

CHAPTER 1

Peter or the Rock?

This is the beginning of a set of notes dealing with lessons from Church History. May God help us to learn from the great lessons of the past. Those who fail to learn from history are bound to repeat its mistakes. As we look back into the past, let us learn much that can help us live righteously today.

In Matthew 16:13 what key question is asked?

If you were to ask this same question to people today (friends in school, teachers, neighbors, etc.), what answers might you receive? Is this an important question? Why or why not?

What is the difference between the question asked in Matthew 16:13 and the question asked in Matthew 16:15? How would *YOU* answer the question asked in Matthew 16:15? How did Peter answer this question (Matthew 16:16)?

_____ Was Peter's answer correct or incorrect (compare verse 17)? _____ How did Peter know these things? Did he have a brilliant mind? Did he attend an outstanding school or university or seminary? What was the key to Peter's spiritual understanding and knowledge (Matthew 16:17)?

_____ What is the key to **YOUR** understanding of spiritual things (1 Cor. 2:9-15)? Can you understand the truth on your own, or does it need to be revealed to you by God Himself?

Was Peter the First Pope?

Matthew 16:18 is a very important verse and one which has been greatly misunderstood and misinterpreted. Here is what the Lord actually said: "And I say also unto thee, That thou art _____ and upon this _____ I will build _____ and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Matthew 16:18)

How are we to understand these words? What was Jesus saying about Peter? What was Jesus saying about the Church? What was Jesus saying about Himself? And of course the key question is this: **WHO IS THE ROCK?**

There are certain things that this verse teaches that are very clear and very important. According to Matthew 16:18, **WHO IS THE BUILDER OF THE CHURCH?** Who is the One who said, "I will build My church"? _____ This is one truth we must never forget. Jesus Christ is the great **BUILDER** of the church. The church is built **BY HIM**. The church is not built by a **MAN**, it is built by **THE LORD!** According to Matthew 16:18, **WHOSE CHURCH IS IT?** Jesus said, "I will build _____ **CHURCH.**" Is the Pastor correct if he boastfully says, "This is **MY** church!" Would the elders or deacons be correct in saying this? The church belongs to Jesus Christ. It is **HIS CHURCH!** People often say, "That's my church," but

we need to constantly remind ourselves that it is really HIS Church.

There is something else that is clearly taught in this key verse. According to Matthew 16:18, the church is built by Christ (He's the builder) and the church belongs to Christ (it's His church) and the church is built upon a R_____. The church is not built upon dirt or sand. The church is built upon a SOLID ROCK.

The foundation of a building is very important. A building must have a good foundation and it must have a SOLID FOUNDATION. The church of Jesus Christ is built upon a ROCK SOLID FOUNDATION. When God builds something, He builds it well. He puts it upon a solid base. The CHURCH is built upon THE ROCK. BUT WHO IS THIS ROCK? That is the key question.

The Catholic Answer

Most of us are familiar with the Roman Catholic Church and most of us know Catholic people and have several Catholic friends. The verse that we have been looking at (Matthew 16:18) is a verse which Catholic teachers use to support one of their key beliefs.

WHO IS THIS ROCK? The position of the Catholic church is this: THE ROCK IS PETER. They believe that Peter is the solid rock upon whom the church is built. They believe that the church of Jesus Christ is built upon Peter. Christ is the BUILDER, the church belongs to Christ, but Peter is the FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH. Here is how they understand the verse: "Thou art PETER, and upon this rock (Peter) I will build My Church" (Matthew 16:18).

The Catholic Church believes that Christ appointed Peter to be the first pope. This is how they understand the words of Jesus: "Peter, I will build My Church upon you. You will be the first pope and the first visible head of the church."

Today there is an important and influential man in our world who is called "THE POPE." He is often mentioned and seen in the news. At times he travels to different countries. He is seen leading certain religious ceremonies during Christmas and Easter and also at other times in the year. Catholic people everywhere look to him as their leader and their head. How much do you know about the pope? Who is he and what authority does he have? What do Catholic people believe about this man?

