

## THE AUTHORITATIVE CLAIM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

The Catholic Church claims their denomination is the “One, Holy, Catholic, And Apostolic Church,” thus they are the “authority.” Are they truly “The Church,” and are they the authority? According to Catholic priest Oscar Lukefahr, C.M. in his book “A Survey Of The Catholic Faith”:

The Church is one. We believe that the Catholic Church is built on the rock, Peter, who proclaimed Christ the son of God (Mat. 16:18) and that it is united under Peter’s successor, the pope. We do not say that the other churches have no relationship to Christ. But we believe that Christ wants all his followers to be united in him. He prayed “that they may all be one” (John 17:21). Vatican II taught that while divisions exist, we should see the good in other churches, and work and pray for unity (Lukefahr 57).

Lukefahr continues:

The Church is catholic. This word, first used in reference to Christians by saint Ignatius of Antioch around A.D. 100, means “universal” and refers to Christ’s church throughout the world. When divisions arose among believers, catholic also became a proper word, like a first name. Thus Augustine spoke of himself as a “Catholic Christian.” ... The church is apostolic. This means that the Church traces its authority back to Jesus through the apostles: Jesus commissioned the apostles (Acts 1:8; 9:15), who commissioned others (2 Tim. 1:6) who did the same through the centuries up to the pope and bishops today.....Our Church, then, is “built upon the foundation of the apostles (Eph. 2:20) (Lukefahr 58).

What a shocking claim of authority “...built on the rock, Peter,...and...under Peter’s successor, the Pope,” yet at the same time saying their followers should “see the good in other churches,” who, according to their beliefs, are false teachers. Does this seem like a contradiction? If so, the reason is because it is a contradiction and contrary to the teachings in the Bible. Next, Lukefahr makes the claim for the scriptural use of the name “Catholic,” and further bases their ever-changing foundation of doctrine as “authoritative” on the basis of Apostolic succession. Let’s address the issues as we determine if the Catholic Church is the true authority.

Is Authority based upon Peter? Does the Catholic Church have the right to claim authority upon Peter’s confession? Their claim is based on Matt 16:18-19.

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 (Mat. 16:18-19).

Kirsch, stated in the Catholic Encyclopedia:

By the word “rock” the savior cannot have meant Himself, but only Peter, as is so much more apparent in Aramaic in which the same word (Kipha) is used for “Peter” and “Rock”. His statement then admits of but one explanation, namely, that He wishes to make Peter the head of the whole community of those who believed in Him as the true Messiah; that through this foundation (Peter) the Kingdom of Christ would be unconquerable; that the spiritual guidance of the faithful was placed in the hands of Peter, as the special representative of Christ (Kirsch 746).

The first thing to note is the Catholic Church feels no need to be consistent in the words or languages it uses to defend its man-made creeds. Early Church “Father” Eusebius does make mention that Matthew recorded a copy of his Gospel account in Aramaic, yet are we to assume that it contradicts the known Greek versions that we have? Additionally, no original Aramaic manuscripts exist and many scholars have agreed that in the Aramaic translation, Kipha, may not have been used to represent both “Peter and Rock” as claimed by Kirsch, but rather the Aramaic word “Shua” would have been used for rock. We stand by the fact that the Greek translations we have are inspired by the Holy Spirit, accurately translated, and are without error. In the Greek, Peter (Petros) is a noun and nominative singular masculine, whereas rock (Petra) is a noun and is dative singular feminine. This is not a translation error or the use of a neutral pronoun. Clearly this foundation was not Peter, but was something else. But what was this foundation?

