them unbelief and contempt against the Christian faith.

Physical or corporeal persecution is often an extension or result of the previous manifestations of natural opposition against the Christian faith. It will assume different forms depending on the culture of the day. In the first century it included jailing, whipping, stoning, burning, and crucifying the Christians. Today we will have to add

shooting to the list, at least for some parts of the world. But not every instance of physical persecution is so extreme. For example, it is not unheard of for a parent to strike his child for converting to the Christian faith.

The church does not face only external attacks, that is, those that come from outside of the community of believers, from those who call themselves non-Christians. Rather, the church also faces internal attacks, partly through the infiltration of non-Christians (who claim to be or falsely consider themselves to be Christians), and partly through the manifestation of remaining sin in believers, at times acting all on its own, and at times stirred up by the infiltration of non-Christian ideas into the church. These attacks materialize in the doctrines and practices of professing Christians, attempting to erode from within the covenant community of Christ.

There is much doctrinal confusion among believers. There are those who claim to be Christians, but who deny the infallibility of Scripture, the blood atonement of Christ, the Trinity of God, and so on. Church divisions seem undesirable, but under certain circumstances they are necessary, and increasing fragmentation occurs if we deal with doctrinal problems only when the yeast has already taken over the whole dough. In terms of practice, adultery, divorce, abortion, and homosexuality run rampant, and because the community has been infiltrated by a staggering number of false converts who in fact favor non-Christian beliefs and values, these things do not disturb them, but the people love to have it so, such that in many cases the acceptance of divorce, abortion, and homosexuality is even regarded as a badge of true Christ-like compassion.

What shall we say to these things? "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31). Jesus promises that he will build his church, and that all the powers of hell will not overcome it. Although resistance against the gospel has been constant, and although persecution against the church has been unrelenting, we can be confident that just as the Christian faith has survived in the past, it will continue to survive in the future. There is no need to worry and think, "Will Christianity be snuffed out eventually?" There is no need to fret and say, "Will the church lose its influence some time in the future?" And there is no need to entertain the possibility that the so-called progress in science and culture will ever strip the Bible of its relevance.

All the powers of hell will not overcome the church. The Christian faith is here to stay forever. It will never be destroyed. It will never be forgotten. It will never be replaced. It will never lose its influence. It will never lose its relevance. In fact, the Christian faith will not only survive, but it will prosper in whatever purpose Christ has for it. This is because Christ promises us more than survival – he promises that he will *build* the church. It is first a promise of progress. Thus the church will continue to mature, increase, and advance in accordance with the will of God. Nothing can stop us. Nothing can hinder us. We will fulfill all the good works that God has foreordained for us before the creation of the world.

Now, even an immortal man might fear defeat and death if he does not realize that he cannot perish. But once he understands and believes it, he enters into rest, and from

within him rises an unquenchable boldness that delivers him from all the threats of his enemies. Likewise, a church that takes hold of Christ's promise moves from a religion of fear, of effort, of striving and self-preservation, into a religion of rest, of faith, and of great power and courage.

However, the "church" is not an abstract entity or idea, but it consists of the individuals that comprise it. Therefore, when we say that the church must take hold of Christ's promise, we are in fact saying that individual believers must take hold of it. In other words, they must learn to think this way about the church – that Christ will continue to build his church, and that the church will never fade or perish even though all the powers of hell come against it.

Instead of allowing their minds to be taken by their own perception of the current condition of the church and the strength of the threats against it, they must place the burden for Christianity's survival and progress back where it belongs, that is, on the promise of Christ. The Christian faith will survive and prosper not because we are wise enough, holy enough, or strong enough, but because God has promised to uphold it, and he is faithful to perform his promise. In order to instill this confidence in individual believers, so that the church as a whole may enter into a realm of faith and rest, we must proclaim and expound on this promise in our congregations, and Christians must take time to study, think, and talk about it.

