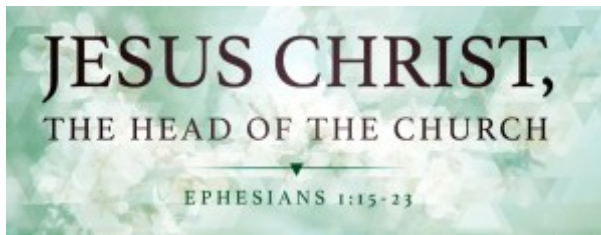


# The Church's Head and Foundation



This is chapter III of a book written in 1941 entitled, "[Our Priceless Heritage Christian Doctrine In Contrast With Romanism](#)" by Henry M. Woods, D.D, LL.D.

*Who is the Head of the true Church of God?*

The Lord Jesus Christ is the only Head of the true Church of God.

*Who is the Foundation of the true Church?*

The Lord Jesus Christ is the only Foundation of the true Church of God.

*Why is the Lord Jesus Christ the only Head and Foundation of the true Church?*

Because He is God and therefore **LORD** of all. And only God has all the perfect attributes which are needed to fill these great offices. "God manifest in the flesh," and "In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." I Tim. 3:16, Col. 2:9—the fulness of Divine wisdom, power, love, righteousness, and holiness. Also, He founded the Church; He redeemed it with His precious blood; He promised to be with His people to the end of the world (or age) ; and because at last He will bring His Church safe to heaven, to reign with Him in glory for evermore. Matt. 16:18, 28:20, Acts 20:28, I Cor. 1:30, Rev. 3:21, 21:9, 10, 11:15.

*What fatal error does the Church of Rome teach concerning the Head and Foundation of the Church?*

The Roman Church teaches that the Pope of Rome is the Head and Foundation of the Church of God. "The Pope is the Chief Priest, the Head, the Husband, and the Foundation of the Church." "That St. Peter had not only a primacy of order, but also a primacy of dominion and jurisdiction." Bellarmine, *De Rom. Pontiff*, 2:31, 1:10,11.

An authorized Roman Catholic catechism asserts that "St. Peter is the supreme Head of the Church." By the Rt. Rev. J. H. Oechtering, imprimatur of Archbishop Glennon of St. Louis, Mo., 1907, page vii.

*Are not these assertions blasphemous, making a sinful human being usurp the high place of the living God?*

They are blasphemous, and a mark of apostasy, for no sinful human being may usurp the place which Christ alone fills. *Only God* can be the *Head and Foundation of the true Church*. It is "the Church of the living God." I Tim.

3:15.

*Is not the sin of the Roman Church, in declaring the pope to be the Head and Foundation of the Church of God, essentially that of the fallen angels who rebelled against Almighty God, strove to usurp the sovereignty of the universe, and are kept in everlasting chains in darkness to await the great Judgment Day?*

It is essentially *the same great sin*. There is the same rash pride, self will, unholy ambition, and rebellion against the Lord of hosts, under the appearance of piety; and there will be the same awful condemnation. Jude 6, II Peter 2: 1-4, II Thess. 2:3, 4, Ezek. 28:2, 8.

### **Christ the only Head and Foundation of the Church**

*What Scriptures prove that the Lord Jesus Christ is the only Head of the true Church of God?*

1. God the Father "gave Him to be the Head over all things to the Church, which is His body." Eph. 1:22, 23.
2. "Grow up into Him in all things who is the Head, even Christ." Eph. 4:18.
3. The husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the Head of the Church. Eph. 5:23.
4. "He is the Head of the body, the Church." Col. 1:18.
5. As there is only "one body," so there can be only one Head. Eph. 4:4, 5.

*What Scripture proves that Christ alone is the Foundation of the true Church?*

"Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." I Cor. 3:11.

*Does Ephesians 2:20 afford any ground for calling a pope the foundation of the Church of God?*

*None at all.* This text teaches that the prophets and apostles were inspired of God specially to write the Holy Scriptures without error, and were sent by Him to proclaim His Gospel and establish the Church. But the Lord Jesus Christ, because He is God, and has provided a perfect atonement for sin, and because of His resurrection from the dead, and His intercession in glory, is the only foundation of salvation, from whom all grace, power and holiness proceed.

*How are we sure that the papal explanation of this text is wrong?*

Because it directly contradicts the declaration of I Corinthians 3:11, that *Christ is the only Foundation*; and because it would prove that there should be not one pope merely, but about thirty popes at the same time, for prophets as well as apostles are included.

The assumption of the Roman Church that a human head of the Church was needed is false, and based on ignorance or unbelief; for our Saviour declares plainly that He Himself would be constantly present with His followers to do all that the Church needed to have done for it. He said: "Lo! I am with you always, even unto the end of the world (or age)!" Matt. 28:20. And after Christ's ascension to heaven we read in Mark: "And they (the Apostles) went forth and preached everywhere the Lord working with them and confirming the Word with signs following." Mark 16:20. Christ was present through His Holy Spirit to teach, "to guide into all truth," to save men, and to sanctify and comfort His people. All through the Book of Acts we read that the Christians in simple faith appealed to Him and always had His presence and help given them. John 14:16, 17, 26, 15:26, 27, 16:7-13; Acts 1:24, 2:42, 4:24-31, etc.

