

**Is
God's Church
Built on Peter?**

Examining the Central
Pillar of Roman Catholicism

By Steve Wohlberg

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Is God's Church Built on Peter?

Examining the Central Pillar of Roman Catholicism

The Roman Catholic Church is the oldest, largest, wealthiest, and most influential church on earth. Its leader is the pope who, presently, is Pope Francis. Amazingly, Pope Francis has become the world's most popular person—far beyond any politician, talk show host, musician, or sports hero. No one can gather a bigger crowd than Pope Francis.

In 2013, *Time* magazine selected Pope Francis as its “Person of the Year.” In 2015, Pope Francis addressed a joint session of the U.S. Congress. His papal encyclical on climate change, “*Laudato Si: On Care for our Common Home*,” now guides government leaders, scientists, and environmentalists around the globe. Often referred to—even by secular media—as the “Holy Father” and “His Holiness,” when Pope Francis speaks, millions listen.

Inseparably connected to the pope's worldwide influence and mystique are three spiritual claims: 1) that Jesus Christ made His disciple Peter the “head” of God's church and the “rock” upon which it is built, 2) that Roman Catholic popes are Peter's legitimate successors, and 3) that popes have

special God-given authority as holders of “the keys of the kingdom of heaven.” The official 1994 Roman Catholic catechism states it this way:

[Section] **880.** When Christ instituted the Twelve, “he constituted [them] in the form of a college or permanent assembly, *at the head of which he placed Peter*, chosen from among them.”¹

[Section] **881.** The Lord made *Simon alone, whom he named Peter, the “rock” of his church. He gave him the keys of his church* and instituted him shepherd of the whole flock.²

[Section] **882.** *The Pope, Bishop of Rome and Peter's successor*, “is the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity both of the bishops and of the whole company of the faithful.” ... “The Roman Pontiff, by reason of his office as Vicar of Christ, and as pastor of the entire Church has *full, supreme, and universal power over the whole Church*, a power which he can always exercise unhindered.”³

These claims are exceedingly broad. If they are true, when a pope speaks, we should listen. But what if they aren't? What then? The purpose of this booklet is to carefully examine these controversial issues.

The foundation of the Catholic Church's claim that Jesus Christ builds His church on Peter is its interpretation of one primary Bible passage, Matthew 16:18–19. In those verses, speaking to Peter, Jesus Christ said:

I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 16:18–19)

The 1994 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* also states:

[Section] 552. Through a revelation from the Father, Peter had confessed: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Our Lord then declared to him: "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it." Christ, the "living Stone," thus assures his Church, *built on Peter*, of victory over the powers of death. Because of the faith he confessed *Peter will remain the unshakable rock of the Church.*⁴

Thus, the Roman Church believes that Peter is now "the unshakable rock of the church" based on its interpretation of Matthew 16:18. But did Jesus

explicitly state that Peter was the rock? Is that what He meant? To discover the answer, we must closely examine Matthew 16:18–19 in its context, plus look at other relevant verses. Here's what God's Word says in Matthew 16:13–20:

¹³ When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?"

¹⁴ So they said, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

¹⁵ He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

¹⁶ Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

¹⁷ Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.

¹⁸ And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

¹⁹ And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

²⁰ Then He commanded His disciples that they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ.

That's the text, in black and white. Let's start with verse 13. Jesus was with His twelve disciples in the region of Caesarea Philippi. Looking at their earnest faces, the Savior asked them all the same question, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" Notice that Jesus' question concerned *His identity*. What were other men saying about Him?

In verse 14, we aren't told exactly which of the disciples answered, but some did. "So they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.'" In verse 15, Jesus asked a similar question, but this time He wanted to know what His disciples thought. "But who do *you* say that *I am*?" Again, notice that Jesus' primary line of questioning concerned *His identity*, not that of His disciples.