It is a certainty that the Christian faith, or the church, can never be destroyed but will endure forever. But personalizing this confidence is what grants an individual believer liberation and effectiveness. Ironically, one of the greatest hindrances for a Christian to attain this personal confidence is the opposition from other people who claim to be Christians.

Some people are confident only to the extent that they are arrogant, and so when they see confidence in another, they do not know what to call it other than arrogance, because arrogance is all they know in themselves. If they are confident in their religion only as far as they are confident in their human ability, then their faith has never been in God's word in the first place. So blinded are they by their own tradition and prejudice regarding how a Christian ought to think and speak, that they would accuse someone like me as arrogant when I state that I am invincible because God's word is invincible. Unless they can show that I am in fact a non-Christian, so that my confidence is without foundation, their judgment toward me is in fact their attitude toward God's word.

My statement, therefore, stands as a witness against them, exposing their lying faith and false humility – *these* are the things that cannot stand against the powers of the enemy. Their judgment concerning me is correct only concerning themselves. Some of them even claim to believe that God's word is invincible, but their negative reaction to someone who personalizes this truth shows that they are liars. They can say that they have faith in God's word, but if they stumble when someone applies it, and if they are offended when someone personalizes it, then it shows that they are liars. They do not believe God's word. They react because one word from me disturbs their hold upon the minds of men,

and throws their system into disarray. But they treasure tradition rather than Christ, and so they would even raise their hand to slay their own brother.

I mention this to illustrate a point. Whether it comes from non-Christians or professing Christians, I must not allow opposition to dictate my ministry agenda, or to derail me from what I know I must do. I will be held accountable for my decisions by the standard of the divine commission, and not by the standard of human reactions and criticisms. In all of this, I remain in perfect faith and rest, because I am confident in the promise of Christ and the call of God. There is nothing that anyone can do to hinder me apart from divine providence, or to destroy my flesh before the task is finished. My work will increase in strength and influence according to the will of God, and there is nothing that anyone can do about it, to diminish it or to undermine it. What is of God will stand, and what is not of God, I am more eager to see demolished than those who oppose me.

Although I am persecuted for expressing a personal confidence in God's word, I will gladly endure the opposition in order to remain an example to others, who may be inspired to likewise embrace and apply the divine promise in a personal way. Pharisaical religionists forbid them. They neither enter into rest themselves, nor permit others to enter. But the promise of Christ stands against them, and they cannot overcome it. They are powerless against me. They are powerless against us.

If they think they can make a difference, let them try it. Let them conspire and combine all their might. Their efforts shall not harm me, but shall turn out to further our cause. Long ago, God's word has given me knowledge and assurance of this. And as the years pass, experience has given us many illustrations of the same. They seethe and scheme, while I sleep soundly in faith and rest. They scream and strive and strike! But we pass through the mob and go on our way. Therefore, let us cast aside a lying faith and move beyond a false humility, and recognize God's word for what it is, and then boldly personalize it. And we can be even more confident about the fate of the church as a whole.

In addition to confidence, Christ's promise gives us the correct perspective regarding the attacks of Satan and their effects on the church. Events and numbers alone are meaningless if there is no interpretive principle by which we can understand the truth about them. For example, just because there appears to be many new converts flowing into a congregation does not mean that the message and method that attract them are sound, and it does not mean that all of them are true converts. There are certain principles in Scripture by which we may ascertain the genuineness of their faith to a high degree of accuracy. Likewise, when the onslaughts of Satan appear to have certain effects, what appears to be happening might not be what is in fact happening.

We need reliable interpretive principles. One central principle must be Christ's promise that he would build his church, and that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. This means that whatever happens, we must not say, "Look, the church is about to be destroyed. The Christian faith is about to become irrelevant. All men shall despise our religion, and soon it will be forgotten. Perhaps the original gospel has expired in its

power, so that we must change if we are to survive." Because of Christ's promise, this is always the false interpretation of events and numbers, and other indicators of religious trends.

