



# **Roman Catholicism**

A Stonegate Workshop

Spring 2023



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## A. Authority and Tradition

- Catholicism teaches that Sacred *Scripture* is inspired by God

God inspired the human authors of the sacred books. "To compose the sacred books, God chose certain men who, all the while he employed them in this task, made full use of their own faculties and powers so that, though he acted in them and by them, it was as true authors that they consigned to writing whatever he wanted written, and no more."

The inspired books teach the truth. "Since therefore all that the inspired authors or sacred writers affirm should be regarded as affirmed by the Holy Spirit, we must acknowledge that the books of Scripture firmly, faithfully, and without error teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the Sacred Scriptures." — Catechism of the Catholic Church (Section 106–107)

"The Sacred Scriptures contain the Word of God and, because they are inspired, they are truly the Word of God" — Catechism of the Catholic Church (Section 135; quoting Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, Section 24)

- Catholicism teaches that Sacred *Tradition* is inspired by God

This living transmission, accomplished in the Holy Spirit, is called Tradition, since it is distinct from Sacred Scripture, though closely connected to it. Through Tradition, "the Church, in her doctrine, life and worship, perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that she herself is, all that she believes." "The sayings of the holy Fathers are a witness to the life-giving presence of this Tradition, showing how its riches are poured out in the practice and life of the Church, in her belief and her prayer. — Catechism of the Catholic Church, Section 78, quoting Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, Section 8, Paragraph 1).

- Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition are *Equal* in terms of their authority.

"There exists a close connection and communication between sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture. For both of them, flowing from the same divine wellspring, in a certain way **merge into a unity** and tend toward the same end...

Consequently, it is **not from Sacred Scripture alone** that the Church draws her certainty about everything which has been revealed. Therefore, both sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with **the same sense** of loyalty and reverence." — Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, 9 (Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation).

### Two Questions

1. What does the Catholic Church mean by "Sacred Scripture"?
2. What does the Catholic Church mean by "Sacred Tradition"?

## What is Sacred Scripture?

- For the Catholic Church, Scripture consists of the 66 books of the Old and New Testament plus an additional collection of books
- These additional books are known as “The [Apocrypha](#)”

The Church accepts and venerates as inspired the 46 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New. — Catechism of the Catholic Church (Section 138)

It was by the apostolic Tradition that the Church discerned which writings are to be included in the list of the sacred books. This complete list is called the canon of Scripture. It includes 46 books for the Old Testament (45 if we count Jeremiah and Lamentations as one) and 27 for the New. — Catechism of the Catholic Church (Section 120)

### The Apocrypha<sup>1</sup>

- A Collection of [Jewish](#) historical writings
- They give us a lot of valuable information about the time between the close of the OT and the beginning of the NT

The Apocrypha is a collection of books written in the four centuries between the Old and New Testaments. Though the Apocrypha is not Scripture, many Protestants (including Luther, Calvin, and other Reformers) have found the collection useful historically, theologically, and spiritually. Discerning readers of the Apocrypha gain a fuller understanding of first-century Judaism, including the messianic fervor that led, in part, to Jesus’s passion. — David Briones<sup>2</sup>

- However, the Protestant Church does *not* consider them to be authoritative Scripture

Belgic Confession (1561) 6: “The church may certainly read these books and learn from them as far as they agree with the canonical books. But they do not have such power and virtue that one could confirm from their testimony any point of faith or of the Christian religion. Much less can they detract from the authority of the other holy books.”

Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) 1.3: “The books commonly called Apocrypha, not being of divine inspiration, are no part of the canon of the Scripture, and therefore are of no authority in the church of God, nor to be any otherwise approved, or made use of, than other human writings.”

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<sup>1</sup> For a helpful breakdown and summary of each book, see David Briones, “What is the Apocrypha? Listening to Four Centuries of Silence,” *Desiring God Online*; Don Stewart, “What are the Contents of the Various Books of the Old Testament Apocrypha?,” *Blue Letter Bible Online*.

<sup>2</sup> David Briones, “What is the Apocrypha? Listening to Four Centuries of Silence,” *Desiring God Online*;

## The Apocrypha: Rejected<sup>3</sup>

- Important early church fathers explicitly *rejected* the Apocryphal documents as Scripture (even Catholic church fathers!; see below)
- Jesus and the Apostles never mention these documents as Scripture
- The Roman Catholic Church didn't formally accept the Apocrypha until the Council of Trent in 1546 as a response to the Protestant Reformation.

In a counter-Reformation move, the Roman Catholic church at the Council of Trent (1546) made an official declaration that the Apocrypha was henceforth to be regarded as Scripture. So, despite the controversial and mixed status of the Apocrypha throughout the history of Christianity, the Roman Catholic church made their view official, creating a division with Protestants over this issue that continues to this day. — Michael Kruger<sup>4</sup>

The action of the Council of Trent was both polemical and prejudicial. In debates with Luther, the Roman Catholics had quoted the Maccabees in support of prayer for the dead (see 2 Mac 12:45-46). Luther and Protestants following him challenged the canonicity of that book, citing the New Testament, the early church Fathers, and Jewish teachers for support. The Council of Trent responded to Luther by canonizing the Apocrypha. Not only is the action of Trent obviously polemical, but it was also prejudicial, since not all of the fourteen (fifteen) books of the Apocrypha were accepted by Trent. — Norman Geisler and William E. Nix<sup>5</sup>

- **Big Idea:** The OT of Jesus and the early church did not include the Apocrypha.

It's important to note, however, that the Jewish order of the OT was very different in Jesus' time that it is today. Today, we recognize a distinction of 36 books in the OT, but in Jewish day many of these books were grouped together to form a collection of 22–24 books. The *contents* were the same, but the *organization* were different.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For a detailed explanation on this subject see James M. Lochford, "The Apocrypha," *Evidence Unseen Website* and Ryan Leasure, "Why the Apocrypha Isn't in the Bible," *Cross Examined Website*

<sup>4</sup> "The Apocrypha," *The Gospel Coalition Website*

<sup>5</sup> Geisler, Norman L., and William E. Nix. *From God to Us: How We Got Our Bible* (Chicago: Moody, 1974), 97-98.

<sup>6</sup> For a helpful article on this, see Ryan Leasure, "How We Got our Bible: Old Testament Canon and the Apocrypha," *Cross Examined Website*.

## Other Reasons

### 1. The Jewish religion never accepted these documents as inspired Scripture

Although these books were known and used among the Jews of this time period, there is little evidence to suggest they were regarded as Scripture. Neither Josephus nor Philo—key sources for our understanding of the scope of the OT canon—used them as Scripture. In addition, no NT author (most of whom were Jews) cites even a single book from the Apocrypha as Scripture. And later rabbinic writers do not receive the Apocrypha, affirming only the Hebrew Scriptures as part of the Jewish canon (*b. Baba Bathra* 14–15). — Michael Kruger<sup>7</sup>

### 2. Authors in the Apocrypha explicitly deny the presence of prophetic revelation in their time

“And they laid up the stones in the mountain of the temple in a convenient place, till there should come a prophet, and give answer concerning them.” — 1 Maccabees 4:46

“And there was a great tribulation in Israel, such as was not since the day, that there was no prophet seen in Israel.” — 1 Maccabees 9:27

“And that the Jews, and their priests, had consented that he should be their prince, and high priest forever, till there should arise a faithful prophet.” — 1 Maccabees 14:41

### 3. Important Roman Catholic thinkers rejected the Apocrypha throughout Church History.

Gregory the Great (Roman Catholic pope, sixth century AD): “With reference to which particular we are not acting irregularly, if from the books, *though not Canonical*, yet brought out for the edification of the Church, we bring forward testimony. Thus Eleazar in the battle smote and brought down an elephant, but fell under the very beast that he killed (*1 Macc. 6.46*).”<sup>8</sup>

Jerome (Translator of the Latin Vulgate; 4th Century) “Therefore as the church indeed reads Judith, Tobit, and the books of Maccabees, but *does not receive them among the canonical books*, so let it also read these two volumes for the edification of the people but not for establishing the authority of ecclesiastical dogmas.”<sup>9</sup>

John Damascene (AD 675-749): “It must be known that there are two and twenty books of the Old Testament, according to the alphabet of the Hebrew language.”<sup>10</sup>

Hugh of St. Victor (AD 1133-1141): “There are also in the Old Testament certain other books which are indeed read [in the church] **but are not inscribed in the body of the text or in the canon of authority**: such are the books of Tobit, Judith and the Maccabees, the so-called Wisdom of Solomon and Ecclesiasticus.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> “The Apocrypha,” *The Gospel Coalition Website*

<sup>8</sup> Library of the Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church, Gregory the Great, *Morals on the Book of Job*, vol. II, Parts III and IV, Book XIX. 34 (Oxford: Parker, 1845), p. 424.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, 91-92.

