

- The Silent Pulpit
- The Record Counts
- Trump: A Good President?
- A Politically Incorrect Sermon

Catholicism's Errant Teachings

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By Mark Swarbrick

Traditions of Men versus God's Word

Sola scriptura, Latin for “by scripture alone” is the doctrinal truth of the reformation that proclaims that the Bible is the only infallible or inerrant authority for Christian faith, and that it contains all knowledge necessary for salvation and holiness. Every non-Christian cult I can think of adds something to the Bible. The Mormons add the Book of Mormon and claim their president is an infallible prophet. The Jehovah's Witnesses wrote their own version of the Bible and they claim their church magazine is an infallible prophet. Christian Scientists revere the writing of Mary Baker Eddy as scripture. Every false religion and non-Christian cult has an extra-biblical source of authority.

The Catholic Church has done the same thing, claiming their Pope is an infallible apostle and that the traditions of the Catholic Church are equal to God's Word in the Holy Bible.

Jesus condemned following man's commandments instead of God's written word:

So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, "Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with 'unclean' hands?" He replied, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: "'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men. You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men.'" And he said to them: "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!" (Mark 7:5-9)

This is exactly what the Catholic Church has done: They neglect the commands of God and hold instead to the tradition of men. They observe rituals and rites made up by men, forbid eating certain meats on certain days and enjoin a plethora of religious observances that, as Paul said

...are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence. (Colossians 2:34)

The Christian Way – Scripture Reveals Truth traditions of Men versus God's Word

The apostles warned us over and over to hold fast to their teaching, and it is their teaching we find in the Holy Bible. This is what they told us:

So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter. (2 Thessalonians 2:15)

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition...rather than on Christ. (Col 2:8)

But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I

say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned! (Galatians 1:8-9)

To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them. (Isaiah 8:20)

Do not add to His words or He will reprove you, and you will be proved a liar. (Proverbs 30:6)

Any revelation or teaching must line up with the Bible. If it is contrary to the Word of God, it is invalid. Any revelation that is truly from God will be in harmony with any previous revelation from God. We read in the scriptures that the Bereans used scripture to determine if the apostles were teaching the truth.

Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with all eagerness, examining the scriptures daily to see if these things were so. (Acts 17:11)

When Jesus was tempted by the devil in the wilderness, his defense in each case was to quote scripture. Three times he told Satan, *"It is written"* and then quoted from the Old Testament. For nearly every question put to Jesus he responded by quoting scripture:

"Have you not read what David did..." Mat 12:3

"Have you not read in the law how on the Sabbath..." Mat 12:5

"Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them..." Mat 19:4

"Have you not read what was said to you by God..." Mat 22:31

"Have you not read this scripture..." Mark 12:10

"Have you not read in the book of Moses..." Mark 12:26

"It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone..." Mat 4:4

“It is written, ‘You shall not tempt the Lord your God...’ Mat 4:7

“It is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God...’ Mat 4:19

“It is written, ‘Behold, I send my messenger...’ Mat 11:10

“It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer...’ Mat 21:13

“It is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd...’ Mat 26:31

“It is written, ‘This people honors me with their lips...’ Mark 7:6

“It is written of him...’ Mark 9:13

As a point of fact, “It is written” appears 64 times in the New Testament. The phrase is used over and over by the apostles, who were accustomed to hearing the Lord define doctrine based upon the Old Testament scriptures. Jesus’ way of saying “Have you not read” is a chiding reprimand. It is Jesus’ way of reinforcing the idea to his hearers, that they *should* have read this in the scripture and therefore understood the truth. This is a clear indication from Christ that the Holy Bible is reliable for discerning spiritual truth. Catholicism has done the very thing that Jesus condemned the Jewish leaders for doing, making up man-made rules, rituals and dogmas to supplant the written Word of God to present a false religiosity.

Jesus: The One and Only Mediator

Nowhere in God’s Holy Scripture are we told we have to confess to a priest to obtain forgiveness for sins. In fact, the scripture tells us that only God can forgive sins (Luke 5:21). When did any of the apostles tell us to pray to dead people? Not one time does the Bible tell us to do this. Not once. On the contrary the Scripture tells us to take our requests directly to God through Jesus Christ. Contact with the dead is a sin:

Do not turn to mediums or seek out spiritists, for you will be defiled by them. I am the LORD your God. (Leviticus 19:31)

Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. (Deuteronomy 18:10-11)

Consulting with the dead is forbidden and that is exactly what prayer to Mary, Joseph and other dead people is. It is consultation with the dead. It is against scripture. It is sin.