In fact, because of the promise, we should always assume the opposite interpretation to the above when things seem to be going against us. We should rather say, "Unbelief appears to be rampant. Heresy seems to proliferate. Immorality is the norm. It appears difficult to make new converts. And it seems hard to retain some who have professed the faith. All these things, then, must have their place in what Christ is doing as he builds his church, and all these things will not result in the destruction of the church, but rather the edification of the elect. The forces of hell will not annihilate the Christian faith." The divine promise is sure and fixed, but the individual events and their interpretations are not. So it is the promise that makes sense of the circumstances, and not the other way around.

We can be even more specific in our understanding of these circumstances, because Scripture provides us with many more interpretive principles. For example, Romans 8:30 says, "And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified." A person comes to faith in Christ because God has chosen him, predestined him to be saved, and at his appointed time, gives him faith in Christ to believe the gospel. This verse tells us that this person will without fail proceed all the way from justification to glorification. In other words, a person who has been predestined for justification is equally predestined for glorification. Predestination does not apply only to faith and conversion, but it applies to the completion of salvation in the person. Therefore, any person who has been predestined for salvation will surely be saved. There is no chance that he would finally forsake the faith and be condemned with the unbelievers.⁵

The same doctrine is taught in John 10. There Jesus explains why some people disbelieve the gospel, and why some believe it:

The Jews gathered around him, saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly."

Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one." (John 10:24-30)

Those who are not already Christ's sheep will never become Christ's sheep. The Jews demand, "If you are the Christ, tell us plainly," to which Jesus answers, "I did tell you." So Jesus affirms that he has been explicit enough with the Jews concerning the fact that

⁵ Vincent Cheung, "The Preservation of the Saints."

he is the Christ. Their unbelief cannot be attributed to any deficiency in the content or presentation of the message, since it is Christ himself who is speaking, and we can assume that he testifies about himself in a complete and perfect manner. Still, these Jews refuse to believe, and Christ explains that it is because they are not his sheep.

On the other hand, those who are Christ's sheep are already Christ's sheep even before they believe. In fact, the reason they believe is because they are already Christ's sheep when they hear the gospel, the voice of Christ. The time that a person is "born again" and believes the gospel is not when he becomes Christ's sheep. But it is because he is already Christ's sheep that he becomes born again and believes the gospel. Conversion happens when Christ's sheep hears his voice and begins to follow him. Again, for this to happen, a person has to be Christ's sheep already, before he hears the voice of the shepherd.

Then, concerning the sheep, Jesus says no one can snatch them out of his hand or the Father's hand. In other words, only his sheep will believe the gospel, all of his sheep will believe the gospel, and none of his sheep will turn to disbelieve the gospel. In Paul's language, we could say, only the chosen or predestined will be saved, all those who have been chosen or predestined will be saved, and none of those who have been chosen or predestined will turn away from the gospel and be condemned. Paul also teaches, as John and Jesus do here, that those who have not been chosen for salvation but rather created for damnation, will be hardened so that they will not and cannot believe the gospel and be saved.

This doctrine constitutes a sure and fixed interpretive principle by which we can understand some of the things that occur in the world and in the church concerning people's attitude toward the Christian faith. For example, an application of this doctrine would naturally yield John's statement, "They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us" (1 John 2:19). The general principle is that if a person who professes to be a Christian really and finally renounces the Christian faith, then he has never been a Christian in the first place.

Any person can speak the words, "I believe in Christ. I am a Christian," and join a church, but doing this does not guarantee that he is truly a believer in Christ or a Christian. Under the right conditions and in the right contexts, a false convert will very likely react in a manner that exposes his true self, that he is in fact a non-Christian. In connection with this, we need to ask ourselves three questions. First, how did this unbeliever manage to infiltrate the church and position himself as a Christian undetected? Perhaps the preaching has been flawed, and the church's standard sub-biblical. Second, does the church in fact generate those conditions and contexts that would naturally expose this unbeliever? Perhaps the doctrine and the culture of this church makes the environment habitable even for non-Christians. Third, when this false believer speaks or behaves in a manner that exposes his true nature, what does the church do about it? Perhaps it is reluctant to practice confrontation and exercise discipline. Thus the false convert remains in the church.

