



# The Good News

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## Was Peter the First Pope?

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The Roman Catholic church considers Peter to have been the first Pope. While the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox churches do not recognize Peter as a Pope, they regard Peter as the first Chief Bishop, which is almost the same thing by comparison. Beyond these three “churches”, many people with no official “church affiliation” also consider Peter as the first Pope. The question we want to ask this morning is, was Peter the first Pope?

Roman Catholic sources, such as **Francis Sullivan’s “From Apostles to Bishops: The Development of the Episcopacy in the Early Church”** admit that *“Most Christian scholars from both sides of this divide agree that the threefold structure of ministry, with one bishop among a number of presbyters and deacons in each church, does not appear in the New Testament...Hardly anyone doubts that the church of Rome was led by a group of presbyters for at least a part of the second century ...No doubt proving that bishops were the successors of the apostles by divine institution would be easier if the New Testament clearly stated that before they died the apostles had appointed a single bishop to lead each of the churches they founded”*. Lutheran theologians further note that: *“We honor Peter and in fact some of our churches are named after him, but he was not the first pope, nor was he Roman Catholic. If you read his first letter, you will see that he did not teach a Roman hierarchy, but that all Christians are royal priests. The same keys given to Peter in Matthew 16 are given to the whole church of believers in Matthew 18.”* (From wels.net – Wels Topical Q&A). In lieu of this, it is not appropriate to go to any non-Biblical source to answer this question, but rather the only source that can be trusted – the Bible.

**Peter was the “rock” upon which the church was built** – While a Greek study of the terms “*petros*” to “*petra*”, found in **Matt. 16:18**, is helpful, we can go to other texts to understand what Jesus meant

when He said: *“upon this rock I will build My Church”*. We will learn that Jesus was referencing back to His earlier question “Who do men say that I am?” Peter answered the question and then gave his famous confession that he believed that Jesus was “the Christ, the Son of the living God”. Jesus was simply answering the same of Peter, that men say that Simon Bar-jonah was Peter, and upon the fact that Jesus is the Christ, He will build His church. In **Eph. 2:19-22**, Paul identifies Jesus as the “*chief cornerstone*” and the One upon whom the church was built. A “chief cornerstone” was the one stone upon which a house started. Identifying Jesus like this, and not Peter, is as plain as day, especially when Paul acknowledges that all the “apostles and prophets” provided a foundation on top of Jesus, not just Peter. **Eph. 1:22** identifies Christ as being “*head over all things to the church*”. **Eph. 4:15, 5:23, Col. 1:18, 2:10,19** all refer to Jesus as the “*head*” of the church. When we read of elders or bishops, there is never just one, but at least two (cf. **Acts 20:17, Titus 1:5**). In **I Peter 5:1**, Peter identifies himself as “*a fellow elder*”, not “the elder”. In **Matt. 20:25-28**, Jesus says that none of the apostles were to have dominion over the other. This comes after the mother of James and John requested an exalted position for them in the kingdom. The Catholic church teaches that the Pope is infallible (or at least when he sits in the Papal chair), yet we see Peter committing sin in **Gal. 2:11-14** by being a hypocrite, to the point that Paul had to confront him publicly.

When we look at what the Bible says, it should be clear that Peter was never a Pope, and no one man is to be respected or revered above another. The head of the church is Christ, and all should follow Christ. Men are fallible, but Christ is not. Heed the words of Jesus today (Mk. 16:16) by believing and being baptized for salvation.