<sup>10</sup> Cited in William Whitaker, *A Disputation on Holy Scripture* (Cambridge University Press, 1849), p.64.

<sup>11</sup> Hugh of St. Victor, *On the Sacraments*, I, Prologue, 7.



## What is Sacred Tradition?

1. Step 1: Jesus *verbally* taught the apostles (oral tradition)
2. Step 2: The apostles taught their successors—the bishops of the early church
3. Step 3: Church bishops have *preserved* this teaching throughout history

[Sacred] Tradition ... includes the Deposit of Faith given to the apostles that has been **transmitted to the Church apart from Scripture**. Some prominent examples of Sacred Tradition include the validity of infant baptism, essential elements for administering the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist, and the permissibility of praying for the dead. **Both** Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition are **the word of God**...but they are not each the word of God in the exact same sense. — Trent Horn (*The Case for Catholicism*, 34–35).

And just as the office granted individually to Peter, the first among the apostles, **is permanent** and is **to be transmitted to his successors**, so also the apostles' office of nurturing the Church is permanent, and is **to be exercised without interruption by the sacred order of bishops**. Therefore, the Sacred Council teaches that **bishops by divine institution have succeeded to the place of the apostles**, as shepherds of the Church, and **he who hears them, hears Christ, and he who rejects them, rejects Christ and Him who sent Christ**. — Vatican II (*Lumen Gentium*, 20).

### Key Doctrine: *Apostolic Succession*

In keeping with the Lord's command, the Gospel was handed on in two ways:

- orally "by the apostles who handed on, by the spoken word of their preaching, by the example they gave, by the institutions they established, what they themselves had received - whether from the lips of Christ, from his way of life and his works, or whether they had learned it at the prompting of the Holy Spirit";

- in writing "by those apostles and other men associated with the apostles who, under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit, committed the message of salvation to writing".  
— Catechism of the Catholic Church (Section 76)

"In order that the full and living Gospel might always be preserved in the Church the apostles left bishops as their successors. They gave them their own position of teaching authority." Indeed, "the apostolic preaching, which is expressed in a special way in the inspired books, was to be preserved in a continuous line of succession until the end of time." — Catechism of the Catholic Church (Section 77, quoting Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, section 7).

## The Magisterium

- The official *teaching* office of the Catholic Church
- Formally establish Church doctrine and dogma
- Consists of The Pope and the council of bishops in communion with him
- Provides the *dogmatic* interpretation of both sacred Scripture and sacred Tradition.

The task of interpreting the Word of God authentically has been entrusted solely to the Magisterium of the Church, that is, to the Pope and to the bishops in communion with him. — Catechism of the Catholic Church, Section 100)

The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living teaching office of the Church alone. Its authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ." This means that the task of interpretation has been entrusted to the bishops in communion with the successor of Peter, the Bishop of Rome.

"Yet this Magisterium is not superior to the Word of God, but is its servant. It teaches only what has been handed on to it. At the divine command and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it listens to this devotedly, guards it with dedication and expounds it faithfully. All that it proposes for belief as being divinely revealed is drawn from this single deposit of faith." — Catechism of the Catholic Church, Section 85–86, quoting Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, Section 10, Paragraph 2).

## An Interesting Question

Has the Catholic Church believed and taught the same unique doctrines in every age?

**Answer:** *No*

- A handful of Roman Catholic doctrines are absent from most of church history (eg. the immaculate conception of Mary, the bodily assumption of Mary, etc).
- This means there has been *doctrinal development* throughout the church's history

## Authority in the Catholic Church

**Summary:** Three Sources of *Equal* Authority

1. Sacred Scripture
2. Sacred Tradition
3. The Magisterium

## Protestant Response

### Key Reformation Doctrine: '*Sola Scriptura*'

- '*Sola Scriptura*' is Latin for "Scripture alone"
- It does not mean that Scripture is our only authority
- It means that Scripture is the only *inspired* and *infallible* authority God has given to his people.
- **Big Idea:** Tradition Matters (!!!!!). But it is not authoritative like Scripture.

Since, then, God wants no one to feel obligated to hold anything not offered by Scripture, we should likewise reject all non-Scriptural doctrine. This injunction can be used against the sacrilege of the pope and the papists who....shamelessly declare that we must accept more than Scripture contains....Beware of this, and be certain that all you need to accept is in Scripture. But concerning anything not found in Scripture, you should say: "When did God ever make that statement?" — Martin Luther.<sup>12</sup>

*Sola Scriptura* is the principle of *ultimate* authority and does not mean the church is without *any other* authority. Though Protestant churches rightly reject the Tradition (capital T) of the Catholic Church, they do not reject tradition (small t), or the accumulated wisdom of the historical church. Examples of tradition include the doctrines of the Trinity (one God, three persons) and of Christ (one person, two natures) that were forged in the early church.

Whereas Scripture possesses *magisterial* (leading) authority for Protestant churches, tradition possesses *ministerial* (serving) authority. Whereas Scripture enjoys *ultimate* authority, tradition enjoys *presumptive* authority: given the fact that it is grounded on Scripture, rightly summarizes Scripture, and has been cherished by the church from the beginning, tradition is to be regarded as a true secondary authority until proven wrong. — Gregg Allison<sup>13</sup>

The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men. Nevertheless we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word; and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and the government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed. — Westminster Confession of Faith (Section 1:6)

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<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Gregg Allison, *Historical Theology*, 88.

<sup>13</sup> "Two Views on Church Authority: Protestant vs. Roman Catholic" 9 Marks Website

## What Jesus Believed

Hypocrites! Isaiah prophesied correctly about you when he said: <sup>8</sup> **This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. They worship me in vain, teaching as doctrines human commands.**” — Matthew 15:7–9 (quoting Isaiah 29:13)

Abandoning the command of God, you hold on to human tradition.” <sup>9</sup> He also said to them, “You have a fine way of *invalidating God’s command in order to set up your tradition!* – Mark 7:7–9

- Jesus never appealed to human tradition as equal with OT Scripture
- Jesus consistently appealed to the OT as the ultimate divine authority to settle all disputes (eg. Have you not read...”)
- Jesus promised new divine revelation would be given through *the [apostles](#)*.

“I still have many things to tell you, but you can’t bear them now. <sup>13</sup> When the Spirit of truth comes, **he will guide you into all the truth**. For he will not speak on his own, but he will speak whatever he hears. He will also declare to you what is to come. He will glorify me, because he will **take from what is mine and declare it to you**. — John 16:12–14

## How it Worked

1. **Step 1:** Jesus promised new revelation by His Spirit through His apostles (John 16:12–13; John 17:8, 14, 17–18)
2. **Step 2:** The Holy Spirit empowered the Apostles to give new revelation (1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Peter 1:20–21)
3. **Step 3:** The Apostles taught/wrote new revelation from God (1 Cor. 15:3–8; 2 Pet. 3:16)
4. **Step 4:** The early church received the apostles teaching as New Covenant revelation from God (Acts 2:45; Eph. 2:19–20; 1 Thess. 2:13).

