

Christ's Gifts and Graces to Peter Don't Establish the Papacy

Daniel 11:36; Luke 22:31-32

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We will return (God willing) next week to our exposition of Daniel 11:36 and the vain and exalted king that is revealed there, but before doing so, I thought it would be important (and hopefully helpful) to briefly consider several New Testament passages (besides Matthew 16:18-19) to which the Church of Rome points in seeking to establish the Papacy and its primacy over the whole world.

Matthew 16:18-19 is for the Church of Rome the foundational passage that it claims establishes the Papacy. If that foundation falls, so does the Papacy (and it is revealed to be the Antichrist that usurps the office/authority of Jesus Christ as the alone Head of His Church). If that foundation falls, so do other passages of Scripture that the Church of Rome likewise claims establishes Peter as the first Pope.

This is no small matter (this is outrageous), for Vatican Council I (1869-1870) which the Church of Rome claims was infallible, decreed that the Papacy possesses

primacy over the whole world ... [that the Papacy is] the true Vicar of Christ, and the Head of the whole Church ... [that] full power was given to him, in Blessed Peter, by Jesus Christ our Lord, to tend, to rule, and to govern the Universal Church [and that from this] no one can deviate without loss of faith and of salvation.

Such claims are blasphemous in denying Christ and His sole Headship over His Universal Church, in taking the crown from off of Christ's head and placing it upon the Pope's head, and in claiming if we do not believe that to be true that we cannot be saved. So where else will the Church of Rome go in the New Testament to seek to falsely establish Peter as the first Pope? Let us briefly examine the following two texts: (1) Luke 22:31-32; (2) John 21:15-17.

I. Luke 22:31-32.

A. After Jesus had instituted the Lord's Supper in the upper room, He gave His disciples some very sad news which they struggled to understand (let alone to receive): one of the disciples would betray Jesus (Luke 22:21). Jesus meant it was Judas that would betray Him.

B. Shortly after that announcement before leaving the upper room, Jesus took the opportunity to forewarn Peter what was about to befall him and the other disciples by way of a great trial of sifting (beating the wheat and separating it from the chaff). This sifting of the disciples would come from Satan as they would soon flee from Christ in fear when He was arrested. They would be led into a period of great confusion because they did not understand why Jesus must die and be raised from the dead on the third day ("you" in Luke 22:31 is in the plural).

C. Jesus then shifts the focus from all the disciples in Luke 22:31 to Peter in Luke 22:32.

1. Jesus forewarns Peter of what is coming first to reveal his pride—Peter would deny the Lord (Luke 22:33-34; 1 Corinthians 10:12); and second, Jesus forewarns Peter to reveal His merciful and effectual intercession for His fallen (yet beloved) disciple. Peter's fall would not be a final and permanent fall in which Peter's faith in Jesus would be destroyed, but it would be a great fall from which Peter would be restored after his repentance. Jesus did not say "if" but "when" thou art turned again, go forth and strengthen thy brethren.

2. Jesus was not exalting Peter to a place as Pope above the other apostles or as Head of the Universal Church but was only commanding him to use his fall and his restoration to strengthen the faith of the other apostles. One could only see in this text an exaltation of Peter over all the apostles if one put it there—not because Jesus put it there. The Church of Rome, having already falsely claimed for Peter the

Papacy in Matthew 16:18-19, also reads into this passage that Jesus confirms the same office of Pope to Peter (without any mention of such an office—strengthen thy brethren is surely appropriate to all ministers of Christ and to all Christians—edify one another, admonish, encourage, and exhort one another).

3. Is the intercession of Jesus as Priest unique to Peter? No, the Lord Jesus likewise intercedes for all believers (Romans 8:33-34; Hebrews 7:25). The intercession of Jesus for us (not the intercession of Mary or the saints) is our assurance that we shall be saved to the uttermost (finally and completely saved through faith alone in Christ alone). The prayers of Jesus are always answered for He always prays according to the will of His Father (John 11:42). This may have been directed to Peter to teach Peter, but it is also true of all that trust alone in Jesus and manifest that saving faith in loving obedience to Him and His truth/commandments (even in repenting of sin and fleeing to the mercy of God in Christ Jesus).

II. **John 21:15-17.**

A. In this passage, the resurrected Jesus appears to some of His apostles after he had already appeared twice to them on two different occasions in John 20 (both times behind closed doors—the first time Thomas was not present—the second time Thomas was present). On both occasions, Peter was present with the other apostles. On neither occasion had Jesus directly addressed Peter and his denial of Christ, but on this occasion, Jesus does address Peter directly.

B. As these disciples went fishing, the resurrected Jesus appears to them on the seashore.

1. They had fished all night and had caught nothing, but Jesus (whom they did not yet recognize) calls out to them to cast their nets on the other side of the boat. When they do so, their nets are immediately filled with so many fish that they could not draw the net into the boat.

