

ROMANISM

In the Light of Scripture

by

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CHAPTER FOUR

WAS PETER THE FIRST POPE?

A VATICAN COUNCIL was called in 1869 by Pius XI to consider the question of the infallibility of the Pope.

In the course of debate over the issue, opposition was raised to the adoption of that doctrine as a dogma of the Roman faith. Bishop Strossmayer with eloquence reviewed the past history of the Roman Church down through the centuries and pled with that body not to enact into dogma the doctrine of papal infallibility. He traced the course of the history of Romanism and pointed out case after case where the official pronouncements of one pope had been rescinded by his successor. With candor he pointed out the dark history of murder, incest, adultery, and avarice associated with the Roman papacy. He concluded his eloquent argument by saying that if Rome affirmed the infallibility of the pope they would leave themselves open to ridicule and scorn by their enemies, the Protestants, who would have history on their side. But in July of 1870 the Vatican council enacted into dogma the doctrine of papal infallibility.

Such a doctrine was not based upon the Word of God or on the teaching of Scripture but upon the teaching that Peter was the first pope.

This doctrine of the primacy of Peter was not supported by Scripture, but rather by the tradition of the Roman Church. That Vatican council reaffirmed the creed of Pius IV, who in 1564 said,

“I admit the holy Scriptures, according to that sense which our Holy Mother, the church, has held and does hold, to which it belongs to judge of the true sense and interpretation of the Scriptures, neither will I ever take and interpret them otherwise than according to the unanimous consent of the fathers. And further, I most steadfastly admit and embrace apostolical and ecclesiastical tradition and all other observances and constitutions of the same church.”

Pius IV declared that he would admit the voice of Scripture as holding light in darkness only as that Scripture was interpreted by the church, but that he would most steadfastly admit and embrace apostolical and ecclesiastical tradition. It was on the basis of this apostolical and ecclesiastical tradition that Rome has espoused the doctrine that the church was founded upon Peter, that Peter was its first pope, and that authority was transmitted from Peter to his successors in an unbroken line which comes down to the present incumbent in the papal office.

Protestants frequently are somewhat embarrassed for they recognize that Protestantism is a break from Roman traditions over four hundred years ago. Many Protestants feel that perhaps they have abandoned that which was a true position, and perhaps the church, after all, was founded upon Peter. The average Protestant is uncertain as to the declarations of the Word of God concerning the position of Peter, and his place in the church following the death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is our purpose to examine with you the claims of Rome and the teachings of Scripture to answer this important question: *Was Peter the First Pope? and Was the Church Founded upon Peter?*

The doctrine of papal infallibility rests upon three essential claims which the Roman Church makes for Peter:

- 1) the claim that Peter was the rock on which the church was built;
- 2) the claim that Peter had the power to forgive sins and this power was transmitted to his successors;
- 3) the claim that Peter was the founder and the first bishop of the Church in Rome.

If the first claim of Rome is true that Peter was the rock, we would expect a clear, unbroken, and unanimous tradition to that effect in the Roman Church, for that church says they will accept that tradition which is “with the unanimous consent of the fathers.” But does this dogma have the unanimous approval of the church fathers?

When you go back to the early church fathers, among those whom the Romanists themselves claim as their authoritative teachers, we find no less than four conflicting views as to the interpretation of the rock upon which the church was based.

Origen, Cyprian and Jerome held that Matthew 16:18 was addressed to Peter and that he is the rock. But Jerome, Origen and Basil said that this was addressed not only to Peter, but to all of the disciples as well.

We find that Hilary, Ambrose, Gregory and Chrysostom said that this was not addressed to Peter, not to Peter’s successors, but that the rock in Matthew 16:18 referred to Peter’s great confession, **“Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”**

Finally, Augustine said that the rock did not refer to Peter personally, nor to Peter and all the apostles, nor even to Peter’s confession, but that it had reference to Jesus Christ Himself.

We would observe at the outset that the tradition that Peter was the rock does not meet the test of their own assertions, for there was not unanimous consent of the fathers that Peter was the rock upon the church was founded. But what says the Word of God? Let us look into Matthew 16 to see our Lord’s statement and to understand what was written for our edification. In verse 13 we find that Jesus had come into Caesarea Philippi.

After an extensive ministry in that area, He had gathered together the disciples to question them concerning the results of His ministry. Jesus Christ, by word and work, had been presenting Himself as the Son of God, the Messiah. Now He wanted to evaluate the response to this presentation of Himself. He asked the question of the disciples, **“Whom do men say that I the Son of Man, am?”** Another way of stating this question would be, “Have the people understood My person? What is their answer to My presentation?”

