

# ROMAN CATHOLICISM

## In the Light of Scripture

by

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### CHAPTER FOUR

#### THE APOSTLE PETER

BEFORE ENTERING into a detailed examination of the many claims the Roman Catholic Church makes for herself, it seems necessary to go into the claims that church has made for the Apostle Peter, for it is upon these that Rome's own demands for supremacy are based.

No true Christian, either Protestant or Romanist, would desire to rob the apostle of any part of the honor due to him as an Apostle, and moreover as a natural leader among his brethren. He is a commanding personality in the Gospels, the Book of Acts, and in his own two brief epistles. He is a very lovable figure, full of human interest, for we so often find echoes of his characteristics in ourselves and in the people who surround us today. He is truly bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh.

It is not the claims that Peter made for himself that are in question, for Peter, who exhorts us to humility, has himself, under the disciplining hand of his Lord, become the humblest of men. See him at Jesus' feet very early in his life of discipleship; "**Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord**" (Luke 5:8). See him too as he enters Cornelius' house, lifting him to his feet saying, "**Stand up; I myself also am a man**" (Acts 10:26). And hear him in his more mature years, indeed as he neared the end of his pilgrimage, and wrote to the scattered Jewish believers in the churches of Asia Minor:

**The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, [his thoughts turn back to the sad day when he thrice denied his Lord] 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.**

**Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time** (I Peter 5:1-6).

No, it is not with Peter's own claims we have to do, but with the altogether false or exaggerated claims that men of a later date made for him, because without them; they could not hope to establish their own claims to supremacy and infallibility.

The Lord rebuked His disciples when they were contending for the best seats in the kingdom, saying:

**Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many (Matthew 20:25-28).**

The Roman Church calls Peter the Prince of the Apostles, and exalts him and his successors to a throne claimed to be higher than that of all secular princes. Could anything be more foreign to the mind of Christ, or indeed to the mind of the Apostle Peter? Were he here on earth today, he would be the first to repudiate such claims.

To support her claim for supremacy, the Roman Catholic Church appeals first to Matthew 16:17-19. After Peter's confession, "**Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,**" Jesus says to him:

**Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. 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 line of reasoning taken is as follows:

Peter was the rock upon which the church was to be built. To him was given the power of the keys, which meant that he alone could open the door of the kingdom of heaven. He only could bind or loose.

That he became the first Bishop of Rome, and thereby marked out that city as the center of ecclesiastical and spiritual government for all other churches everywhere.

And finally, that by an uninterrupted succession, all the authority given to Peter was passed on in a long line of bishops and popes, all of them Christ's vicars on earth, right down to the present day.

In this chapter we take up these related arguments one by one, so far as they refer to the Apostle Peter. Those concerning his so-called successors must be kept for another chapter.

A. It is claimed that Peter was the rock on which the Church was to be built.

There is a play on the words "**Peter**" and "**rock**," which come from the same Greek word, but differ. The one, *petros*, from which Peter is taken means a loose piece of rock, such as one man could throw to another. The other word, *petra*, means a fixed and permanent rock.

**"Thou art *Petros* [a piece of rock] and on this *petra* [a fixed permanent rock] I will build my church."**

Peter was anything but a fixed, permanent rock, and certainly a poor foundation for any building. Almost immediately after receiving the Lord's commendation he has to be rebuked with a severity which startles us, because he had said, "**Be it far from thee, Lord,**" when Christ spoke of His coming sufferings and death.

**"Get thee behind me, Satan,"** our Lord said, "**thou art an offense unto me: for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men**" (Matthew 16:23).

Only sixteen out of the eighty-four early church fathers believed that the Lord referred to Peter when He said, “**this rock,**” the others holding variously that it applied to Christ or to Peter’s testimony to Christ, or to all the apostles.

So if appeal is made to the early church fathers of the first four centuries, Rome’s claim must be disallowed. It is quite impossible to believe that God would permit such a basic doctrine as this, if it were indeed His truth, to sink into obscurity and uncertainty for so long a time, only to be rediscovered by leaders of the Roman Catholic Church when they were struggling to assert their authority centuries later.

Let us see what light we have on this subject from other Scriptures.

When the Jews of Christ’s day rejected His claim to Messiahship, He said to 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?** (Matthew 21:42).

Peter, when asked by the same Jewish rulers by what power and in what name he had cured the lame man at the Beautiful gate of the temple, said:

**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).

The Apostle repeats the same thought in his epistle, pointing to Christ as the rock:

**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** (I Peter 2:6).

It is Peter himself, and none other, who thus points to the Lord Jesus as the rock foundation. No suggestion of himself appears.

