

**AN APPRAISAL OF “KLEIS” IN MATT. 16:19 IN ACTS OF THE APOSTLES  
AND ITS RELEVANCE IN THE CONTEMPORARY CHURCH**

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**Abstract:**

In Matt. 16:19, Jesus said He had given Peter the keys of the Kingdom of heaven, that whatever he would bind on earth, would be bound in heaven, and whatever he would loose on earth would also be loosed in heaven. According to Meta AI, “Kleis” (Greek) refers to a physical key to lock and unlock doors. However, in this spiritual context, the “keys” (Kleis) symbolize the authority and power: to bind and loose, i.e., to prohibit or permit; to restrict or release. Secondly, the keys represent the power to unlock the gates of heaven, granting access to God’s presence, forgiveness, and salvation. Thirdly, the keys represent the Church’s responsibility to proclaim the Gospel, teach, and govern following God’s will. Ultimately, “Kleis” represents the authority and power that Jesus entrusted to His Church, not only to Peter, to fulfill its mission and ministry on earth. This article aims at exploring how the early Church in Acts of the Apostles used “Kleis”, and to what extent in its ministry, and its relevance for the contemporary Church.

**Keywords:** Bible, Kleis, Matthew, Acts, Apostles, Key, Church, Kingdom, Heaven.

**Introduction**

The prophecy which preceded the subject matter of “kleis”, “I will build My Church ...” made by Jesus Christ was fulfilled in Acts 2, following the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles. Amaowoh (2022) presented various arguments by notable scholars concerning the birth of the Church, first, that the Church started before the day of Pentecost. Such scholars include Kuiper, who saw the *Proto Evangelium*, Gen. 3:15, as the beginning of “Christ’s Church”, with Adam and Eve as its first members. Objecting to the Day of Pentecost as the birth of the Church, Kuiper saw the event as marking a turning point in the history of the Church. He reiterated that the Church came into existence in the Garden of Eden, with Adam and Eve as members. Scholars such as Lewis Sperry Chafer and Charles C. Ryrie espoused the day of Pentecost as the birth of the Church in fulfillment of Matt. 16:18. This article thinks that the Church started on the Day of Pentecost, although it was in the embryonic state, in God’s womb in the Old Testament. The Church, according to O’Donovan (1996:153), is not a denomination, but the true Church, which is composed of all those who have repented of their sins and put their faith in Christ. Vine defines “Church” from the Greek word “ekklesia” to mean “Assembly” or “Congregation” of the redeemed or called out ones. This definition is supported by Meta AI. It refers to both local gatherings and the universal body (I Cor. 1:2; Eph. 1:22-23).

Luke is generally accepted to be the author of the Book of Acts, written around 63 AD. The theme of the Book is the triumphant spread of the Gospel through the power of the Holy

Spirit. The Book is addressed to Theophilus (Acts 1:1). Acts covers the first thirty years of the history of the Church, tracing the spread of the Gospel from Jerusalem to Rome, mentioning about 32 countries, 54 cities, names of prominent persons, and geographical features such as islands.

Acts of the Apostles, which is the record of the activities in the early Church, is replete with stories of the demonstration of “Kleis” by the Apostles through the power of the Holy Spirit. Their deeds and words were so amazing that the people wondered where they got such powers and learning, and recalled that they had been with Jesus (Acts 4:13). Below is an appraisal of the use of “Kleis” by the Apostles in the Book of Acts, which has made some scholars to refer to the Book as “Acts of the Holy spirit through the Apostles.”

### **“Kleis” as Authority**

To the Lord Jesus, “Kleis” was reminiscence of the dominion which God gave to man at creation (Gen. 1:26-28; Psalm 8:4-8) but was lost when man fell into sin (Gen. 3). Jesus intended that the Church should be the centre of God’s power on earth, spiritual, and not political or military power. This power or authority was to follow their being baptized in the Holy Spirit as it happened on the Day of Pentecost, having been promised before His passion and ascension, namely, (Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:8).