Our Lord was told of the popular explanations of the person of Christ. Different individuals had different interpretations of His person. Some identified Jesus with John the Baptist, because His message was the same, the message of repentance with a view to the remission of sins; a message of judgment; the announcement that the Kingdom was at hand. Others equated Jesus with Elias, the fiery prophet of the Old Testament who announced judgment from God upon sin. Others equated Him with Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, whose heart was broken because of the sin of the nation Israel. Still others without identifying Christ with any specific prophet said that He was one of the Old Testament prophets; that is, He came with a message from God; He had been sent by divine authority.

After these interpretations had been reported to the Lord Jesus, He turned to them with the question, **“But whom say ye that I am?”** Our Lord asked, “Do you have any more insight than the nation Israel has, or are you any better able to take the evidence, evaluate it, and draw your conclusions in the light of the Old Testament? Have you seen that I am the Son of God, the Messiah?”

Peter answered and said, **“Thou art the Christ,”** or we could interpret it, “Thou art the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Peter’s word, **“Thou art the Christ,”** refers to His office, and **“the Son of the living God”** refers to His person. Peter, with the twelve, had been able to take the words and the work of Christ, to evaluate them in the light of the Old Testament revelation, and draw the conclusion that, as to His office, Jesus Christ met all the qualifications for Messiah, and as to His person, He was truly the Son of the living God.

Because of this affirmation, our Lord pronounced a beatitude upon Peter: **“Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee.”**

The nation Israel had the same evidence that Peter had; the whole nation had the same ability to interpret the facts that Peter had. And yet the nation Israel had already concluded that Jesus Christ was a blasphemous impostor. Why didn’t Peter follow in that same majority report? Because there had been a work of divine revelation so that the person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ were clearly revealed by God to those who would accept Jesus Christ by faith.

“Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.”

What Peter perceived he perceived because of revelation given to him, revelation of Christ’s person and office.

“And I say . . . unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church.”

Here is the first prophecy in the Word of God that the Lord Jesus Christ is going to turn from His peculiar mission to the nation Israel and is going to offer a gospel to Jew and Gentile alike. This is the first prophecy that the Lord Jesus Christ is going to gather together, under His headship, all who will accept Him as a personal Saviour. It is the first prophecy of the church. Yet it is said of Peter, **“Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church.”**

All interpreters of the Word, both Protestant and Roman, have recognized that the Lord Jesus is using a play on words, for the word Peter and the word rock are almost identical in the text, and Peter means *“a rock or a stone.”* In verse 17, the Lord has referred to him as Simon, son of Jona. Simon was the name given to him at his birth and it means *“unstable, vacillating,”* and the Lord changed his name to Peter, *“a rock.”* The Lord is saying literally, *“Thou art ‘Petros’ [the masculine form of the word], and upon this ‘petra’ [the feminine form of the word] I will build My church. Thou art a rock, Peter, and upon this rock, I will build My church.”*

It is at this point we find Roman and Protestant interpretations at variance, for the Romanist says our Lord’s words mean, *“thou art Peter, the rock, and upon thee I will build My church,”* whereas the Protestant finds another interpretation.

There are several interpretations of the meaning of *“this rock.”* Rome says it is Peter himself. Among some Romanist and some Protestant interpretations, *“this rock”* refers to verse 16, so that it has reference to Peter’s affirmation. There Peter had said, **“Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”** According to this view Christ says to him, ***“Thou art Peter, and upon this affirmation, or upon the truth contained in this affirmation, namely, that I am the Son of God, I will build my church.”***

We do recognize theologically that the church is built upon the truth of the deity of Jesus Christ. With the exception of Unitarians, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and a few others, all those who call themselves Christian acknowledge the fact of the deity of Christ. And it would be possible to interpret this passage in that sense.

Many believe, however, that *“this rock”* is a reference, not to Peter, nor to Peter and all the other disciples, nor to Peter’s affirmation of faith in the deity of Christ, nor even to the deity of Christ itself, but rather to Christ Himself. Thus the verse is to be understood: ***“upon this rock, that is, upon Myself, I will build My church.”***

In the text, there is a difference between the masculine and the feminine form of this word rock. The masculine *petros*, from which we get the name Peter, refers to *a building stone, a large stone that has been taken out of the quarry.* When stones were fashioned to fit into a magnificent building and were hewn into their square form to be put into the wall, they were referred to by the masculine form, they were *“petros.”* The feminine form *petra* refers to *the great ledge of rock, or the quarry, from which the building blocks were taken.* And it seems as though our Lord is saying, ***“Thou art a building stone, but upon the great ledge of rock upon which you have been founded and from which you have been taken I will build My church.”***

In the New Testament you will find a number of passages where stone or rock is used in reference to Jesus Christ.

