

JESUS, THE ROCK UPON WHICH THE CHURCH IS BUILT, NOT PETER

The interpretation of Mt 16:18 has been a major bone of contention among Christians in the professing church for centuries. The Catholic church interprets it to mean that Peter is the *rock* upon which the church is built, and that he was given precedence in authority over all the other apostles and total jurisdiction over the entire church of Christ in the earth. This authority and jurisdiction extends to individuals elected to succeed Peter who are called the “vicars of Jesus Christ on earth”, or popes. According to the Catholic church the teachings of these so-called vicars of Jesus Christ on earth, or popes, is infallible; that they cannot teach error because of the position they hold. But what do Scriptures teach? They must be the final arbiters in all matters of doctrine. Christians must let them speak for themselves (CP Mt 16:13-18).

There is no suggestion whatever here that Jesus is referring to Peter as the rock upon which He will build His church (CP also Mk 8:27-29; Lu 9:18-20). The church is founded upon the great Spiritual truth Peter confessed in those passages of Scripture that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Catholic teaching is that Peter is the rock because his name means “rock”, but that contradicts what Jesus Himself said Peter’s name means (CP Jn 1:40-42). Peter, from the Greek word **Petros**, means a stone or fragment of rock that is easily moved, whereas the rock that Jesus said He would build His church upon is **Petra**, an impregnable, immovable mass of rock, which is used figuratively of Jesus Himself in both the Old and New Testaments alike.

Jesus was the Rock of Horeb from which the water of life, or living water flowed that sustained God’s people, Israel, in the Old Testament (CP Ex 17:1-6 also Nu 20:1-11 with 1Cor 10:4). As God’s people Israel drank from the rock and were sustained by the water of life that flowed from it in the Old Testament, so too God’s people, the church, drink from the Water of Life, Jesus, and are sustained, in the New Testament (CP Jn 4:6-14 with Isa 12:1-6; 44:3; 55:1-7; Eze 36:25-27 also Jn 7:37-39; Rev 21:6; 22:17). Jesus is the stone David prophesied the builders rejected which would become the Head of the Corner, or Chief Corner Stone of the New Testament church (CP Psa 118:22; Isa 28:16 with Mt 21:42-44; Mk 12:10; Lu 20:17-18; Ac 4:10-11; Eph 2:19-22; 1Pe 2:3-6). The chief corner stone is the stone set in the corner of the foundations of a building by which the whole building is squared. It also gives strength to the two walls by which they are connected. It is applied figuratively to Christ in Eph 2:20 who not only sustains the whole structure of the church, but also unites Jews and Gentiles into one mystical building (CP V 13-18).

Jesus is a Stone of Stumbling and a Rock of Offence to unbelievers, of whom Isaiah prophesied in the Old Testament (CP Isa 8:13-15 with Lu 20:17-18; Ro 9:33; 1Pe 2:7-8). Jesus is also the Stone of Israel of whom Jacob prophesied in the Old Testament who was to come from God (CP Gen 49:24). Clearly Scriptures refute the teaching that Peter was the rock upon whom the church is built. In Mt 16:18 Jesus is referring to Himself and the testimony concerning Him, which is an unchangeable, immovable

testimony, as the Rock upon which He will build His church (CP also Mt 7:24-25; Lu 6:47-48). Peter and the other apostles played a foundational role in the building of the church, but Jesus remains the Rock upon which it is built (CP 1Cor 3:9-11; Eph 2:13-22).

Now let us see what Scriptures have to say about Peter having precedence in authority over all the other apostles and total jurisdiction over the entire church in the earth. Catholics have interpreted Mt 16:19 and Jn 21:15-17 as meaning this, but that interpretation also contradicts what Jesus Himself teaches elsewhere in Scripture (CP Mt 16:19; Jn 21:15-17). Again, there is nothing whatever in either of those two passages of Scripture to suggest that Christ conferred headship on Peter over all the other apostles, or total jurisdiction over the entire church in the earth. In fact the complete opposite is true (CP Mt 20:20-28; 23:8-12; Mk 10:35-45; Lu 22:24-27). In commanding Peter three times to feed His lambs and His sheep in Jn 21:15-17, Jesus was simply giving Peter a threefold command to carry out the apostolic duties for which he had been called (CP 1Cor 3:9-11; 2Cor 5:18-20; Eph 2:19-22).