2. The Apostle John was the first to recognize this man on the shore to be the Lord Jesus, and says, “It is the Lord” (John 21:7). Upon hearing that, Peter jumps into the water and swims 100 yards to shore while the other disciples bring the boat to shore. Is Peter seeking to show Jesus that he loves Him even though he had denied Him? Then once all of them are together on dry land, Jesus invites His disciples who had fled from Him in fear the night He was arrested to share a meal that He has prepared for them. Jesus tells all the disciples to bring fish from the net (John 21:10). But who alone rushes to pull the whole net of fish to the shore? Peter (John 21:11). Is Peter once again seeking to show Jesus that he loves Him even more than the other apostles?

C. Jesus then directly addresses Peter (John 21:15-17) as to his attempts to show Jesus that he loved Him in spite of his denials of Christ. Just as Peter had denied the Lord Jesus three times, so Jesus asks Peter three times “lovest thou me more than these?” (i.e. more than the other apostles). He does not proudly respond that he loves Jesus more than the other apostles—he has learned his lesson about pride. Peter responds three times, “Yea, Lord; thou knowst that I love thee.” Each time the question is asked by Jesus and answered by Peter, Jesus then recommissions Peter to feed His lambs/sheep. As Peter publicly denied the Lord three time, so Jesus publicly restores/recommissions Peter to minister as His apostle.

D. Once again, the Church of Rome falsely claims that Jesus is confirming that Peter is the Pope and Head over His whole Church throughout the world. I say again that such an interpretation can only be imposed upon the text (from a previous false assumption from Matthew 16:18-19)—not derived from the text. Jesus is restoring that apostle to ministry that had fallen to such a great degree because of his three denials of Jesus. There is nothing mentioned here about Peter being established over all the other apostles or established as the supreme head of the Universal Church throughout the whole world or being the Vicar of Christ. A great fall was overcome by the greater love and mercy of the Lord Jesus in restoring Peter to feed, instruct, and care for the sheep over which Jesus is the Head/Good Shepherd.

E. Peter’s restoration is an example to us all that even such a great fall from the Lord Jesus does not close the door to His mercy when we sincerely repent and fall upon the mercy of God in Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 1:15-16). God’s grace is greater than all our sin.

F. Peter and Paul likewise command (on behalf of Jesus) faithful pastors/elders to feed the flock of Jesus (1 Peter 5:1-4; Acts 20:28; Matthew 28:18-20). It is not just Peter that was commissioned to feed the sheep, but Paul and all of the apostles as well as all ministers entrusted with the keys of the kingdom (especially the key of knowledge).

G. Neither of these two texts to which the Church of Rome appeals can carry the weight they impose upon them in establishing a universal headship of the Papacy over the whole Church throughout the world (let alone establishing the infallibility of the Papacy). Both these passages address the restoration of Peter, but not a restoration to some supreme office of Papacy over all the other apostles.

H. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit will teach His apostles all things and bring to memory all things that they need in order to record Scripture and to proclaim the truth (John 14:26). But that gift is not limited to Peter, but is bestowed on all the apostles. Jesus gave to His apostles the authority to declare the forgiveness of sin in His name and to declare the unforgiveness of sin in those who disbelieve (John 20:23). But that is not a power bestowed upon Peter alone, but is a declaratory power given to all the apostles (and to their true ministerial successors who proclaim the pure gospel of Jesus Christ). Paul speaks of the church being the pillar and support of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15). But Paul does not claim an infallibility in the Papacy or in Ecumenical Councils, but rather proclaims that Christ's faithful Church will always be identified by upholding, supporting, and defending the truth revealed in Scripture (that is true apostolic succession). All that we have to behold and to hear presently that is infallible is Holy Scripture—not Popes or Ecumenical Councils.

I. Application

1. Jesus confronted Peter with his sin, but He also showed to Peter His desire to enjoy fellowship with him in spite of his past unfaithfulness in denying Him. This is absolutely amazing. The resurrected and holy Christ desires to have fellowship with one like me, who sins against Him every day. What an incentive to come to Christ (rather than to flee from Him). We do not have to force His hand or to bend His arm as it were. He wants to enjoy us, even more than we want to enjoy Him. Just as the resurrected Christ prepared a communion meal for Peter (and the other disciples) along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, so our resurrected Savior comes to us today and every day to lovingly confront us with our unfaithfulness and pride. But He also promises us His forgiveness and usefulness in His kingdom that we may glorify/enjoy Him forever.

2. Many try to deal with past sins in various ways. Some do so by punishing themselves (as did Martin Luther by self-flagellation) or by calling themselves names. Some do so by depriving themselves of food (to show how despicable of a person they really are). Others go to the other extreme of drowning themselves in food, wine, sex, money, and clothing, or by binging in the very sin that brought on the guilt in the first place. Others go to a priest and receive various acts of penance which they are told will purge away their guilt and sin. Others simply push the sin into the background of their memories or contrive various excuses to justify their sin. Finally, there are those who deal with past sins by lashing out at others, and making life generally miserable not only for themselves, but for everyone around them. The Lord does not endorse any of the methods above in our dealing with our sins. He is a merciful God. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, no man can come to the Father but through Him. Regardless of our sin (we are all sinners in need of Christ as Savior), He will forgive us, if we will receive Him as our Savior and Lord who died for our sin and was raised from the dead to show that His sacrifice for our sin was accepted by the Father. Let us come to Him (one and all).

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