Putting the argument from the Aramaic aside, which is no argument at all, one must ask a needed question. Was the church founded on Peter himself or on the confession of Christ as the Messiah? Christ asked Peter the question “But whom say ye that I am” (Mat. 16:15)? Peter responds with what many call the good confession “Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God” (Mat. 16:16). Here is the point. The Jews of the day called him a prophet, but Peter confessed him as the “Son of the living God.” Jesus said “for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee. (Mat. 16:17). What did flesh and blood not reveal? The answer is clearly the good confession Peter made “Thou are the Christ the Son of the living God.” Christ himself built the church upon the foundation of the Apostles (Eph. 2:20), and this foundation was the confession of Him as the Messiah. The foundation of which His church is built must be the confession that Christ is the Messiah. If you take away the foundation that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, the entirety of Christianity would collapse. Peter was never made the head of the church or the “community” as Kirsch claims (746). Christ is the only head of the church (Eph. 5:23). Peter was not the special representative of Christ. He was an apostle who confessed that Christ was the Messiah, preached to the Jews that they killed the Messiah, and then told them how to be saved (Acts 2:36-38).

The previous quote from Lukefahr takes the position that Peter was the successor to Christ and the foundation of the church, and that current popes are the successor to Peter. He then stated “that while divisions exist, we should see the good in other churches, and work and pray for unity” (Lukefahr, p. 57). If Peter passed Christ’s authority to modern popes, and they teach one must be in the Catholic Church for salvation, how can they “see the good in other churches” which teach other methods of salvation? This is an outright contradiction, and therefore we must address the claim of “Apostolic Succession.” Do they have authority based on this claim?

### **Apostolic Succession (The Passing of Authority)?**

The primary claim for authority of the Catholic Church and her leadership (Pope) is the claim of Apostolic Succession. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church:

In order that the full and living Gospel might always be preserved in the church the Apostles left bishops as their successors. They gave them ‘their own position of teaching authority.’ Indeed the ‘apostolic preaching, which is expressed in a special way in the inspired books, was to be preserved in a continuous line of succession until the end of time (Catechism of the Catholic Church 30).

One must address this claim with scripture. First, the Catholic Church tries to mislead you by making the reader think that Bishops in the Catholic Church are the equivalent of the Bishops we read about in the New Testament. This could not be further from the truth. Bishop is only one of the names, from the New Testament, given to those who oversaw the local church. Other names include: Elder, Pastor, Presbyter, Overseer, or Shepherd. There are many requirements of Bishops in the New Testament, which space will not allow for a full description. However, one of the requirements to be a Bishop in the New Testament, according to 1 Tim. 3:2, is that he is the “husband of one wife”. How can a Bishop in the Catholic Church be one in the same as the New Testament when Catholic Priests cannot marry? A Bishop must also have faithful children (Titus 1:6), which would also be out of the question for a unmarried, celibate man. Obviously they are not one in the same! The attempt to pass off Catholic Bishops today as equivalent to New Testament Bishops is easily defeated by showing their characteristics, then comparing those to “Bishops” in the Catholic faith today. They have never been, nor are they now the same.

The next claim according to the Catholic Catechism is “they (Apostles) gave them ‘their own position of teaching authority’” to these Bishops (Catechism of the Catholic Church, p. 30). This was not possible, as only Jesus had the authority to determine who would be inspired by the Holy Spirit for the reason of teaching and recording the New Testament. “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26). Ask

yourself “who was Jesus talking to?” He was clearly talking to the Apostles and the Apostles only. Jesus hand selected the Apostles to be his ambassadors in the inspired teaching and preaching of the Gospel, and did not at any time give them authority to “pass” on this position of authority. The Apostles could give a miraculous gift to a baptized believer by laying hands on that believer, but this was a far cry from giving infallible authority and the ability to make laws for God. The conferring of miraculous gifts, as well as the Apostles position of authority, ended when the last Apostle died. According to Lukefahr in *We Believe...A Survey Of The Catholic Faith*:

Bishops are leaders of church communities called dioceses, which vary in size and in number of parishes (local churches) and members. The word bishop comes from the Greek episkopos, meaning “overseer.” Bishops are the successors of the apostles, and have the fullness of the priesthood... Originally, local bishops were elected by the people. Now the pope selects bishops, in consultation with the bishops and perhaps the priests of a given area (Lukefahr 152).

Once again one sees a member of the Catholic Church making a claim which is contrary to the teachings of the Bible and offering no scripture in support of his doctrine. There is no verse of scripture which declares “Bishops are the successors of the Apostles, and have the fullness of the priesthood.” Further, since the apostles did not have the authority to pass on their “positions of authority” as mentioned above, there is no authorized Biblical position of Papacy. Thus, since there is no Biblically authorized position of Papa, Pope, or Holy Father (used by Catholics to describe the Pope), he does not have the authority to change the criteria or process as to how bishops are selected or who selects them.

