

FOUNDATION OF FAITH!
ECCLESIOLOGY
THE STUDY OF THE CHURCH
PART 6

This morning in our series on Foundation of Faith we are looking at the Church and specifically what the church is not. In our studies so far we saw that the church on the earth is not the universal or Catholic church, which that word means. The universal church or the invisible church is made up of believers who have gone to be with the Lord and those living on the earth right now. On the other hand, the visible church is made up of believers and unbelievers and that will not be sorted out until the Lord comes back.

This is not just a Protestant idea but it is clearly what the Scriptures teach. In Matthew 13:24-30 we see Jesus give a parable of the wheat and the tares and we are told, **“Another parable He put forth to them, saying: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. So the servants of the owner came and said to him, “Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?” He said to them, “An enemy has done this.” The servants said to him, “Do you want us then to go and gather them up?” But he said, “No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.””**

Here we see the farmer who sowed his seed and before it began to grow, while the farmer slept, someone came in and sowed tares or darnel amongst the good seed. Now this darnel is a weed that closely resembles wheat and is almost impossible to distinguish from the wheat until the wheat ripens and bears grain, fruit. Now his servants were ready to go and remove the darnel but because it so closely resembled the wheat, the farmer wanted them to wait until the harvest and then the reapers would come and separate them. The grain would go into the barn and the darnel into the fire. In other words, in the church today, the visible church, there are believers and unbelievers and some of the unbelievers look like believers. And thus, we must wait until the harvest, until the Lord comes back and He will separate the wheat from the tares!

The study this morning is not an easy one and it may offend some people. That is not what I want to do. What I would ask of you is that you would put aside tradition, put aside what others may have told you and let the Word of God speak what the truth is. And you will see that the Word of God is very clear on this issue of what the church is not or who the church is built upon. I will do my best to present the facts, not what others have said, just what God's Word has said. For some of it we will have to look at extra-biblical resources but as you will see, the foundation of who the church is built upon, the Scriptures are very clear. So hang in there, don't close me out, listen and then if I am wrong, you can show me but you can't show me by using what man has to say, you must show me what the Scriptures have to say regarding this issue!

And please understand that it is not about the Catholic denomination, or the Lutheran denomination, or the Methodist denomination, or the Episcopalian denomination or Calvary Chapel, it is about Jesus Christ! None of these denominations are in heaven, never have been and never will be. I know, great place to start out, offending everyone! I am sorry but that is just the reality. You are not going to get to heaven and have to show that you are a card carrying member of this denomination or non-denominational church. You will never find that in the Word of God! You must believe and receive Jesus as your Lord and Savior and you will be saved! That is how we enter into heaven, into the presence of God. There is salvation in no other name except the name of Jesus I don't care what church you go to!

Now before we get to our text this morning let me share what one denomination believes because it is from the verse we will be looking at this morning that they come to this conclusion. Thus, if they are right, then there is one visible true church, one universal church on the earth and if they are wrong, well then that destroys that denomination. You see, Catholics believe that the one true visible church Christ established is the Roman Catholic Church, over which He placed a visible Vicar of Christ, namely, St. Peter. They further hold that God set up an apostolic succession so that those who subsequently served as bishop of Rome are the only divinely appointed, infallible, official interpreters of faith and practice for believers. But, as we have seen in our previous studies and as we will see here this morning, there is no one visible church. There are many visible churches - with one invisible Head, Christ - that are to be based on the teachings of His infallible Word, the Bible.

Now I guess we need to start at where all this controversy and dispute comes from in the Word of God. And as you will see, once you look at what these verses say and what the rest of the Scriptures tell us, it will be very clear who the Church is built upon. Please turn to Matthew chapter 16 and we will begin reading in verse 13 where we are told, **“When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, ‘Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?’ So they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter answered and said, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.’ Then He commanded His disciples that they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ.”** Matthew 16:13-20.