According to Catholic teaching, WHO IS THE POPE? Here is their answer: "The pope is Christ's representative on earth as the lawful successor of St. Peter and visible head of the church. Just as a human body has one head, so does the Church have one Head who is Christ. The Pope is His Vicar, or representative, on earth, the visible head of the church" (*Baltimore Catechism*). The Catholic church believes that Peter was "the Apostle chosen by Christ to be the head, or first Pope, of the Church He founded" (*Baltimore Catechism*). They believe that when Jesus spoke to Peter in Matthew 16:18 He was choosing or appointing Peter as the first pope and as the one who would represent Him and take His place on earth as the visible head of the church.

The following is from a Catholic book entitled, *A Brief Catechism for Adults* by William J. Cogan:

What did Jesus do to make sure His Church would always be

united? He put one man in complete charge of His Church. **Who has complete charge of the Church?** The Pope, who is the bishop of Rome and the Vicar (agent) of Christ on earth. **Who is the Pope?** The Pope is the visible head of the whole Catholic Church. **Who was the first Pope?** St. Peter, who was made Pope by Jesus Christ Himself. **When did Jesus promise to make Peter the Pope?** Several months before He died. "*Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church*" (Matthew 16:18).

They also believe that Peter was just the first of many. "Christ did not intend that the special power of chief teacher and ruler of the entire church should be exercised by Saint Peter alone, but intended that this power should be passed down to his successor, the Pope, the Bishop of Rome, who is the Vicar of Christ on earth and the visible head of the Church" (*Baltimore Catechism*).

Did Peter' authority die with him? No, it was handed down to a man named Linus, and after he died (78 A.D.), it was handed down to Cletus (d. 90 A.D.), and then to Clement (d. 100 A.D.), and after that to another, and so on, during the past nearly 2,000 years.--*A Brief Catechism for Adults* by William J. Cogan, p. 60.

Catholics believe that Peter was the first pope, but that many other popes would follow. Today's pope believes that he is the representative of Christ on earth and that he is the visible head of the church. DO YOU BELIEVE THIS?

The Lord Jesus did choose someone to take His place on earth. According to John 16:7-16 and John 14:16-18, who did Christ choose to take His place on earth--Peter or Someone else?

According to Ephesians 1:20-22 and Colossians 1:18, WHO IS THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH?

According to Ephesians 4:5, how many LORDS does the church have? The church has only ONE LORD and only ONE HEAD! It does not have Christ as its invisible Head and some man as its visible head on earth. He is the BUILDER of the church, the OWNER of the church and the HEAD of the church. We do not want to take away from Christ that which only belongs to Him?

The word "POPE" comes from the Latin *papa*, meaning "father." What did the Lord Jesus say about using this term to describe mere men (see Matthew 23:9)?

Sometimes the pope is referred to as "THE HOLY FATHER." Do you think a mere man should be called by such a title (compare John 17:11)? _____

Sometimes in the news or elsewhere you will hear the pope described by the word "PONTIFF." This word literally means "bridge builder." A bridge stands in the middle of two points and helps you to get from one point to the other. The pope claims to be the BRIDGE or MEDIATOR ("GO-BETWEEN") between God and men. According to the Bible, who is the only MEDIATOR between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5)? _____

Infallibility

The word INFALLIBLE means **not liable to error**, incapable of being wrong or mistaken or inaccurate or misleading. Catholics believe that the Catholic Church and the Catholic Pope are INFALLIBLE. But let's make sure we understand what they mean by this:

"By the infallibility of the Catholic Church is meant that the Church, by the special assistance of the Holy Ghost, cannot err when it teaches or believes a doctrine of faith or morals. Infallibility does not mean that the Pope cannot commit a sin, but that in teaching a doctrine of faith or morals, he is prevented by the Holy Ghost from making a mistake. The Church teaches only truth. The Church teaches infallibly when it defines, through the Pope alone, as the teacher of all Christians, or through the Pope and the bishops, a doctrine of faith or morals to be held by all the faithful" (*Baltimore Catechism*).