**Big Idea:** No Church council decided which books are Biblical. Rather, the earned Church Councils *affirmed* what was already accepted as Scripture

**See Appendix 2 for More Details on this Subject.**

## What the Apostles Believed

All Scripture is *inspired by God (theopneustas)* and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness,<sup>17</sup> so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. – 2 Timothy 3:16

- No other writings or traditions are given this status of “inspired by God” or “God breathed.”
- No other writings are ascribed the effects of “equipp[ing]” God’s people for “every good work.”
- This is one of the main reasons why Protestants have always sought to get the Bible into the hands of the people.

## Scripture Says

This is why we constantly thank God, because when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you welcomed it not as a human message, but as it truly is, **the word of God**, which also works effectively in you who believe. — 1 Thessalonians 2:13

We also have the prophetic word strongly confirmed, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you know this: No prophecy of Scripture comes from the prophet’s own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the will of man; instead, **men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit**. -- 2 Peter 1:19–21

Also, regard the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our dear brother Paul has written to you according to the wisdom given to him. He speaks about these things in all his letters. There are some things hard to understand in them. The untaught and unstable will twist them to their own destruction, as they also do with **the rest of the Scriptures**. — 2 Peter 3:15–16

So, then, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of God’s household, **built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets**, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. — Ephesians 2:19–21

They devoted themselves **to the apostles’ teaching**, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. — Acts 2:45

The New Testament apostles had a unique kind of authority in the early church: authority to speak and write words which were “words of God” in an absolute sense. To disbelieve or disobey them was to disbelieve or disobey God. The apostles, therefore, had the authority to write words which became words of Scripture. This fact in itself should suggest to us that there was something unique about the office of apostle, and that we would not expect it to continue today, for no one today can add words to the Bible and have them be counted as God’s very words or as part of Scripture. (Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 905–906)

In John 14:26, Christ authorized His apostles to lead the church, promising them that the Helper would come and bring to their remembrance all that Jesus had taught them. The instruction they gave the church, then, was really an extension of Jesus’ ministry, as enabled by the Holy Spirit (cf. Eph. 3:5–6; 2 Pet. 1:20–21). Those in the early church generally understood apostolic instruction as authoritative and as being on par with the OT Scriptures (cf. 1 Thess. 2:13; 1 Cor. 14:37; Gal. 1:9; 2 Pet. 3:16). — Nate Bussenitz<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> “Are there Still Apostles Today?,” *The CrippleGate Website*.

## Answering An Objection

**Objection:** “What if you don’t have a dogmatic interpretation for the church—utter chaos would ensue!”

**Answer:** The [Bible](#) doesn’t teach this

- God promises an infallible *Bible*, but He doesn’t promise infallible *interpreters*
- Jesus holds us accountable to know and read the Bible for ourselves (“Have you not read...?”)

The idea of relying on the bare authority of men, rather than on reason and the evidence of nature and Scripture, also contradicts biblical principles. Repeatedly, mankind is told to follow evidence and the written Word (John 10:35; Acts 17:11; 1 Timothy 2:15). We’re admonished to test spirits (1 John 4:1), confront false teachings (1 Timothy 6:3–4), and avoid bad reasoning (Colossians 2:8). At no time are we told to accept teaching simply because “the church” said so. In fact, we’re explicitly warned that even the most pious-seeming messengers can carry lies (2 Corinthians 11:13–14; Galatians 1:8). This means we need to be cautious and we are personally responsible for our beliefs (Hebrews 5:13; Romans 14:5). — Got Questions Website<sup>15</sup>

- Most differences between Protestant denominations are matters of [secondary](#) doctrine, not primary doctrine.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> “What is the magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church?”

<sup>16</sup> For more on this subject, see the workshop we taught in 2020 entitled “Disagreement without Division.” available on [StonegateFellowship.com](http://StonegateFellowship.com)

## Big Idea: The *Clarity* (aka: Perspicuity) of Scripture

- The main things are the clear things and the clear things are the main things.

All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all; yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed, for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them. — Westminster Confession of Faith (Section 1.7)

- Helpful Tool: The *Analogy* of Faith

- Let *Scripture* interpret Scripture

The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture, is the Scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it may be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly. — Westminster Confession of Faith (Section 19).

- Interpret Scripture in Community!

“When the Reformers broke with Rome and claimed the view that the Bible was to be the supreme authority of the church (*sola Scriptura*), they were very careful to define basic principles of interpretation. The primary rule of hermeneutics [bible interpretation] was called ‘the analogy of faith.’ The analogy of faith is the rule that Scripture is to interpret Scripture....Sacred Scripture is its own interpreter.” — R.C. Sproul<sup>17</sup>

“That the Bible is clear enough for even a child to understand is assumed in passages such as Deuteronomy 6:6–9. Moses instructs the people of Israel to teach the divinely revealed commandments of God to their children. This implies that the children are capable of understanding and applying the Word of God as their parents teach it to them. But note that it also implies that ordinary mothers and fathers are able to have a grasp of Scripture sufficient enough to teach it to their children. This is particularly notable, given that most of the people to whom Moses originally spoke these words would not have had much in the way of education, and many of them would have been unable to read at all. Neither of these factors, however, was a barrier to understanding enough about the Scriptures to be able to understand them and teach them to others.

The clarity of Scripture does not deny that some passages of Scripture are difficult to understand (2 Peter 3:15–16). It does mean that anyone who studies the Word of God can discern the basic message of salvation and what it means to please the Lord. — R.C. Sproul<sup>18</sup>

Since, therefore, the entire Scriptures, the prophets, and the Gospels, can be clearly, unambiguously, and harmoniously understood by all, although all do not believe them ... Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, II.27.2

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<sup>17</sup> *Knowing Scripture*, 46

<sup>18</sup> “The Clarity of Scripture” Ligonier Ministries Website

The Holy Spirit, therefore, has generously planned Holy Scripture in such a way that in the easier passages He relieves our hunger; in the more obscure He drives away our pride. Practically nothing is dug out from those obscure texts which is discovered to be said very plainly in another place. — Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, II. 6 (8)

Scripture is like ‘a river broad and deep, shallow enough for a lamb to go wading, but deep enough for an elephant to swim’. — Gregory the Great, *Commentary on Job*, prefatory letter to Leander, 4.

## Summary

- Catholic position: Scripture *plus* Tradition
- Protestant position: Scripture *alone*
- Again, this does not mean Scripture is our only authority
- It means Scripture is the ultimate, primary authority by which every other authority is weighed, measured, and judged.

“Unless I am convinced by the testimony of Scripture or by clear reason, for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves, ***I am bound by the Scriptures*** that I have quoted and *my conscience is captive to the word of God*. I cannot and I will not recant anything since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot to do otherwise. Here I stand, God help me. Amen.” – Martin Luther (April 18, 1521)



## B. Church Leadership

### The Pope

- In Catholicism, the Pope is the [head](#) of the church on earth.

“At the top of the Church hierarchy is the bishop of Rome. As God’s prime minister, he acts as the final, unifying voice of authority in the community of believers. He is the chief shepherd (see John 21:15-19, Matthew 10:2).” — Catholic Answers Website (“The Blessing and Burden of the Keys”)

- Catholicism teaches that Jesus gave a unique authority to the apostle Peter as the first leader of the Church.
- This authority has been passed down to each new generation of popes.