Let me set the stage for what transpires here. We are told that Jesus and His disciples were in the area of Caesarea Philippi, which was located about 25 miles north of Bethsaida, by the slopes of Mount Hermon. It was gentile country with many pagan shrines, and the biggest was the Pan god which was located in a cave where the springs would flow which went into the Jordan River. And it is possible that as Jesus and His men walked by this shrine to Pan or Paneion, Jesus posed this question to them, **“Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?”**

Obviously that is a very important question and many people have many different answers to who Jesus is and we see that with the answers that some of them gave. Some people said He was John the Baptist, others said Elijah, and still others said Jeremiah or one of the prophets. The people were missing the point that Jesus is the Messiah, the fulfillment of what the Old Testament prophets spoke of.

Then Jesus makes this very personal, it is not important what others are saying, but what do you say about Jesus, who do you think He is! That is the most important question you will ever be asked, and how you respond will have eternal consequences! For Peter, he got it right. Jesus is the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Christ! How about you? Who is Jesus to you, Peter said, “**You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.**”

Now I like what Jesus does here to keep Peter from thinking too highly of himself. Jesus tells Peter that this was a spiritual revelation from God the Father and not from himself! Keep in mind that these guys would fight over who would be greatest in the kingdom and thus, I am sure that Peter felt pretty good about what he just said. Maybe he was thinking, “Hey guys, did you hear that? I got a spiritual revelation! I’m on my way to Pope-hood!” Sorry, but don’t knock Peter, we are all like that and we need to realize all that we do God is the one who has given us the ability to do those things. And for Peter, right after this encounter, He tells Jesus that He does not have to go to the cross and Jesus tells Peter, “**Get behind me Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.**” Matthew 16:23.

That is the problem with man, we blow it, we mess up, we get it wrong because we are acting contrary to what God has said in His Word and thus, how can the church be built upon fallible man? It can't as you will see! Now some of you may be thinking that this is not that important, but it really is. The reason being is that if the Catholic Church is right, if the Church is built upon Peter and his successors, the Popes, then we need to listen to them. But, if it is not built upon Peter and his successors, the Popes, then we need to look to the one who it is built upon, Jesus. And we will see that in a few minutes here.

Let me show you what was said in the First Vatican Council. They wrote,
... the Roman pontiff is the successor of blessed Peter, the prince of the apostles, true vicar of Christ, head of the whole church and father and teacher of all Christian people. To him, in blessed Peter, full power has been given by our lord Jesus Christ to tend, rule and govern the universal church.

- First Vatican Council, session 4, "First Dogmatic Constitution of the Church of Christ," chapter 1

All this controversy stems from what Jesus said after Peter made that declaration of who Jesus is. In Matthew 16:18 we are told, "**And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.**"

Now the Catholic Church believes that Peter is the Rock that the church has been built upon and Peter passed on that authority to succeeding Popes. They argue that “Peter” and “rock” are the same in Aramaic and thus, the church is built upon Peter, case closed. One big problem is that the Scriptures were written in Greek and not Aramaic. And to say that Jesus spoke in Aramaic and the words were transcribed in Greek and thus are wrong is pure speculation; there is no evidence for that. And if that were true then the same words would be used, but they are not as we will see. In fact, when words are spoken in Aramaic in the Bible they are written down that way.

Let’s look at these two Greek words and see what they mean because it will give us solid evidence of who the church is built upon. First of all “Peter” comes from the Greek word Petros and it is in the masculine genders and refers to a stone or a detached stone. Think of this stone as one that could be picked up and tossed or thrown. Now, listen carefully to this. Jesus did not say, “You are Peter (Petros) and upon this rock (petros) I will build my church.”

The word that Jesus used for “rock” is the Greek word petra and it speaks of a large rock or bedrock and it is a feminine noun. It is speaking of a massive rock. Thus, to understand what Jesus said we can translate this verse here in Matthew 16 like this, “You are a stone, and upon this bedrock I will build My church.” That means that what Jesus said was that the church was going to be built upon something other than Peter, this would be the foundation of the faith, the bedrock of the faith, it is a solid rock!

