

Peter And The Pope

Introduction. On April 19, 2005, the Catholic church selected Joseph Ratzinger from Germany as their new Pope. John Paul II died on April 2 after serving as Pope for 26 years. Mr. Ratzinger chose the name Benedict XVI and he will be known by this name until his death.

About 1.1 billion Catholics in the world and about sixty million in America call the Pope "Holy Father." He is revered as the head of the church on earth and devotees of the Catholic religion assert that he is the successor of "Saint Peter," and they contend that his authority is derived from the fact that the church was founded upon Peter.

The doctrine of the primacy of Peter and the papal authority supposedly derived from Peter is the very foundation of Roman Catholicism. The system, however, is barren of any semblance of scriptural support. In this lesson, we will briefly reflect upon two subjects. First, we will consider the New Testament information regarding Peter. Second, we will consider the prooftexts used to "prove" that Peter was the first Pope.

I. **Was Peter The First Pope?**

- A. Catholics claim that the Pope is the visible head of the church. Catholic writers often speak of the "primacy of Peter" and the "primacy of the Pope." Please notice the following from Catholic sources:
 1. "Jesus our Lord, founded but one Church, which He was pleased to build on Peter. Therefore, any church that does not recognize Peter as its foundation stone is not the Church of Christ, and therefore cannot stand, for it is not the work of God" (*The Faith of Our Fathers*, James Cardinal Gibbons, p. 82).
 2. "The pope, therefore, as vicar of Christ, is the visible head of Christ's kingdom on earth, the Church, of which Christ Himself is the invisible head" (*Answer Wisely*, Martin J. Scott, p. 49).
 3. "According to the will of Christ, all its members profess the same faith, have the same worship and Sacraments, and are united under the one and same visible head, the Pope" (*Father Smith Instructs Jackson*, John F. Noll and Lester J. Fallon, p. 42).
 - a) Catholic officials always use the word "visible" no doubt thinking that it removes the thought of the Pope standing in opposition to the headship of Christ.
 - b) They may also think that this removes the apparent problem of having a church with two heads. Nonetheless, the scriptures nowhere teach the idea of a visible and invisible head. Jesus Christ holds the primacy in all things (Colossians 1:18). This leaves nothing for the Pope!
- B. In the books of men, the following titles are commonly used with ref-

erence to a man: "Pope," "Holy Father," "Vicar of Christ" and "Sovereign Pontiff."

1. These titles command the respect that rightly belongs only to the Lord Jesus Christ and to God the Father. There is not a single instance in the scriptures where any of the above titles are applied to a man.
 2. In fact, one sees the exact opposite (Matthew 23:9). The term, "Holy Father" is used only once in the entire Bible, and it is used by Jesus in addressing God the Father (John 17:11).
- C. Among the above titles is the bold assertion that the Pope is the "Vicar of Christ."
1. A "Vicar" is "one serving as a substitute or agent; one authorized to perform the functions of another in higher office." The only passage which gives an indication of a "Vicar" of Christ is 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4.
 2. Some religionists today advocate that man is saved by faith only. However, there is only one passage in the entire Bible that has the words "faith" and "only" together (James 2:24).
 3. The Catholics today speak of the Pope as "Vicar," taking the place of God (Matthew 1:23; John 1:1), yet there is only one passage in the entire Bible which speaks of a man doing such and it calls him "the man of sin."
- D. Analogies of the body made by New Testament writers demonstrate that the Peter could not have been the first Pope.
1. Ephesians 5:23-25 shows that Christ is the only head of the church. Consequently, the wife is subject to her husband as the church is to Christ. Just as the wife is subject to only one head -- her husband, the church is subject to only one head -- Christ. Just as the husband does not send a substitute to rule over his wife, Christ does not authorize a substitute to rule over His bride, the church.
 2. The church is often compared to the human body in the scriptures. The members of the church are represented as the various parts of the body. Christ is always said to be the head (1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:15-16). But what part of the body is the Pope?
- E. One of the greatest arguments against the primacy of Peter is the fact that the apostles had an argument as to which of them should be the greatest (Luke 22:24-26).
1. The very fact that the apostles had an argument among themselves shows they did not understand that Peter was to be the Pope. Also, the occasion of the argument was the night of the betrayal -- the last night of the Lord's earthly ministry -- and yet the apostles still did not understand that Christ had given Peter a position of pri-

- macy!
2. The Lord settled the argument, not by stating that He had already made Peter head, but by declaring that the Gentiles have their heads, "But ye shall not be so." Thus, Jesus very plainly taught that no one would occupy any such place as a Pope to exercise authority over the others.
- F. If the Catholic claims for Peter's primacy were valid, one would expect to discover at least some indication of this in the apostle's personal writings.
1. In the salutations of his letters, Peter designates himself simply as an apostle or a servant of Christ (1 Peter 1:1; 2 Peter 1:1). In fact, Peter's terminology is identical to Paul's (Romans 1:1; Titus 1:1).
 2. In alluding to the church's foundation, Peter characterizes Jesus as the "chief corner stone" (1 Peter 2:6-7). Strangely, he neglected to mention that he is the "human foundation." As a matter of fact, Paul was equal to Peter (2 Corinthians 12:11).

