

WAS PETER THE FIRST "POPE"?

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Roman Catholicism teaches that the apostle Peter was the first "pope" and that there has been an unbroken line of popes since Peter. From this belief they proclaim that the Roman Catholic Church is the only true church because Peter (and the Catholic Church) were given the "keys", so to speak, to the kingdom of God and no other church has been given those keys. The Catholic Church base this teaching on those well known words that Christ Jesus spoke to Peter in Matthew:

Matthew 16:18 ... 'And I say unto thee Peter, thou art Peter [petros], and upon this Rock [petra] will I build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.'

So who was the "rock" [petra] that Christ was talking about? Was it Peter like the Catholics believe? Or was Christ speaking of Himself? Well, we are going to use the best way of getting to the TRUTH of this verse, by using the Bible to interpret itself.

How did the Disciples Interpret This?

Would you agree that the best way to interpret these words from Jesus is to find out how the other apostles who heard these very words understood them? After all, if Jesus really did mean that Peter was to be the "head" of the church, then we should find some support for this in the rest of the New Testament writings.

Let us start with the very apostle who these words were directed at; Peter. Who did Peter believe was the "rock" upon which the church was to be built? Speaking of Jesus Christ before the people, Peter said:

Acts 4:11-12 ... 'This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.'

Ok, is there any reference at all here from Peter that the church was to be built upon himself? No, he clearly points to Christ Jesus as the "stone" or "rock" that the church is to be built on, with Jesus being the HEAD of it. And notice what else Peter says. He clearly states that NO OTHER NAME HAS BEEN GIVEN AMONGST MEN whereby we can be saved. Only Jesus Christ. And yet the Catholic leaders teach that it is only through the Roman Church that salvation can be secured, due to Jesus giving Peter the "headship" of the church. But Peter himself disagrees with them!

1 Peter 5:1-4 ... 'The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.'

I love this verse from Peter. We can clearly see that Peter thought himself to be just an "elder" amongst the other elders of the church. Nothing more! And he confirms Christ to be the "chief Shepherd" and only Leader of the Christian church. Also, look at what else he says. No one is to act as a "lord" over God's heritage, ie, **no one is to exercise any kind of dominion over the church.**

A rebuke to Roman Catholicism from the very man they believe to be their leader and first pope!

What about the apostle Paul. Who did he proclaim as the "rock"? Well, in all of Paul's writings in the New Testament, not once does he refer to Peter as any kind of leader of the church. But he does share something interesting:

*1 Corinthians 10:1-4 ...'Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual **Rock** that followed them: and **that Rock was Christ.**'*

The Greek word for "rock" here is the same one used by Jesus in Matthew 16, which is "PETRA". And Paul is clearly pointing to Christ Jesus as that "Petra" (Rock).

Interestingly, the Old Testament is awash with verses describing our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ as a "Rock". See Deuteronomy 32:4; 1 Samuel 2:2; Psalms 18:2; Psalms 28:1.

Paul also states in 1 Corinthians 3:11 that *"no other foundation can be laid other than the one already laid which is Christ Jesus."* What is a building built upon? It's a FOUNDATION right? So the "Rock" that Jesus said He would build His church on is the very foundation of the church, which is Christ Jesus crucified. Think about it. How can the Christian church be built upon a sinful man, Peter? There is nothing to build upon with Peter, because salvation requires faith in Christ Jesus alone, and Him crucified for our sins. THAT is the "rock", the rock of calvary. There is NO OTHER foundation that the church can be built upon. And if we attempt to build a church on a sinful man, then that church will end up falling, just like [Babylon has fallen!](#) Because she built her foundation upon the sand, rather than the TRUE rock, which is Christ Jesus.

So let's ask the disciples who is the "greatest" among them and if Jesus had given any one of them the position as leader:

Luke 22:24 ...'And there was strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest.'

Now this is AFTER Matthew 16, so surely they should know who is the leader of them, because Jesus had already told them. The problem is, they clearly understood Jesus' words in Matthew 16 to be pointing to Himself, NOT Peter. Which is why they are now arguing as to which one of them should be the leader. And what about Jesus' reply to their arguing? He will surely clear this up and tell them that Peter is now the leader right? Wrong. Jesus confirms no such thing. In fact, He states that WHOEVER wants to be the greatest, needs to be the least.

In Galatians 2 we find Paul confirming that he was the apostle to take the gospel to the Gentile world, while Peter was the apostle charged with taking the gospel to the Jews. And Paul states in verse 9 that it was **James, Cephas (Peter) and John who ALL "SEEMED" to be pillars of the church.** Making no distinction between them whatsoever.

What about the great church meeting in Acts 15? Did Peter stand out as the leader in this great meeting? No, Peter did speak, but if you read the whole of that meeting, you will see that in fact **James seemed to be the presiding elder**, as he was the one who gave the final decision on the question of circumcision (see Acts 15:19).

The Church is Built With "Stones"

1 Peter 2:5-8 ... 'Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe he is precious?: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.'

Can you see the truth contained in these words from Peter himself? All who believe in Jesus Christ and accept that He is the Son of the Living God, become "*lively stones*", just like Peter did in Matthew 16. We all become "petros" (stones) and are built up into a spiritual house. A house that is built upon the "ROCK" which is Christ Jesus, the ONLY sure foundation for the church.

