

Was Peter The First Pope?

Bible Answers About Denominations

The cornerstone of Roman Catholicism is their claim for authority. They readily admit that the "whole doctrine of the Catholic Church" stands or falls with what it teaches relative to Peter being the "first pope" and all other popes receiving their office through "apostolic succession." Catholics express it in the following way:

"... The name of Peter, which means the foundation, has become inseparable from his person. He carries and takes about with him his position as a Rock. And as that position is one of those which can never again be absent from the church, any more than the foundation of a building can be taken away, all the indications are that the successors of Peter must inherit his title, his mission, his authority. The whole doctrine of the Catholic Church rests upon this basis." (The Papacy: Expression of God's Love, Catholic Information Service, New Haven, CT: Knights of Columbus, pp. 22-23)

Since, "The whole doctrine of the Catholic Church rests upon this basis," if it can be demonstrated that Peter was not the first pope, then "apostolic succession" and the "whole doctrine of the Catholic Church" will fall and should be utterly rejected. Catholics confess that their whole doctrine of the papacy rests on Matthew 16:18-19. They declare, "It is the authority of this text that is invoked to establish the primacy of Peter and his successors." (The Papacy: Expression of God's Love, p. 16).

Therefore, we must look at the context of Matt. 16:18-19: "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it. "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (NAS) Noticing the context of these verses we see that Peter had just confessed, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God" (v. 16). Was what Peter confessed, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," the foundation upon which the church would be built, or was Peter the foundation of the church? Let us state the question a different way: Is the Christ, the Son of the living God the rock, the foundation of His church, or is Peter, a mere mortal man with all of his frailties, the rock, the foundation of the church?

The words "Peter" and "rock" (v. 18) are translated from two different Greek words. "Peter" in Greek is PETROS (masculine gender) and means a detached or "a piece of a rock" (Strong's Definition). The word "rock" is PETRA (feminine gender) and means "a mass of rock" (Strong's Definition). Catholics try to avoid the force of this difference in Greek words by asserting that Matthew was originally written in Aramaic and that it used the same word for both Peter and rock. This is merely an assertion because there is no proof that Matthew was written in Aramaic. All available credible evidence demands the conclusion that Matthew was originally written in Greek. The Standard Bible Encyclopedia agrees with this conclusion also. Furthermore, if it had been written in Aramaic, a

distinction must have existed between the meaning of Peter and rock anyway because two different words were used in both the Greek text as well as the Latin Vulgate.

As we look into the Bible regarding this subject of the foundation of the church we find that Paul proclaimed that Christ was the foundation of the church when he wrote: "For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 3:11). Notice also that Jesus Christ is called "the rock" when Paul wrote: "and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ" (1 Cor 10:4). (The Douay Version of their Bible agrees with both of these passages). Therefore, unwittingly, Catholics, by their own writings, show that Jesus Christ is the "rock" upon which He built His church.

The Old Testament prophets foresaw Jesus Christ as the rock, the foundation of the church. The Psalmist wrote: "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief corner {stone.}" (Ps 118:22). (The Douay Version has this verse in Ps. 117:22). Isaiah proclaimed: "Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone, a costly cornerstone {for} the foundation, firmly placed. He who believes {in it} will not be disturbed" (Isa 28:16). Peter applied this prophecy to Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 2:5-8). It is very interesting that it was the apostle Peter, himself, who verified what those prophets said and then confirmed that it was indeed Jesus Christ they foresaw, not himself, as the foundation of the church.

The title of "pope" was never conferred on Peter. The word "pope" is not even found in the New Testament and it nowhere teaches, implies, or lends support in any way to Roman Catholicism's doctrine of the papacy. In fact, the other apostles did not honor Peter as one having supremacy. Paul said that he was not inferior to any of the apostles (2 Cor. 11:5; 12:11). Could this have been true if Peter were Pope? Peter was never addressed with titles of primacy. He was never called "The Pope, Vicar, Reverend, Right Reverend, or Father." Jesus was crystal clear on this matter when He said, "And do not call {anyone} on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. "And do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, {that is,} Christ" (Matt 23:9-10).

If Peter were Pope he certainly did not act like it for several reasons: First, Peter refused worship at the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:25-26). Second, Peter was a married man for the Bible speaks three times of his wife's mother (Matt. 8:14-15; Mk. 1:30-31; Lk. 4:38). All the apostles had a divine right to be married (1 Cor. 9:5). Third, Peter had to be rebuked by Paul because he had human weaknesses (Gal. 2:11-14).

The most widely held Roman Catholic tradition has the apostle Peter in Rome from 42 A.D. to 67 A.D. But, where is the tangible, credible proof to support this tradition. The Bible gives absolutely no support to the idea that Peter was ever in Rome. Furthermore, there is no hard historical evidence to support such a claim. The apostle Paul, though imprisoned in Rome and according to the Catholic Bible wrote the books of Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians while imprisoned there, never mentioned Peter being in Rome although he mentioned a great number of Christians who were in Rome. Philip Schaff, concluded, "The Roman tradition of a twenty or twenty-five years episcopate of Peter in Rome is unquestionably a colossal chronological mistake." Therefore, Catholic historians and theologians are left only to assume, speculate, and theorize. No, Peter was not the first pope because the Catholic Church did not even exist in that day and didn't exist until several centuries later. The first person to claim this title wasn't even in Rome but was John, bishop of Constantinople, in 588. Gregory the Great wrote to John and condemned the use of the title pope. Writing also to the

emperor, Mauritius, he said “whoever adopts or affects the title of universal bishop has the pride and character of antiChrist.”

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