II. **An Examination Of Prooftexts**

A. Matthew 16:18.

1. Catholicism alleges that Matthew 16:18 teaches that the church was built on Peter. The church is built upon Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 3:11), not Peter. Although this is appealed to as a papal proof text, it is lacking of any such proof.
2. It is true that the apostle Peter was the one chosen to first set forth the instructions that were necessary to enter into the kingdom of God to the Jews and to the Gentiles.
 - a) But overall the apostle Paul is actually named the apostle to the Gentiles (Romans 11:13) as Peter was the apostle to the Jews (Galatians 2:7-8).
 - b) But all the apostles, being directed by the Holy Spirit (John 16:7-15), sent out and commissioned by Jesus (Matthew 18:18-20; 18:18) gave instructions to all people as to how to enter the kingdom or church.
3. The relationship between the name "Peter" and the term "rock" is the basis of the Catholic argument. However, the Lord took deliberate pains to draw a clear contrast between Peter and the "rock" to which He alluded. Note these very important points:
 - a) *Petros* (Peter) is a masculine gender noun; *petra* (rock) is a feminine form. The change in grammatical form is not incidental.
 - b) *Petros* suggests a small rock, a fragment; whereas *petra* indicates a more massive, bedrock-like boulder. The contrast is significant.

- c) Jesus employed the second person, *su* (you), in addressing Peter, but He changed to the third person, *taute* (this) when referring to the rock. Christ distinguished between *petros* and *petra* by the use of pronouns of different person.
 - d) Within the illustration, Christ is the builder, the church is the edifice, and Peter's confession that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, is the foundational truth upon which the house of God was to be erected.
 - (1) In the symbolism employed by Jesus, Peter is designated as the one who opens the doors to the kingdom.
 - (2) It is not customary for an object to occupy two roles, e.g., the foundation and door-opener, at the same time in the same metaphorical illustration.
 - (3) Peter cannot occupy the position of both "foundation" and "door-opener" in the same illustration without violating the rules of symbolism.
- B. Luke 22:31-32.
- 1. This verse simply cannot be used to prove the papal infallibility of Peter because Peter erred so bad later that Paul condemned him as a heretic (Galatians 2:11). Why was Peter was not an infallible guide in faith and morals?
 - 2. Peter was told to "strengthen thy brethren" (Luke 22:32) and to "feed My sheep" and to "follow Me" (John 21:15-19). Why was this said to Peter? Because he was the one who was going to stumble by denying the Lord (John 13:36-38), and hence he was the one who needed to be converted and be given these specific exhortations.
- C. John 16:12-13.
- 1. Peter was inspired by the Holy Spirit to proclaim the word of God, but so were the rest of the apostles.
 - 2. Peter is not given any special status and the promise of the Holy Spirit applied equally to all the apostles.
- D. John 21:15-17.
- 1. To suggest this proves Peter is a pope is short sighted. Jesus was reversing the three denials of Peter with three confessions of faith. The emphasis was not on Peter leading the church as a Pope or being promoted to the "top position" but rather accepting him back from the realm of condemnation into the common fold of the apostles who had not denied the Lord.
 - 2. Peter was told to be a shepherd of the sheep not a Pope. Peter was simply an overseer or shepherd (1 Peter 5:1-4).
 - a) Contrary to Catholic theology, Peter describes himself as a "fellow shepherd" on an equal level with other fellow elders.

- b) The chief shepherd is Jesus not Peter (John 10:11, 14-16). If one is subject to Christ as one Shepherd and subject to the Pope as another shepherd -- that's two "chief" shepherds!
 - c) In this very context Peter forbids any elder to be a "lord" over the church (1 Peter 5:3). The original language has as intensive force, conveying the sense of one who acts as a master or lord over others. As an elder, Peter repudiated this disposition; and yet, it is the very type of action to which the Pope arrogates himself.
- E. Acts 15:6-29.
- 1. The Jerusalem meeting provides absolutely no help to the Catholic for the papal authority of Peter and the supremacy of the church at Rome. The council occurs in Jerusalem, not Rome! But even if this meeting had occurred in Rome, Peter was not the keynote speaker, but one of four who are highlighted.
 - 2. In fact, James was the speaker who not only summed up the matter, but concluded the meeting with his personal judgment (vs. 19). The inspired letter that was sent out to other churches made no mention of Peter at all (vss. 23-29). If Peter was the Pope, there was no indication in Jerusalem of such authority!
- F. Galatians 1:8-9.
- 1. The words of all the apostles are unchangeable. The only record of what the apostles said is contained in the New Testament.
 - 2. But oral tradition is full of contradiction. For example, the oral traditions of the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches contradict each other so badly that they condemn each other! Both of these groups base their teachings on the same oral tradition of the apostles, yet they cannot agree.
 - 3. Whose tradition is correct? With all this division, it is obvious that scripture is the only sure method of determining truth.
- G. 1 Timothy 3:15.
- 1. The church that supports and upholds the truth is distinguished from the truth she upholds. Truth is the gospel message contained in scripture.
 - 2. If the church is the source of truth, as both Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches claim, then which truth must we follow? They are divided against themselves in doctrine!

Conclusion. The New Testament contains no authority for Peter being the first Pope or for any man to be Pope on earth. If we are going to "speak as the oracles of God" (1 Peter 4:11), then we must reject the Pope and plead for a return to the old paths (Jeremiah 6:16).