The appearance of Moses and Elijah with Christ to the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration does not in any way sanction prayers to the dead. I have heard this argument before. Look at it in context. Did Jesus direct the disciples to pray to them when they appeared or after they left? Did the disciples even speak to them? No, only Jesus. In spite of these facts the Catholic Church has made up myriads of rules and rituals for praying to supposed “saints.” In the first place, there is no such things as a select group called “saints,” in the Catholic sense. The Bible teaches that all born again believers are saints. This is all man-made religion in contradiction to the World of God. The only Biblical instance of a man speaking to a dead person was when Saul spoke to the prophet Samuel and as punishment for this violation of God’s Word, Samuel pronounced that Saul would die the next day.

If prayer to dead people were as important as the Catholic Church makes it, then why didn’t the apostles ever tell us to do it? Why isn’t it in the Bible? The unbiblical practice of prayers to the spirits of the dead wasn’t begun until 375 AD. In Luke chapter 11 we read that the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray. What did Jesus teach them? The Rosary? Did he tell them to pray, “Hail Mary, full of grace...”? Did he give instruction on praying to dead people? No. Rather:

When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven (Luke 11:2)

Furthermore, praying to dead people is not the same thing as simply asking a living friend to pray for you, as is claimed. Prayer is a spiritual activity, a form of worship. It is a duty of service and supplication that belongs only to God. Prayer to anyone but God is idolatry. The reason God forbids contact with the dead is because He knows it will lead to idolatry. God jealously desires our devotion and he doesn’t want it given away to anyone or anything else. Prayers to the dead can lead to

demonic oppression and delusion. Demons delight in this sort of activity.

Why should we pray to some dead person and ask them to ask Jesus for something, when Jesus and the apostles told us repeatedly that we can go directly to God through Christ? God sees our thoughts from afar. He hears our every prayer. He desires and wants our attention and devotion and he delights in our prayers. Praying to the dead makes as much sense as, for example, if I am standing next to you, and I call someone else on the phone and ask them to call you to ask you something for me. Why would I do that? I am right there with you. I can ask you myself. Jesus said he would never leave nor forsake us and that He is with us even to the end of the age. He has entered into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. So why ask some dead person to talk to God for you when God is right there, knowing your every thought and delighting in your every word? Catholicism has invented a multitude of mediators between God and man. Yet scripture tells us something different:

For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5)

That nails it right there. One mediator. Yet Catholicism has referred to Mary as *Mary Mediatrix of all graces, Queen of Heaven, Mother of God* and that, like Jesus, she was sinless, assumed into heaven, and there participates in the mediating of divine grace along with her son. The truth is, the Bible tells us that Mary was a sinner that needed salvation like anyone else and as far as the kingdom of God is concerned, she was no more special than the average believer:

While Jesus was saying these things, one of the women in the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, "Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts at which you nursed." But He said, "On the contrary, blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it." (Luke 11:27-28)

A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you." "Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother." (Mark 3:31-

25)

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The fact is Mary is not the mother of God. She is merely the mother of Jesus' earthly body. Jesus existed as God long before He created Mary. Nevertheless, the Catholic Church has elevated her to a place where she is adored and worshipped by thousands. Supposedly her apparition appears all over the world and she goes about bestowing her miracles on whosoever she chooses. People direct their spiritual worship to her instead of to God. They pray to her statue and punish their bodies till they bleed to prove their devotion to her. This is idolatrous worship. Catholic myths have been invented that claim she never sinned, never had any other children besides Jesus (when the Bible says she did) and that she never died and was taken up to heaven. None of that is true or Biblical. It is merely myth to promote Mary worship.

Catholics are taught to claim that they don't worship Mary, they only adore her. They pull out dictionaries and talk about the Greek and Aramaic word meanings of different levels of devotion to try to obfuscate the obvious. But these are only semantic distortions to attempt to evade the fact that they are disobeying God. Catholics say they only ask Mary to pray to God for them. Not true. Go to Mexico and observe frenzied Catholics crawling for blocks on bloody knees to the Basilica of Guadalupe to worship the Virgin Mary. See them kneeling and crying and praying to her statue and then tell me they are not worshipping her. This sort of thing goes on all over the world. And what do they pray? Here are some sample prayers. These are from *The Glories of Mary*, a fully authorized publication of the Roman Catholic Church. Its latest edition is published by the Catholic Book Publishing Company of New York and officially stamped by the Vicar General, the Archdiocese of New York.

