

# Reflections on the Pope

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*Is the New Testament information regarding Peter consistent with the image of the pope? Do the Scriptures teach that the church of Jesus Christ was founded upon the apostle Peter?*

Fifty-eight million American Roman Catholics call him “Holy Father” (in violation of Matthew 23:9). He is revered as the head of the church on earth (though Christ possesses all authority, in heaven and on earth, and is the exclusive head of the church – Matt. 28:18; Col. 1:18).

Devotees of the Catholic religion assert that he is the successor of “Saint Peter,” and they contend that his authority is derived from the fact that the church was founded upon Peter. World leaders drool at his feet. The United States has an ambassador (supported with tax revenues) to his little “state” of 108 acres, the Vatican. We are speaking, of course, of the Roman pontiff, John Paul II.

The doctrine of the primacy of Peter, and the papal authority supposedly derived from the Lord’s apostle, is the very foundation of Roman Catholicism. The system, however, is barren of any semblance of biblical support. In this article, we will briefly reflect upon two ideas. First, is the New Testament information regarding Peter consistent with the image of the pope? Second, do the Scriptures teach that the church of Jesus Christ was founded upon the apostle Peter?

## Was Peter Pope?

The biblical description of the apostle Peter, as compared to that of the Roman pontiff, is like contrasting daylight with darkness. Consider the following factors:

- ✍ The Roman Church considers the state of celibacy to be a holier status than that of matrimony, hence, the pope cannot be married. Clearly, though, Peter was a married man.
- ✍ Matthew records an instance where the Lord healed the apostle’s mother-in-law (8:14). And in a defense of his apostleship, Paul once said that he had as much right to have a wife as Cephas (Peter) did (1 Cor. 9:5).
- ✍ Additionally, Peter was an “elder” (1 Pet. 5:1), which means that he was also a husband (1 Tim. 3:2).
- ✍ A survey of the news coverage of the pope’s activities revealed how very desirous he is of human adulation. People bow before him, he extends his hand for kisses, etc. By way of vivid contrast, when the centurion, Cornelius, fell at Peter’s feet to worship, the apostle rebuked him thusly: “Stand up; I myself also am a man” (Acts 10:26). Not only was Peter not given to inordinate adoration, when he sinned by hypocritically refusing to fellowship Gentiles, he was openly rebuked to his face by Paul (Gal. 2:11ff).

There is a great deal of information about the travels of Peter as his apostolic activity took him from place to place. And yet, there is not one line in the New Testament which suggests that he was ever in the city of Rome, much less exercising the authority of the church in that community.

Consider this: when Paul penned his epistle to the saints in the city of Rome (c. A.D. 56 – perhaps more than a score of years after the church was established there), though he sent personal greetings to, and mentioned, more than twenty people (Rom. 16), he never once referred to the “Holy Father,” who was supposedly occupying the papal chair in that city. A strange circumstance indeed – if the claims of Catholicism are true.

Moreover, towards the end of his ministry, Paul spent two years (under house arrest) in Rome. How odd that the divine record (Acts 28) makes no mention of any association with the “pope.” This is especially significant in light of the fact that inspiration mentions a brief, fifteen-day trip that Paul made to Jerusalem during which time he saw Peter (Gal. 1:18). And yet, two years in the same city with the “pontiff” – and not a word about it!

About twenty years after the establishment of the church, a controversy arose regarding circumcision. Would Gentiles be obligated to receive this ordinance in conjunction with their acceptance of Christianity?

A council was convened in Jerusalem to discuss the matter. Had Peter been pope, surely he would have presided over this affair; but he did not. James was the leading figure; Peter was merely a testifying witness (Acts 15).

There is simply no evidence at all that Peter was ever recognized as a pope. As a matter of fact, the term “pope” is not even in the New Testament!

### **Was The Church Built On Peter?**

Catholicism alleges that Matthew 16:18 teaches that the church was built on Peter. Jesus said:

“I say unto you, that you are Peter [*petros* - rock], and upon this rock [*petra*] I will build my church.”

The relationship between the name “Peter,” and the term “rock,” is the basis of the Catholic argument. The fact is, however, the Lord took deliberate pains to draw a clear contrast between Peter, and the “rock” to which He alluded.

Note these very important points:

✍ *Petros* (Peter) is a masculine gender noun; *petra* (rock) is a feminine form. The change in grammatical form is not incidental.

✍ *Petros* suggests a small rock, whereas *petra* indicates a boulder. The contrast is significant.

✍ Jesus employed the second person, *su* (you), in addressing Peter, but He changed to the third person, *taute* (this) when referring to the rock.

In this narrative, the Lord uses the symbolism of the construction of a building to make His point. Within the illustration, Christ is the builder, the church is the edifice, and Peter’s confession that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, is the foundational truth upon which the house of God was to be erected.

Then, hinting of Peter’s privilege of proclaiming the gospel – first to the Jews (Acts 2), and then to the Gentiles (Acts 10) – the Lord suggested that the apostle would be granted the “keys,” i.e., the authority to open (cf. Rev. 1:18), of the kingdom.

Peter cannot occupy the position of both “foundation” and “door-opener” in the same illustration, without violating the rules of symbolism.

The church of Jesus Christ was not founded upon Peter. Catholicism is a corruption of the primitive Christian system. It is a manifestation of that great departure from the faith of which Paul warned (see 2 Thess. 2:1ff; 1 Tim. 4:1ff).