In verse 16, Peter answered by saying, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." What a marvelous confession! While others viewed Jesus as a mere mortal, Peter was correct. Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the living God." Notice the words, "*the* Christ," and "*the* Son." Here Peter affirmed that there is no one quite like Jesus. He is uniquely *the* Messiah, *the* only begotten Son of God, *the* Savior of the world. The famous poem

“One Solitary Life” highlights our blessed Savior’s uniqueness:

One Solitary Life

He was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant. He grew up in another village, where he worked in a carpenter shop until he was 30. Then, for three years, he was an itinerant preacher.

He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never had a family or owned a home. He didn’t go to college. He never lived in a big city. He never traveled 200 miles from the place where he was born. He did none of the things that usually accompany greatness. He had no credentials but himself.

He was only 33 when the tide of public opinion turned against him. His friends ran away. One of them denied him. He was turned over to his enemies and went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed to a cross between two thieves. While he was dying, his executioners gambled for his garments, the only property he had on earth. When he was dead, he was laid in a borrowed grave, through the pity of a friend.

Twenty centuries have come and gone, and today he is the central figure of the human race. I am well within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, all the navies that ever sailed, all the parliaments that ever sat, all the kings that ever reigned—put together—have not affected the life of man on this earth as much as that one, solitary life.⁵

Compared to Jesus Christ, all men and women are fallen, frail, erring humans. Jesus alone is the eternal “I AM” (John 8:58). His “goings forth are from of old, from everlasting” (Micah 5:2). He came down from heaven (John 6:51) to become the “Savior of the world” (1 John 4:14).

During His pilgrimage on earth, unlike any other person, Jesus “committed no sin” (1 Peter 2:22). He alone “died for our sins ... was buried, and ... rose again the third day” (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). Today, He alone is “the Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6).

By contrast, “All have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). “There is none righteous, no, not one” (Romans 3:10).

After Peter made his bold confession, “Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven’” (verse 17). Notice carefully: Peter was “blessed.”

Why? Because he understood who Jesus was—that He was “the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

This knowledge was not something Peter could congratulate himself for discovering, for it didn't originate with him. He was mere “flesh and blood.” Rather, it had been divinely “revealed” by our “Father who is in heaven.” And what an insight it was! From heaven's perspective, it was a milestone moment. Peter was truly “blessed.”

In this light, it's time to examine Matthew 16:18–19—the key text—the true interpretation of which either validates the Roman Catholic Church's claim that Jesus Christ built His church on Peter, and that its popes are Peter's successors; or, quite frankly, exposes that claim as fraudulent. It can be no other way. The New Testament tells us that Jesus Christ is “the truth” (John 14:6), and that “no lie is of the truth” (1 John 2:21).

Rome's claims about its popes are large, bold, and have been made public before the world. Such claims *should* be investigated. Ultimately, they're either true or false. They can't be both. If they are true, then popes really are God's spokesmen on earth. If false, how can they legitimately represent One who “committed no sin,” and never lied?

I trust you can see the significance of this issue.

In Matthew 16:18, immediately following Peter's confession that Jesus was “the Christ, the Son

of the living God” (verse 16), and immediately after Jesus’ follow-up statement that Peter had received this special knowledge by divine revelation (verse 17), our Lord declared: “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” The red hot issue is: who is that rock? Peter or Christ Himself?

Before examining the Greek words that Matthew used for “Peter” and “rock” in verse 18—and Catholic counterarguments about those Greek words—let’s review the basic flow of the dialog itself. Here are the simple facts:

1. Jesus had asked the disciples about *His own identity* (verses 13–15).
2. Peter answered correctly, that *Jesus Himself* was “the Christ, the Son of the living God” (verse 16).
3. Peter’s answer didn’t come from his own weak flesh and blood, but from *God alone* (verse 17).
4. Jesus then responded to Peter by saying, “On *this rock* I will build My church” (verse 18).

Before going further, at this point it seems to me that “this rock” is Jesus Christ Himself, rather than a fallen mortal like Peter. This conclusion is strengthened by the last verse of this particular

section, which states that after their dialog was over, Jesus “commanded His disciples that they should tell no one that *He was Jesus the Christ*” (verse 20, italics added). Yet more proof is needed than merely my opinion. Let's proceed.