And just as the office granted individually to Peter, the first among the apostles, **is permanent** and is **to be transmitted to his successors**, so also the apostles' office of nurturing the Church is permanent, and is **to be exercised without interruption by the sacred order of bishops**. Therefore, the Sacred Council teaches that **bishops by divine institution have succeeded to the place of the apostles**, as shepherds of the Church, and **he who hears them, hears Christ, and he who rejects them, rejects Christ and Him who sent Christ**. — Vatican II (*Lumen Gentium*, 20).

When Christ instituted the Twelve, "he constituted [them] in the form of a college or permanent assembly, at the head of which he placed Peter, chosen from among them." Just as "by the Lord's institution, St. Peter and the rest of the apostles constitute a single apostolic college, so in like fashion the Roman Pontiff, Peter's successor, and the bishops, the successors of the apostles, are related with and united to one another."

The Lord made Simon alone, whom he named Peter, the "rock" of his Church. He gave him the keys of his Church and instituted him shepherd of the whole flock. "The office of binding and loosing which was given to Peter was also assigned to the college of apostles united to its head." This pastoral office of Peter and the other apostles belongs to the Church's very foundation and is continued by the bishops under the primacy of the Pope.

The Pope, Bishop of Rome and Peter's successor, "is the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity both of the bishops and of the whole company of the faithful." "For the Roman Pontiff, by reason of his office as Vicar of Christ, and as pastor of the entire Church has full, supreme, and universal power over the whole Church, a power which he can always exercise unhindered."

"The college or body of bishops has no authority unless united with the Roman Pontiff, Peter's successor, as its head." As such, this college has "supreme and full authority over the universal Church; but this power cannot be exercised without the agreement of the Roman Pontiff." — Catechism of the Catholic Church (Sections 880–883, quoting from Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*)

## The Key Text: Matthew 16:13–20

<sup>13</sup> When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” <sup>14</sup> They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others, Elijah; still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

<sup>15</sup> “But you,” he asked them, “who do you say that I am?” <sup>16</sup> Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” <sup>17</sup> Jesus responded, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father in heaven.

<sup>18</sup> And I also say to you that you are Peter, and *on this rock I will build my church*, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. <sup>19</sup> *I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven*, and whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will have been loosed in heaven.”

<sup>20</sup> Then he gave the disciples orders to tell no one that he was the Messiah.

### Some Questions

- **Question:** What is “this rock”?
- **Catholic Answer:** [Peter](#)
- **Question:** What are “the keys of the kingdom of heaven”?
- **Catholic Answer:** The authority to lead the church
- **Question:** What (the heck) does “binding and loosing” mean?
- **Catholic Answer:** The ability to [forgive](#) sins

In imparting to his apostles his own power to forgive sins the Lord also gives them the authority to reconcile sinners with the Church. This ecclesial dimension of their task is expressed most notably in Christ's solemn words to Simon 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."<sup>45</sup> "The office of binding and loosing which was given to Peter was also assigned to the college of the apostles united to its head.

The words *bind and loose* mean: whomever you exclude from your communion, will be excluded from communion with God; whomever you receive anew into your communion, God will welcome back into his. *Reconciliation with the Church is inseparable from reconciliation with God.* — Catechism of the Catholic Church (Sections 1444– 1445)

## Some Interesting Church History

**Question:** Has this been the universal interpretation of Matthew 16?

**Answer:** No

This interpretation came to prominence in the 3rd century when Stephen, the bishop of Rome disputed with Cyprian, the bishop of Carthage (North Africa). Stephen held that Jesus was referring to Peter, while Cyprian held that all the apostles equally shared the power of the keys. Eventually Stephen's view one the day and by the 7th century, the bishop of Rome was called the pope.

Some important historical factors that led to this:

- Rome was the capital and chief city of the western Roman Empire. When Rome was sacked by barbarians in 410, the bishop of Rome emerged as a chief religious, social, and political leader.
- During these early years, the orthodoxy of the church of Rome was widely acknowledged, because the bishop of Rome rarely held to false doctrine.
- The bishop of Rome played an important role in the orthodox definitions of Christology that came out of controversies in the 4th and 5th centuries.
- There was a tradition of Peter's burial in Rome that circulated, indicating a primacy for that city and Peter's leadership there before his death.<sup>19</sup>

[The Church] Fathers differed in opinion as to what was meant by "this rock," and... occasionally the same Father wavered in his opinion on this subject. [This] proves that non of them regarded this text as one establishing a perpetual constitution for the Christian Church. — George Salmon<sup>20</sup>

The French Roman Catholic scholar Jean de Launoy (17th century) surveyed the early church fathers and found the following:

- 17 citations of Peter as "the rock"
- 16 citations of Christ as "the rock"
- 8 citations of the Apostles as "the rock"
- 44 citations of Peter's confession as "the rock"<sup>21</sup>

Jesuit Scholar Joannes Maldonatus (16th century) said the following:

There are among ancient authors some who interpret "on this rock," that is," on this faith," or "on this confession of faith in which thou has called me the Son of the living God," as Hilary, and Gregory Nyssen, and Chrysostom, and Cyril of Alexandria.<sup>22</sup>

St. Hilary (4th century church father) wrote the following: "This faith it is which is the foundation of the Church; through this faith the gates of hell cannot prevail against her. This is the faith which has the keys of the kingdom of heaven." (*De Trinitate*, book 6, ch. 37).

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<sup>19</sup> These two sections are a summary of Greg Allison, *40 Questions About Catholicism*, 22.

<sup>20</sup> *The Infallibility of the Church*, 337.

<sup>21</sup> James White, *The Roman Catholic Controversy*, 120.

<sup>22</sup> George Salmon, *The Infallibility of the Church*, 335.

## Key Doctrine: Papal *Infallibility*

The doctrine of papal infallibility teaches that the pope has a special grace from God that protects him from binding the Church to believe error. — Trent Horn (*The Case for Catholicism*, 113)

In order to preserve the Church in the purity of the faith handed on by the apostles, Christ who is the Truth willed to confer on her a share in his own infallibility. By a "supernatural sense of faith" the People of God, under the guidance of the Church's living Magisterium, "unfailingly adheres to this faith."

The mission of the Magisterium is linked to the definitive nature of the covenant established by God with his people in Christ. It is this Magisterium's task to preserve God's people from deviations and defections and to guarantee them the objective possibility of professing the true faith without error. Thus, the pastoral duty of the Magisterium is aimed at seeing to it that the People of God abides in the truth that liberates. To fulfill this service, Christ endowed the Church's shepherds with the charism of infallibility in matters of faith and morals. The exercise of this charism takes several forms:

"The Roman Pontiff, head of the college of bishops, enjoys this infallibility in virtue of his office, when, as supreme pastor and teacher of all the faithful - who confirms his brethren in the faith he proclaims by a definitive act a doctrine pertaining to faith or morals. . . . The infallibility promised to the Church is also present in the body of bishops when, together with Peter's successor, they exercise the supreme Magisterium," above all in an Ecumenical Council. When the Church through its supreme Magisterium proposes a doctrine "for belief as being divinely revealed," and as the teaching of Christ, the definitions "must be adhered to with the obedience of faith."<sup>420</sup> This infallibility extends as far as the deposit of divine Revelation itself. — Catechism of the Catholic Church (Sections 889–891, quoting from Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*).

### Four Things to Know:

1. Only when he speaks on a matter of faith or morals
2. Only when he speaks *ex cathedra* (latin: "from the chair")
3. God has promised His divine assistance (Matthew 16:13–20)
4. Once a pronouncement has been given, it is *universally binding as sacred tradition* and cannot be subject to correction or error.

Several important clarifications must be made when it comes to this doctrine. First, infallibility does not include impeccability, or protection from sinning in general... Instead, infallibility means the pope will be kept from binding the Church to doctrinal error *in spite* of his moral failings. Second, the pope is infallible when he "definitely" proclaims a doctrine or makes what is called an *ex cathedra* statement related to faith or morals... However, if the pope is speaking as a private theologian, or even issuing a magisterial document that does not explicitly make a dogmatic definition, then his teaching is not protected by infallibility. — Trent Horn (*The Case for Catholicism*, 114).