Such negligence and disobedience in our churches have resulted in an almost overwhelming number of false believers in our congregations. They in turn resist our doctrines, affect our policies, pressure our leaders, confuse our missions, tarnish our reputations, corrupt our flocks, control our finances, and drain our resources. So severe is the problem that many churches of God are in fact synagogues of Satan. If we were to suddenly obey biblical teachings on church discipline – and we should – tens of thousands, thousands upon thousands, and even millions of church members would be excommunicated *today*. With all those professing believers in our churches who deny biblical inspiration, who practice witchcraft, who commit adultery, who endorse homosexuality, doctrinal tolerance, interreligious dialogue, and such things, this number is by no means an exaggeration. But this mass excommunication is unlikely to occur, because many churches are negligent and disobedient when it comes to maintaining the purity of the faith or the community.

However, even when we are unfaithful to his commands, Christ is faithful to his promise. He is still building his church, and he is still ensuring that the gates of hell will not overcome it. And when the forces of hell begin to gain multiple footholds in the churches themselves, Christ will do something about it. So perhaps one reason that Christ ordains the attacks of the enemy is to do exactly what he promises us – that he will build his church, and that the forces of hell will not overcome it. But he also says that no one can snatch away from him true believers. Therefore, the net effect of an exodus from our churches as a result of the attacks of the enemy is a purging of false believers from the church. Christ does for us what we are too cowardly and unfaithful to do.

The attacks bring shame and suffering upon the believers, but the church in fact becomes healthier for it. As the letter to the Hebrews says, "Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?...No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees" (12:7, 11-12). The world's mockery against the church spurs true believers toward greater faith and excellence. It wakes up slumbering Christians from their spiritual stupor. It encourages self-examination, resulting in biblical and genuine assurance of faith, instead of a mere assumption of salvation. Through their constant assaults, God trains our intellectual muscles and tests our spiritual character.

In fact, for those believers who are able to exercise accurate perception, all the attacks of the enemy serve to confirm the excellence and superiority of their religion. Christians who have been well-taught marvel at the irrational nature of the non-Christians' arguments and maneuvers against the church, and they further marvel that their fellow non-Christians (both within and without the church) are convinced and moved to action by them. Every hostile campaign of the enemy is a public testimony to the stupidity and wickedness of the non-Christians, and in contrast, the perfect coherence and righteousness of God, so that in every instance God confirms to the elect his own wisdom and derives glory for himself out of the situation.

Meanwhile, *not one* true Christian is lost. All those who turn away are non-Christians to begin with, or are unbelievers posing as believers in the church. The attacks of the enemy only help to divide the righteous from the unrighteous in a more distinct manner than our own half-hearted effort has been able to do. Neither is our influence on culture or our campaign against the world diminished by the forces of hell. Just as God reduced Gideon's army from about thirty-two thousand men to only three hundred, he will do more with a small number of true believers than with a large congregation burdened with an overwhelming number of unbelievers, who are nothing more than spiritual and social liabilities as long as they are identified with us. Their departure poses no loss to the church, but rather a cleansing and a deliverance for us. All things serve the promise of Christ, the edification of the elect, and the condemnation of the reprobate.

Although Christ is active and determined in building his church, and although this means that the forces of hell are unable to diminish or destroy it, this should not encourage complacency in us, and it does not follow that we have no responsibilities or that our actions as individuals are meaningless. And confidence should not lead to indolence or negligence.