"We have confidence but in thee, O most faithful virgin. O great mediatrix of peace between men and God..."

"O Mary, sweet refuge of poor sinners, assist me with thy mercy. Banish me from the infernal enemies and come thou to take my soul and present it to the eternal judge. My queen, do not abandon me, I give you my heart and soul."

"Mary, blessed virgin, immaculate queen, I dedicate my family forever to thy service. I

Mary, blessed virgin, immaculate queen, I dedicate my family forever to thy service. I appoint thee ruler of my whole house. Bless us, defend us, provide for us, counsel us, comfort us, assist us in our infirmities, especially in the sorrows of death. Grant that we may go to heaven.”

Just listen to them: *“I give you my heart and soul...grant that we may go to heaven.”* That is worship and no amount of semantic silliness can get around this fact. This is not simply asking a deceased friend to pray for you. This is idolatrous worship of Mary. So that there could be no confusion as to what idolatry is, God has made it very plain in scripture, beginning with the Ten Commandments:

*Thou shalt not make unto thee **any graven image**, or **any likeness** of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. **Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them**, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God... (Exodus 20:3-5)*

*Ye shall make you no idols nor **graven image**, neither rear you up **a standing image**, neither shall ye set up any image of stone in your land, **to bow down unto it**: for I am the LORD your God. (Leviticus 26:1)*

*So watch yourselves carefully...so that you do not **act corruptly and make a graven image** for yourselves in the form of any figure, the likeness of **male or female**...So watch yourselves, that you **do not forget the covenant of the LORD your God** which He made with you, and make for yourselves a **graven image in the form of anything** against which the LORD your God has commanded you. (Deuteronomy 4:15-16,23)*

*Thou shalt not make thee **any graven image**, or any **likeness of any thing** that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the waters beneath the earth: **Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them**, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God... (Deuteronomy 5:8-9)*

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness... (2 Timothy 3:16)

Does the Catholic Church set up graven images? Yes. Do Catholics bow down before them? Yes. Does the Bible call this idolatry? Yes. Does the Bible tell us to lovingly rebuke with scripture Christians who disobey God's Word? Yes.

So no matter what words the Catholic Church tries to cloak their worship with, the Bible says that bowing down to a statue is worship and the Bible says this provokes God to a righteous jealous anger. Every Catholic who willfully disregards God's Word and instead follows after man's teaching will have to give an account to God for their idolatry.

This is what the LORD says: "Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the LORD. (Jeremiah 17:5)

You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men. (Mark 7:8)

Where in the Psalms are there examples of prayers to Mary? They are not to be found. Where in the New Testament are we told to pray to Mary or to dead people? Nowhere. Do we find Jesus condemning the Pharisees for following their traditions instead of the Word of God? Yes, many times! Catholicism is following in the error of the Pharisees, putting their own man-made traditions above God's Word – The Holy Bible.

Papism versus the Ministry of the Holy Spirit

Catholicism considers their "Pope" to be an infallible prophet or apostle to the church. This error stems from a misunderstanding of spiritual authority under the new covenant. The way God leads the church under the new covenant is vastly different from the way he led under the old covenant. Like Mormonism, Jehovah Witnesses and other cults which recognize an authoritative spiritual leader, Catholicism mistakenly assumes that the Old Testament manner of leadership is still in effect.

One of the problems with this position is that it assumes that the Old Testament practice of God providing new revelation through prophets is something that continues under the new covenant. Such is not the case. In Hebrews 1:1-2 we read:

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son... (Hebrews 1:1-2)

It was *in the past*, under the old covenant, that God spoke through prophets. Today he speaks through His Son, Jesus. When Jesus taught that certain things of the Old Covenant were done away, he made this statement:

No one puts a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and a worse tear results. Nor do people put new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wineskins burst, and the wine pours out and the wineskins are ruined; but they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved.”

Bringing back the office of Old Testament prophets is like putting new wine into old wineskins. New prophets to teach new doctrines are not needed today. Scripture tells us that the church is...