## Some Interesting Church History

- Papal Infallibility was not formally declared until [1870](#) at Vatican I
- Since that time, the popes have issued [one](#) *ex cathedra* pronouncement:
- The Bodily Assumption of Mary in *1950*.

## Summary

- The Pope is believed to be the successor of Peter and therefore, the leader of Jesus' church on Earth.
- Together with his college of bishops, the Pope leads the Magisterium in the official dogmatic interpretation of the Bible.
- This supposedly protects the church from falling into error and confusion.

## Protestant Response

- There is a lot of debate surrounding what Jesus meant by “this rock”

*Peter and the rock.* The first feature is a well-known wordplay in Greek: “You are Peter [Petros], and on this rock [petra] I will build my church.” In Aramaic, almost certainly the language Jesus spoke on this occasion, the same word (*kepha*) would have been used for both “Peter” and “rock.” Translating it into Greek, Matthew would naturally use the feminine noun *petra* for “rock,” since it is the most common and closest equivalent to *kepha*. But when it came to recording the wordplay in Greek, Matthew had to use the less common masculine noun (*petros*) in the first half of the wordplay, for he would not refer to Peter with a feminine noun. Nevertheless, the use of the two different Greek words does not change the basic meaning of the wordplay, for *petros* and *petra* were at times used interchangeably. In essence Jesus is saying: “You are Rock, and on this rock I will build my church. — Michael J. Wilkins<sup>23</sup>

- He could have been referring to Peter or He could have been referring to Peter’s [\*Confession \(of faith\)\*](#).

This has been the majority view among Protestants. R. V. G. Tasker wrote, “The faith that was expressed by him was the rock upon which he would build his church.” Surprisingly, this was also the view of a large number of the early Catholic fathers. John A. Broadus is informative here. He quotes Chrysostom as saying, “On this rock; that is, on the faith of his confession.... He did not say upon Peter, for it was not upon man, but upon his faith.” Broadus also cites Gregory of Nyssa, Isidore of Pelusium, Hilary, Theodoret, Theophanes, Theophylact, and John of Damascus as having held this interpretation. — James Montgomery Boice<sup>24</sup>

- In truth: it’s probably some combination of [\*both\*](#)—you can’t separate Peter from his confession.

The statement that the rock is Peter is true only as we keep in mind what that apostle has just said; it is not Peter simply as Peter but Peter who has confessed Jesus as the Messiah who is the church’s foundation on whom the church is to be built. We must not separate the man from the words he has just spoken. From the earliest times it has been recognized that Peter’s faith is important for an understanding of the passage. Thus Chrysostom cites the words “upon this rock will I build my Church” and immediately goes on, “that is, on the faith of his confession” (p. 333). Any interpretation that minimizes the importance of the faith that found expression in Peter’s words is to be rejected. Barclay puts it this way: Jesus “did not mean that the Church *depended* on Peter, as it depended on Himself, and on God the Rock, alone. He did mean that the Church *began* with Peter; in that sense Peter is the foundation of the Church” (II, p. 156). — Leon Morris<sup>25</sup>

- Jesus will build his church **on people who confess Him** as their Lord and Messiah.

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<sup>23</sup> Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 562.

<sup>24</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 305–306.

<sup>25</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, PNTC; Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 423.

“The confession cannot be separated from Peter, neither can Peter be separated from his confession.” — Ed. Clowney (*The Church*, 40)

A better interpretation holds these two prominent textual elements together: The rock is Peter by virtue of his confession.

The main support for this view can be seen in the prominent salvation-historical role that Peter plays in the New Testament (especially the Gospels and the first half of Acts). His prominence is seen in various ways. He’s the first to announce the gospel to the Jews (Acts 2:14–41). Together with John, he confirms the inclusion of the Samaritans in the church (Acts 8:14–25). Finally, he is instrumental in the conversion of the first Gentiles (Acts 10–11).

This vivid narration in the book of Acts shows how the keys of the kingdom were used to build the church. And though all the apostles were active (cf. Matt. 18:18), Peter’s prominence at various key points is unmistakable. — Greg Allison<sup>26</sup>

Christ addresses Peter alone: he does so, because Peter alone, in the name of all, had confessed Christ to be *the Son of God*, and to him alone is addressed the discourse, which applies equally to the rest. And the reason adduced by Cyprian and others is not to be despised, that Christ spake to all in the person of one man, in order to recommend the unity of the Church. — John Calvin<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> “What Does ‘This Rock’ Refer to in Matthew 16:18?,” *The Gospel Coalition Website*.

<sup>27</sup> John Calvin and William Pringle, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, vol. 2 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 296.

## The Keys? Binding and Losing? What?????

### Protestant Perspectives

1. Right / Wrong Doctrine or Behavior (Least Popular)
2. Retaining and Remitting Sins (Reformation View)

### One Way This Might Look: Church Membership and Discipline

Jesus established local churches to declare some of heaven's judgments now, albeit provisionally. By giving the keys of the kingdom first to Peter and the apostles and then to gathered churches, Jesus gave churches a similar authority to the U.S. Embassy in Brussels: the authority to make provisional judgments concerning *what* is a right confession of the gospel (Matt. 16:13–19) and *who* is a citizen of the kingdom of heaven (18:15–20). This is what Jesus meant when he said churches possess the authority to bind and loose on earth what's bound and loosed in heaven (16:18; 18:17–18). He didn't mean they could *make* people Christians or *make* the gospel what it is, no more than the embassy could *make* me an American or *make* American laws. Rather, Jesus meant that churches could make official pronouncements or judgments concerning the *what* and the *who* of the gospel on behalf of heaven.

Churches declare the judgments of heaven through the keys of the kingdom, I said in the last point. But I skipped over a couple of crucial points. Jesus *also* says that Christians must *gather* and *agree* in making those judgments.

After explaining the authority of the keys to bind and loose in verse 18, he explains himself again in verse 19: "Again I say to you, if two of you on earth *agree* about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven" (Matt. 18:19). Notice the agreement on earth signals what the Father's doing in heaven. They're speaking for him. Then in verse 20 Jesus further explains that this agreement needs to occur in the church *gathering*: "For where two or three *gather* in my name, there am I among them" (v. 20). A church can gather in his name because it agrees upon his name—who Jesus is and what he has done. Jesus then seals that agreement with his own presence. When Jesus says he's "there" and "among" them, he doesn't mean he's hovering like a mystical fog in the room. He means the very literal and embodied gathering represents him. It speaks for him. It bears his authority. He identifies himself with it, as if they were flying his flag

In other words, it's not just that a church provisionally represents Christ's rule and judgment. It's the *gathered* church. The *gathered* church is the embassy. The *gathering* represents Jesus' heavenly authority and geography, whether that pin on the map is in Belgium, Germany, Russia, Iran, China, Canada, or Brazil.

And it's not just Jesus who says this. Paul appears to have Jesus's Matthew 18:20 promise in mind when the Corinthian church faced their own situation of church discipline: "When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan" (1 Cor. 5:4–5). When a church gathers or assembles in Christ's name, they possess the power of the Lord Jesus to remove someone from membership. After all, they can no



longer *agree* that this person is a believer. Therefore, they must render a provisional judgment on Jesus' behalf on earth. — Jonathan Leeman<sup>28</sup>

Q. 83. What are the keys of the kingdom of heaven?

*Answer.* The preaching of the holy gospel and Christian discipline, or excommunication out of the Christian church; by these two, the kingdom of heaven is opened to believers, and shut against unbelievers.