"Papal infallibility means that the Pope, when speaking as head of the whole church on matters of faith or morals, cannot teach error. Infallibility is not to be confused with impeccability, which means that one cannot commit sin. The Pope is not impeccable; he can sin" (*A Brief Catechism for Adults* by William J. Cogan, p. 61).

In other words, when the pope teaches what to believe (faith) or how to behave (morals) he is INFALLIBLE (he makes no mistakes).

The doctrine of the infallibility of the pope is a "new" doctrine. It was carefully defined by the Vatican Council which met in Rome in 1870. Here is their definition:

"...we teach and define that it is a dogma divinely revealed that the Roman Pontiff, when he speaks **ex cathedra**, that is, when in discharge of the office of pastor and doctor of all Christians, by virtue of his supreme Apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine regarding faith and morals to be held by the universal Church, by the divine assistance promised him in blessed Peter, is possessed of that infallibility with which the divine Redeemer willed that His Church should be endowed for defending doctrines regarding faith and morals, and that therefore such definitions of the Roman Pontiff are irreformable of themselves, and not from the consent of the Church."

There are three things that we should carefully note from the above definition:

1. Infallibility is not claimed for every statement made by the pope, but only for those made when he is speaking **ex cathedra**, that is, seated in his papal chair, the chair of St. Peter, and speaking in his official capacity as the head of the church.
2. The pronouncement must be intended as binding on the whole church. Infallibility is not claimed for statements addressed to particular segments or groups within the church which may relate more or less to local conditions.
3. The pronouncements must have to do with matters pertaining to "faith and morals." **FAITH** is what the church should **believe** and **MORALS** is how the church should **behave**.

Do you believe that any man (human) can be INFALLIBLE? Do you believe that PETER was infallible? Are YOU infallible? Is your Pastor infallible? Is it possible for a Pastor to teach something that is not true? What should every believer do to make sure that what he is being taught is the truth (see Acts 17:11)?

Do you do this?

No pope, priest, pastor or any other person is infallible. The Lord Jesus made it very clear that people E_____ (Matthew 22:29). Mere men are not infallible but...

1. **GOD IS INFALLIBLE. He makes no mistakes and He teaches only what is true**
2. **GOD'S WORD IS INFALLIBLE. It contains no mistakes and teaches only what is true.**

What infallible guide has God given to us when it comes to FAITH (**what to believe**) and MORALS (**how to behave**) – see 2 Timothy 3:16-17?

_____ A man is infallible only so far as he agrees with and practices God's Word. A church is infallible only so far as it agrees with and practices God's Word. How infallible are you? How infallible is your church? How closely do you and your church adhere to God's Word?

The Catholic church believes that it is infallible and it also believes that it has the power to make laws and even change laws: "The Church has power from God to make laws and to change the laws it makes. This right to make laws is exercised by the bishops, the successors of the apostles, and especially by the Pope, who as the successor of the chief of the apostles, Saint Peter, has the right to make laws for the Universal Church" (*Baltimore Catechism*).

Who Is THE ROCK?

All of these Catholic teachings are based upon their understanding of Matthew 16:18. **THEY BELIEVE THAT PETER WAS THE ROCK.** Let us search the Scriptures to see if this is really so.

In 1 Corinthians 10:4 a great Rock is mentioned. Who is this ROCK? _____ Read Matthew 21:42. In this verse the Lord Jesus spoke of a great stone which was rejected and which became the head or chief cornerstone. In Acts 4:10-12 Peter mentions this very same stone. Was Peter referring to himself as the stone? _____ Who was he referring to?