The Apostle Paul, writing to the church at Ephesus, says:

**But now, in Christ Jesus, ye [Gentiles] who sometime were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both [Jews and Gentiles] one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross . . . Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens 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 corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord** (Ephesians 2:13-22).

Here we have Christ the chief cornerstone. But we have something else, a secondary foundation, which is very nearly what Rome says, for on page 149 of *The Question Box* she says: “*Christ was the Divine Founder of the Church, its Rock primarily; Peter was the rock secondarily, by Divine appointment.*”

But that is not what the Ephesian passage says. It reads: “**Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets.**”

Peter is included, of course, but he is only one of a group, and all the apostles and all the prophets are there too. He and the apostles and prophets together are the secondary foundation, not Peter alone.

B. But there is a second claim that the Roman Catholic Church makes for Peter, from the passage in Matthew 16:17-19.

To him were given the keys of the kingdom of Heaven. Quite true! And he used them well, for on the Day of Pentecost it was his inestimable privilege to open the door of the kingdom to the vast multitude of Jews and proselytes gathered at Jerusalem for the feast, when three thousand souls entered in and received the gift of the Holy Spirit as the seal of their forgiveness. (Cf. Ephesians 1:13: **“In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise”**).

After the door was once opened, it did not need opening again.

Then at Caesarea, Peter, the apostle to the Jews, as he primarily was (Galatians 2:8), had the second great privilege of unlocking the door of faith to the Gentile world, when Cornelius and the other Gentiles with him, believing, were saved and received the gift of the Holy Spirit. That door also does not need opening a second time.

Incidentally, Peter, with his Jewish upbringing and prejudices, seems to have been very reluctant to open this second door. This is why, even after his great confession at Caesarea Philippi, he attempted to argue with God, saying, **“Not so, Lord.”** For a second time he received a rebuke for his forwardness: **“What God hath cleansed, that call thou not common”** (Acts 10:1-15).

The Lord said to Peter, **“I will give unto thee the keys.”** There were two doors, and Peter opened them both. Is that mere coincidence?

C. Yet another claim is made for the Apostle Peter: his is the power to bind and loose.

**Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven** (Matthew 16:19).

Quite right! But Peter can only do that on divinely appointed conditions, conditions laid down by the Lord Himself. We read:

**Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel** (Mark 1:14, 15).

Repentance and faith—these are the unchangeable conditions on which forgiveness is offered to the sinner and received by him. They were laid down by the Lord, and they were preached and insisted upon by the Apostle Peter.

**Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins** (Acts 2:38).

**Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out** (Acts 3:19).

**To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins** (Acts 10:43).

Those conditions for forgiveness still stand.

There are two other places where the Lord used the same words concerning binding and loosing. One is in Matthew 18:15-18, where speaking to His disciples He said:

**Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican. 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.**

This passage deals primarily with an offending brother, but the principle of forgiveness is the same, with the addition, however, that the Lord's words were not addressed to Peter only but to all the apostles. Moreover, the congregation of the church was also to share in the authority to bind or loose. The ground of authority given here, is not the presence of Peter or other apostles in the group, but because Christ is there:

**For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them** (Matthew 18:20).

The other passage is in John 20:21-23, after the Resurrection. Roman Catholics claim that this is the occasion when authority to bind and loose was not merely promised but actually bestowed upon Peter. But on this occasion also the words were not addressed to Peter only but to all the apostles.

By comparing the record of John with the parallel account in Luke 24:33-48, we find that the two from Emmaus were present as well, for it was while they were yet speaking that the Lord Jesus stood in their midst and showed them the wound prints, as in John's account. So to Cleopas and his companion also the same authority was given. Peter received it—yes, but so did the apostles, and the two from Emmaus, and in the days to come the church also.

Further, Rome claims, purely on the ground of her interpretation of Scripture being binding upon everyone, that the authority given to Peter is to be understood as the power of forgiving and retaining sins in the sacrament of penance.

The Council of Trent declares:

*Whosoever shall affirm that the words of the Lord and Saviour, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost; whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven; whose sins ye retain, they are retained," are not to be understood of the power of forgiving and retaining sins in the sacrament of penance, as the Catholic Church has always from the first understood them, but shall restrict them to the authority of preaching the Gospel in opposition to the institution of this sacrament, let him be accursed. Council of Trent, XIV Session.*

Protestant Christians believe and maintain that what the Council of Trent pronounces an anathema against is indeed the Truth of God with the plain teaching of the Holy Scriptures behind it. They do not fear the anathemas of Rome, for "the curse that is causeless, lighted, not" (Proverbs 26:2; II Samuel 16:12).