Sometimes people think that they are responsible or that their actions are meaningful only when the entire enterprise stands or falls with them. If the outcome is not directly, necessarily, and proportionately related to their effort, then they throw up their hands and conclude that it is pointless for them to do anything. This attitude is foolish and wicked, because it implies that unless the outcome ultimately depends on the human person – unless that person replaces God – then he finds no reason to do the right thing, or to obey God's commands.

Incidentally, this evil attitude is a controlling premise in many arguments for human freedom, including some arguments in favor of compatibilism and the doctrine of secondary causes.⁶ Their assumption is that the meaningfulness of an action and the responsibility of a person necessarily depend on some kind of human freedom. Few perceive the arbitrariness of this premise because of its wide acceptance. But there is no justification for it. Nevertheless, our present concern is not with human freedom, but with the relation between action and effect, and how that relates to responsibility.

⁶ Compatibilists have at times challenged my understanding of their position. After engaging them on this issue, my perception is that at least some of them realize that I am correct in my doctrine, but rather than abandoning a cherished tradition, which is admittedly difficult to do, they prefer to say that their position does not in fact commit the errors that I mention. However, to take one respected compatibilist as an example, John Frame writes, "I believe that compatibilist freedom is the main kind of freedom necessary to moral responsibility. There are other kinds of freedom, however, which are also important theologically and ethically" ("Free Will and Moral Responsibility, IIM Magazine Online, Volume 1, Number 12, May 17 to May 23, 1999). Notice that he not only calls compatibilism a kind of "freedom" and relates it to moral responsibility, but he also believes that there are other kinds of freedom that are "important theologically and ethically." Some expositions of compatibilism are not as clear and concise, but they assert the same thing. So it would seem that my understanding of compatibilism is in fact more accurate than some of the defenders of this doctrine.

The biblical and rational position is that it does not undermine moral responsibility to say that a person's action has no direct, necessary, or proportionate effect on anything, but that, when we must speak on the metaphysical level or speak relative to the ultimate reference point, God is the direct and necessary cause of all things. There is no necessary connection between our responsibility and the effect or outcome of our actions. The assumption that there is a relation between the two is based on a misguided existential desire for meaning rather than a biblical or rational demonstration of a relationship between the two. Rather, our responsibility relates only to God's commands and judgments.

All this is to say that we are morally responsible to do the things that his commands tell us to do, and not to produce the effects that we think his commands are intended to produce. There is a big difference between the two – God wants us to obey him, not to replace him. Of course, God will often relate the effects that he produces with the efforts that we exert into following his commands, but the two are not related thus by necessity, but only by God's sovereign arrangement. The point is that although the survival of the church does not depend on our actions, we are still responsible and our actions are still meaningful because responsibility and meaning should be measured relative to God's commands and not relative to the effects that we can produce.

So we say that Christ will build his church and that the church will stand and succeed "no matter what," but this is not a doctrine of fatalism, which teaches that events are determined by an impersonal force, and that effects will come about regardless of means. Contrary to fatalism, we insist that a rational and personal God determines all events, and that he often uses means, including human instruments, to produce the effects that he intends.

Against some who hold to an incoherent and incomplete doctrine of divine sovereignty, we also affirm that God has direct and total control over human instruments, so that these have no freedom. But again, this doctrine does not thus become fatalism, since our God is still personal, and his means are still effective. By definition, it cannot be identified as fatalism. This doctrine is not only different from fatalism, but it is a stronger form of determinism than fatalism. In fact, this biblical, rational, and coherent formulation is the strongest form of determinism possible. Where the state of the church is concerned, as a general principle we can say that God will fulfill his decrees by his sovereign direction of human instruments as they relate to his divine commands. However, God is not required to employ human instruments to produce every effect. It is an error to assume that he does or that he must always use means.

Therefore, although the church does not stand or fall with us, and although we can have unshakable confidence when it comes to the construction and perpetuation of the church, we still carry many responsibilities since we have received commands from God about what we should believe, how we should live, how we must treat people, and what we must say to them. In our context, we must consider the proper reaction toward the attacks of the enemy against the Christian faith. What are our responsibilities when all the forces of hell are unleashed against us, as if to destroy us? What should we do when we come

face to face with skepticism, immorality, persecution from without, and dissension and heresy from within?

