

Is The Church Built on “Petros” or “Petra”?

The churches of Christ Greet You (Romans 16:16)

The Roman Catholic Church claims that Peter was the first pope, the successor of Christ. They say he is therefore Christ's vicar and the visible and infallible head of the church, having power and authority over all the other apostles and the entire church. Catholic leaders also claim that Christ built His church upon Peter and gave him the keys to unlock and close the kingdom of heaven and hell to anyone as he chose. They assert that the popes in past history up to the present are Peter's successors, and have the same power of the keys.

These far-reaching claims are based on the verses found in Matthew 16:18-19. Let us make a careful and critical examination of these verses and see what Jesus said and what He actually meant. Here is the text: "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 New Testament was originally written in the Greek, from which the Latin, English, and other versions were translated. If you study the Greek text you will find that the word *Peter* and the word *Rock* on which Christ was to build His church are two separate and distinct words, each having a different meaning. The word *Peter* in Greek is *petros*, which means "a piece of rock; a stone; a single stone; movable, insecure, shifting, or rolling." The word *rock is petra*, which means "a rock; a cliff; a projecting rock; mother rock; huge mass; solid formation; fixed; immovable; enduring."

The word *petros* for Peter in the Greek is in the masculine gender and the word *petra* for the rock is in the feminine gender. *Petros* and *petra* are two distinct words in the Greek. *Petros* is a shifting, rolling, or insecure stone, while *petra* is a solid, immovable rock. In the English language the gender is not specified by the article. We say *the* fork, *the* spoon, and *the* knife. The three words have the same article. In the Greek, as in many of the modern languages, each noun and corresponding article is in the masculine, feminine, or neuter gender. In many cases it is an arbitrary arrangement, regardless of sex.

The article in Greek is important. If one noun is in the masculine it must have a masculine article, and if it is in the feminine it must have a feminine article. The text under consideration in the Greek shows that *petros* is in the masculine, and *petra* in the feminine, proving that they are two distinct words; and each one has a different meaning. Now the question is, on which of the two, *petros* or *petra*, did Christ establish His church? Was it on *petros*, a movable stone, or *petra*, an immovable rock?

Let us quote the text again: "I say also unto thee [to Peter], That thou art Peter [*petros*, masculine gender], and upon this Rock [*petra*, feminine gender] I will build My church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). The text indicates clearly that the church of Christ is built on *petra* and not on *Petros*.

Now, who is this *petra* or rock on which Christ built His true church? Let the Holy Bible again give the answer. If the Bible gives the answer, we make no mistake in accepting it because the definition is authentic. "They drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock [*petra*, in the Greek] was Christ" (1 Corinthians 10:4). Here we have evidence that *petra* refers to Christ, and not to Peter, *petros*. Again we quote: "Jesus Christ Himself being the chief Cornerstone" (Ephesians 2:20) "He is the Rock, His work is perfect" (Deuteronomy 32:4; 2 Samuel 22:2-3) (Douay, 2 Kings 22:2-3).

If Peter is the rock on which Christ was to build His church, Peter could not be overcome and the gates of hell could not prevail against him. But the fact is that he was overcome, and the gates of hell did prevail against him. Didn't he deny his Lord? This was after Christ told him that the Rock was not to be overcome. Jesus told Peter on one occasion: "Get thee behind Me, Satan: thou art an offense unto Me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men" (Matthew 16:23). Peter himself gives the answer as to who the Rock is. He says Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). Again, speaking of Christ, he says: "This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders" (Acts 4:10-11); so Christ, the Son of God, must be the rock on which God built His church.

If Jesus would have built His church on Peter, petros, He would have said: "Thou art Petros, and upon this Petros [or upon it] I will build My church," but such is not the case. He plainly says: "Thou art Petros, and upon this petra I will build My church." Paul tells us that the petra is Christ. He also says, "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3:11). Peter is never designated by petra. Thus, Peter and Paul agree that Christ is the Rock; but the pope claims the title for himself. Which testimony should we accept? "Let God be true, but every man a liar" (Romans 3:4).

Long before Jesus was born He was considered the Rock. Isaiah declares: "Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation" (Isaiah 28:16). Peter applies this prophecy to Christ. He wrote: "Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief Cornerstone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on Him shall not be confounded" (1 Peter 2:6). David said: "Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I" (Psalm 61:2) (Douay, Psalm 60:3).

If the church was built on Peter then Peter would be the head of the church. However, Peter was not the head of the church in his day. Instead of having the disciples, apostles, and other believers call Peter pope, or Father Peter, or Holy Father Peter, Jesus 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.... But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant" (Matthew 23:8-11). "Call no man your father," could not refer to an earthly parent, but to the spiritual fathers. Jesus recommended our paying full respect to earthly parents when He quoted the commandment: "Honor thy father and thy mother" (Mark 7:10).

Sometimes 1 Corinthians 4:15 is used to prove that we may call spiritual leaders our fathers. Paul writes: "For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel." They were begotten through the Gospel and not through Paul. Again Paul writes: "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth" (Romans 1:16). We repeat: it is through the Gospel that we are begotten, and not through Paul or some other person. It is the Gospel that is the power of God unto salvation, and not man.

If Jesus delegated Peter as the head of the church, why did the other disciples quarrel among themselves as to who would be the greatest (Luke 9:46)? If this decision had already been made by Christ, why should the others fret about it? The other disciples would have submitted to the wish of their Master. Thus it seems evident that no such appointment had been made by Jesus. Neither Peter nor any of his successors were heads of the true church. Paul explains this when he says: "*The head of every man is Christ*" (1 Cor. 11:3). God "gave Him to be the head over all things to the church" (Ephesians 1:22). This explains that Jesus is the head of every person and also of the church. We are responsible to the head, which is Christ, and not to men who try to circumvent the work of Christ and take His place. Christ is the head of every person, and we are responsible to Him as individuals.

There is not a trace of evidence in the Bible that Peter was a pope. What would you think of historians who would write accounts of Abraham Lincoln, yet in not a single instance mention his title as President

of the United States of America? Could you imagine such an oversight? If Peter had borne some such title as "pope," don't you think that at least one inspired writer would have mentioned it? Peter wrote two epistles, but he does not use the title of pope in either. Can you imagine a pope today writing two letters to the church and forgetting his title? Peter could have mentioned it on the Day of Pentecost when he delivered that stirring sermon (Acts 2), but he did not do so. The church in the days of the apostles did not recognize Peter as pope or the head of the church. Neither does the true church today.

Source: <http://www.trustingodamerica.com/Petra.htm>