### **Holy Scripture Proves That St. Peter Was Not The Foundation Of The Church Of God**

*The Church of Rome tries to use Matthew 16:18, 19 to prove the papacy, alleging that Peter was the rock on which Christ built the Church; but does it correctly interpret this passage?*

No. The Church of Rome *wholly misinterprets it*. When our Lord said, "Thou art Peter, and on this rock I will build My Church," if he had meant that Peter was to be the foundation, the natural form of the statement would have been, "Thou art Peter, and on thee I will build My Church"; but He does not say this, because it never was His purpose that a sinful man should be the rock on which the Church was built. Note carefully that in the expression "on this rock," our Lord purposely used a different Greek word --πέτρα, pétra from that used for Peter Πέτρος Pétros. He did this to show that not Peter, but the great truth which had just been revealed to him, viz.: that our Lord was "the Christ, the Son of the living God," was to be the Church's foundation. Built on this divine foundation, the Christ, the ever-living Saviour, the gates of hell should never prevail against the Church. But built on the well meaning but sinful Peter, or on any other man, the gates of hell would surely prevail; for a little later our Lord had to severely rebuke Peter, calling him "Satan!" "Get thee behind Me, Satan," thou art an offense unto Me; for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." Verse 23.

*Is this the interpretation of Protestant commentators only?*

No. It is the interpretation which has *uniformly prevailed in the Church of God from the days of the apostles*.

The fathers of the early Church, Ambrose, Basil, Chrysostom, Hilary and Jerome all make "the rock" on which the Church was founded to be not Peter, but the *great truths confessed by him*.

St. Augustine, in his treatise on the first epistle of John, asks, What do these words mean, "on this rock I will build My Church?" He replies, "On this faith that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." On this rock which thou hast confessed, I will build My Church; for Christ was the rock." Again in his 13th sermon, Augustine practically repeats the same words,

adding, "I will build My Church upon Myself, who am the Son of the living God; upon Me, not upon thee." This is also the interpretation of a majority of learned Roman Catholic commentators. Of 61 Roman expositors only 17 explained 'the rock' as referring to Peter; 44 of them held the Protestant interpretation that Christ, not Peter, was the rock on which the Church was built. It is only since the Council of Trent, in the 16th century, that the mistaken view which makes Peter, not Christ, 'the Rock' on which the Church was built, has prevailed.

### **The Power of the Keys Belong to All True Ministers of Christ**

"The Power of the Keys," the "binding and loosing," the "opening and shutting" of the Kingdom of heaven, belongs not only to the apostles, but also to all true ministers of the Lord Jesus Christ. Tertullian in the 2nd Century rightly said, "Everyone who confesses Christ as Peter did, also carries the Keys of heaven as he did." *Scorpiace*, Shotwell, page 295. This power is declarative, for the actual exercise of the power, "the opening and shutting," "the admitting to, or excluding from," the Kingdom of heaven, belongs to Christ ALONE; for HE alone knows the hearts of men, and He alone can forgive sins. This divine power he holds as Lord of the Resurrection, Rev. 1:18, and He claims the exclusive right to exercise it. Rev. 3:7. Any other interpretation makes Scripture contradict Scripture.

*What acts of Peter show that he was weak and erring, and could not be the foundation of God's Church?*

His sinful sleeping in Gethsemane, during Christ's agony, when he should have been watching and praying, as his Lord commanded. Matt. 26:40. His rash act in cutting off the high priest's servant's ear, for which Christ rebuked him. Matt. 26:51, 52. After boasting that he was willing to die for Christ, he shamefully denied his Lord three times, even with oaths and curses! Matt. 26:74. Even after Pentecost Peter gravely sinned. At a crisis in the Church when dealing with the Gentile Christians, Peter was guilty of deceitful conduct, and drew upon himself in public a stern reproof from St. Paul. Gal. 2:11-13.

*Does Scripture show any real primacy of Peter among the apostles?*

It does not, except perhaps in a readiness to be spokesman for the disciples. 'The apostles, while differing in ability, all seem to have been of equal rank. St. James was the leader of the Church in Jerusalem; he pronounced the decision arrived at in the General Council, and probably presided over it. Acts 15:13-19.

While all the apostles had equal authority, James seems to have had a kind of leadership; he is several times mentioned first. "Go, show these things unto James, and to the brethren." Acts 12:17. "Paul went in unto James." Acts 21:18. "And when James, Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars," James is here put before Peter. Gal, 2:9.

Also, St. Paul wrote much more of the Scriptures than St. Peter,<sup>1</sup> and seems to have established many more churches.

<sup>1</sup> If Hebrews is included among the Pauline epistles, there were 14 epistles written by St. Paul, and only 2 short ones written by St. Peter.