For instance, our Lord uses it Himself in Matthew 21:42: “Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.” If you examine the context, you will find that the Lord Jesus is talking about Himself and referring to Himself as the stone which the builders rejected.

Further, we find that Peter referred to Jesus Christ as the rock or the stone: **“Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. 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”** (Acts 4:10-12).

There, referring to the Lord Jesus Christ, Peter called Him the stone. See it again in I Peter 2:6: **“Behold, I lay in Sion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.”**

In writing and preaching concerning the stone, Peter does not refer it to himself as though he were the rock, but uses it to refer to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul refers to Jesus Christ as the rock or the stone, in Ephesians 2:19-22: **“Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord.”**

The Apostle Paul adds his testimony to that of the Apostle Peter that the stone is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now when Rome would set aside the Lord Jesus as the chief cornerstone upon which the church is built and claim that Peter holds the place of primacy and is the rock, they base their interpretation upon several considerations. Luke 22:31-32 is used as support for their doctrine of the primacy of Peter. There the Lord says, **“Simon, Simon, 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.”**

They take those last three words, **“strengthen thy brethren,”** and contend that that confers the place of primacy upon Peter so that he was elevated to a position above all the others. Our Lord is doing no such thing. In this context He is predicting the denial of Peter. He promises Peter that he will be restored. As a result he can declare the same truth that John declared, that if we have sinned confess our sins, **“He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”** Peter would be able to present himself as one who had been tested, who had stumbled and fallen but who, by grace, had been restored to an intimacy of fellowship again. There is no primacy for Peter in Luke 22:32.

Rome further argues that in the Gospels where you have the list of the twelve disciples whom the Lord chose, Peter's name occurs first in each case. This proves the primacy of Peter, according to them. Rather than expressing any primacy, it seems as though the disciples are listed in the order of their call. When the Lord began to call His disciples, He called Simon, Andrew, James, and John; later others were added.

Another argument that Rome uses to support the primacy of Peter is found in Acts 2. Peter was the one selected to preach the sermon on the day of Pentecost. That indicates a special primacy of Peter, according to Rome. However, Peter claims no primacy there. He was appointed as a spokesman, but no primacy was conferred upon him.

In the fourth place, it is claimed that in Acts 15, where you find the first council of the church being held at Jerusalem, Peter was in the place of primacy. However, if you examine this contention, you will find that it does not harmonize with the Word. At the first church council in Jerusalem Peter was not there to preside, but to give a report. He simply stood up to tell what God had done through the preaching of the Gospel. James was the one who was in charge of the first council and directed the affairs of that body.

As you look into the Upper Room, when the Lord brought the disciples together and they were seated there around the table for the Last Supper, Simon Peter was not given the place of prominence next to the Lord; he was seated down the table. He had to wigwag to the one who was reclining next to the Lord to ask him to find out from Christ the identity of the betrayer.

We do not find in the New Testament any authorization for the claim that Peter is the rock and that primacy was given to Peter which elevated him above all the other believers and above the apostles.

We come now to the second claim: that Peter had the power to forgive sins and that he passed that power on to his successors. This is based on Matthew 16:19: **“And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”**

The Roman interpretation of this passage is that Peter was given the power to open up the gates of the church and to receive into the church; to receive into the church is synonymous with receiving into Heaven. The **“keys of the kingdom”** refers to Peter's right to admit into the church and into Heaven, or to exclude from the church and, consequently, to exclude from Heaven.

When we examine the Word of God we find that a key was the sign of a steward.

When the master of a household had great possessions, instead of administering those himself, he would turn the keys of his treasure house or his storehouse over to a trusted servant. The steward was an administrator of the affairs of his master. The master went about his business and dismissed the storehouse from his mind. He committed the keys of that treasure house to a trusted servant.

