

# **IS PETER THE FIRST POPE (BISHOP OF ROME)?**

*The Catholic Blog - Helping people find answers to the most common questions about Catholicism with answers from the Catechism of the Catholic Church and the Bible.*

[www.catholic.blog](http://www.catholic.blog)

## **“Is Peter the first Pope?” - Important Passages of *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* to Consider:**

- “Simon Peter holds first place in the college of the Twelve”(CCC 551)
- “Peter has confessed: ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ Our Lord then declared to him: ‘You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.’” (CCC 552)
- “Christ, the ‘living stone,’ thus assures his Church, built on Peter, of victory over the power of death. Because of the faith he confessed Peter will remain the unshakeable rock of the Church. His mission will be to keep this faith from every lapse and to strengthen his brothers in it.” (CCC 552)
- “Jesus entrusted a specific authority to Peter: ‘I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.’ The ‘power of the keys’ designates **authority to govern the house of God, which is the Church.**” (CCC 553)
- **“The power to ‘bind and loose’ connotes the authority to absolve sins, to pronounce doctrinal judgments, and to make disciplinary judgments in the Church.” (CCC 553)**
- “Jesus entrusted this authority to the Church through the ministry of the apostles and in particular through the ministry of Peter, the only one to whom he specifically **entrusted the keys of the kingdom**” (CCC 553)

## **“Is Peter the first Pope?” - Important Scriptures to Consider:**

- Luke 6:47–48 “Everyone who **comes to me and hears my words and does them**, I will show you what he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the **foundation on the rock**. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built.” (ESV)
- Mark 8:27–30 “And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” [28] And they told him, “John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets.” [29] And he asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, **“You are the Christ.”** [30] And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him.” (ESV)
- Luke 9:20 “Then he said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” And Peter answered, **“The Christ of God.”** (ESV)
- Luke 9:32 “Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, but when they became fully awake they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him.” (ESV)
- John 13:8–10 “Peter said to him, “You shall never wash my feet.” Jesus answered him, “If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.” [9] Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!” [10] Jesus said to him, “The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you.” (ESV)
- Matthew 14:30–31 “But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, ‘Lord, save me.’ [31] Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, ‘O you of little faith, why did you doubt?’” (ESV)

- Matthew 16:22–23 “And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.” [23] But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.” (ESV)
- Matthew 17:4–5 “And Peter said to Jesus, ‘Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.’ [5] He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” (ESV)
- Matthew 26:33–35 “Peter answered him, “Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away.” [34] Jesus said to him, “Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.” [35] Peter said to him, “Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!” And all the disciples said the same.” (ESV)
- Matthew 26:40–43 “And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, “So, could you not watch with me one hour? [41] Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” [42] Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.” [43] And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy.” (ESV)
- John 18:10–11 “Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) [11] So Jesus said to Peter, “Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?” (ESV)
- Matthew 26:56 “But all this has taken place that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.” Then all the disciples left him and fled.” (ESV)
- Matthew 26:69–75 “Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came up to him and said, “You also were with Jesus the Galilean.” [70] But he denied it before them all, saying, “I do not know what you mean.” [71] And when he went out to the entrance, another servant girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, “This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.” [72] And again he denied it with an oath: “I do not know the man.” [73] After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, “Certainly you too are one of them, for your accent betrays you.” [74] Then he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, “I do not know the man.” And immediately the rooster crowed. [75] And Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, “Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly.” (ESV)
- Luke 22:61 “And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, “Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.” (ESV)
- John 21:21 “When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, ‘Lord, what about this man?’”
- Acts 10:13–16 “And there came a voice to him: “Rise, Peter; kill and eat.” [14] But Peter said, “**By no means, Lord**; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.” [15] And the voice came to him again a second time, “What God has made clean, do not call common.” [16] This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven.” (ESV)
- Galatians 2:11–14 “But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. [12] For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. [13] And the rest of the Jews **acted hypocritically** along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. [14] But when I saw that their conduct was **not in step with the truth of the gospel**, I said to Cephas before them all, ‘If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?’” (ESV)

### “Is Peter the first Pope?” - Important Questions to Consider:

- Why does Jesus, right after this affirmation to Peter, then rebuke Peter and say “**Get behind me, Satan!** You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”? (Matthew 16:21-23 ESV). Is this a characteristic of Papal Infallibility?