First, we must maintain the confession. As Hebrews 10:23 says, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful" (ESV; also 4:14). Jesus promises to construct and to continue his church. The fulfillment of this promise depends only on himself, and not on human desire or ability. He is faithful to fulfill his promise even when we are unfaithful. And even when we are weak, he is strong. In fact, whenever he chooses to accomplish his will through willing human instruments, he would create the needed desire and ability in those vessels that he uses.⁷

That said, his promise in Matthew 16:18 is made about a church that he will build upon the confession that Jesus of Nazareth is "the Christ, the Son of the living God." His promise guarantees that there will always be a community of people who affirm this confession. In other words, there will always be Christians in this world, and the Christian faith will remain forever regardless of what the forces of hell do to attack it. However, it does not mean that every individual who claims to be a Christian is among this group of people. Or, to say this another way, the promise is made concerning the church, and the church consists of individuals, but not every individual who claims to be a part of the church is indeed a part of the church.

There will always be individuals who are Christians, who are a part of the church that Christ builds, but whether a particular person is a Christian is another question. Paul writes, "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves" (2 Corinthians 13:5). In the context of Matthew 16, everything depends on the confession. Jesus promises nothing other than damnation to a community or an individual that is placed on any other foundation. He does not promise to build or to protect it, or to give it victory. He will always preserve a church that maintains this confession, and again, since the church consists of individuals, this means that he will always preserve a group of people that hold fast to the confession. And whether a particular individual belongs to this church that Christ is building is determined by whether he maintains this same confession.

There is a bishop who said, "Christianity must change or die," referring to some of our central theological and ethical teachings. The moment he said that, he had become an agent of hell. Only someone who has in mind the things of man and not the things of God can make such a statement (Matthew 16:23). He does not have in mind the promise, but he has in mind what he thinks it will take for the "Christianity" to survive apart from any divine power to preserve it. His solution is to preserve the name but to destroy the substance. But then Christianity would already be dead. No, Jesus makes no promise to

⁷ He can accomplish his will through unwilling and unbelieving instruments, and even through the devil himself. That is, a person might perform an action with a negative intention, but the effect will be what God ordains. Note that this is not compatibilism, since even the negative intention here is not free, but caused by divine power. God is indeed compatible with himself in all his actions, but this is not what compatibilism intends to assert.

build or to protect a "Christianity" that has some other foundation. If Christianity changes, then it will die, if for no other reason than that the change is the death.

Any individual who makes a confession that is different from or contrary to Peter's confession becomes an enemy of the church. Christ's promise is then not for him but against him. In fact, Christ promises that this person will not succeed in his opposition to or disagreement with the confession. He could call himself a Christian, but if his confession differs, Christ does not promise to protect this person, but rather to protect his church from this person.

Jesus makes the promise about a church that is well-defined in its faith and doctrine. This is why I did not begin with verse 18, with the promise itself, to make the point that the church is invincible. I had to first define the church toward which the promise is made. And the church is defined by Peter's confession, which as we have noted, asserts and implies several major and nonnegotiable doctrines, including the Christian God, the Trinity, a fully divine and fully human Christ, who is no other than the Jesus of Nazareth of the Gospel of Matthew.

Anyone who compromises this confession removes himself from the guarantee of Christ's promise. Of course this confession, along with all its theological and ethical implications, is offensive and unpopular. But according to Christ, this is also the most protected place, or the place of promise. What appears to be the most dangerous position is in fact the place of safety and of power. And what appears to man as the safest position, the position of peace and of no conflict, is in fact the most dangerous position. As Hebrews 10:38-39 says, "But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him. But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved."