The Greek/Aramaic Controversy

In the interpretation of Matthew 16:18, there is a Greek/Aramaic controversy between Protestants (who reject Rome's claim that popes uniquely speak for God) and Catholics (who believe they do). Let's start with the Greek. The book of Matthew and the New Testament were written in Greek. Greek was a common language in Christ's day, although many other languages were spoken.

In the Greek text of Matthew's gospel, two different Greek words are used for “Peter” and “rock.” When Jesus said, “you are Peter,” the Greek word for Peter is *petros*, which means “a stone (pebble), such as a small rock found along a pathway.”⁶ Yet, when He said, “On this rock I will build My church,” the Greek word for rock is *petra*, which means “a huge mass of rock (a boulder), such as a projecting cliff.”⁷

One example illustrating that *petra* typically means a large, massive rock is the city of Petra located in southern Jordan, not far from Jerusalem.

Named one of the “Seven Wonders of the World” in 2007, and also chosen in 2008 by *Smithsonian* magazine as one of “28 Places to See before You Die,” Petra is an incredible city carved into gigantic rock formations. It’s called, “Petra: Ancient City of Rock,” by LiveScience.⁸

Petros (a small stone or pebble) and *petra* (a huge mass of rock) are variations of the same Greek word, yet they are distinct, as their spelling indicates. *Petros* is a masculine form, while *petra* is feminine. *If we stick to the Greek text*, it seems that Jesus made a careful play on words. He essentially said, “You are Peter [*petros*, a small stone or pebble], and on this rock [*petra*, a large massive rock, meaning Himself] I will build My church.”

This *petros/petra* argument is highly satisfying to Bible-believing Protestants who reject Rome’s claim that God’s church is built on a mere man, Peter, and that Roman popes are Peter’s successors. Yet Catholic apologists have definite counterarguments that should be fairly considered. A *Catholic Answers* article entitled, “Origins of Peter as Pope,” declares:

Jesus spoke Aramaic ... thus, what Jesus actually said to Peter in Aramaic was: “You are *Kepha* and on this very *kepha* I will build my Church.”⁹

Essentially, Catholic scholars argue that although Matthew wrote his book in Greek, the original words that Jesus spoke were in Aramaic, and because the Aramaic word for “Peter” is *kepha*, and because the Aramaic word for “rock” is also *kepha*, the sentence structure would look like this:

You are Peter [*kepha*], and on this rock [*kepha*]
I will build my Church.¹⁰

Thus, according to the Catholic/Aramaic argument, *Peter is the rock*. Let's examine this. First of all, did Jesus speak Aramaic? Most likely He did, for Aramaic was commonly spoken by first-century Palestinian Jews. But other languages were available to Him, too. In Acts 26:14, Paul testified that when he first heard the risen Christ speak to him, Jesus spoke “in the Hebrew language.”

In John 19:1–11, Jesus spoke with Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor. In that instance, He probably spoke Latin, the common language of Romans. When Jesus was crucified, Pilate placed an inscription above His head, “written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin,” stating, “JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS” (John 19:19–20).

What language did Jesus speak in Matthew 16:13–20? As I see it, there is only one answer that both Protestants and Catholics can be absolutely certain of: we don't know, for we weren't there.

Thus, the Aramaic argument lacks proof. But here's something we do know for sure: Matthew wrote his book in Greek, and in the Greek text the distinction is clear. Matthew used one Greek word for Peter (*petros*) and a different Greek word for rock (*petra*).

Catholic apologists have other arguments to support their position, such as providing detailed quotes from some of the "Church Fathers" (influential Christian leaders who lived after the time of Christ), some of whom similarly believed that Peter was the rock.¹¹ But the problem is that their writings often contradict each other, so it is impossible to fully trust everything they wrote. Instead, the Bible urges us to rely on "*all Scripture*" (the written text) that is "given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine" (2 Timothy 3:16). Thus, it is Scripture itself—not the church fathers—that has the final word on "doctrine."