So who is Jesus speaking of? What was the profession of Peter? It was, “**You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.**” Thus, the church is not built upon Peter or any other man or organization, not even a denomination, it is built upon Jesus! And guess what? The Scriptures support that thought. You see, the context is not about Peter, it is about Jesus! Also, whenever Peter is referred to in this passage, it is in the second person; the “**this rock**” is in the third person!

When you look at the Old Testament and its usage of the word “**rock**” it is pointing to God and never to man and we see this almost 50 times in the Old Testament. G. Campbell Morgan put it like this, “If we take the figurative use of the word rock through Hebrew Scriptures, we find that it is never used symbolically of man, but always of God.” That is important and we are going to see in a few minutes that it is not just the Old Testament that speaks of the rock being God or Jesus but we also see that in the New Testament, it never refers to man being a rock, a bedrock, a foundation stone!

Let me give you a few Old Testament Scriptures that point to the rock being God and we will then look at how the rock is speaking specifically of Jesus in the Old Testament. First of all in I Samuel 2:2 we are told, “**No one is holy like the Lord, For there is none besides You, Nor is there any rock like our God.**” That is very clear; the rock being spoken of is God! In this prayer of Hannah, as she leaves her son Samuel with the high priest, dedicating him to the Lord, we see that her faith is built upon a solid foundation, it is built upon the true and living God and there is no one like Him, no one that even comes close!

In Psalm 18:31 we are told, **“For who is God, except the Lord? And who is a rock, except our God?”** The focus here is that if you want stability in your walk, rest in the Lord. If you want to walk on shaky ground, take your eyes off the Lord. But when you place your feet upon the rock, upon God you will have stability in your life as the storms of life come crashing in. The focus of the rock is God!

In Isaiah 44:8 we are told, **“Do not fear, nor be afraid; Have I not told you from that time, and declared it? You are My witnesses. Is there a God besides Me? Indeed there is no other Rock; I know not one.”** Is there any other rock besides God? God Himself says that there is none that He knows and thus, how could God, Jesus say that Peter is this rock upon which the church is built upon? That would be foolish and it is foolish to think along those lines!

And there are many references to God being our rock in the Psalms, I will share several with you so you can see when the word **“rock”** is used in the Old Testament referring to a person it is always referring to God and not man, never man. In Psalm 19:14 we are told, **“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.”** Not only is God our strength but He is our Redeemer and this is pointing us to the Rock, Jesus Christ our Redeemer! The word “strength” can be translated “rock.”

Then, in Psalm 62:5-7 we are told, **“My soul, wait silently for God alone, For my expectation is from Him. He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defense; I shall not be moved. In God is my salvation and my glory; The rock of my strength, And my refuge, is in God.”** So here we see that God alone is not only our salvation but He is our rock and not man. And again, I think this is speaking of the One who has brought to us salvation, Jesus Christ!

Also, in Psalm 71:3 the Psalmist tells us, **“Be my strong refuge, To which I may resort continually; You have given the commandment to save me, For You are my rock and my fortress.”** Do you see the recurring theme in these verses, that God alone is our rock, there is no other rock!

Just a few more verses and this time we read in Psalm 78:35, **“Then they remembered that God was their rock, And the Most High God their Redeemer.”** And lastly, in Psalm 89:26 we are told, **“He shall cry to Me, ‘You are my Father, My God, and the rock of my salvation.’”**

Now some of you may be thinking, “Pastor Joe, that was the Old Testament and in the new covenant that Jesus made, He could have made Peter the rock from which the church was built upon, couldn’t He?” It sounds reasonable until you compare it with the Scriptures and you will see that is not true, we never see man called a “rock” in the New Testament either, not this foundation stone!