Of course, it is wrong to offend over something that is only a matter of preference, but when the issue pertains to a doctrine or a principle, then that which is most offensive to human rebellion is also that which is most subject to divine deliverance. On the other hand, when a person tries to deliver himself from human rejection through compromise, then he will become a common thing, so that there is really no point in hearing him or agreeing with him over any other person. Or, since divine deliverance no longer accompanies him, he will crumble under any human persecution that remains. And the even more pressing question is, who will deliver him from the divine judgment to come?

Let us, therefore, first maintain our confession of faith. Let us pray, study, and build up one another through mutual instruction and encouragement, so that we may become convinced and established in the faith, and thus remain under the invincible promise of Christ.

Second, we must proclaim the confession. Christ promises to build his church, and that the gates of hell will not overcome it. The second part of this promise is based on the first part, bridged by the assumption that Christ will succeed in building the church, since he succeeds in whatever he does, so that all opposition against it shall fail. The second part,

then, is a necessary inference from the first, and would be true even if unstated. This observation helps us to perceive that the promise's negative application (that hell shall not overcome) is dependent on its positive thrust. The essence of the promise is positive, and is captured by the words "I will build my church." The church will be as large, prosperous, and influential as Christ wishes to make it.

In other words, the promise implies not only that the church will be able to withstand the gates of hell, but also that the gates of hell will be unable to withstand the advance of the church. Christ indeed defends the church against Satan according to the promise, but this negative aspect of the promise is based on the positive thrust, that he will build his church. This positive thrust necessarily yields a positive implication as well, that the church will continue to be constructed, or to advance, that Satan will be unable to stop Christ from building his church – that is, Satan will be unable to stop the church that maintains and proclaims the confession.

We have orders to not only maintain the confession, but to proclaim it to every part of the world, and we have the promise that Christ will be with us as we do so (Matthew 28:18-20). Therefore, we have the authority and the obligation to be active, aggressive, and even militant in advancing the Christian faith. Of course, I am not referring to the use of physical or military forces to spread our religion. But as with Paul's military metaphors, I am pointing out the fact that we are involved in a conflict with the forces of hell, which consist of Satan, demons, and non-Christians. This conflict is spiritual and intellectual in nature, and it is on this level that our aggression applies. Our weapons include earnest petitions toward God and proclamations toward men, and not the superficial and inferior tactics of terrorism, which might cause the flesh to submit but can never change the heart.

Make no mistake about it: We are indeed out to advance our faith and destroy all others. Christ commands us to do this, so that we must call into question the Christian commitment of anyone who denies or disobeys such a formulation of our mission. To convert people to our faith is to convert them away from theirs. To say that we are right is to say that they are wrong. There is no middle ground. But we employ weapons that are far more devastating, effective, and permanent than the physical weapons of any military. According to God's will we wield the very powers of the world to come. We are endued with power by the Spirit of God, conquering nations and peoples by the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. The promise of Christ is to us a safe refuge, but it is a death curse upon all the non-Christian beliefs and efforts of this world.

So we are to be vigilant in our attitude and approach, in our proclamation of the confession of our faith. And just as content is essential when we maintain our confession, it is also necessary that the content of our proclamation be the same as the confession that we maintain for ourselves, and that our presentation be uncompromising, aggressive, and often in effect, offensive (1 Corinthians 1:23). We must speak the truth to all men in love, and that is to say, boldly and plainly, so that they may hear us. We must tell them what the Bible says, that non-Christians are sinful and stupid, and that to change this they require the righteousness and enlightenment that comes only through faith in Jesus Christ.

There are some who distort Scripture to attack those who would speak the truth in this manner, in order to hide their own inadequacies. They are a disgrace to the kingdom of God. It is as if they have made a peace treaty with the devil in their hearts, and they would even tear down their own brothers in order to remain in favor with the realm of darkness. But we must not compromise with the devil in the attitude or in the content of our proclamation of the Christian confession.