Who wrote the book of 1 Peter? _____ Read 1 Peter 2:4-7. Peter mentions a stone in verse 4 and also in verse 6. Was he referring to himself or to Christ? _____

In verse 5 Peter recognized that all believers are part of this great building which is the church. The church is a "spiritual house" not made with bricks or boards or concrete, but made with "living stones" (believers). Every believer is a living stone in this great building which is the church. Are you a part of this building? Was Peter a part of this building? Was Peter the CHIEF STONE (compare verses 6-7)? _____

Please answer **True or False** (based on 1 Peter 2:4-7):

_____	According to these verses, Peter is the chief stone.
_____	According to these verses, Jesus Christ is the chief stone.
_____	Every believer is a "living stone" and part of this great building.
_____	Peter considered himself the most important part of the building.
_____	Peter was a "living stone" just like every other believer.
_____	In these verses Peter claimed that he was the first pope and the visible head of the church.

According to 1 Corinthians 3:11, WHO IS THE CHURCH'S ONLY FOUNDATION?
 _____ As the hymn says, "The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ our Lord." The hymn does not say, "The Church's one foundation is Peter." The church is built upon the rock solid foundation of Christ and His Word, not Peter.

About 34 times in the Old Testament God is called THE ROCK. According to Deuteronomy 32:3-4, WHO IS THE ROCK? _____ Read 2 Samuel 22:2,3,32,47. WHO IS THE ROCK? _____ What is one thing that believers always need to remember (Psalm 78:35)? _____ There are also three Old Testament prophecies which clearly refer to CHRIST AS OUR ROCK AND AS THE CHIEF STONE. See Isaiah 8:14; 28:16 and Psalm 118:22.

Who Me?

If Peter were the first Pope he certainly did not know it! How did Peter describe himself in Luke 5:8? _____ Did Peter accept homage and worship from men? Did Peter allow people to kneel before him (see Acts 10:25-26)? _____ (Note: The popes not only accept, but demand, such homage, even to the extent that men, including even the highest cardinals, prostrate themselves on the floor before a newly elected pope or when making ordination vows before him and kiss his foot. Also the popes accept the title of "HOLY FATHER" as theirs as a matter of right. Was Peter ever called by the title "HOLY FATHER"?)

Catholics believe that Peter was chosen to be pope in Matthew 16:18. Read the verses that come after this verse. Read especially Matthew 16:21-23. Here we find that the Lord Jesus gives Peter a very strong rebuke! Those seem to be strong words to use against one who had just been appointed pope! In verse 22 did Peter prove that he was fallible or infallible?

_____ Read Galatians 2:11-14. Here we learn that the Apostle Paul had to give a strong rebuke to the Apostle Peter because PETER WAS WRONG! (He was not infallible).

Peter was a great man of God and the Lord used him in a wonderful way. It was Peter who preached to the multitudes on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). It was Peter who opened the door of faith to the Jews (Acts 2), to the Samaritans (Acts 8) and to the Gentiles (Acts 10). In fact, Peter is the main and prominent character in the first 12 chapters of the book of Acts. He was a great man of God and a great servant of Christ but he was not the pope and he was not infallible. In the last half of the book of Acts (chapter 13 and on) we read very little about Peter. It is mostly about Paul. Is Peter had been the first pope, then would not we expect the book of Acts to mention him more often?

Let us return again to Matthew chapter 16. Consider especially verses 13-17. Do these verses emphasize WHO CHRIST IS or do they emphasize WHO PETER IS? Do these verses point us to the PERSON OF CHRIST or the PERSON OF PETER? Did Peter confess how great he was or did he confess how great Christ was (verse 16)?

_____ The focus of all of these verses is upon Christ not Peter.

A Play On Words: Petros and Petra

Matthew 16:18 is a pun (a play on words). Two very similar words are used. Jesus said, "thou art PETER (the Greek word is PETROS), and upon this ROCK (the Greek word is PETRA) I will build My Church." In other words, He said this: "Thou art PETROS and upon this PETRA I will build my church."