A Closer Look at Matthew 16:18

Let's consider some more evidence. Look closely again at the actual sentence structure of Matthew 16:18:

And I also say to you that *you are Peter*, and on *this rock* I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

Notice carefully: Jesus didn't say, "You are Peter, and *on you* I will build My church." Rather, He said, "You are Peter [a mere man], and on *this rock* [something massive, something separate from Peter] I will build My church." Therefore, the sentence structure lends itself to "this rock" being someone besides Peter. Based on the immediate context, that rock would be "the Christ, the Son of the living God."

If you are a sincere, truth-seeking Catholic, I simply ask that you ponder these things, and let God lead you. It is clear from the context of Matthew 16:13–20 that the focus of the narrative is the identity of Jesus. Right? Clearly, He is the living center of heaven's plan of salvation.

In this light, would it make sense for the unique Christ, the Son of the living God, to abruptly shift gears in verse 18 and say that He is going to build His battle-torn church on one solitary sinful mortal man named Peter? No, it wouldn't, especially when we discover that immediately after this same dialog Peter became Satan's mouthpiece (Matthew 16:21–23), and later even denied his Lord with cursing and swearing (Matthew 26:74). Surely Peter's later actions weren't rock-like. The "gates of Hades" *did* prevail against Peter many times.

Who Is the Rock?

Can we know for sure who the rock is? Yes, but not by meandering through the maze of men's minds, or even by wading through the opinions of scholars, for they are merely "flesh and blood" too. Thankfully, God has given us something infinitely more solid than that. In the same book where Jesus spoke of "this rock," He provided the key to unlocking the truth. Twelve chapters earlier we find Jesus being fiercely tempted by the devil. How did our Savior overcome his infernal adversary? "It is *written*," was His weapon. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by *every word* that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4, italics added).

Don't miss this: Jesus conquered by knowing and using God's Word. He wasn't referring to the New Testament alone, for in Matthew 4:4 He was quoting Deuteronomy 8:3. Thus "every word" applies to both Old and New Testaments, just like Paul's statement that "All Scripture" is God-inspired (2 Timothy 3:16). Based on this, let's find out what "Scripture" teaches about the rock. The Old Testament reports:

1. "*The Lord is my rock*," wrote David, "and my fortress and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I trust" (Psalm 18:2, italics added).

2. "For who *is* God, except the Lord? *And who is a rock, except our God?*" (2 Samuel 22:32, italics added).
3. "You *are* My witnesses. Is there a God besides Me? *Indeed there is no other Rock; I know not one*" (Isaiah 44:8, italics added).

That last passage above is most significant. God Almighty speaks to us. "Indeed," says the Lord, "there is no other Rock" besides Himself, "not one."

What about the New Testament? In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul wrote about the journeys of the ancient Israelites after their deliverance from Egypt. Referring to the "spiritual Rock" that followed them and who miraculously gave them water in the desert, Paul clarified: "*that Rock was Christ*" (verse 4, italics added). Thus, to David, the Lord was his "rock." To Paul, the "Rock" was Christ Himself. And guess what Greek word Paul used for "Rock"? *Petra*—the exact same Greek word for rock used in Matthew 16:18.

Jesus knew the Old Testament scriptures. He knew that David wrote, "the Lord is my rock," and that God told Isaiah, "there is no other Rock ... not one." He also knew that we are to be His "witnesses."

Putting these pieces together—like the legendary Sherlock Holmes did when solving crimes—it is reasonable to conclude that when Jesus told Peter, “on this rock I will build My church,” He could not have been referring to a mere man, for this would deny God’s Word. Instead, Jesus was saying that He, “the Christ, the Son of the living God,” was equal with God Himself, and that a church built on this impregnable foundation could never be conquered by Lucifer’s host of demonic spirits.

The Keys of the Kingdom

In Matthew 16:19 Jesus continued:

I will give you [Peter] the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

Here Jesus gave Peter “the keys of the kingdom.” Believing that Peter is the rock, and that popes are Peter’s successors, the Roman Church interprets this verse to mean that papal leaders (above other Christians) have been given the keys of authority over God’s church on earth. Let’s examine this.

First, look again at the context. In verse 17, Jesus had just clarified that Peter’s insight into His identity didn’t come from Peter’s own “flesh and

blood,” but was divinely revealed by God. The lesson is that man can't take credit for anything.