...built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

And Jesus taught that the time of the prophets ended with John the Baptist. Jesus said:

For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. (Matthew 11:13)

The Old Testament prophets that God used *in the past* are part of the foundation of God's Church, along with the teaching of the apostles. We have this foundation in the Holy Bible, the sole rule for faith and practice in Christian churches. Jesus Christ, his reality in our lives, his redemptive power at work in us as we surrender to Him, is the chief cornerstone of the church. Catholicism has replaced Jesus, the chief cornerstone, with a piece of old foundation from the past – Old Testament prophets. Jude 1:3 tells us:

*Contenta earnestly for the faith which was **once for all** handed down to the saints.*

Notice this tells us that the faith was **once for all** handed down to the saints. But if Catholic theology is correct, the faith was not once for all handed down. It had to be handed down again and again by pope after pope.

We should bear in mind that the Bible never once encourages us to seek out a living prophet or pope to give us further revelation from God, but rather tells us over and over to hold onto what we have already been taught and to be cautious of those claiming to be prophets. As the Apostle Paul says:

...hold fast the word which I preached to you (1 Co 15:2)

In Jeremiah Chapter 31 there is a prophecy that predicted the coming of the new covenant and some of the changes it would bring:

The time is coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers...This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the LORD. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.” (Jeremiah 31:21-34)

This tells us that under the new covenant that we no longer need a prophet to teach us how to know the Lord, for all who accept Christ have him in their heart, from the least to the greatest, and the Holy Spirit guides each of us into all truth. When God’s law is written into our hearts and minds by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, then we no longer need the office of Old Testament prophet. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would do these things for us:

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. (John 16:13)

And this promise wasn’t to just a select few:

And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.” (Acts 2:38-39)

The Apostle John taught that special prophets were not needed to bring new teaching because the anointing of the Holy Spirit would guide every believer.

As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him. (1 John 2:27)

There is a type of New Testament prophecy that is entirely different from Old Testament prophecy. Under the Old Covenant only a select few were chosen to be anointed with God’s Spirit and speak for Him. Under the New Covenant *everyone* can prophesy by speaking forth the truth of God’s Word. Hear the Apostle Peter:

This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: ” ‘In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.” (Acts 2:16-18)

Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues, but even more that you would prophesy; and greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edifying...For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted. (1 Corinthians 14: 5, 31)

So we see that there is change between Old Testament prophets and New Testament Prophecy. Under the new covenant all Christians can prophesy. Yet, all prophecy and preaching was to be judged by the standard of the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament Apostles. In other words, if it doesn’t agree with the Bible, reject it:

Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. (Romans 16:17)

Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment. (1 Co 14:29)

Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. (Acts 17:11)

Bringing back the office of Old Testament prophet is contrary to the New Testament doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. The Bible clearly tells us that all Christians are priests unto God:

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for god's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light... (1 Peter 2:9)

You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God... (Rev 5:10)

The Wikipedia Encyclopedia explains this doctrine succinctly:

*The Epistle to the Hebrews calls Jesus the supreme "high priest," who offered himself as a perfect sacrifice (Hebrews 7:23-28). Protestants believe that through Christ they have been given direct access to God, just like a priest; thus the doctrine is called the **priesthood of all believers**. God is equally accessible to all the faithful, and every Christian has equal potential to minister for God. This doctrine stands in opposition to the concept of a spiritual aristocracy or hierarchy within Christianity.*

All Christians are priests, in the sense that they can proclaim forth the gospel message found in the Bible, but the Old Testament concept of a priest being a mediator between God and man is discontinued under the New Covenant.

For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus... (1 Timothy 2:5)

All Christians have access directly to God through their personal relationship with Jesus Christ. This is far better than the Old Testament arrangement of only a select few having this privilege. The idea of a special prophet speaking authoritatively for God is also contrary to the New Testament teaching of the equality of believers:

But you are not to be called 'Rabbi, for you have only one Master and you are all

brothers. And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor are you to be called 'teacher,' for you have one Teacher, the Christ. The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. (Matthew 23:8-12)

The Catholic practice of calling a priest “father” or calling someone a “pope” (which means father) or referring to the pope as “Holy Father” is a violation of Jesus’ explicit command to not call “anyone on earth father.” 1 John 3:4 tells us that “sin is lawlessness.” Calling the pope Holy Father is violating Jesus’ command, and therefore is lawlessness. It is sin.