Now before we get to the New Testament, let me share one more verse with you from the Old Testament because it is a verse that is repeated in the New Testament and then we will see who said it and the point he was making, who he was referring to. In Isaiah 28:16 we are told, **“Therefore thus says the Lord God: ‘Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, A tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; Whoever believes will not act hastily.’”**

I think we can all agree that this tried stone, this precious cornerstone, this sure foundation is none other than Jesus, He is that bedrock, that solid foundation from which our life is built upon and from which the church is built upon.

Now, let’s move into the New Testament and listen to what we are told in Acts 4:11-12 as this verse is quoted. We are told, **“This is the ‘stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.’ Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”**

Now please understand that it was Peter himself who spoke these words to the Sanhedrin or Jewish religious council and nowhere in his words does he speak of himself being the head of the church or that he is the rock. What he does say is that Jesus is this cornerstone, the chief rock! And just think this through. Peter and every other son of Adam, who we are all related by physical birth, have failed the test, we have sinned, we fall far short of the glory of God. The only One who has passed the test, who is a **“tried stone”** and fit to be the chief cornerstone, is Jesus Christ. Thus, Peter tells us that there is salvation in no other than this rock, this cornerstone, Jesus Christ! So Peter himself recognized that Jesus is the rock, the cornerstone, the sure foundation and not himself!

Also, listen to what Peter said in I Peter 2:4-8, **“Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, ‘Behold, I lay in Zion A chief cornerstone, elect, precious, And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.’ Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, ‘The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone,’ and ‘A stone of stumbling And a rock of offense.’ They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed.”**

Now keep in mind that Peter is saying that believers are living stones being built into a spiritual house, but there is a problem. You just don't lay stones out, you need the cornerstone or in a sense the plumb line which will keep the building in line. Jesus is not only the plumb line for this building but the support, the stone in which the rest of the structure rests upon for strength and stability, you and me, the living stones rest upon Jesus and he keeps us in line!

The problem is that the Jewish religious leaders rejected Jesus and the reason they rejected Him is because they rejected the Word of God and now are disobedient to God. How many today are moving away from the Word of God and by doing so are being disobedient to God. We need to learn the lesson that God says what He means and means what He says and we need to obey if we love Him.

Now because they rejected the Rock, Jesus, instead of being their salvation He has become a Rock of offense to them and that is true of all who reject Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. It is as Jesus said in Matthew 21:44, “**And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder.**” But, if you believe in Him, in Jesus, you will never be put to shame and in the Greek it is written in a double negative which means it can never happen, you are His and no one can take that away!

Let’s look at what the Scriptures say of Jesus being the Rock. He is the Chief Cornerstone in Psalm 118:22-24. He is the Stumbling Stone of Isaiah 8:14. He is the Foundation Stone of Isaiah 28:16. He is the Supernatural Stone of Daniel 2:34, 45. And He is the Rock that gave Israel water in the wilderness according to I Corinthians 10:4. It is as we are told in Deuteronomy 32:31, “**For their rock is not like our Rock . . .**” There is no Rock like our Jesus!

And what I want you to see is that Peter clearly attributes this rock to Jesus and not himself! That is important for us to understand, Peter did not see himself as the one who the church was built upon. He understood that the church was built upon Jesus as Peter points us back to that Old Testament passage!

Paul, in Romans 9:33 quotes this Old Testament passage and it points us right back to Jesus being the rock as he said, “**As it is written: ‘Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.’**” Do you see how clear that is! These writers knew exactly who the rock is, Jesus, and thus, who the church was built upon, Jesus!

Another important point is that Peter was not an apostle to the Gentiles, Paul was. Let me show you what Paul said first of all in Romans 11:13-14, **“For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them.”** Obviously Paul is saying that the Lord called him to minister to the Gentiles and his prayer is that the blessings of God upon the Gentiles will stir the hearts of his Jewish brethren and they would come to Jesus! And yes Paul did share his faith with the Jews, but he recognized that the Lord called him to minister the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles!