The same is true of “the keys.” They come from God alone. The words, “I will give you the keys,” are *Christ's own words*. He spoke them. His very words open and close the heavenly gates. Jesus also said, “The flesh profits nothing. *The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life*” (John 6:63, italics added). In contrast to men's fleshy theories, thoughts, and opinions, Jesus Christ's words have eternal authority and give everlasting life!

In the verse immediately preceding “the keys” promise to Peter, Jesus declared that “the gates of Hades” would not conquer His church. Significantly, Jesus used exactly the same words (“keys” and “Hades”) when He spoke to John on the Isle of Patmos:

I have the keys of Hades and of Death. (Revelation 1:18, italics added)

Hades literally means “the grave.” The Bible teaches that Christ's words can raise dead people. He spoke, and the lifeless heart of Lazarus was revived (see John 11:43–44). When Jesus returns in blazing apocalyptic glory, “all who are in the graves will hear *His voice* and come forth” (John 5:28–29, italics added).

In Matthew 16:19, when Jesus gave Peter “the keys of the kingdom,” this means that He was

officially giving Peter His own kingly words of authority for use in holy ministry. These sacred “keys”—which can unlock human hearts to His love, or slam the New Jerusalem gates tight based on how sinners respond—are the words of “Christ, the Son of the Living God” Himself.

Here's another “key” point. While it's true that in Matthew 16:19 Jesus gave Peter the official commission to minister to God's people using His words in His name by His power to build up His church, two chapters later, in Matthew 18, Jesus extended this same honor to all His disciples, not just to Peter. Addressing them all (see verse 1), our Lord stated:

Assuredly, I say to you [the Greek word for “you” is *humin*, which is plural], whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. (Matthew 18:18)

So to focus exclusively on Matthew 16:19, while neglecting Matthew 18:18, doesn't tell the whole story. It's a half-truth. Half-truths can lead to whole lies, if we're not careful.

From Caesarea Philippi to Roman Popes

Roman Catholic theology teaches that: 1) Peter was “first” among Christ's disciples; 2) Peter is the

rock upon which Jesus built His church; 3) Peter alone was given “the keys” of authority over God’s church; 4) Peter became the first pope; 5) Pope Peter later became the first bishop of a Christian church planted in Rome; 6) Peter’s authority has been transferred to a succession of Roman Catholic Church leaders—all the way to the current Pope Francis.

That’s quite an elaborate system of theological beliefs and propositions. But what is most striking is that there is not an explicit Bible verse to support these theories, not one. Let’s look at more Bible evidence that focuses our attention on Christ, not Peter.

First, even after hearing what Jesus said near Caesarea Philippi, it is clear from many other New Testament passages that none of the other disciples believed that Peter was first among them, or that God’s church was built upon Peter. Many months later, on the night before Jesus was crucified, our Lord met again with His disciples in a room inside Jerusalem. As they prepared for a Passover meal, unfortunately, “there was also a dispute among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest” (Luke 22:24).

Why would the disciples be arguing about which of them was greatest if Jesus had previously selected Peter to be the head and rock of His

church? Obviously, He hadn't. The very idea of any one of His erring disciples becoming the head of God's entire church is repulsive. It can't be so. None were qualified.

According to the Bible, God alone is the Rock—and *there is no other*. The very dispute about which disciple was "the greatest" shows: 1) that the other disciples didn't think it was Peter, and 2) that they were infected with a slimy spirit of selfishness that produced such an argument in the first place.