Not once in the records of The Acts of the Apostles or the Epistles does Peter or any other apostle utter his “*Absolvo te*” as claimed by Rome, but always and only as a part of the content of the Gospel they preach:

**Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man 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 (Acts 13:38, 39).**

Rome quotes these three Scriptures to bolster up her claim for the primacy of Peter over the other apostles.

The first is Matthew 16:18, 19, which we have already considered.

The second is Luke 22:31, 32, “**And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, 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.**”

The third is John 21:15-17, with its thrice repeated question, “**Lovest thou me?**” and its thrice repeated command, “**Feed my sheep.**”

Protestants everywhere absolutely deny that on any of these occasions the Lord either promised or bestowed the primacy on Peter. It is not necessary to repeat what has been said concerning the passage in Matthew 16. In Luke 22:31-32, the Lord prayed specially for Peter, not because of any new responsibility to be put upon him, but because He foresaw the attack Satan would make upon Peter, and his peculiar liability to attack and defeat because of self-confidence—for Peter had said: “**Though all should deny thee, yet will not I.**”

Jesus saw that in the mercy of God, Peter’s fall and his experience of Christ’s forgiving love could be overruled to make him the better able to strengthen others in temptation.

In John 21:15-17, the Lord’s question searched Peter three times, because three times he had denied his Lord. His threefold “**Feed my sheep**” is not to establish him in the primacy. The whole setting of the scene is against that. It is surely to reinstate him publicly in his apostleship, that Peter and the other apostles might know with certainty that in spite of his failure, he had not been cast off by the Lord, but would still be used in His service. This is a very different thing from making him head of the church militant and Prince of the Apostles. Rome’s forced interpretation of these Scriptures, backed by anathemas on those who refuse to accept her view, only goes to show how hard up she is to find any scriptural support for her claim, without which she is thrown back entirely on papal decrees and Council decisions. While Peter’s name repeatedly heads the list of the apostles, nowhere is it said in Scripture that he was given any superior position, either in office or authority. His impetuous nature and gift of ready speech and action inevitably brought him into prominence—but often into trouble as well.

There are also many other indications in Scripture that Peter never held the position of Prince of the Apostles. For instance, in Acts 8:14 we read that the apostles sent Peter and John to Samaria, showing that Peter was just one of them. They sent—and he went! Our Lord said: “**The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him**” (John 13:16).

After returning from Caesarea to Jerusalem Peter was charged by some in the church with improper action in visiting and eating with uncircumcised men. Peter did not rebuke them as he might have done, had he been a prince among them and head of the church. Instead, he modestly and meekly explained the circumstances (Acts 11:1-18).

When certain Jewish believers went to Antioch and stirred up dissension, the whole church delegated Paul and Barnabas with other brethren to go to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders. They did not send them to Peter, as they would have done had he been head of the church. A decision was reached by the whole church, not by Peter, though he did take part in the discussion. The letters were not sent in his name, but in the names of the apostles and elder brethren, and carried by men chosen not by Peter but by the church (Acts 15:1-29).

Peter wrote two epistles, but in neither of them does he suggest that he stood in a position of supreme authority. He calls himself an elder and he addresses fellow-elders. He lays on them no commands, but in his second epistle he writes:

**This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance, That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles [note the plural] of the Lord and Saviour (II Peter 3:1, 2).**

Paul regarded as a sectarian, one who brings division into the church, anyone who said he was “**of Paul or Apollos or Cephas [Peter]**” or attached himself to any human name (I Corinthians 1:12).

In II Corinthians 11:5, Paul says, “**For I suppose I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles.**” If Peter was indeed the official head of the church, we may be quite sure Paul would never have so written under divine inspiration.

The effect of the Scriptures quoted against the Romish doctrine of the primacy of the Apostle Peter and all the errors arising from that claim is cumulative and cannot be overthrown.

Christ is the Rock-foundation on which the church is built, and not Peter. He is the one and only Head of the church.

Christ alone, by right of His atoning death on the cross, can forgive sin. To Peter, as God’s instrument, was given the privilege of opening the door of faith to both Jew and Gentile.

Peter was never given, nor did he ever occupy any position of rulership over the other apostles. “**One is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren**” (Matthew 23:8).

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