One more and that is found in II Timothy 1:11, **“to which I was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles.”** I think that is pretty clear and there are others but the one that nails it for me is found in Galatians 2:7-8 where Paul tells us, **“But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter (for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles).”**

Paul is clearly showing us that Peter's focus was primarily to the Jews and yes it was through Peter that the door to the Gentiles was opened, but that was just until God raised up Paul. Of this Calvin makes these comments: "But if Peter's apostleship pertained peculiarly to the Jews, let the Romanists ask by what right they derive from him their succession to the primacy. If the Pope of Rome claims the primacy because he is Peter's successor, he ought to exercise it over the Jews. Paul is here the bishop of Rome. Therefore, if the Pope would enter into the possession of his primacy, let him assemble Churches from the Jews." Interesting thought! Paul was the apostle to the uncircumcised, the Gentiles and Peter was the apostle to the Jews or the circumcised.

In fact, when you think about it, who wrote the epistle to the Romans? No, it was not Peter even though the Catholic Church claims that he was the bishop of Rome, but it was Paul himself who wrote that epistle! Paul, in Romans 15:15-16 put it like this, **"Nevertheless, brethren, I have written more boldly to you on some points, as reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God, that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit."** Do you see how clear that is and thus, listen to what the Scriptures are teaching and not what man has to say because God is never wrong, man is!

As Paul concluded his letter to the Romans somewhere between 56 A. D. and 58 A. D. Paul lists some 33 names at the close of this letter. In Romans chapter 16 Paul, in listing those 33 names, 24 of them were in Rome, 17 men and 7 women. What is missing is the name of Peter. Why wasn't he mentioned if he was the head of the church in Rome? Because he never was the head of the church in Rome, he wasn't even in Rome when Paul wrote this epistle!

What about what Paul said in Ephesians 2:20, **“having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.”** Does this mean that the apostles and the prophets are rocks? Look at what is said here. Jesus is the chief cornerstone, the primary cornerstone and the apostles and the prophets were secondary you might say. They help lay the foundation of the church, which is built upon Jesus Christ and His Word! That is all that Paul is saying here and if you even take it wrong, you would have to come to the conclusion that all these men were the heads of the church, not just Peter. But that is not what it is saying!

In II Timothy, Paul's last epistle the persecution against Christians was growing. And by 66 A. D. the persecution against Christians grew so strong that Paul was re-arrested, possibly in Ephesus, and then taken back to Rome. This time not under house arrest, but placed into a dungeon called the Mamertime prison that was nothing more than a dungeon with a hole on the top to let light in. It was dark, it was cold, it was damp, it was filthy, it stunk as you can imagine and that is where Paul was. You can go to Rome today and visit the Mamertime prison, which was nothing more than a holding cell until the prisoners could be executed and that is what is going to happen to Paul.

Now in II Timothy chapter 4 Paul writes, **“Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry. . . . At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them.”**

II Timothy 4:11, 16.

Notice that Luke, who was a physician, accompanied Paul on most of his journeys and now he was with Paul in Rome attending to his physical needs. Also, we see Paul speaking of his first hearing, a preliminary hearing in Rome, not his first Roman imprisonment. And all those who said they were his friends were absent; they distanced themselves from Paul because of fear or whatever! Notice that Peter is not mentioned at all. If he was there then he did not come to the aid of Paul but I don't believe he was there at all and that is why Paul does not mention him.

I think you can clearly see that there is no evidence at all from the Scriptures that teach that the church is built upon Peter and if that is true, then the rest of what the Catholic Church teaches on the authority and infallibility of the Pope is also false. In Matthew 16:19 Jesus said, **“And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”**

First of all please understand that Peter is not standing at the gates of heaven to let you in or keep you out, as the case may be. But to Peter and to us God has given the keys or the access or the entrance into heaven and we can share that with people, and that is Jesus!