According to Meta AI and Vine (1996), the word “authority” is defined from the Greek word “exousia” to mean: 1. Power: The ability or capacity to act; 2. Authority: The right or permission to exercise power; 3. Jurisdiction: The sphere or domain over which authority is exercised.

In the New Testament economy, exousia is used to describe God’s authority and power (Matt. 28:18); Jesus’ authority (Matt 7:29; Mark 1:22); and the authority of spiritual leaders (13:17). Exousia consists in the legitimate exercise of power and authority, based on divine sanction which is found in Luke 10:19 “Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall hurt you.”

Murphy (2002:285-292) has done a great work in elucidating the importance of authority in Christian Ministry. He argues that it is very important for the Church, particularly, those in leadership, to come to a full understanding of the Church’s authority, the vast power which is available to the Church, for effective ministry, as witnessed in the ministry of Jesus and that of the disciples (Luke 10:17-20). This authority must be exercised by the Church over the Satanic kingdom through the spoken word, as people duly delegated by God. He added that the first authority given in Gen. 1:26-28 was lost through sin, but through redemption, it has been restored to those who believe in Christ.

In the ministry of Jesus, people recognized that He taught with authority, different from other religious leaders of His day (Matt. 7:28-29; Mark 1:22; Luke 4:32). “Kleis” is synonymous with “exousia” by which the Apostles performed all the miracles in the Book of Acts. The “exousia” was exercised in the name of Jesus according to the scripture, “And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak

in new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover" (Mark 16:17-18).

### **An Appraisal of the Use of “Kleis” in Acts of the Apostles**

#### **Conversion of souls**

Converting sinners who are under the power of Satan “to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me” is not a simple task. It takes a superior authority and power to liberate sinful men. Through “Kleis” Peter was able to convert three thousand men through his sermon on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41). Thereafter, five thousand members were added to the Church (Acts 4:4); Multitudes of men and women were added (Acts 5:14). Conversion of sinners is the main task of the Church, and through divine authority, the Apostles were able to do this.

#### **The door to Gentile Ministry was opened**

The Gentile world was dominated by Satan, idolatry, and all forms of vices. The Jews called them “uncircumcised people” and would not associate with them. That was why Peter refused to eat the “unclean” animals which God showed him in Acts 10, until God convinced him that nothing He created should be called common or unclean. However, through “Kleis” the Gospel penetrated the Gentile world, especially under the ministry of Paul.

- (a) Many people were converted through Philip in Samaria (Acts 8).
- (b) The Ethiopian Eunuch was converted (Acts 8:26-40).
- (c) The Gospel reached Caesarea through the house of Cornelius by the ministry of Peter (Acts 10).
- (d) The conversion of Saul (Paul) might have been as a result of the prayers of the Church (Acts 9).
- (e) Following the conversion and call of Saul (Paul), the door of Gentile Ministry was opened wider (Acts 13-28).

No ordinary power could have achieved this except “Kleis”.

#### **Miracles, Signs, and Wonders**

. According to Halley (1965:563), miracles form a very conspicuous part of the Book of Acts. He said, “Take miracles out of the Book of Acts, and there is little left” (p. 564). Through “Kleis” many miracles, signs, and wonders were performed by the Apostles, including exorcisms (using authority, Greek “exousia”), to cast out demons (Luke 10:19). These miracles were done through the power of the Holy Spirit, and they include the following:

- 1. Healing of the lame man at the temple (Acts 3:1-10).
- 2. Healing of many people (Acts 5:12-16).
- 3. Judgment of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11).
- 4. Many unspecified signs and wonders (Acts 2:43).
- 5. Philip’s miracles in Samaria (Acts 8:6-7).
- 6. Healing of Aeneas by Peter (Acts 9:32-35).
- 7. Dorcas was raised back to life (Acts 9:36-42).