Christ strictly forbade the apostles – and by extension every New Testament Christian – seeking any form of headship for themselves or to exercise lordship over the Church, like the kings of the Gentiles. Neither are they to seek after or receive any title for themselves, or even refer to each other by title. So much for so-called “papal authority” over the church (CP also Job 32:21-22). Christians cannot mistake what all those Scriptures mean. In Mt 20:25-28 Jesus explained that in the world the greatest are those who wield the most power, but in God’s Kingdom the greatest are the servants of all, like Jesus Himself (CP Mt 20:26-28; Mk 10:44-45; Lu 22:25-27). Christ condemns the use of titles in the New Testament church because He does not want His followers to be like the religious leaders of His day. The use of titles creates a hierarchical system of church government to which Christ is totally opposed. Mt 23:8 teaches that there is always to be a brotherly relationship between Christians regardless of their ministry gifts, which begs the question: why would Christ who was so opposed to any form of church government which ranks one Christian above another as the foregoing Scriptures clearly teach, give Peter precedence in authority over all the other apostles and total jurisdiction over the entire church in the earth, as Catholic teaching claims He did.

Peter had no precedence at all over the other apostles in authority, only in time – he was the first to confess his faith in Jesus as the Messiah. On the ground of his confession, the Lord simply designated Peter as the first one to open the door of the Kingdom of Heaven – to the Jews on the day of Pentecost (CP Ac 2:14-41), and later to the Gentiles through the salvation of Cornelius and his house (CP Ac 10:1-8, 21-48). The keys of the Kingdom of Heaven in Mt 16:19 are metaphorical – they represent the ministry of the Word by which the Kingdom of Heaven is unlocked for all who hear the Word and wish to enter in. Every believer in Christ has been given the keys of the Kingdom and has this authority. They have all been

delegated to minister God's word and empowered to bind and loose, the same as Peter (CP Mt 16:13-19 with Mt 18:18-20; Jn 20:21-23; 2Cor 5:17-20).

Mt 16:19; 18:18 and Jn 20:23 are used in Catholic teaching to provide Scriptural sanction for their so-called "sacrament of penance", whereby church members confess their sins to a priest who, as the supposed successor to Peter and the original apostles, has the power to forgive them. That is arrogant nonsense. No human can forgive sins against God – only God Himself can do that (CP Psa 32:5; 51:1-9; 66:18; Mt 6:12; 9:2-8; 18:21-35; Mk 11:25-26; Lu 7:44-50; 11:1-4; 1Jn 1:5-10). Anyway, Mt 16:19 and 18:18 does not only apply to church discipline and remitting or retaining sins. The word *whatsoever* in both verses is all-inclusive and extends to every facet of ministry (CP Ac 5:1-11; 13:6-11). It also includes walking on water, stilling storms and tempests, raising the dead, feeding multitudes of people with very little food, etc. In fact it includes everything that Jesus Himself did, and more even (CP Jn 14:12-14).

Had Jesus intended to establish the supreme authority of Peter in the church and to have that authority perpetuated in popes or so-called vicars of Jesus Christ on earth thereafter, He would have distinctly informed His followers. It is worth noting here that the gospel of Mark does not even recount Mt 16:19, but it does record the incidents concerning which of the twelve apostles were the greatest, and the request of James and John to sit on either side of Jesus (CP Mk 9:33-37; 10:35-45 also Lu 22:24-26). If Peter had been given pre-eminence over all the other apostles, Jesus would have declared it here. Anyway, the very fact that Jesus appointed twelve apostles who are to be given a throne each to reign over the twelve tribes of Israel in the Eternal Kingdom is itself a good enough reason to discount Catholic teachings on this subject (CP Mt 19:28 with Rev 21:9-14). Furthermore, Peter only ever declared himself to be a fellow elder with all the other elders in the church (CP 1Pe 5:1-3).