Let's think about what these Greek words mean:

1) PETROS

If you wanted to define this word by using just one word you would use the word STONE. See John 1:42 (Peter=Cephas=stone). A stone is a piece of a rock. Thus this word often refers to a loose stone or a movable stone, such as one man could throw to another (a detached stone or boulder). It could refer to a very large stone, but often this word refers to a small, movable stone. It is used of small stones including flints and pebbles for slings. It is used of a little rock or a little chip off a big rock, a stone, a pebble. This word was also used as a proper name (PETER). Did Peter consider himself to be a stone (1 Peter 2:5)? _____ Would it be wise to build a church on a loose stone? Should a building be erected on a pebble? Would this make a good foundation?

2) PETRA

If you wanted to define this word by using just one word you would use the word ROCK (Matthew 16:18--"upon this ROCK"). Which is bigger (usually), a ROCK or a STONE?

_____ The word PETRA means a large stone or a massive rock. It often is

used to describe a fixed and permanent rock or an immovable rock. This word is often used to describe a cliff by the sea (rock, ledge, cliff). The church is built upon a large, solid, immovable and permanent ROCK! This foundation is so solid and so secure that "the gates of hell (hades) shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18).

Peter had just made a clear confession. He had clearly pointed to Jesus Christ and WHO HE WAS (Matthew 16:16). The truth that Peter just confessed was the rock foundation upon which the church of Christ would be built. Christ was the BUILDER, Christ was the OWNER (it was His church) and Christ was the ROCK FOUNDATION (1 Cor. 3:11).

Are you thankful that the church is built upon someone more solid than Peter? Are you thankful that Christ is the Head of the church and not some visible, fallible, sinful man? Are you thankful that the church is built by God and upon God and not by man and upon man?

There are great dangers whenever people look to human leaders and human heads. Can men let us down? Can men disappoint us? Can men make mistakes? Can men make poor decisions (Jer. 17:5)? If the Pastor were the Head of the church, what problems might we have? If our leader and head is just a mere man, we are in great trouble.

If your church led by a man or by God? Is your church headed up by a man (or by men) or by God? Whose church is it (compare Matthew 16:18)? Whom should the church obey, God or man (compare Acts 4:19 and 5:29)? Whom should the church follow, men or God? We should only follow men if they are following _____ (1 Corinthians 11:1).

How Solid Is Your Foundation

How solid is the ground under your feet? Are you standing on a safe and solid foundation? What must you do in order to build your life upon the ROCK (Matthew 7:24-27)? Are you doing this? If you are, don't move and don't budge! Stay on the solid rock because all other ground is sinking sand. See 1 Corinthians 15:58.

It is true that men can build churches. Men can gather people into a building. Men can teach them whatever they want. There are many, many churches built by and built upon men. But they have no rock foundation and their building will not last. Charles Spurgeon said it this way:

I stood this week by the side of a church which once was a considerable distance inland, but now it stands just by the ocean side. Almost every year a great mass of the clay cliff falls into the sea, and in a year or two this church must fall. It stands now in quietude and peace, but on a certain day it will all be swallowed up into the sea, as certainly as the elements still work according to their ordinary laws. I could not help thinking that the edifice was a type of certain ecclesiastical bodies, which stand upon the clay cliff of statecraft or superstition. The tide of public enlightenment and above all the ocean tide of God's Spirit, is advancing and wearing away their foundation till at last the whole fabric must go. What then? Shall we cry, "The church of God is gone?" Forbear the foolish utterance; God's church is safe enough. Look yonder, there stands the church of God upon a stormy promontory, where the sea always dashes and perpetually rages on all sides, and yet she fears no undermining, because she is built on no clay cliff, but on a rock against which the waves of hell shall not prevail. The church of the living God shall stand (MATTHEW 16:18).