8. Paul's handkerchiefs and aprons healed many people, and demons were cast out (Acts 19:11-12).
9. Elymas judged with blindness by Paul (Acts 13:8-12).
10. A cripple healed by Paul at Lystra (Acts 14:8-10)
11. Deliverance from prisons (Acts 5:19-20; 12; 16).
12. Delivering a demon-possessed girl by Paul (Acts 16).
13. Raising of Eutychus back to life by Paul (Acts 20:9-12).
14. Paul talks about many signs and wonders as an Apostle (2 Cor. 12:11-12).
15. No one was poor among them. They were a prosperous people through the power of God (Acts 4:34). It takes God's power to create wealth, (Beware lest you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth. You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth; that he may confirm his covenant which he swore to your fathers, as at this day (Deut 8:17-18).

To illustrate the fact that these miracles were performed as a result of "Kleis", the seven sons of Sceva who tried to cast out demons as the Apostles were doing were overpowered and disgraced by the demons (Acts 19:13-17). "Kleis" was God's uncommon authority given to the Apostles by God. Halley (1956:442) on the keys of the Kingdom, said, "The ordinary interpretation of this is that Peter opened the door of salvation, on the Day of Pentecost, to the Jews (Acts 2), and later to the Gentiles (Acts 10). Not that he was given the power to forgive sins, but to proclaim the terms of forgiveness."

### **Effective Leadership**

"Kleis" has a lot to do with leadership. Through this authority, Peter provided very effective leadership at all times, which led to the growth, stability, and peace of the Church. Arguably, he led the Church by example according to 1 Peter 5:3, leading by example known as Tupocracy. Amaowoh, as cited in Wikipedia (2024), defines Tupocracy and gives its key features as follows: "Tupocracy is a system of government or leadership style where leaders set positive and inspiring precedents through their own actions and behaviors. It's essentially leadership by example, where leaders demonstrate the desired values, work ethic, and integrity consistently, inspiring and motivating others to follow suit."

In a tupocracy, leaders don't just direct or command others; they model the behaviors and attitudes they expect from their team or followers. This approach fosters trust, credibility, and a sense of shared purpose, resulting in a more engaged and productive group. The term "tupocracy" was invented and created by Amaowoh (2006), a Nigerian clergyman and scholar, in 2006. Tupocracy is a viable alternative to other forms of government, such as democracy, aristocracy, and autocracy.

Some key characteristics of tupocracy leadership include:

- Leading by example: Tupocratic leaders demonstrate the behaviors and values they expect from others.
- Integrity: Tupocratic leaders are truthful, transparent, and accountable.
- Selflessness: Tupocratic leaders prioritize the greater good over personal interests.
- Honesty: Tupocratic leaders are honest and trustworthy.

Overall, tupocracy is about inspiring and motivating others through positive examples, rather than relying on authority or coercion. Tupocracy is a system of government or leadership style where leaders set positive and inspiring precedents through their own actions and behaviors. It's essentially leadership by example, where leaders demonstrate the desired values, work ethic, and integrity consistently, inspiring and motivating others to follow suit.

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### **The Relationship between “Kleis” and Faith**

“Kleis” is not physical, but spiritual, intangible, and therefore cannot be operated like physical keys. “Kleis” is propelled and activated through faith. Vine (1996:222) defines “Faith” from the Greek word “Pistis” as a “firm persuasion, “a conviction based on hearing. According to Merriam-Webster online Dictionary, faith means “to trust or have confidence in an object or person.” Meta AI defines faith as a strong belief or trust in something or someone, often without concrete evidence or proof. The Bible defines faith as “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb 11:1)

Usen (2012:9) posited that faith is a demonstration of confidence in God. There are five senses to prove the existence of matter, namely: sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell. However, the sixth sense is faith, which believes in the existence and reality of the invisible. Admittedly, God is described as “Invisible” (John 1:18; Col. 1:15; I Tim 1:17 and Heb. 11:27). Faith is so pivotal to Christian living that the axiom, “The just (righteous) shall live by faith” is stated four times in the Bible, namely: Hab. 2:4; Rom. 1:16-17; Gal: 3:11 and Heb. 10:38; and the Bible says without faith no man can please God (Heb. 11:6). Faith makes God real and takes Him at His word. Faith believes that all things are possible to God (Luke 1:37; Mark 10:27) and to the one who believes (Mark 9:23). God is angry at unbelief, which does not take God at His word (Num 13-14; Luke 1:18-20; Mark 6:1-6).