*But the best proof is a man's own testimony. What does St. Peter say of himself? Does he claim to have been a pope, or to have primacy above the other apostles?*

No. Surely if Peter had been a pope, or "the supreme head of the Church," or of rank superior to the other apostles, he would have declared it in his general epistles, for that was the place of all others to assert his authority, and popes have never been slow to make claims, for themselves. But Peter does not make any claim whatever to superiority. He does not call himself Pontifex Maximus, or any such title. He simply speaks of himself as a presbyter, an ordinary minister of Christ.<sup>2</sup> It is from this apostolic office that the Presbyterian Church takes its name,—the "Church of the Presbyters." That this was the original, apostolic form of Church Government set forth in Holy Scripture, eminent scholars of different Communion testify; among others, Anglican leaders, like Bishop Lightfoot, Dean Stanley, etc.

<sup>2</sup>It is noteworthy that one of the greatest apostles, he who leaned on Christ's bosom, who wrote the most spiritual of the Gospels, three epistles, and received a special revelation of things to come, viz.: St. John, does not speak of himself at all as an apostle, but only as a presbyter. "The Presbyter unto the elect lady"; "The presbyter unto the well-beloved Gaius." II John, 1. III John, 1. This was not accidental, nor merely from humility. It seems to have been done in order to show that the office of the apostle was only temporary, and that the office of presbyter was to be the permanent, important one in the Christian ministry.

*What were Peter's exact words in declaring that his office in the Church was simply that of presbyter (elder)?*

Peter said: "The presbyters (elders) who are among you I exhort, who am a fellow-presbyter." I Peter 5:1. The Greek word is συν-πρεσβύτερος, meaning "joint" or 'fellow'-presbyter. St. Peter thus puts himself where he rightly belongs, on the same level as other presbyters or ministers; for the Scriptures clearly teach the parity of all Christian ministers. The humility and self-forgetfulness of Peter shown toward the end of his life in his epistles, is in marked contrast to the impulsive, self-assertive spirit seen in his earlier years. Toward the end, as he grew in grace, he had much to say of meekness and humility, "Yea, all of you be clothed with humility; for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God," he constantly exalted *Christ, not self*, "and when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away." How entirely different was that humble presbyter from the popes of Rome!

### **The Testimony of The Fathers Proves Clearly There Was No Pope In The Early Church**

It cannot be repeated too often that there was no hint of a pope in the early centuries of the Church. Christ was still faithfully acknowledged as the only Head and Foundation. Nor did the Christians of those early times believe that Peter had a primacy, or was exalted in any way above the other apostles. That great error was reserved for the Dark Ages of ignorance and superstition,

which soon descended upon the Church. This is proved by the fact that there is no mention of a pope, or of any primacy of Peter in the three oldest creeds of Christendom, the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian: and, as already stated, *it is only since the Council of Trent (1564-1563) that Peter was held to be the rock on which Christ built the Church.* How different it is now! For now the papacy is declared to be a fundamental dogma of Romanism, necessary to salvation! Boniface VIII radically changed the faith of the Church, when he wrote in the bull, *Unam Sanctam*. "We declare that every human creature is subject to the Roman pontiff; and we pronounce this to be altogether necessary to salvation." (Nov. 18, 1302.) Wholly different was the belief of St. Jerome, when writing against Jovinian in 393, "Thou sayest the Church is founded on Peter, albeit the same is true of all the apostles, and they all received the Keys of the Kingdom of heaven." And he might have added as Tertullian declared, "and true of all Christian ministers as well!" St. Augustine distinctly wrote "We who are Christians, in name and deed, do not believe in Peter, but In Him on whom Peter himself believed." "He, the Christ, is Peter's Master in the teaching which leads to life everlasting, and He is our Master too." *De civit. Dei.*, xvii, 54. Bishop Bossuet protested against the false claims of the popes, saying, "That very late invention, that bishops receive their jurisdiction from the pope, and are as it were, his Vicars, ought to be banished from Christian schools as unheard of for twelve centuries!" Bossuet, *Defens, Declar, Clart Galli*, vii, 14.

Church history thus plainly shows that the belief of the early Christian church concerning its Head and Foundation were essentially those held by the Protestant Church of the Reformation; that the papacy was an invention of later centuries which was gradually built up by a series of encroachments on the rights and liberties of the clergy and laymen, and by means of documents which were acknowledged by Roman Church leaders to be fraudulent. St. Peter never claimed to be a pope, or the Head of the Church; he was not "the rock" on which Christ built the Church. The Lord Jesus Christ is the only Head of the Church, and He alone, is its everlasting Foundation. It was centuries later, when the Church had forgotten the Scriptures, had lost its original simplicity and spiritual power, and had been submerged by a flood of worldliness and unholy ambition, that popes began to appear.

"According to the Sacred Record, Peter never celebrated 'Mass,' nor did he hear Confessions. He never directed a soul to pray to Mary or to the Saints, nor to use beads. He never advocated the use of 'holy water,' scapulars, and relics. He never ordered the people to abstain from meat on Fridays, and during Lent. He never declared that priests and nuns should not marry. He never presented his foot to be kissed. He never lived in a palace, with soldiers to guard him, and multitudes of servants to wait on him. Why did Peter not do these things? Because he never was pope." MacFaul's, *"Is there salvation within the Roman Catholic Church?"*

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