As we have already stated, and this point needs to take root in our minds. The Christian church could NEVER be built upon a sinful man, because it would end up falling. To build the church upon a sinner, would be just like building a house upon the sand, which Jesus told us about in Matthew 7. No, the only sure foundation to build a house upon is the sinless life of Christ Jesus and His sacrifice on Calvary. THAT is the ONLY rock the church can be safely built upon. And when the storm comes, the house will remain standing.

There can only be ONE head of the body (church) and that is Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:18)

Unbroken Line of Popes?

Another teaching the Roman Catholic Church puts forward is the teaching that there has been an unbroken line of Popes since Peter. But there is a problem with this teaching also. First, no Christians for FOUR CENTURIES after the time of Christ believed that Peter was the leader of the church. This teaching wasn't accepted until around A.D.445 during the reign of Pope Leo I. It was only during this time that the Catholic Church needed to find some Biblical support for Papal supremacy.

The other problem with this teaching of an unbroken line is that in A.D.1045, Pope Benedict IX was ran out of office because of his unworthiness, with Silvester III taking his place. When Benedict IX returned, he sold the Papal throne to Gregory VI, but still refused to give up his own claim to the throne. So at this time, all three men claimed to be the legitimate

Pope! Then in 1046, the German Emperor Henry III settled it by deposing all three Popes and appointing a fourth, Clement II.

So history hardly supports this "unbroken line" of Popes.

So Who Was the First Pope?

*Acts 8:9-22 ...'But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries. But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done. Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost. And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, **Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money.** Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.'*

The Roman Catholic Church tell their followers that they can PURCHASE salvation with money through the doctrine of indulgences!

Simon Magus was a Pagan who blended his Pagan ways with Christianity. Yes, he asked Peter to pray for him so that none of the bad things Peter said would happen to him would come upon him. But it is widely accepted by Christian historians that Simon Magus did not leave his Pagan ways behind. Instead he blended them into his new "Christian" beliefs. Which is exactly what the Roman Catholic Church is, a blending of Paganism and Christianity.

Now what did Simon Magus try to do? He tried to **PURCHASE** the gift of God with money, which the apostle Peter strongly rebuked. And what has the Roman Catholic Church done all throughout history and still does today? **They offer salvation to those who are willing to BUY IT through indulgences!** The very thing that Simon Magus wanted to do.

You will notice from the verses in Acts 8 that Simon Magus was not just a Pagan who practiced sorcery. He was in fact the LEADER of the Pagan "church" and had many followers who thought that he was ordained of God!

"The author, or first representative of this baptized heathenism, according to the uniform testimony of Christian antiquity, is Simon Magus, who unquestionably adulterated Christianity with pagan ideas and practices, and gave himself out, in a pantheistic style for an emanation of God." (Schaff's History of the Church, Apostolic Christianity, Vol. 2, p. 566)

And where did Simon Magus end up going?

When Justin Martyr wrote his Apology [152 A.D.], the sect of the Simonians appears to have been formidable, for he speaks four times of their founder, Simon; and we need not doubt that he identified him with the Simon of Acts 8. He states that he was a Samaritan, adding that his birthplace was a village called Gitta; he describes him as a formidable magician, and tells that he came to **ROME** in the days of Claudius Caesar (45 A.D.), and made such an impression by his magical powers, THAT HE WAS HONORED AS A GOD, a statue being erected to him on the Tiber, between the two bridges, bearing the inscription 'Simoni deo Sancto' (the holy god Simon) (Dictionary of Christian Biography, Vol. 4, p. 682).

Simon Magus went to Rome and setup his new "church" there. An amalgamation of Paganism and Christianity! And yet the apostle Peter did not go to Rome. It was Paul who was the apostle to the Romans!

So who was the first pope? It was Simon Magus, the Pagan sorcerer!

Conclusion

If the Roman Catholic teaching of Peter being assigned as the first Pope in Matthew 16 was true, then the rest of the New Testament would clearly support this fact. But what we have instead is the complete opposite. None of the other apostles recognized Peter as the leader, and they all pointed to Christ Jesus as that "rock" upon which the church was to be built. So no, Peter was NOT the first "pope" or leader of the Christian church. But Simon Magus, the leader of the Pagan Church at that time fits perfectly as being the one who brought Paganism and Christianity together, which resulted in the Roman Catholic Church.

Jesus Christ is the ONLY "Rock" on which the entire church structure rests, for without Him there would be no church at all. Faith in Him as the Son of God makes it possible for us also to become sons of God (John 1:12). And the realization and acceptance that Jesus Christ is indeed the Son of God, as Peter emphatically affirmed upon this occasion, is the "key" to the door of salvation. But it is merely incidental, not fundamental, that Peter was the first to recognize and declare his faith, which, upon this occasion, he did as spokesman for all the disciples.

John 14:5 ...'I am the way, the truth and the life, no man cometh unto the Father, BUT BY ME.'

On Christ the solid Rock I stand, ALL OTHER GROUND is sinking sand!