The spirit of this command is to prevent a spiritual hierarchy within the church. Jesus was not making a legalistic demand that no child should ever call his dad “father,” or that father/child relationships never were to be verbally recognized. Neither was he saying that you couldn’t ever use the phrase, “teacher.” Jesus’ prohibition is to be understood in a religious context. He didn’t want Christian leaders to be given the kind of titles that might be perceived as designating spiritual superiority. He was saying not to set up a religious hierarchy within the church and consider some religious teacher or leader as holier than anyone else, because in the New Testament church everyone is to be considered as equal, as brothers and sisters in Christ. This is the spirit of the command. This principle is exactly what Catholicism violates with its priests and popes. God wants the New Testament church to rely intimately upon the Holy Spirit for guidance. Popes, priests and prophets, or any such high sounding titles or offices, detract and distract from the vitally important and intimate relationship of Christ to His church through the Holy Spirit.

Setting up some man as a pope and calling him Holy Father and Vicar of Christ is a blatant violation of the express command of our Lord Jesus Christ. Catholics try to divert attention from this commandment of our Lord by pointing to verses where Paul speaks of Timothy as his child:

Therefore I sent to you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord... (1 Co 4:17)

Catholics argue, “See, Paul speaks of Timothy as his son, so Paul is calling himself his spiritual father, so that makes it OK to have a priest and a pope and call them

Father or Holy Father.” But this misses the point. Paul was not instructing Timothy or anyone else to call him “Holy Father,” “Vicar of Christ,” or any other pompous religious title. He was only saying that he had led Timothy to the Lord and instructed him in the gospel and he therefore calls him his “child in the Lord” because Timothy was the fruit of Paul’s ministry. This argument used by Catholics is nothing but the proverbial straw man argument. They set up a straw man and knock it down and think they have proved a point. Protestants don’t claim that the Bible condemns the use of the words father, child, or teacher. What we point out is that Jesus taught in numerous places that the New Testament church should not be led by an oligarchy and that this was of such importance that we should be careful not to designate grandiose titles to those who minister.

Catholics also call the pope the *Vicar of Christ*, which means, “*Instead of Christ.*” Consider Jesus’ words:

But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. (John 16:7)

Notice that Jesus did not say that when he went away he would leave a pope to be on earth “instead” of him. No, the only “Vicar of Christ” or “Instead of Christ” upon earth today is the Holy Spirit.

Jesus the Christ is the Rock, not Peter

In Matthew Chapter 16 Jesus says to Peter, “*And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church...*” Catholicism claims that this statement is proof that Peter was the first pope. However, we know from many other scriptures that Jesus is the Rock and that Jesus is the Cornerstone of the church, not Peter. Let us look at this passage in context and we can see what it really says. As you read the passage below, ask yourself, “What is the context?”

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not

revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” Then he warned his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ. (Matthew 16:13-20)

You see, the subject of discussion is not who Peter is, but who Jesus is. That is the whole point here. The discussion was not about Peter being appointed as a pope, but rather it is all about who Jesus is. Throughout the New Testament the central message is the personage of Jesus. “Who do you say that I am?” is the question upon which rests every individual’s salvation. It is faith in *who* Jesus said he was that is fundamental to the gospel message. When Peter gets it right, “You are the Christ,” then Jesus commends him. Jesus expounds that this statement is foundational; it is the rock upon which Christ will build his church. He commends Peter and explains that in God’s providence and plan, that the one whose name means rock, was the first to proclaim forth the foundational rock of Christianity – belief in the name of Jesus as the Christ, as it says in Romans 10:8-9

...the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Do you see that this is the rock? Think about it: When you confess that Jesus is the Christ and confess with your mouth and make him Lord of your life, it is that which brings salvation, adds you to the church and brings you into right relationship with God. It is that which is the rock upon which Christ builds his church. His church is built by adding members to it, and members are added, not by faith in Peter as a pope, but by people professing and confessing their faith in Jesus as the Christ.

Jesus said 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.” What did he mean by that? What are the keys? Catholics are taught to believe that this gave Peter some special authority. But we know that cannot be so, for shortly after this Jesus instructs them that all in the church are to be equal brothers and sisters and that the authoritative pompous way of the world was not to be the pattern for the church:

Also a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. (Luke 22:25-26)

Here was the perfect place for Jesus to say that Peter was the greatest, and proclaim him the first pope, if that were really the case. But that is not said. Instead Jesus says, "You are not to be like that." So what did Jesus mean by this reference to the keys of the kingdom? The phrase "keys to the kingdom of heaven" is merely a poetic reference to the gospel message, for acceptance thereof is what grants one entrance to heaven. Jesus was going to give the authority and responsibility of the proclamation and definition of the gospel to Peter, but not to him (or any imagined successors) exclusively as Catholicism would say. Peter, as representative of the apostles as a whole, was to be given the keys, and by inference and extension, all the apostles were to be recipients of the keys.