Q. 84. How is the kingdom of heaven opened and shut by the preaching of the holy gospel?

*Answer.* Thus: when according to the command of Christ, it is declared and publicly testified to all and every believer, that, whenever they receive the promise of the gospel by a true faith, all their sins are really forgiven them of God, for the sake of Christ's merits; and on the contrary, when it is declared and testified to all unbelievers, and such as do not sincerely repent, that they stand exposed to the wrath of God, and eternal condemnation, so long as they are unconverted: according to which testimony of the gospel, God will judge them, both in this, and in the life to come.

Q. 85. How is the kingdom of heaven shut and opened by Christian discipline?

*Answer.* Thus: when according to the command of Christ, those, who under the name of Christians, maintain doctrines, or practices inconsistent therewith, and will not, after having been often brotherly admonished, renounce their errors and wicked course of life, are complained of to the church, or to those, who are thereunto appointed by the church; and if they despise their admonition, are by them forbidden the use of the sacraments; whereby they are excluded from the Christian church, and by God himself from the kingdom of Christ; and when they promise and show real amendment, are again received as members of Christ and his church. — Heidelberg Catechism (1563)

Zacharias Ursinus, co-author of the Heidelberg Catechism, wrote that the keys of the kingdom consist in preaching and discipline, "by which the kingdom of heaven is opened to believers, and shut against unbelievers." Through these spiritual means the church testifies the grace of God to those who live in true faith and repentance. Simultaneously these means declare the wrath of God to the wicked and their exclusion from the kingdom. Ursinus explains that the metaphor of keys borrows from the image of house stewards. "The church is the house of the living God," he writes, and "the ministers of the church are the stewards of God." In declaring the will of God for salvation, ministers have the keys to open and shut God's house. — D.G. Hart<sup>29</sup>

The second metaphor, or comparison, is intended directly to point out the forgiveness of sins; for Christ, in delivering us, by his Gospel, from the condemnation of eternal death, *looses* the cords of the curse by which we are held bound. The doctrine of the Gospel is, therefore, declared to be appointed for loosing our bonds, that, being loosed on earth by the voice and testimony of men, we may be actually *loosed* in heaven. — John Calvin<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> "Churches: The Embassies and Geography of Heaven," *9 Marks Website*.

<sup>29</sup> "Recovering the Keys of the Kingdom in an Age of Equipped Saints," *Monergism Website*.

<sup>30</sup> John Calvin and William Pringle, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, vol. 2 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 293.

It was this act of confession by Simon which gave Jesus the opportunity to proclaim the foundation of his church. The keys of the kingdom, the power of binding and loosing men from their sins, are given here to Peter (or perhaps the disciples), and later (Matt. 18:18) to all who confess him as Lord. The keys signify the power to proclaim the gospel which liberates men from sin. The rejection of this gospel also leaves men bound in sin, without hope in the world. — Wayne E. Ward <sup>31</sup>

Jesus gave these keys in Matthew 16 to his disciples, and in them to the governors or officers who rule his church. Church officers are given the task of binding and loosing, or retaining and remitting sins - making judgements as to whether sinners are impenitent, unrepentant, and bound by Satan, or penitent, repentant, and freed for Christ. — Chad Van Dixhoorn<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Wayne E. Ward, "Matthew," in *The Teacher's Bible Commentary*, ed. H. Franklin Paschall and Herschel H. Hobbs (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1972), 605.

<sup>32</sup> "Through the Westminster Confession: Chapter 30.1,2" *Reformation 21 Website*

## Some Important Observations

1. This is the first of only two mentions of “church” by Jesus.
2. Jesus gives His [disciples](#) the same authority in Matthew 18:15–20

If your brother sins against you, go tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have won your brother. **16** But if he won't listen, take one or two others with you, so that **by the testimony of two or three witnesses every fact may be established.** **17** If he doesn't pay attention to them, tell the church. If he doesn't pay attention even to the church, let him be like a Gentile and a tax collector to you. **18** Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will have been loosed in heaven. **19** Again, truly I tell you, if two of you on earth agree about any matter that you pray for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. **20** For where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there among them.” — Matthew 18:15–20

Peter is obviously singled out, yet he is still within the circle of disciples, so he is not being set apart from or above the rest. Indeed, as spokesman he represents the common view of the group, and the blessing and revelation may be obliquely directed to the group as well. His confession is an answer *for* the disciples (16:15–16) and provokes a charge *to* all the disciples (16:20). Perhaps it is best to say that Peter is individually singled out for his act of leadership in making the confession, yet his leadership role is from *within* the circle of disciples. Even with the pronouncement about Peter's special role, the rest of the disciples will also be included in similar roles (e.g., 18:18–20). — Michael J. Wilkins<sup>33</sup>

3. Whatever it is, it's connected to the truth of [Jesus](#) and the [apostles](#) as His unique representatives (2 Corinthians 5:20)

**The Keys:** Jesus gives Peter and the apostles the authority to officially declare that people are in or out of the kingdom. The question is: on *what basis* are people declared “in” or “out”? The book of Acts and the writings of the apostles suggest: people enter the kingdom of God through repenting of their sins and believing the gospel—the gospel Peter and the apostles preached. Conversely, people are “out” of the kingdom if they do not repent and reject the gospel preached by Peter and the apostles.

Peter and the apostles played the role of *ambassador* (2 Cor. 5:20): they spoke on behalf of Jesus and were given the authority to proclaim His message and admit people into His church on the basis of a credible profession. Conversely, the apostles were given authority to exclude people from inclusion in the church community—something that publicly and formally declared someone to be “out” of God's kingdom (Matthew 18:17; 1 Corinthians 5). — Josh's Interpretation :)

Peter stands in contrasts to the scribes and Pharisees, who shut off entrance to the kingdom (23:13). Peter's mission is to give people access to the kingdom, and this mission involves especially his preaching of the gospel. Peter, the representative disciple who gives the first personal declaration of the Messiah's identity, is the one in the book of Acts who opens the door of the kingdom to the Jews on Pentecost (Acts 2), to the Samaritans (Acts 8), and finally to the Gentiles (Acts 10). The entrance image is

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<sup>33</sup> Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 561.

foremost in view, and therefore “the keys refer to the fact that chronologically Peter, acting as the representative of Jesus, was the first to announce the message.” Note that even though the Samaritans had “believed” through the preaching of Philip (8:4–13), Peter had to go there in order for them to receive the Holy Spirit as confirmation to the early church that God had now included the Samaritans (8:14–17). Once Peter used the keys to open the door to the kingdom of God, he passes from the scene. The door to the kingdom now stands open throughout the ages, so the keys are no longer needed. — Michael J. Wilkins<sup>34</sup>

In rabbinic literature, “binding and loosing” describes the authority of the rabbis in teaching and discipline to declare what is forbidden or permitted and thus to impose or remove an obligation by a doctrinal decision. Some therefore suggest that Peter is given authority as a “supreme rabbi” who applies binding interpretations in the life of the church.<sup>50</sup> However, since the keys metaphor suggests that Peter is given authority to open the door to the kingdom of heaven, the binding and loosing metaphor continues that theme by indicating that Peter is the one who is given authority to declare the terms under which God grants entrance to, and exclusion from, the kingdom.