Peter had just made the affirmation, **“Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”** The Lord said, **“Peter, I am going to make you the steward within my house and I am going to entrust to you the administration of this truth which you have just professed. I give to you the keys of the kingdom and it will be your responsibility to open these treasures and make them available to all who are in need.”**

When you turn to Acts 2, you find Peter opening up the Master’s treasure house and inviting all who have the need to come and satisfy themselves from those treasures. Peter said in Acts 2:36, **“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.”** And there Peter is only publicly affirming again what he had confessed in the presence of our Lord: Jesus Christ is both Lord and Christ. And when his hearers came to him and said, **“What shall we do?”** he said, **“Repent, and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.”** There were added unto them about three thousand souls and **“the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”** Peter was administering the riches of his Master to all who were in need.

In Acts 10, you find Peter again using those keys to bring Gentiles to the blessing that had been provided by his Master. Peter went to Caesarea, into the house of Cornelius, and said to him: **“To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins”** (10:43). As a faithful steward, Peter took those treasures which he had found in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the Saviour, and distributed them to meet the need of those who would come to Him.

When we examine this phrase, **“binding and loosing,”** which was used in reference to Peter in Matthew 16:19; we find that it had a reference to the law. In Matthew 23:2-4 the Lord speaks to the disciples, saying, **“The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat: all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.”**

There the Lord speaks about the Pharisees binding the precepts and the curse of the law upon men, but they will not loose these individuals from the curse and the bondage of the law.

The law of Moses had been so added to by traditions that men could not be certain whether they had transgressed or not. Therefore, at the annual feasts of the Jews, a council of learned doctors would sit as a jury.

One who was concerned about his own conscience would present his case before these doctors of the law. They would hear the case and then examine the traditions of the Phariseeism. Then they would make their pronouncement. Either they would say, **“You are guilty of the law and we bind the curse of the law upon you,”** or they would say, **“You are not guilty of violating the law. We loose you from the penalty of that law which you were afraid you had violated.”**

To loose and to bind had to do with pronouncing judgment or release upon an individual.

Now when Peter is told, “**Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven,**” he is not given any authority to forgive sin; Peter is given authority to make a pronouncement concerning a man’s sin. When Peter preached the Gospel as he did in Acts 2 and 10 and on many other occasions, and a man heard Peter declare that Jesus is Lord and Christ, and said, “I accept Jesus Christ as my personal Saviour,” Peter had the authority to say, “I loose you from any curse of the law upon you”; as we would say it today, “You are saved.”

And if one heard the preaching of the Word and rejected the message, Peter had the right to say to him, “You are lost.” It was a man’s personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ that saved him. That individual who heard the Gospel and rejected it was lost because he had rejected the message. Peter’s pronouncement did not change the man’s position before God one whit. Yet Peter had the authority, as he opened up the treasure house of God’s blessing, to declare the individual saved or lost on the basis of his response to this proclamation of the Gospel.

We find that this same authority was given, not only to Peter, but to the other disciples as well. In Matthew 18:18, as the Lord addressed all of the disciples, He said, “**Verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.**”

It was the privilege of all the disciples to proclaim the Gospel and to officially declare that a man who received it was born into God’s family and to announce that a man who had rejected it was lost and separated from God forever.

When you look at the English translation in Matthew 16:19, it does appear as though Peter himself does the actual binding and the loosing. The text gives a satisfactory answer to the problem raised by this translation into English. Our Lord said literally, “***Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be that which has already been bound in heaven and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be that which has already been loosed in heaven.***” In that translation, which the Roman version mentions as an acceptable translation in the footnotes, it is God who does the binding; Peter has the right only to announce God’s judicial decision in response to an individual’s acceptance or rejection of the Gospel of Christ.

In the Book of Acts we have Peter’s own declaration as to how a man is forgiven.

According to the Romanist, basing it upon his interpretation of Matthew 16:19; we are told that an individual is forgiven because Peter remits his sins. Now listen to what Peter says in Acts 13:38: “**Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man [that is, Jesus Christ] is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.**”

Could anything be plainer than that?

Peter disclaims all right and authority to forgive sins himself, and directs men to the Lord Jesus Christ, who alone has the right to forgive sins.

The second claim of Rome, that Peter had power to forgive sins and that he passed that power to his successors, does not stand the investigation of the Word of God.

We come now to the third claim, that Peter was the founder of and first bishop in the church of Rome. Rome claims that Peter was bishop in Antioch from the year A.D. 39 to 42, and that then he was elevated to become bishop of Rome in the year 42 and stayed in what is called the Holy See for twenty-five years, during which time the church in Rome was founded.