Notice Jesus speaks in the future tense: Peter doesn't yet have the keys, but Jesus *will* (future tense) give them to him. Jesus next launches into an explanation that he is going to die, which is the reason for speaking of the keys. Peter had just declared to Jesus, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus, upon hearing this declaration and seeing that his disciples have come to understanding of his nature, realizes that his earthly mission was nearly finished, for the disciples were nearly ready to become apostles; thus the discussion of the keys.

Jesus currently held the keys, in that while he was on earth his word was the ultimate authority for truth. After Christ's death and resurrection, and the disciples tarried in wait for the Holy Spirit, they at that time received the keys to the kingdom. Now, as possessors of the "keys to the kingdom of heaven" they were no longer just disciples, but were now fully qualified apostles, with authority to proclaim the word of God by their writing and speaking. They realized the mantle had passed to them and immediately began to minister in that capacity.

Although Jesus was speaking to Peter, in the hearing of the apostles, these words were not only for Peter, but by extension to all the apostles, for all the apostles proclaimed salvation to "whosoever believes." The "key" to entering heaven is to

believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. The apostles proclaimed that message and any Christian who preaches salvation to others is wielding the keys to the kingdom of heaven, for it is not Peter who decides who goes to heaven, it is determined by our choice, by whether we believe or not. And when the apostles or any Christian proclaims the truth of God's word, that there is salvation in Jesus and in no other name, signs and wonders follow the preaching of this message and people make decisions which will affect them for eternity in this life and the next. Truly, response to the word of God binds things in heaven and on earth, but not only for Peter but for all Christians.

Sometimes Jesus spoke a truth to one disciple which was in fact truth for all of them. At times when Jesus spoke to the disciples, his words to them were also words to us. Communion for example: Jesus told the twelve at the last supper, "Do this in remembrance of me." But nowhere did Jesus ever tell the rest of the church to practice communion. He only said it to the twelve. Yet we practice communion. Why? Jesus never told any others to do this. Yes, we practice communion and rightly so, for those words were not just for the twelve, but for us as well. He said those words to the apostles, but by extension they applied to us also. In the same way then, these words to Peter about the keys of the kingdom and binding and loosing were not just for Peter and not just for the twelve, but for us also.

And this is mighty wonderful news! How sad it would be if only Peter could proclaim the truth of the gospel and loose the powers of heaven upon earth. Praise be to God that all believers have this power! When we proclaim and believe that Jesus is the Christ the son of the living God, then we stand upon the solid rock of truth upon which the church is built and we can, with faith, command demons to flee and mountains to move as we believe Jesus' words:

Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. (Mark 11:24)

This power to bind the powers of Satan and to loose the mercies of God was not only for Peter, but for all of the church to use as we make disciples of all nations. We all – all Christians – hold the keys to the kingdom of heaven. We can speak with authority to all who will hear us, that if they believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, that

entrance to heaven is given to them. Faith in Christ is the key to heaven.

How much more wonderful this truth is than Catholicism's distortion! Catholicism would take this great truth and twist into a depraved system wherein a pompous pope supposedly holds the keys to God's kingdom and can decide who enters there based upon indulgences purchased for money. What wicked arrogance this is! Truly this is a doctrine of demons.

Early Church Government

The Bible Presbyterian Reporter, January 1959 has a nice synopsis which describes the government of the early church. As we can see, the first century church had no pope and Peter didn't call the shots:

The fact is that the early church had no head on earth. Christ was their head and they all were brothers. They did have an organization, however, and Presbyterians point to Acts 15 as a splendid example of how it operated. There was a doctrinal question at Antioch. What should the church of Antioch do to settle it? Should they write a letter to Peter asking his decision? This would be the Romanist position. But they did not. Should they write a letter to the "college of Apostles"? This is the Episcopal position that the bishops by apostolic succession have the whole authority in the church. But Antioch did not do that. Should they call a congregational meeting of the church at Antioch and have the matter decided by the vote of the congregation? That would be the independent theory of church government. But they did not do this either. Rather they sent representatives to a synod meeting held at Jerusalem where the apostles and elders came together to consider the matter. They considered it carefully with prayer and Scripture study. Finally the apostles and elders decided on a policy and gave out decrees to which all the churches were expected to submit (Acts 16: 4). There was no primacy of Peter or of anyone else. There was instead a democratic meeting of the ordained leaders of the churches judging matters according to God's Word. This is the Scriptural answer to Roman Catholic pretensions on Peter.

