

Are The Popes Of Roman Catholicism Infallible?

Bible Answers About Denominations

The Roman Catholic controversy turns on the decision of one question—the Infallibility of the Church. This is really the cornerstone of Roman Catholicism. If Catholicism cannot sustain this claim, all other claims are useless. As long as anyone believes in the infallibility of his Church, that premise immunizes him against any argument you can make from the Bible. But if this one doctrine or belief can be shown to be false, then the whole system of Roman Catholicism falls and the battle is won.

While several attempts are made to prove the Infallibility of the Church, the usual approach is what is termed “the three texts”: First, is where Christ promised to build the church on Peter (Matt. 16:18); second, is where Jesus told Peter to strengthen his brethren (Lk. 22:31-32); third, is where Jesus told Peter to feed His sheep (Jno. 21:15-17). To the Catholic mind this establishes the primacy and infallibility of Peter and his successors (George Salmon, *The Infallibility of the Church*, p. 332).

It must be pointed out that this doctrine of infallibility means that the pope is excluded from all error, that he is invested with divine power and this power extends over the church, all temporal affairs, and even the scriptures. (Foy E. Wallace, Jr., *Bulwarks of the Faith*, Part One, pp. 166-167). This infallibility includes the idea that if something Catholics practice is not found in scripture, then another source than scripture is also true. (Salmon, p. 17). Therefore, when the pope speaks *ex cathedra*, i.e., “from the chair,” he is revealing new truths from the mind of God! From the Catholic book, *My Catholic Faith*, p. 147, we read, “The Church teaches infallibly when it states, through the Pope alone, that he speaks officially (*ex-cathedra*) as the Supreme Head, for the entire universal church.”

However, there are seven assumptions Roman Catholicism must prove if this doctrine is true: (1) that the church was ever built upon Peter; (2) that Peter was given sole authority to bind and loose, (3) that Peter was ever made the head of the church, the vicar of Christ, or the rector of the universe, (4) that Peter was ever the “Prince of the apostles,” (5) that the authority of Peter and his successors is universal, (6) that such authority is supreme and independent of all earthly authority, and (7) that the office of Peter has passed to all successors through all the ages. (L. R. Wilson, *Roman Catholicism: Facts or Fabrications*, p. 1-2).

Examining “The Three Texts”

First, consider the text of Matt. 16:18 where Jesus said, “....thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church....” Any Greek lexicon will point out that the word for “Peter” is “PETROS,” which is masculine, while the word for “rock” is “PETRA,” and is feminine. Therefore, Peter is not the foundation rock of the church. Instead, the truth Peter confessed (“Thou art the Christ, the Son of

the living God" Matt 16:16) is the rock upon which the church is built (cf. also Acts 4:11; I Cor. 3:11; Eph. 2:20; Rom. 9:33; I Pet. 2:6). 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). Jesus was opposed to all titles used by the Catholic Church.

Second, look at the statement by Jesus to Peter, "And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Luke 22:31-32). Jesus, foreseeing the danger facing Peter, and knowing that he was about to deny him, took occasion to forewarn him and put him on his guard, and also to furnish him with comfort when he should be brought to repentance. "Converted" means turned, changed, and recovered. The meaning is, when you are turned from this sin, then use "your" experience to warn and strengthen those who are in danger of such sins. Use your experience to warn them of their danger, and to comfort and sustain them in their temptations. This should be true of any Christian overtaken by sin and not just Peter. This work of "strengthening" his brethren was no peculiar prerogative of Peter's. Paul did the same work as well as others. The same word "sterizein" is used in three of four places in the book of Acts (Acts 14:19-22; 15:32, 41; 18:23; cf. Rom. 1:11) Later, Peter had to be rebuked by Paul because he had human weaknesses (Gal. 2:11-14). It would appear that if any of the apostles should have been pope it would have been Paul and not Peter because Paul had to rebuke Peter. Besides, it was Paul who said, "there is the daily pressure upon me {of} concern for all the churches" (2 Cor 11:28).

Third, examine carefully the passage in John 21:15-17 where Jesus told Peter to feed His lambs and sheep. Peter, alone, was not told to feed sheep for all the apostles were previously sent to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 10:5-6). Then elders (the overseers of a local church) were told to shepherd the flock of sheep (Acts 20:28), and even Peter instructed elders to feed the flock (I Pet. 5:1-2). Therefore, the same charge to Peter to feed the sheep of the Lord was given to others in the first century church. There is no indication in the text itself that there was an appointment to an office peculiar in its kind to Peter.

The argument is also made by Catholics that the listing of Peter's name first in the names of the apostles proves he had primacy. But what proves too much proves nothing. It certainly does not prove primacy or superiority. The "rest of the apostles" are listed prior to Peter in one instance (I Cor. 9:5). Paul's name was listed first in another instance (I Cor. 3:22), and James, a non-apostle, is listed before Peter also (Gal. 2:9). The order of listing proves nothing.

The apostles were all equal as the New Testament clearly shows. They were all the foundation of the church (Eph. 2:20; Rev. 21:14). They were all ambassadors (2 Cor. 5:20). They were all ministers and stewards (I Cor. 4:1). They functioned as builders of the spiritual house of God (I Cor. 3:10). They were all given the keys of the kingdom and were all told to bind and loose (Matt. 18:18; Jno. 20:21, 23). They were all given a commission to the whole world (Matt. 28:18-20). They were all promised the Comforter and could do the signs promised the Comforter and could do the signs of an apostle (Jno. 16:1-13; 2 Cor. 12:12). What prerogatives, then, did Peter have beyond the other apostles? Absolutely none.

There is absolutely no need for successors to the apostles and prophets today. They were God's chosen ambassadors to deliver "the faith" unto mankind and their work has been completed and we have it in the New Testament (Jno. 16:13; Jude 3; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:3). When we read what they wrote, we can understand their knowledge in the mystery of Christ (Eph. 3:3 -4), and that is as God would have it.

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