If Jesus wanted Peter to be head of His church, surely He could have dissipated that argument by simply saying, "Friends, don't you remember what I said near Caesarea Philippi, that Peter is the head and rock of My church?" That would have settled the contest. But He didn't. Instead, He sought to slay their selfishness by doing two things: 1) humbly washing their filthy feet (see John 13:1–15), and 2) giving them this special instruction:

[Jesus] said to them, "*The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called 'benefactors.'* *But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves.*" (Luke 22:25–26, italics added)

Christ's disciples were not to imitate the kings of the earth. The question of who is first, or greatest, shouldn't be their concern; but quite the opposite. In God's kingdom, it is service, not self-exalting supremacy, that matters most. Years later, Peter's own letter revealed his view of himself when he wrote:

The elders who are among you I exhort, *I who am a fellow elder* and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away ... be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." (1 Peter 5:1-5, italics added)

Peter never called himself a "pope." Instead, he considered himself "a fellow elder" and "a witness of the sufferings of Christ." He also counseled his fellow elders to serve as godly overseers, not acting "as lords," or using compulsion, or seeking dishonest gain, but with humility, for "God resists the

proud, but gives grace to the humble.” By the time he wrote this, Peter had learned his lesson. He no longer wanted to be the greatest.

Here is a brief history lesson explaining why the Peter-pope theory developed. Unfortunately, it was rooted in a “dispute” just like the one that rattled Christ’s disciples the night before He hung on a cruel cross to unselfishly pay the price for all human sin—including the sins of Protestants, Catholics, you, me, and everyone else.

After the Holy Spirit’s descent at Pentecost (see Acts 2), Christianity spread like wildfire throughout the Roman Empire. Churches were established in many places, including inside the city of Rome itself. Paul wrote an inspired letter to those early Roman believers. His letter begins with, “To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints” (Romans 1:7).

Did Peter journey all the way to Rome? There’s no direct New Testament proof that he did. Even if he did, there is still no biblical evidence that he ever became Rome’s pope. And in Paul’s letter to the early church in Rome, he never mentioned Peter. Surely, if Peter founded that church and became its first pope, as Rome asserts, Paul would have mentioned this. But he didn’t. So we conclude that Peter was *not* a bishop of the Roman Church, and surely not its pope.

As time passed, the Roman church grew. In A.D. 330, the Roman emperor Constantine moved his governmental seat out of Rome to Constantinople, creating a leadership vacuum. The history is complex, but as time advanced—especially after the remaining Roman government collapsed in A.D. 476—the original church in Rome changed course. Was this transition like a beautiful butterfly exiting a chrysalis? Unfortunately, no. Instead, history reveals that its metamorphosis was more comparable to a clean person diving headlong into the mud of politics and self-service.

Rivers of blood flowed too, especially as some popes not only sought “dishonest gain,” but even promoted cruel “compulsion”—such as during the days of the persecuting Inquisition—which is exactly what Peter warned against. Amidst fierce competition to become number one over other sister churches in Alexandria, Jerusalem, and Antioch, the Roman church eventually used the “Primacy of Peter,” “Peter is the rock,” and “Peter was a Roman pope” theories to strengthen its authority. By courting European kings, it finally dominated Europe.

Sober spiritual reflection detects that Rome's entire quest, or “dispute,” to prove that Peter—whom it claims as its pope—is the head and rock of the church, is a manifestation of the same

self-exalting spirit that not only infected Christ's disciples the night before He died, but which also led to our dear Savior being mercilessly spiked to a cross. All selfish pride should be rejected with loathing—wherever it's found.

“The kings of the Gentiles,” Jesus told His disciples, seek “lordship” over their subjects, “but not so among you” (Luke 22:25–26). Peter heard this, which is why he warned his “fellow elders” to abhor “being lords” over other believers, but to be “examples to the flock ... with humility” (1 Peter 5:2, 5).

Self, however, dies hard. As the wheels of history rolled, Papal Rome succumbed to temptation, to the all-too-common thirst for power, developing its Peter-pope doctrines to establish superior authority. Notice again this statement from the 1994 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

[Section] **882.** *The Pope, Bishop of Rome and Peter's successor ... as pastor of the entire Church has full, supreme, and universal power over the whole Church, a power which he can always exercise unhindered.*¹²

“Full, supreme, universal power over the whole church ... which he [the Pope] can always exercise unhindered”! What is this but seeking “lordship” which Peter warned against? Such a

claim reeks of pride—the same pride that ultimately turned shiny Lucifer into a dark devil (see Isaiah 14:12–14). Paul warned of this too when he told Christian leaders to beware of being “puffed up with pride” lest they “fall into the same condemnation as the devil” (1 Timothy 3:6).