The claim that Peter was the first pope is simply not supported by scripture and Catholicism's claim that they are the original church is false. There is no "unbroken succession of popes" as is claimed. Countless books have been written which easily show the falsity of Catholic claims for apostolic succession. That fact is, for six

centuries after the time of Christ none of the churches attempted to exercise authority over any of the other churches. The early ecumenical councils were composed of delegates from the various churches who met as equals. The first six hundred years of the Christian era know nothing of any spiritual supremacy on the part of the bishops of Rome. The papacy was not founded until the year 590 with Gregory I, who consolidated the power of the bishopric in Rome.

Will The Real Pope Please Stand Up?

The world certainly has had no shortage of religions claiming to have a true prophet. The Catholic Church claims they always have a living prophet, or apostle, to speak for God and they call him the Pope. The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints says that their president is the true living prophet, while the Utah-based Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints says their president is the correct prophet. And then there is the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints who say they are the true church and have the correct prophet. Charles Russell, of the Jehovah's Witnesses, claimed to be a prophet and today JWs claim that their publishing house is God's current prophet. The Christian Scientists recognize Mary Baker Eddy as having been a prophetess and they revere her writings as scripture. Seventh Day Adventists believe that Ellen G. White was a prophetess and they quote her writings like Christians quote the Bible. How are we to know which of these, if any, is a true prophet? Everyone claims their "pope" is the true pope.

Warnings Against False Prophets

Indeed, which prophet is the true prophet? This is an important question because scripture warns over and over about the dangers of false prophets:

For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of

righteousness... (2 Corinthians 2:11-13-15)

But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons... (1 Timothy 4:1)

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies... Many will follow their sensuality... (2 Peter 2:1-2)

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. (1 John 4:1)

Contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints. For certain persons have crept in unnoticed... who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness... following after their own lusts; they speak arrogantly... (Jude 1:3-4,16)

Testing a Prophet — Examining the Fruit

How are we to determine who is a false prophet and who is a true prophet? Since the Bible has warned repeatedly to watch out for false prophets, there must be some way of testing a prophet. In fact, 1 John 4:1 above tells us to do exactly that – to test anyone claiming to be a prophet. So how exactly do we do that?

Fortunately, the Bible has given us specific instructions on how to test them:

Our Lord and Savior told us:

Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. (Matthew 7:15-18)

In this message, I want to tell you how to examine the fruit of the life of anyone

In this passage Jesus tells us we should examine the fruit of the life of any one claiming to be a prophet. We should expect good fruit from a true prophet. Good fruit doesn't mean having lots of followers, writing many books or building a large organization. Many wicked and evil men have built large organizations, written books or have even ruled entire countries. Good fruit means the fruit of the Holy Spirit in one's life:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control... (Galatians 5:22-23)

The Fruit of the Popes

What sort of fruit have we seen in the popes? The wickedness of the popes is so notorious that volumes have been written on the subject. Catholic historian Peter de Rosa in his book *Vicars of Christ*, writes:

Popes had mistresses as young as fifteen years of age, were guilty of incest and sexual perversions of every sort, had innumerable children, were murdered in the very act of adultery...In the old Catholic phrase, why be holier than the Pope?

Following is just a very small example of the wickedness of some of the popes:

Pope Sergius III ordered the murder of another pope and started the infamous pornocracy. He fathered an illegitimate son who later became pope.

John XII (937-964) became Pope as a teenager. He raped his two sisters along with other young girls. His massive orgies were notoriously spectacular. He converted the Lateran Palace into a brothel, raped female pilgrims in St. Peter's, stole church offerings, drank toasts to the devil, and invoked the aid of Jove, Venus, and other pagan gods when playing dice. He was deposed, but returned as pope when Otto left Rome, maiming and mutilating all who had opposed him. In 964 AD he was beaten by the husband of a woman with whom he was having an affair, dying three days later without receiving confession or the sacraments.

Pope John XIII (965-972) like his father (John XII) was known for his promiscuity.

He committed fornication with his dad's concubine and his own niece. He died just like his father – at the hands of an angry husband.