Peter’s authority is tied directly to his confession. Through the revelation of the Father and the personal confession of Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of the living God, Peter receives a blessing and becomes the foundation of the church. His confession is a condensation of the gospel, and through Peter’s preaching of the gospel and the preaching of others who follow him, sins are forgiven and entrance gained to the kingdom. — Michael J. Wilkins<sup>35</sup>

Thus far in Matthew’s story what gets people into the kingdom of heaven is their response to what Jesus is, brings, announces, and teaches. In the move from image to application, Peter’s keys must be understood against this background. Both authority and power are involved, but Peter is not being set up as an ecclesiastical power figure on whose personal decision hang people’s fates. Peter’s possession of the keys primarily involves him in pointing to Jesus as the Christ and the Son of God and relaying what he has learned from him. In Matthew’s story Peter is now in a position to be given keys because he has come to the place of insight and confession represented in Mt. 16:16. — John Nolland<sup>36</sup>

In Matthew 16:19, Jesus is specifically addressing Peter, so it is significant that, in the book of Acts, Peter figures prominently in the “opening of doors” to three different groups of people so they can enter the Kingdom. In Acts 2, it is Peter who preaches in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost; about three thousand Jewish people are saved that day. Peter’s preaching had “unlocked the door” of heaven for the Jews. Later, in Acts 8, the Samaritans believe the gospel and receive the Holy Spirit; again, Peter (and John) was present for this event. Peter had “unlocked the door” for the Samaritans. Then, in Acts 10, Peter brings the gospel to a Roman centurion’s household, and they, too, receive the Holy Spirit. Peter had “unlocked the door” for the Gentiles. The “keys” that Jesus had given him worked in each case.

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<sup>34</sup> Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 566–567.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* 567.

<sup>36</sup> John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC-13; Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 677.

Of course, keys can be used to lock doors as well as open them. Part of the gospel message is that faith is necessary. Without faith in Christ, the door to heaven is shut and barred (see John 3:18). As the apostles preached the gospel, those who responded in faith and repentance were granted access to the Kingdom of Heaven; yet those who continued to harden their hearts and reject the gospel of God's saving grace were shut out of the Kingdom (Acts 8:23).

The context of Matthew 16 also refers to a "binding and loosing." To better understand this concept, we turn to Matthew 18:15–20, where Jesus gives the guidelines for church discipline, using the same "binding and loosing" language we find in Matthew 16. The apostles were not to usurp Christ's authority over individual believers and their eternal destiny, but they were to exercise authority to discipline erring believers and, if necessary, excommunicate disobedient church members. — GotQuestions.org

This is a great honour, that we are God's messengers to assure the world of its salvation. It is the highest honour conferred on the Gospel, that it is declared to be the *embassy* of mutual *reconciliation* between God and men, (2 Cor. 5:20.) In a word, it is a wonderful consolation to devout minds to know that the message of salvation brought to them by a poor mortal man is ratified before God. — John Calvin<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> John Calvin and William Pringle, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, vol. 2 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 294.

## Interpretation vs. Application

Even if the Catholic *interpretation* is correct; its *application* is very questionable.

### For several reasons:

1. Jesus' words say nothing about Peter's successors, infallibility, or exclusive authority.
2. Peter does not appear as the supreme leader of the church in the rest of the NT.
  - He is certainly *prominent*, but he's not *preeminent*.
  - Peter pretty much disappears from the early Church narrative in Acts 16
  - Peter is "sent" to Samaria by the apostles in Acts 8:14
  - Peter's voice is not the final voice at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 (instead, James gives the final voice).
3. Paul says the church is built on the foundation of "the apostles and prophets" (Ephesians 2:20)

The text says nothing about Peter's successors, infallibility, or exclusive authority. These late interpretations entail insuperable exegetical and historical problems — e.g., after Peter's death, his "successor" would have authority over a surviving apostle, John. What the NT does show is that Peter is the first to make this formal confession and that his prominence continues in the earliest years of the church (Ac 1–12). But he, along with John, can be sent by other apostles (Ac 8:14), and he is held accountable for his actions by the Jerusalem church (Ac 11:1–18) and rebuked by Paul (Gal 2:11–14). He is, in short, *primus inter pares* ("first among equals"), and on the foundation of such men (Eph 2:20), Jesus built his church. That is precisely why Jesus, toward the close of his earthly ministry, spent so much time with them. — D.A. Carson<sup>38</sup>

The natural reading of the passage, despite the necessary shift from *Petros* to *petra* required by the word play in the Greek (but not the Aramaic, where the same word *kêpā*<sup>7</sup> occurs in both places), is that it is Peter who is the rock upon which the church is to be built (thus rightly Morris, France, Carson, Blomberg, Cullmann [*Peter*, 207], Davies-Allison; so too the interconfessional volume by Brown, Donfried, and Reumann [*Peter in the NT*, 92]). The frequent attempts that have been made, largely in the past, to deny this in favor of the view that the confession itself is the rock (eg, most recently Caragounis) seem to be largely motivated by Protestant prejudice against a passage that is used by the Roman Catholics to justify the papacy. Not infrequently these attempts reveal the improper influence of passages such as 1 Cor 3:11 and Eph 2:20. But to allow this passage its natural meaning, that Peter is the rock upon which the church is built, is by no means either to affirm the papacy or to deny that the church, like the apostles, rests upon Jesus as the bedrock of its existence. Jesus is after all the builder, and all that the apostles do they do through him. — Donald A. Hagner<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *Matthew & Mark*, vol. 9 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary Revised Edition*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland; Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 419.

<sup>39</sup> Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, WBC 33B; Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 470.

## Another Option

Jesus is referring to the *mountain* they were standing next to.

### Mount Hermon

- More than 20 pagan temples have been excavated—an unprecedented number compared to other regions in the Ancient Near East.
- In OT times, this was a place associated with *evil spirits*
- It was a place of *centuries*-old pagan worship (Joshua 11:17)
- In this conversation: Jesus and His disciples are surrounded by explicit *paganism* and all its evil connotations.
- Its nickname: The Gates of Hell (*Hades*)

When viewed from this perspective, the scene takes place on geography considered *the gates of hell* in Old Testament times, the domain of Baal, the lord of the dead...This isn't about who gets to be pope (or not). It's a cosmic confrontation, with Jesus challenging the authority of the lord of the dead....Jesus goes to ground zero in biblical demonic geography to announce that Bashan will be defeated. It is the gates of hell that are under assault—and they will not hold up against the church. — Michael Heiser (*Reversing Hermon*, 95–96).

Peter further expresses Jesus' identity as “the Son of the living God,” an expression that has special significance in the area of Caesarea Philippi with its plethora of ancient Baal, Pan, and Caesar worship. Jesus is the Son of the God who is living, not like those mythical, superstitious figures etched in stone. Even more significantly, this expression bears witness to a relationship that has characterized Jesus and God throughout Matthew — Michael J. Wilkins<sup>40</sup>

The term has a metaphorical use at times (Job 38:17; Isa. 38:10), but normally a gate is the entry to a city, temple, or prison (Luke 7:12; Acts 3:10; 12:10). Gates are defensive structures (Gen. 22:17; Deut. 3:5). Thus Jesus is saying that hell's defenses will not thwart the church's progress. The church will advance and prevail through the confession that Jesus is Messiah and Son of God. Jesus is the church's founder and builder, yet Peter has a role. — Daniel Doriani<sup>41</sup>

Like fifteenth-century Spanish explorers crossing oceans in search of gold, the gathering is where our ship runs aground on the temporary-but-visible geography of Christ's kingdom: the gathering. It's temporary because it lasts on a weekly basis for only a couple of hours. It's temporary because we have not yet attained our permanent inheritance. But the geography is real nonetheless. It's spatial. It's physical. It exists. It's not theoretical. It's visible. And it's where the action happens.

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<sup>40</sup> Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 559.

<sup>41</sup> “Why Did Jesus Say, ‘On This Rock I Will Build My Church’? (Matthew 16),” *Crossway Website*.

Christ's authority actually transforms and sanctifies the physical space of the church gathering. Remember how I said embassy officials told me that stepping into U.S. embassy in Brussels was stepping onto American soil? How is that? Because the authority of the U.S. government controls that space. The physical space itself is inert, but its social significance is transformed by the imposition of U.S. authority. Authority "sanctifies" the land and space.