Jesus Christ alone is the foundation and head of God's church. As it is written:

No other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, *which is Jesus Christ*. (1 Corinthians 3:11, italics added)

[God] gave *Him* [Jesus Christ] *to be the head* over all things to the church. (Ephesians 1:22, italics added)

He [Jesus Christ] is *the head of the body, the church*, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, *that in all things He may have the preeminence*. (Colossians 1:18, italics added)

In Peter's first letter, after exalting Jesus as the “chief cornerstone” (1 Peter 2:6–7) of God's church, he then refers to Jesus as “rock” (verse 8). Guess what Greek word the Holy Spirit inspired Peter to pick for “rock”? *Petra*.

Paul wrote the same, “As it is written, ‘Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and a rock [*petra*] of offense, and whoever believes on Him will not

be put to shame” (Romans 9:33). Therefore, if we stick to what Peter wrote in his letter, and to what Paul wrote to the believers “in Rome,” Jesus Christ alone is our Petra—our Rock of Ages.

May we all be enlightened, humbled, convicted, blessed, and encouraged by reading the following words from the famous Christian hymn “My Hope is Built on Nothing Less,” written by Edward Mote in 1834:

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.

*On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand,
All other ground is sinking sand.*

When darkness veils His lovely face,
I rest on His unchanging grace;
In every high and stormy gale,
My anchor holds within the veil.

*On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand,
All other ground is sinking sand.*

His oath, His covenant, His blood
Support me in the whelming flood;
When all around my soul gives way,
He then is all my hope and stay.

*On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand,
All other ground is sinking sand.*

When He shall come with trumpet sound,
Oh, may I then in Him be found;
Dressed in His righteousness alone,
Faultless to stand before the throne.

*On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand,
All other ground is sinking sand.¹³*

When we accept God's words as recorded in the Holy Bible, then "flesh and blood" has not revealed these truths to us, but our merciful Father in heaven (Matthew 16:17). Jesus alone is "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (verse 16). He alone is "the rock" upon which God's church is built (Matthew 16:18; Isaiah 44:8; 1 Corinthians 10:4). He alone paid an infinite price for our sins (1 John 2:2). No one else can rescue us from pit of pride and selfishness, and save us by His matchless

grace (see Matthew 1:21; Ephesians 2:8–9). Jesus loves us all. May *He* become the supreme focus of our faith, love, and hearts' affections, rather than any fallen man, including Peter.

“The words” of Jesus Christ Himself “are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63). By embracing His words, you too can hold the golden “keys” that unlock heaven.

Grasp them firmly; but don't leave them in your pocket.

Use them.

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(Endnotes)

- 1 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Section 880 (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Company, 1994), italics added.
- 2 *Ibid.*, Section 881, italics added.
- 3 *Ibid.*, Section 882, italics added.
- 4 *Ibid.*, Section 552, italics added.
- 5 Dr. James Allan Francis, "One Solitary Life," Baptist Young People's Union, Los Angeles, CA, July 11, 1926 (adaptation of original text), http://www.celebratingholidays.com/?page_id=4456, accessed April 19, 2017.
- 6 "4074. Petros," Bible Hub, <http://biblehub.com/greek/4074.htm>, accessed April 19, 2017.
- 7 "4073. Petra," <http://biblehub.com/greek/4073.htm>, accessed April 19, 2017.
- 8 Owen Jarus, "Petra: Ancient city of Rock," *Live Science*, September 13:2012, <http://www.livescience.com/23168-petra.html>, accessed April 19, 2017.
- 9 "Origins of Peter as Pope," Catholic Answers, <https://www.catholic.com/tract/origins-of-peter-as-pope>, accessed April 19, 2017.
- 10 *Ibid.*
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 *Catechism*, Section 882, italics added.
- 13 Edward Mote, "My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less," 1834, Hymnary.org, http://hymnary.org/text/my_hope_is_built_on_nothing_less, accessed April 26, 2017.