Peter is highlighting here the Divine order of government for the New Testament church, not the Catholic order. God has committed the direction and government of the New Testament church to a plurality of elders co-equally (CP Eph 4:7-16). The church Christ is building is not a vast religious system totally under the jurisdiction of one man called the "pope", who is far removed from the realities of life, lives in an exclusive "official" residence in a faraway place, and is carried about on a throne by his subordinates. Nobody carries anyone about on a throne in the church Christ is building, although Christ himself is enthroned in the hearts of all who belong to this church, which consists of local assemblies or congregations of believers gathered together in every corner of the earth to honour and give glory to their Lord and Saviour, who are governed and guided Spiritually by a plurality of elders co-equally, as Eph 4:7-16 and many other Scriptures plainly teach. (For an extended teaching on this subject see this author's

study *The Church* in his book **Advanced Studies in the Christian Faith (Volume 1)**).

Scriptures clearly refute Catholic teaching that Christ vested total authority for the well-being of His church in one man. When Peter addressed the elders in Ch 5:1 in his first epistle it was as a fellow-elder – one on the same level with them – not as their superior (CP 1Pe 5:1). Also in Ac 15 James was the prominent speaker who summed up the question of Gentile circumcision, not Peter. Beside this, Paul withstood Peter to his face and rebuked him in front of the whole church at Antioch for his hypocritical behaviour toward the Gentile Christians in front of the Judaisers from Jerusalem who were visiting Antioch (CP Ac 15:6-24; Ga 2:11-14).

In bringing this study to a close let us look now at the Catholic claim mentioned at the outset of the study of the infallibility of the pope; that as head of the church he cannot teach what is false. Jn 14:16 and 16:13-15 have been interpreted to mean this (CP Jn 14:16; 16:13-15). There is nothing whatsoever here that teaches the infallibility of the pope. In the context of Jn 14:16 Jesus is speaking of the infilling, and being baptised in the Spirit (CP 14:16-17), and in the context of 16:13-15 how the Spirit enhances believers' sensitivity to sin and gives them a deeper awareness of God's judgement against all ungodliness. He quickens – makes alive – the Word of God to believers. He imparts revelation knowledge to believers and gives them a deeper love and understanding of the Word, and also convicts believers of their sins, as well as the unsaved. That is the sum of Jesus' teaching in these Scriptures – nothing more, nothing less (CP Jn 16:7-15, see also this author's studies *Baptism in the Spirit* in his book, **Foundational Truths of the Christian Faith, The Work of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament Church and The Doctrine of the Trinity** in his book **Advanced Studies in the Christian Faith (Volume 2)**).

To sum up, clearly there is no justification in Scripture whatever for the fallacious teaching promoted and perpetuated by the Catholic church of a ranking order of authority in the church; the election of popes – the so-called "vicars of Jesus Christ on earth", "papal infallibility"; apostolic succession; the sacrament of penance; the giving and receiving of titles etc. Neither does it have a mandate to call itself the "true" church of Christ, nor the oldest, as it claims to be – many churches antedate the church in Rome as Scriptures plainly teach. The first church was in Jerusalem (CP Ac 2:1-47). Christians must learn to distinguish for themselves between that which "tradition" teaches, and that which Scriptures teach. There is not one Scripture that teaches any of the foregoing Catholic teachings, which begs the question then – from whence do they come? They come from the *tradition of men*, which Jesus, Paul and Peter himself vehemently opposed (CP Mt 15:1-9; Mk 7:9-13; Col 2:8; 1Pe 1:18).