“Kleis” was used in performing all the miracles in Acts through faith in God’s word. The Apostles had been with Jesus Christ and witnessed how He drove out demons, healed the sick, raised the dead, and calmed the storm by the word of His mouth only. Thus, beginning from the healing of the lame man at the Beautiful Gate (Acts 3), the Apostles performed many miracles through the spoken word of faith, which other religious leaders were not able to perform. “Kleis” was like the rod of Moses (Book of Exodus), which Moses used in performing all the miracles in Egypt and the wilderness. The faith of the Apostles was activated through Prayer and hearing the word of God (Rom 10:17). Unbelief and doubt cannot perform miracles.

### **Limitations in the Use of Kleis**

Despite their exploits, the Apostles were still fallible as humans in their ministry in Acts. They had their limitations, though, with “Kleis”. They lost James to the sword of Herod. They lost Stephen, also. They had internal conflicts and misunderstandings from time to time (Acts 6: 11 and 15). Although they had “Kleis”, they still had to run for their lives during persecution (Acts 8). They could not use “Kleis” to stop death and persecutions, but counted

themselves worthy to be persecuted for the sake of Christ (Acts 5:41). On the whole, they made good use of “Kleis” to expand the frontiers of the Church and perform miracles which those who were not among them could not, e.g. Simon (Acts 8:9-24); the seven sons of Sceva, (Acts 19:13-17).

### **Relevance of “Kleis” for the contemporary Church**

“Kleis” is as relevant for the contemporary Church as it was for the early Church. Meta AI gives the following points to show the relevance of “Kleis” for the contemporary Church:

1. **Authority:** The Church has been given authority by Jesus to declare God’s truth and will.
2. **Stewardship:** The Church is responsible for using this authority to build up the body of Christ and advance the Kingdom of God.
3. **Evangelism:** The Church is commissioned to proclaim the Gospel and share the message of salvation with the world.

Just as the early Church converted souls, performed miracles, and provided effective leadership that aided the growth of the Church, the contemporary Church should use the same authority that Jesus gave them to do exploits for God.

“Kleis” has no expiration date, and the Church should use it until the *parousia*. The challenges faced by the Church in Acts of the Apostles are still around, namely, activities of Satan, demons, and their human agents. Contemporary Church leaders should follow the Acts pattern of depending on the power of the Holy Spirit for world evangelism so that the Gates of Hades will not overpower and extinguish the Church. The contemporary Church is thriving through “Kleis”, yet a lot more needs to be done, but for it to do as the Apostles, Miller et al (2011:25) recommends for the contemporary to preach the same message, do missions as they did, receive the same spiritual experiences and follow the same methods which the Apostles adopted in spreading the Gospel in Acts.

### **Conclusion**

“Kleis” enabled the early Church to do exploits in terms of conversion of souls, Gentile mission, miracles, and effective leadership, although they had limitations as fallible men. The contemporary Church should use Kleis as the early Church did. “Kleis” is not physical, but spiritual, and so needs faith to operate. Faith is the pivot of Christian life and ministry, without which no man can please God. Faith believes that all things are possible with God (Mark 10:27) and all things are possible to those who believe (Mark 9:23). “Kleis” cannot operate in the atmosphere of unbelief, doubt, or faithlessness. Admittedly, the Apostles had grown from little faith to faith that moves mountains (Matt. 14:31; Mark 11:22-24). The contemporary Church needs this level of faith, too.

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