This tradition that Peter founded the church at Rome was attributed first to Hippolytus, a leading Roman theologian in the third century, who, shortly before he died in A.D. 236, drew up a list of Roman bishops. He began with his own day and worked back. According to his reckoning a bishop by the name of Linus assumed the bishopric of Rome twenty-six years after Christ's ascension. But he was not able to establish a previous bishop. At the time of Hippolytus the church was debating the question of the superiority of the Roman church and the Roman bishops.

Therefore this theologian felt it necessary for the church in Rome to have some direct successor of Christ as bishop upon which they could base their claim that the Roman church was in a position of primacy over other churches. Since no predecessor could be found to connect the church in Rome directly to Christ, Hippolytus assigned Peter to the post to fill the gap to strengthen the claim that the church of Rome had the right to a position of prominence over all the other churches because it was founded by Christ and by Peter.

Let us examine this teaching in the light of the New Testament.

The first question: *"Was Peter bishop at Antioch from the year A.D. 39 to 42?"*

From Galatians 1:15-18 we infer that Peter was a resident of Jerusalem between the years 38 and 40. Paul, after his conversion, went down to Jerusalem to confer with the apostles who lived there, and Peter was one of them. According to Acts 9:26-32; after his time of residence in Jerusalem, Peter was found at Lydda.

Next, according to Acts 10, he ministered at Joppa. Again in Acts 10 he ministered in Caesarea Philippi. According to Acts 11:2, he left Caesarea Philippi and returned to Jerusalem, remaining there until he was imprisoned by Herod Agrippa I in A.D. 44 (according to Acts 12). Now if Peter was bishop in Antioch during that time, he certainly was an absentee bishop who gave no consideration to that church of which he was supposed to have been the spiritual overseer.

The second question: *"Is the Catholic Church correct in contending that Peter moved to Rome in the year 42 to start a twenty-five-year bishopric there, during which time he founded the church of Rome?"*

As we examine the Scriptures again, according to Acts 12, Peter was in prison in Jerusalem in the year 44. It would be difficult for Peter to be in both places at the same time but, according to the Roman tradition Peter was busy in Rome, founding the church at that time.

When you go to Acts 15; the year 49 shows Peter in Jerusalem at the first church council. No reference is made to any ministry in Rome. When Peter gives a report of his ministry, it was one within the bounds of Palestine, not outside that land. When Peter came into Antioch, as we read in Galatians 2, Peter and Paul had a very strong difference and Paul rebuked Peter. Peter was then ministering in Antioch and that would be around the year A.D. 50.

About eight years later, or in the year 58, the Apostle Paul wrote an epistle to the church at Rome. Let us look into the Epistle to the Romans to see whether, in writing to this assembly of believers, the Apostle Paul recognizes Peter's twenty-five-year ministry in that place.

In Romans 15:20 Paul tells us of his method of ministry. He says there, "**So have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation.**"

Paul says that it was his accepted principle that he would not go where another apostle had ministered before him, lest he should be faithless to the office of apostle, and he should do the work of pastor and teacher. Paul was faithful to his gift. When he wrote his Epistle to the Romans, there was no apology inserted for one apostle trespassing on the diocese of another. Paul did not know anything about the ministry of Peter in Rome.

Again, in Romans 1:11, Paul says that he desires to write to them and he longs to come to see them, "**that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end that ye may be established.**"

These believers were without any apostle to teach them the Word so that spiritual gifts might be given to the church. The church of Rome had not had the ministry of an apostle among them. We might ask, "If Peter were in Rome for about sixteen years before the Apostle Paul got there, why were the Romans so ignorant of even the most simple scriptural doctrine?" If Peter were the first pope and had his headquarters in Rome, he was doing something besides that which an apostle was supposed to be doing; that is, teaching Scripture for the edification of the saints. Further, if you look in Romans 16, Paul mentions by name all of the believers with whom he was personally acquainted, but he does not mention Peter as among them.

Paul wrote a number of epistles from Rome—Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. In them he mentions the brethren who were with him while he was in prison, but he does not mention Peter. After he returned to prison a second time, he mentions, as he writes II Timothy, that all have forsaken him and only Luke was with him.

Certainly had Peter still been in Rome, the apostle would have mentioned him as one with whom he could have had fellowship. We do not believe then that the history of the early years of the Christian church, as they are recorded in the Word of God, will support the third claim of Rome that the church was founded by the Apostle Peter.

We might ask the question, "*How was the church founded if it were not established by the Apostle Peter?*"

Some say that it was founded by converts of Peter on the day of Pentecost, for there were Jews from Rome in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. While there were some from Rome present who heard Peter preach, these persons certainly did not have the knowledge of the truth to establish a church. Further, we would wonder why other churches were not established by believers who were brought to know the Lord on the day of Pentecost. This explanation does not satisfy.