Remember what Jesus said in John 20:23, **“If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”** This is not saying that Peter or any of the apostles had the power to forgive sins. How do I know that? Because the Bible tells me so!

In Mark 2:1-12 listen to what took place and what is said. We are told, **“And again He entered Capernaum after some days, and it was heard that He was in the house. Immediately many gathered together, so that there was no longer room to receive them, not even near the door. And He preached the word to them. Then they came to Him, bringing a paralytic who was carried by four men. And when they could not come near Him because of the crowd, they uncovered the roof where He was. So when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven you.’ And some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, ‘Why does this Man speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?’ But immediately, when Jesus perceived in His spirit that they reasoned thus within themselves, He said to them, ‘Why do you reason about these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Arise, take up your bed and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins’ - He said to the paralytic, ‘I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.’ Immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went out in the presence of them all, so that all were amazed and glorified God, saying, ‘We never saw anything like this!’”**

There is a lot going on here but what I want to focus on is this debate. The Jewish religious leaders knew that God alone could forgive sins and here is Jesus saying that He can forgive this man's sin. Thus, in their minds Jesus was claiming to be God. The reality is that Jesus is God and He did not have to claim it! The point I want to make is that no man can forgive sins, only God can. This is something that the church has come up with based upon a faulty reading of the Scriptures. So in Matthew chapter 16 Jesus can't be telling Peter that he can forgive sins because, like we have seen, God alone can forgive sins and not man! Thus, if a person rejects Jesus we can tell them that they are lost, and if they have accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior we can say that they are saved, not that we have forgiven their sins, but God has in Christ and we are only recognizing that fact.

John MacArthur sums this up for us like this, "If a person declares himself to be an atheist, or to be anything other than a believer in and lover of the Lord Jesus Christ, Christians can say to that person with absolute certainty, 'You are under God's judgment and condemned to hell,' because that is what Scripture teaches. If, on the other hand, a person testifies that he has trusted Christ as his saving Lord, Christians can say to him with equal certainty, 'If what you say is true, then your sins are forgiven, you are a child of God, and your eternal destiny is heaven.' The authority of the church lies in the fact that it has heaven's word on everything 'pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence' (2 Peter 1:3). When believers are in agreement with God's Word, God is in agreement with them. Believers can declare a person's spiritual state with divinely granted authority by comparing that person to the Word of God."

Also, this binding and losing is speaking of church discipline if you take the whole verse in its totality! In other words, a duly constituted body of believers has the right to tell an unrepentant brother that he is out of line with God's Word and has no right to fellowship with God's people.

John MacArthur put it like this, "Christians have such authority because they have the truth of God's authoritative Word by which to judge. The source of the church's authority is not in itself, anymore than the source of the apostles' authority was in themselves or even in their office, exalted as it was. Christians can authoritatively declare what is acceptable to God or forbidden by Him because they have His Word. Christians do not determine what is right or wrong, forgiven or unforgiven. Rather, on the basis of God's own Word, they recognize and proclaim what God has already determined to be right or wrong, forgiven or unforgiven. When they judge on the basis of God's Word, they can be certain their judgment corresponds with the judgment of heaven."

I also see this section as a section of prayer, of laying our requests before God, asking God to direct us, guide us but I think the primary focus is church discipline.

I hope that is clear for you. If not hopefully Matthew 18:15-20 will clear it up. We are told, **“Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’ And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”** This section is dealing with church discipline and it is speaking of everyone, not just Peter or a select few! This authority was given to all the Disciples of Christ!

Irenaeus, who is reported to have heard Polycarp, the disciple of the apostle John, declared in his treatise *Against Heresies*: “The Lord of all gave the power of the Gospel to his apostles, through whom we have come to know the truth, that is, the teaching of the Son of God. . . . This Gospel they first preached. Afterwards, by the will of God, they handed it down to us in the Scriptures, to be ‘the pillar and ground’ of our faith.” (3.1.1).