- In parallel accounts of Matthew 16:13-20 (**Mark 8:27-30 & Luke 9:20**), why does Jesus **not mention the claim of Peter being the rock of the church and having the keys to “bind and loose”**? If it is that important to the Church why is it only mentioned one book of the Bible?
- What are keys used for? What “unlocks” the doors of the Kingdom of Heaven? What does Jesus say in John 3:3? What does Paul say it takes to be saved in Romans 10:9-10? John in Revelation 3:20?
  - John 3:3 “Jesus answered him, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.’” (ESV)
  - Romans 10:9–10 “because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. [10] For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.” (ESV)
  - Revelation 3:20 “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.” (ESV)
- What does Jesus’ warning in Matthew 23:13 mean in terms of doors and the kingdom of heaven?
  - Matt23:13 “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in.”
- What about “bind” and “loose” being used in **Matthew 18:15-20** in terms of church discipline? Why is Peter’s authority not mentioned in this passage? Why is this authority extended to the church body?
- **What about when Peter was wrong...**correcting Jesus (John 13:8-10), doubting Jesus with little faith (Matthew 14:30-31), rebuking Jesus (Matthew 16:22-23), misunderstanding the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-8), questioning Jesus, promising to never abandon Jesus (Matthew 26:33-35), falling asleep on the Mount of Transfiguration and the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 9:32 and Matthew 26:40–43), impulsive (John 18:10–11), abandoning Jesus (Matthew 26:56), denying Jesus (Matthew 26:69–75) to in His presence (Luke 22:61), blame shifting (John 21:21), refusing to obey God’s voice in a vision (Acts 10:13-16), and being hypocritically legalistic and exclusive (“not in step with the truth of the Gospel” Galatians 2:11-14). **How do we process that with claims of Papal infallibility? Why did Paul correct him if Peter is the first pope?**
- Did Peter ever go to Rome? Why, historically speaking, does the Catholic Church become associated with Rome? Was the **Edict of Milan in 313 A.D.** by Constantine helpful or harmful to Christianity? Did the Roman influence and control co-opt the Catholic Church for its own use? Was the biblical fidelity compromised in order to adapt the biblical message to be syncretized (changed) into a more palatable flavor for a variety of cultural contexts (i.e. by adding purgatory, indulgences, icons, prayers to the dead, etc.)?
- **So is Jesus saying that the church is being built on the person of Peter, or the proclamation of the Gospel, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God?**
- Considering Luke 6:47-48; What is the foundation and rock Jesus is referencing?
- In the Bible, is the test of faithfulness one of succession and lineage or one of consistency with God’s words?
  - Matthew 16:17 “And Jesus answered him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.’” (ESV)
    - Is Jesus conferring a blessing or acknowledging the blessing of God?
  - Matthew 16:18 “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” (ESV)
    - Is this verse more about Peter and his lineage of popes, or about looking upon and believing in Jesus? What do we do with the many passages about Jesus who conquers death/Hades/Hell (Romans 8:2; Acts 2:24) because “death no longer is master over Him” (Romans 6:9), thus bringing his church (gathered ones) together as “conquerors” (Romans 8:37-39).
- When 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 lay out the office of elder/overseer/bishop/pastor why is there no distinction made about a Pope or head Bishop? Why is there always a plurality of elders referenced in the leadership of local churches?

- Ephesians 2:19–22 “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, [20] built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, [21] in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. [22] In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.” (ESV)
  - In this description of the church, why is Peter not referenced? Why is there no reference to the oversight of a head/lead/arch Bishop or Pope? Is the sole reference to Jesus a reference back to the foundation/rock of the church being on Jesus alone and not on human authority?
- To whom was the name “rock” assigned in the Old Testament (Deut. 32:4, 15, 18, 30–31)? To whom does 1 Corinthians 10:4 assign the name rock?
  - Deuteronomy 32:4 “The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he.” (ESV)
  - 1 Corinthians 10:4 “all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.” (ESV)
- Acts 8:14 “Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John” (ESV)
  - If Peter is authoritatively in charge of the church, why is he “sent” by the other apostles?
- If Peter has the authority to forgive sins (per CCC 982, 986, 987), where does he do that in the Bible? Like the ways in which Jesus expresses His authority to forgive sins (Matthew 9:6, Mark 2:10, Luke 5:24; 7:49, Acts 10:43, Colossians 1:14, 1 John 1:9) ?
  - “There is no offense, however serious, that the Church cannot forgive” (CCC 982)
  - “the Church possesses the power to forgive the sins of the baptized and exercises it through bishops and priests normally in the sacrament of Penance” (CCC 986)
  - “In the forgiveness of sins, both priests and sacraments are instruments through which our Lord Jesus Christ, the only author and liberal giver of salvation, wills to use in order to efface our sins and give us the grace of justification” (CCC 987)
- John 20:21–23 “Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” [22] And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. [23] If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.” (ESV)
  - What did Jesus just show them in John 20:20? Why was this evidence important to their mission? How do the disciples’ response demonstrate their belief?
  - What is the message they are being sent with? How is the Holy Spirit connected to Jesus’ sending of his disciples?
  - Since the words for “forgive” are written as perfect-tense verbs, they represent actions completed in the past with continuing effects into the present and future. Doesn’t this appear to point more towards Christian responsibility to proclaim the Gospel message of forgiveness of sins in the power of the Holy Spirit?
    - ESV Study Bible NOTE: “The idea is not that individual Christians or churches have authority on their own to forgive or not forgive people, but rather that as the church proclaims the gospel message of forgiveness of sins in the power of the Holy Spirit (see v. 22), it proclaims that those who believe in Jesus have their sins forgiven, and that those who do not believe in him do not have their sins forgiven—which simply reflects what God in heaven has already done (cf. note on Matt. 16:19).”
  - Are Christians called to be judges withholding forgiveness from one another? Or are they called to be ambassadors or messengers of the message of forgiveness found in the Gospel?
    - 2 Corinthians 5:20 “Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” (ESV)

**Subscribe to “The Catholic Blog” on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCo3uZywULBplunOmh4nCB2A>**

**Free Books for Catholics: [www.catholic.blog/books](http://www.catholic.blog/books)**

**Free Videos for Catholics: [www.catholic.blog/videos](http://www.catholic.blog/videos)**

**Frequently Asked Catholic Questions: [www.catholic.blog](http://www.catholic.blog)**