The most reasonable explanation seems to be that the church in Rome was founded by converts of the Apostle Paul.

Rome was the educational, governmental, religious, and commercial center of the Roman Empire. Many believers who had been brought to know Jesus Christ through the ministry of the Apostle Paul, found that their business took them over to that capital city. When they arrived there they sought out other believers and began to fellowship together.

When you study Romans, Chapter 16, you find that the church of Rome was not one organization of believers but rather groups of believers, meeting in different homes, as they fellowshiped together around the person of Christ. There was no central organization. The apostle Paul could not write to “**the church at Rome**,” as he wrote so many of his epistles, but he wrote “**to the saints who are at Rome**,” individuals, who had gone there for business reasons, who fellowshiped together in small groups.

Thus we would affirm that the church was not founded by Peter during a twenty-five-year ministry there, but was founded as Paul’s converts gathered together in little groups; they looked to Paul for instruction that they might grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Let us look into the Word to see if the attitude of those associated with Peter reveals that he had any special prominence.

The Lord’s attitude toward Peter is revealed in Matthew 16:23. The words have scarcely fallen from the Lord’s lips, “***Thou art Petros and upon this petra I will build my church***,” than Jesus begins to tell the disciples that He is going to Jerusalem to suffer.

In verse 22, Peter took hold of Him and shook Him. The Greek suggests that Peter laid his hands on Christ’s shoulders and gave him a good shaking, as though to waken Him. He began to rebuke Him, saying, “**Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee.**” But Christ turned and said unto Peter, “**Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou art an offense unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.**” Here the Lord negates any concept that Peter had any power or any right to a position of prominence.

Or again in Matthew 23:8-9 our Lord said, “**Be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven.**”

As the Lord is speaking to all the disciples, He is emphasizing the equality of each disciple. No disciple is to be elevated above another, and no one is to call a man on earth his “father.”

Now Christ is not speaking about the natural relationship of son and sire; He is speaking here about the spiritual relationship. Whereas their rabbis say, "You are our children," and the Pharisees called all their followers "sons of the Pharisees," the Lord says, "**Call no man father, or papa or pope, for one is your father, even God, in heaven.**"

Now what was the attitude of the apostles toward Peter as pope? This should be very revealing for, if Peter had a place of primacy among the apostles, they certainly would have known it. If you look in II Corinthians 11:5, Paul tells us that he was not a bit behind the chiefest of the apostles. If Peter had any primacy, Paul knew nothing about it, for he puts himself on a level with Peter.

And again, in Galatians 2:11-16, because Peter withdraws from the freedom of the Gospel and practices legalism, the Apostle Paul has to rebuke him: "**When Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed.**" Paul had no right to rebuke Peter, if Peter was given the place of primacy as the first pope. In Galatians 2:8-10, Peter is referred to as one of the pillars in the church, but not the keystone or the capstone.

Then we might ask, "What was Peter's attitude toward himself?" Read Acts 10:25-26, where Cornelius sought to kneel down before him because he was a revealer sent from God. Peter refused to let Cornelius bow before him, or to recognize him as a superior person. In Acts 8:14, Peter let himself be sent on a difficult mission by the rest of the apostles. He was not giving orders to the rest of the apostles as the supreme pope; he was taking orders from them. In Acts 8:22, when Simon asked Peter for the gift of forgiveness, Peter disclaims any power to forgive sins and directs Simon to ask God Himself for pardon. Christ knew nothing of the papacy of Peter. The apostles knew nothing of the primacy of Peter. Peter knew nothing himself of any papal authority that resided in him. The claims of Rome simply cannot be substantiated.

As we go into a passage such as Ephesians 2, we find that we, as fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God, are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, that is, the foundation that Peter and the others laid as they proclaimed Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and Jesus Christ Himself is the chief cornerstone. We are not built upon the shifting sands of a man who has been elevated by the traditions of the church. We are built upon the rock, Christ Jesus. If you do not know Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour, may I invite you to Him? You need not come through any individual. You do not need to come through a church. You do not come through the sacrament of confession, of penance, of baptism. You come to the Lord Jesus Christ, the great Head of the Church, the Stone upon which the Church is builded, to receive from Him directly the free gift of salvation by faith and by faith, alone. God offers you a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, the one whom Peter proclaimed as "**the Christ, the Son of the living God.**"

~ end of chapter 4 ~

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