### **What Does The Bible Teach About Authority?**

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him (Col. 3:16-17).

What we learn from these verses is that the “Word of Christ” (New Testament) should dwell in us, and that all things should be done in the “name of the Lord Jesus”. That does not mean we can do anything as long as we claim to do it in his name. It means we do all things by His authority. My favorite example to explain this verse is when a police officer comes to the door and says “in the name of the law, open the door.” The police officer means by the authority of the law, open the door. The same is true of Col 3:16-17. Paul is saying “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all” by the authority of Jesus Christ. Is the Catholic Church doing all things by the authority of Jesus Christ? The answer is clearly no in the areas of belief, teaching, and manner of worship.

When studying authority, one must understand there are common types of language in the Scriptures which give authority. There are imperative statements (statements of direct command), Declarative statements (statements which state a fact), and Interrogative sentences (questions). We cannot simply change or make decisions in regard to “the faith” based on our own preferences.

A great example of Biblical authority is the account with Nadab and Abihu in the Old Testament. “And he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the LORD, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring it within the veil” (Lev. 16:12). Now, to understand Biblical Authority, let’s look at how Nadab and Abihu sinned.

And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD (Lev. 10:1-2).

What we learn is they offered “strange,” or unauthorized, fire and were consumed by God. Anything unauthorized by God is an abomination to Him. As Christians we are under the New Covenant (New Testament) and are bound to its teachings. Consider Matthew 15:9: “But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.” This is exactly what the Catholic Church is doing today! They are teaching commandments of men. Their commandments are contradictory to the Scriptures. Nowhere in the Bible do I see Peter given the authority to pass on, through “Apostolic Succession,” the office of Pope. Nowhere in the Bible do I find that an infallible leader of the church would be allowed to make “new laws,” especially laws which contradict plainly understood scriptures.

### **How Can We Understand Authoritative Truth?**

“God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” we learn that we must worship him in “truth” (John 4:24). Does the Catholic church have the truth? “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (John 17:17). God’s word is truth! We must worship according to his Word, doing only that which is found in the New Testament. The Catholic Church worships him according to their own doctrines and not by abiding in the doctrine of Christ. You may say, “is that really so bad, or aren’t all religious groups really o.k.?” “Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son” (2 John 9). Based on 2 John 1:9, those who “transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God”. Notice another verse: Now these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes; that in us ye might learn not to go beyond the things which are written; that no one of you be puffed up for the one against the other (1 Cor. 4:6 ASV).

The Catholic Church does transgress God's laws and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ. The Catholic Church does "go beyond the things which are written." Thus, according to these verses, they have "not God." If one has not God, how can they be the Authority? Clearly the Catholic Church is NOT the Authority!

### **Review Questions:**

Question 1) Does the argument that the Aramaic text shows Peter was the foundation of the church have any merit?

Question 2) Does the argument that the Greek text shows Peter was the foundation of the church have any merit?

Question 3) If Peter was the foundation of the Catholic Church, and they have all truth, are they contradicting themselves by saying they should be in unity with all religious groups which claim a belief in Jesus but teach differing methods of salvation?

Question 4) Does the claim of the Catholic Church that Peter passed on his "authority given by Christ" to Bishops have any scriptural proof?

Question 5) Who were the only men to be appointed as ambassadors (authoritative) for Christ according to John 14:26?

Question 6) Do Bishops in the Catholic Church meet the requirements of Bishops in the New Testament?

Question 7) Did unscriptural Bishops have the authority to create a new office of "Pope"?

Question 8) What does "in the name of the Lord Jesus" mean?

Question 9) Why did Nadab and Abihu die?

Question 10) Why must worship be in spirit and Truth? What is truth according to John 17:17?

Question 11) Does Catholicism worship according to the authority of the Bible (truth)?

Question 12) Does Catholicism "transgress" or "go beyond" the authority of the Scriptures?

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