Now we have seen what the Scriptures have to say regarding the church being built upon Jesus and not upon Peter but we need to spend just a little time on this idea of Apostolic succession or that from after Peter and onward through today we see the successors of the apostle Peter. Does history support that? Absolutely not and I will show you what I mean. Dave Hunt writes,

The claim that the popes are the successors of the apostle Peter is the cornerstone of Roman Catholicism, without which that Church would lose its uniqueness and could not function. . . . Is there actually an unbroken line of . . . popes succeeding Peter?

. . . Furthermore, there is no record that Peter was ever Bishop of Rome, and therefore no Bishop of Rome could possibly be his successor. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons (178-200), provided a list of the first 12 Bishops of Rome. Linus was the first. Peter's name does not appear. Eusebius of Caesaria, the Father of church history, never mentions Peter as Bishop of Rome. . . .

The Vatican puts out an official list of popes, arbitrarily beginning with Peter and continuing to the present. There have been several such lists which were apparently considered accurate at one time but subsequently had to be revised – and now conflict with each other. The earliest lists come from *Liber Pontificalis* (Book of Popes), presumably first composed under Pope Hormisdus (514-23), yet even the Catholic Encyclopedia casts doubt upon its authenticity, and most scholars today agree that it mixed fact with fiction. Who the actual Bishops of Rome were cannot be known with any certainty at this late date. Even the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, published by the Catholic University of America, acknowledges this fact:

But it must be frankly admitted that bias or deficiencies in the sources make it impossible to determine in certain cases whether the claimants were popes or anti-popes.

The simple truth is that the Roman Catholic Church itself, with all of its archives, cannot verify an accurate and complete list of the popes. The alleged “unbroken line of succession back to Peter” is therefore a mere fiction. Anyone who takes the time to seriously attempt a verification of its accuracy will conclude that the Church has fabricated an official list of popes in order to justify the papacy and its pretensions. Nor was the Bishop of Rome considered to be the pope of the universal Church until about a thousand years after Pentecost!

- Dave Hunt, *A Woman Rides the Beast*, pp. 99-100

Make no mistake about it, you will hear people say and they will fight over this issue of apostolic succession, but there is no record of it. And, more importantly, the Scriptures themselves speak against it. Even Peter did not see himself as the first pope or even the apostle to the Gentiles!

Please understand that it really doesn't matter what I think or what you think or what this church leaders says or that church leader says. It all boils down to this. What has God said in His Word, the Bible because that is truth! What happens as man makes his rules and his regulations is you have lost the Gospel and you end up with a works salvation and that is what we see in the Catholic Church today!

I hope that I have challenged some of you this morning in what you believe. Maybe I have made some of you angry, that was not my intention, not at all. What I desired to do was to challenge you in what you believe and compare what you believe with the Word of God. You see, if you can't trust God's Word then how can you even trust the words of men? If God is not truthful, how can man be? He can't!

Thus, Jesus Christ has not placed any mortal man as the foundation of His church. He never has done that and He will never ever do that! The Church is built upon that proclamation made by Peter, given to him by God the Father, **“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”** Matthew 16:16. Jesus is the Rock, may we never forget that fact. If we try to build His Church on anything else but Jesus then we are doomed for failure. That is not to say the church will be small, but that it will not be accepted by God because apart from Christ we can do nothing that He will accept!

And like I have said, if Peter was truly the first pope, the church would be in trouble because just a few verses down from this statement by Jesus we see Jesus tell Peter, **“Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.”** Matthew 16:23. So why would Jesus want to build His church upon fallible man? Yes, there are times that man is good and there are times when he is bad but why build upon a faulty foundation when the church can be built upon a solid foundation, a sure foundation, Jesus Christ!

Thus, if the Catholic Church is wrong here, how can we trust the doctrines of men in areas such as our salvation? For instance, Pope John Paul II gave this prayer, “Sustain us, O Virgin Mary, on our journey of faith and obtain for us the grace of eternal salvation.” (Pope John Paul II, from “The Holy Father’s Prayer for the Marian Year”).