Pope Benedict IX (1033-1048) became pope at the age of twelve, had sex with boys, girls and *animals*. He also murdered a number of people.

Pope Clement VI (1342-1352) was a sex addict. He fornicated with prostitutes and mistresses. He was so taken with the idea of fornication; his thoughts would often stray during conversation to the point of embarrassment, Sunday mass included.

Pope Paul III (1534-1549) fornicated with his daughter on a regular basis. He murdered his mother and other relatives to protect his interests. He was also a pimp of 45,000 Roman prostitutes, collecting payments on a monthly basis.

Pope Leo X (1518-1521) is known primarily for the sale of indulgences to reconstruct St. Peter's Basilica and his challenging of Martin Luther's 95 theses. His extravagance offended not only people like Martin Luther, but also some cardinals. Many leading Catholics who opposed him died of food poisoning.

Pope Innocent IV (1243-1254) approved the use of torture to extract confessions of heresy. It is shocking to learn about the deranged instruments of torture that were used on so many innocent people. One of the most famous people to suffer at the hands of Roman inquisitors was Galileo. The church condemned Galileo for claiming that the earth revolved around the sun. So much for Papal infallibility.

Today wickedness still pervades Catholicism. The unnatural state of forced celibacy upon priests has driven many of them to sexual perversion and many a young boy has fallen prey to their advances. The Roman hierarchy has been complicit in attempting to shield and hide priests from the consequences of their actions, allowing them to continue their predatory debauchery. The Apostle Paul warned of this when he said:

...since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. (1Co 7:2)

The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons...they forbid people to marry... (1

Timothy 4:1)

Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife... (1 Timothy 3:2)

We see from this that Catholicism's ban on priests marrying is a doctrine of demons and contrary to the command of scripture that a pastor should be the "husband of one wife." It is the dogma of Catholicism that has led to the debauchery of priests and popes throughout history. The Catholic prohibition against priests marrying has created a psychosis amongst priests wherein, fifty percent engage in illicit sexual affairs, and nine percent of all priests prey upon minors.

These facts were compiled by psychotherapist Richard Spine who treated troubled priests, drawing upon his data from 500 case files from his 1990 study of celibacy for the Catholic Church. The recent movie *Spotlight* shows that in the city of Boston alone, the hierarchy of the Catholic Church kept nearly a hundred priests in ministry, moving them around to avoid detection, even after they knew they were pedophiles.

Jesus warned that false prophets would come as wolves in sheep's clothing. In other words, they would look like Christians; they would dress up like Christians. Look at the Roman Catholic aristocracy and behold their attire of royal robes. It is merely a ploy to look holy. It is merely sheep's clothing. The history of Catholicism shows that popes have been wolves in sheep's clothing. The entire institution of popery is fraught with deceit, idolatry and the glorification of man which has led to all manner of wickedness. Jesus said we would know the false prophets by their fruit. Truly the popes have been false prophets. We know them by their fruit.

Roman Catholicism – The First Church?

Like Mormonism and other cults, Catholicism accuses Protestantism of being split into many different warring factions and that only their group has remained unified since the time of the apostles. They claim they are the first church, tracing their

roots back to the first century and the Apostle Peter.

Nothing could be further from the truth. The errors of Catholicism didn't begin until the time of Constantine in the fourth century. It was then that Emperor Constantine married the church to the state. From then on the distinctive doctrines of Catholicism began to gradually arise as paganistic practices were adopted by the church. This was a fulfillment of The Apostle Paul's prophecy to the elders from Ephesus who met Paul at Miletus:

Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. (Acts 20:28-30)

In Ephesus, Christianity struck a blow to the worship of Diana, the Mother of the gods. It is noteworthy that the modern-day equivalent, the worship of Mary as the mother of God, finds its root in Ephesus. In AD 451, at the Council of Ephesus, the Roman Catholic Church bequeathed the title "Mother of God" to Mary, thus reviving the ancient cult in a modern garb.

As time went on other pagan ideas were incorporated, such as:[1]

1. Prayers for the dead. (A.D. 300)
2. Making the sign of the cross. (300)
3. Wax candles. (320)
4. Veneration of angels and dead saints, and use of images. (375)
5. The beginning of mass as a daily celebration. (394)
6. The worship and exaltation of Mary and use of term "Mother of God"(431)
7. Priests begin to dress differently from laity. (500)
8. Extreme unction. (526)