We must never permit a synthesis with non-Christian thinking, but many have done this in the name of peace, dialogue, tolerance, discovering common ground, or mutual respect and understanding. Then, there are those who boast that they "press the antithesis," when the truth is that they merely pretend the antithesis by building a different structure upon the common ground of an anti-biblical foundation. They indeed teach people to bow to Christ, but not before they make Christ bow to Satan.

They speak peace to the false intellectual methods and premises of unbelievers, but claim that we cannot account for or make sense of them apart from biblical presuppositions. As if this is not bad enough, they then make these false methods and premises the precondition to knowing the very biblical presuppositions that they claim are necessary to account for these same methods and premises.⁸ This is to betray the entire Christian faith to the enemy, and in doing so they reinforce the hold of non-Christian thinking in the minds of men, so that they have joined the very forces of hell that seek to undermine our confession of faith. As for us, we have Christ's promise of survival and victory. Let us be bold to make a clear stand for the Christian faith and confession.

Just as God made the footsteps of four lepers into the sound of a great army in order to fulfill his decree to turn back Israel's enemy (2 Kings 7:1-7), he can devastate the enemy and convert the sinner by making powerful and effective even the most pitiful human effort. Even the most sophisticated philosopher has no defense against the most uneducated and untrained Christian whose plain assertion of the gospel is empowered by the Holy Spirit. Although it is far better to be properly equipped, not by worldly professionalism but by a sound understanding and application of the faith, our overall success and progress is guaranteed by the divine promise. The effect will not always be in proportion to our ability or faithfulness, but to Christ's promise and decree.

⁸ The arguments that we formulate concerning various topics are founded upon more foundational premises that should be examined. The arguments could seem sound once these premises are assumed, but the question is whether they should be assumed in the first place. Among other things, the presuppositional approach to apologetics brings awareness to these premises and scrutinizes them. It is the practice of presuppositional apologetics to demonstrate that biblical revelation is the precondition for any argument and any proposition. However, not all who advocate presuppositionalism agree. There is a school of thought that claims to acknowledge biblical revelation as the precondition for all propositions, but then it claims that once this is assumed, it provides an account for even things that are inherently irrational (in the sense that even they can yield truth and knowledge when in fact they cannot), such as induction, empiricism, and the fallacy of asserting the consequent that characterizes the scientific method. Then, it turns around and makes these irrational items the precondition for knowing the biblical revelation. Thus in effect it denies the Bible, and all of the Christian faith. See Vincent Cheung, *Ultimate Questions, Presuppositional Confrontations, Apologetics in Conversation, and Captive to Reason*.

The Christian who is not thoroughly taught and trained is at a disadvantage, and he should be diligent and prepare himself in order to show himself approved as a workman for the faith. That said, meanwhile he is far from helpless, because God is on his side, and by his Spirit his testimony for the faith can be as a hammer or a blazing fire to the heart of men. There are indeed sound arguments in favor of the Christian faith, and God sometimes uses them as occasions to humiliate and harden the reprobate, to confirm the elect, and to bring his chosen ones to faith. But he does not have to use these arguments. He can break the enemy and reach the elect with a simple word. He can break through the irrational and immoral defenses of unbelievers with or without arguments. We are obligated to learn and improve, but we do not need to attain perfection before God can work through us to accomplish his will.⁹

The Christian faith is indestructible because our Father is greater than all. The church is invincible because Christ promises to build his church and that the forces of hell will not overcome it. Christianity is a permanent religion, and Christ's church a permanent institution. For this reason, our work is not a matter of survival, but a matter of responsibility imposed by God's command to maintain and proclaim the confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. In the light of Christ's promise, the forces of the devil and the unbelievers are pathetic and impotent. They are defenseless against us, for greater is he who is in us than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4). Therefore, resting on the divine promise of an invincible church, we warn all men with great sincerity and confidence: Join him, or be crushed by him (Matthew 21:44).

⁹ Vincent Cheung, "The Bible, the Preacher, and the Spirit."