Thus, according to former Pope John Paul II Mary can obtain our salvation for us. Is that found in the Scriptures? Absolutely not! In Luke 1:46-47 we see this prayer of Mary that says, **“My soul magnifies the Lord, And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.”** Notice that Mary cried out to God who is her Savior, which means that she was a sinner in need of a Savior, in need of Jesus. Not only that but Peter himself declared in Acts 4:12, **“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”** There is no other name than Jesus, no other mediator, not even Mary! So Pope John Paul II spoke according to church tradition and not according to the Word of God and thus, he is wrong and God is right!

Can the Catholic Church give you hope? Well, I can't speak for them but the late John Cardinal O'Connor from New York said, “Church teaching is that I don't know, at any given moment, what my eternal future will be. I can hope, pray, do my very best – but I still don't know. Pope John Paul II doesn't know absolutely that he will go to heaven, nor does Mother Teresa of Calcutta. . . .” (New York's John Cardinal O'Connor in The New York Times).

What a sad statement to make, that neither the Cardinal nor the Pope know if they are going to heaven. Why is that? Because their salvation is based upon works and they don't know how much good works are needed to atone for their sins. Let me say this, you will never work your way into heaven, you can't atone for your sins! Paul said in Ephesians 2:8-9, **“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”** Do you see that, it is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone that saves us, not good works!

But can we know we are saved? Can we know we are going to heaven? In spite of what these leaders in the church have to say, God says that we can know if we are going to heaven and we don't have to wait until we get there! Jesus said in John 5:24, "**Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.**" And the apostle John picked up on this in I John 5:13 when he said, "**These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may [continue to] believe in the name of the Son of God.**"

It is so simple, if you are in Christ, if you are saved, you will have that abundant life, that everlasting life, that eternal life. But, apart from Him, if Jesus is not your Lord and Savior, you will not have that abundant life but your eternity will be in the Lake of Fire enduring the punishment of God for your sins because you refused the pardon for your sins that is only found in Christ!

The last reason John wrote this letter was to let believers know that they can be assured of their salvation, that you can know if you are saved, that you have eternal life, but how? Are you in the Son, Jesus Christ? You see, like I have said, if you are not then you don't have eternal life and if you are you do have eternal life. What a great comfort that should be to each of us!

And lastly, Mother Teresa said these words, “I have said to Jesus that if I don’t go to heaven for anything else, I will be going to heaven for all the traveling with all the publicity, because it has purified me and sacrificed me and made me really ready to go to heaven.” (Mother Teresa of Calcutta at Washington D. C.’s national Prayer Breakfast, February 3, 1994). So if you are a frequent flyer you have a good chance of being purified? Really, is that what the Scriptures teach? Absolutely not, we are cleansed by the precious blood of Jesus!

Peter once again tells us in I Peter 1:18-19, “**knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.**” That is the bottom line. That is how we are saved, by the precious blood of Jesus and not by our own works; our own efforts, our frequent flyer miles and we can know that we are saved! Praise the Lord for that hope, that confidence and we can only have that confidence as we trust in God’s Word and not the words of man!

As I close this morning let me say this. I don’t care where you are coming from, what church or denomination or non-denomination, if they are teaching contrary to the Word of God then they are wrong and you should ask them why! It is that important, it is a matter of eternal life and eternal death!

I want to close with these words from a hymn and I pray that the precious words, the precious truths of God's Word that we heard this morning and that are in this hymn would fill your mind and give you great comfort and hope. You see, we can find security, we can find peace in our Rock, Jesus Christ but we must be willing to place our hope in Him, on *Christ the Solid ROCK – that is where we need to stand!*

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;

I dare not trust the sweetest frame.
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.

On Christ, the solid ROCK, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand.

- Edward Mote