Likewise, Christ's authority transforms geography. He sanctifies the space where Christians gather. He gives it a new social significance with his words "there" and "among" (Matt. 18:20). He's there. He's among. This is true whether or not the lord of that particular realm acknowledges it, whether that lord's name is the Chinese Communist Party or the Iranian Ayatollah or a movie theater owner. When coupled with the preaching of the gospel and the ordinances, that gathering becomes a church. Jesus' kingdom has become visible and geographic *there, among* those people. — Jonathan Leeman<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>"Churches: The Embassies and Geography of Heaven," *9 Marks Website*.



## Key Reformation Doctrine: Solus Christus

### Implications

- Christ Alone is the head of the church and no one else.
- The presence of Jesus transforms the geography a sacred space (Matt. 18:20; 20:18–20; 2 Corinthians 6:16–7:1; Ephesians 2:19–22; 1 Peter 2:5)
- Jesus has appointed Elders and *deacons*, but there is no “Chief Elder” or “Pope”

I exhort the elders among you as **a fellow elder** and witness to the sufferings of Christ, as well as one who shares in the glory about to be revealed: <sup>2</sup> Shepherd God’s flock among you, not overseeing out of compulsion but willingly, as God would have you; not out of greed for money but eagerly; <sup>3</sup> not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. <sup>4</sup> And when **the chief Shepherd appears**, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. — 1 Peter 5:1–4

How did Peter understand Jesus’ words? First Peter 2:4–8 provides a definitive answer to that question, because there, as in his great sermon before the Jewish Sanhedrin (Acts 4:8–12), Peter does not suggest even for a moment that he is the rock on which the church is built. Rather, he insists that the foundation stone is actually Jesus Christ. Peter refers to Jesus as “the living Stone” on which those who believe are, “like living stones,” being built into a spiritual house or temple. Therefore, if others, like Peter himself, are to be called stones in any sense, it is only because they have been built on Jesus, who is the actual foundation. — James Montgomery Boice<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 306.

## C. The Gospel and Salvation

### Justification and Sanctification

- Justification is God's act of declaring us righteous in His sight
- Sanctification is our work with God to be conformed into the image of Christ (John 17:17; Romans 8:28–29; Philippians 2:12–13)
- Justification = Personal Salvation
- Sanctification = Personal Growth

**In Catholic theology, these two realities are merge.**

- Justification is both something we *receive* and something we merit through our Christian life.
- It is both an event and a process
- In Justification we are not *declared* righteous, but instead begin the process of *becoming* righteous.

“Since the initiative belongs to God in the order of grace, **no one can merit the initial grace** of forgiveness and justification, at the beginning of conversion. Moved by the Holy Spirit, we can **merit for ourselves** and for others **the graces needed for sanctification**, for the increase of grace and charity, and **for the attainment of eternal life**.” — Catechism of the Catholic Church (Section 2010).

We can have merit in God's sight only because of God's free plan to associate man with the work of his grace. Merit is to be ascribed in the first place to the grace of God, and **secondly to man's collaboration**. Man's merit is due to God. — Catechism of the Catholic Church (Section 2025)

First, as baptized Catholics, we can agree that we have been justified and we have been saved. Thus, in one sense, our justification and salvation is in the past as a completed action. The initial grace of justification and salvation we receive in baptism is a done deal...However, this is not the end of the story. Scripture reveals that it is precisely through this justification and salvation the new Christian experiences in baptism that he **enters into a process of justification and salvation** requiring his free cooperation with God's grace. — Tim Staples (Catholic Apologist)<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> “Justification: Process or One-Time Deal?” *Catholic Answers Website*.

## The Catholic Plan of Salvation

- Begins with [Baptism](#)
- An infant is cleansed from *original sin*
- An adult is cleansed from original sin and all their *previous* sins.

### Key Doctrine: Baptismal [Regeneration](#)

“The faithful are born anew by Baptism...Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit...and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission: ‘Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration through water in the word.’” — Catechism of the Catholic Church (Paragraph 1212—1213. Quotation from Roman Catechism [Catechism of the Council of Trent] II,2,5; Cf. Council Of Florence: DS 1314)

Baptism is **necessary for salvation** for those to whom the Gospel has been proclaimed and who have had the possibility of asking for this sacrament. The Church does not know of **any means other than Baptism** that assures entry into eternal beatitude.

By Baptism **all sins are forgiven**, original sin and all personal sins, as well as all punishment for sins. In those who have been reborn nothing remains that would impede their entry into the Kingdom of God, neither Adam's sin, nor personal sin, nor the consequences of sin, the gravest of which is separation from God. — Catechism of the Catholic Church (Paragraph 1257)

Once Baptized, the Catholic faithful *maintain and/or recover* their salvation through participation in the [Sacraments](#).

- 3 Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist.
- 2 Sacraments of Healing: Reconciliation and Anointing the sick
- 2 Sacraments at the service of Communion: holy orders and marriage.

Celebrated worthily in faith, the sacraments **confer the grace that they signify**. They are efficacious because in them Christ himself is at work: it is he who baptizes, he who acts in his sacraments in order to communicate the grace that each sacrament signifies. — Catechism of the Catholic Church (Paragraph 1127)

## The Eucharist

- Means “Thanksgiving”
- *Central* to the Catholic faith and Worship
- Catholic dogma teaches the bread and wine *literally* become the body and blood of Jesus.

### Key Doctrine: *Transubstantiation*

“The Eucharist is ‘the **source and summit of the Christian life.**’ The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are **bound up with the Eucharist** and are oriented toward it. For **in the blessed Eucharist** is contained **the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself.**” — Catechism of the Catholic Church (Paragraph 1324)

“At the heart of the Eucharistic celebration are the bread and wine that, by the words of Christ and the invocation of the Holy Spirit, **become Christ's Body and Blood.**” — Catechism of the Catholic Church (Paragraph 1333)

Because it is the memorial of Christ's Passover, the Eucharist is also **a sacrifice**....In the Eucharist Christ gives us the very body which he gave up for us on the cross, the very blood which he "poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” — Catechism of the Catholic Church (Paragraph 1365)

The Eucharist is thus **a sacrifice** because it **re-presents** (makes present) **the sacrifice of the cross**, because it is its *memorial* and because it **applies its fruit...** The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are **one single sacrifice.** — Catechism of the Catholic Church (1366–1367)

### Protestant Response<sup>45</sup>

1. **Consubstantiation (Lutheran View):** Jesus’ body-blood are physically present *with* the elements, but are not *transformed into* the elements.
2. **Spiritual Presence (Reformed View):** Jesus is spiritually present, but not physically present in the elements.
3. **Memorial (Baptist View):** The elements are taken as a token of remembrance and thanksgiving.

### All Agree

- There are *two* sacraments (or ordinances), not seven
- Baptism and the Lords Supper
- Neither of them are *salvific*.

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<sup>45</sup> For more on this see Jonathan Griffiths, “The Lords Supper,” *The Gospel Coalition Website*

## What About Faith?

- Catholicism view: faith (for adults) is *required* for salvation
- The Reformers Complaint: Catholicism affirms the *necessity* of personal faith, but it Catholicism denies the *sufficiency* of personal faith

If anyone says that the sinner is **justified by faith alone**, meaning that nothing else is required to cooperate in order to obtain the grace of justification, and that it is not in any way necessary that he be prepared and disposed by the action of his own will, **let him be anathema**. – Canon 9, The Council of Trent, 1547

If anyone says that the justice received is not preserved and also not increased before God through good works, but that those works are merely the fruits and signs of justification obtained, but not the cause of it's increase, let him be anathema. — Canon 24, The Council of Trent, 1547.

### A Key Text: James 2:14–26

<sup>14</sup> What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith *but does not have works*? **Can such faith save him?** ... <sup>20</sup> Senseless person! Are you willing to learn that **faith without works is useless?** <sup>21</sup>

Wasn't Abraham our father **justified by works** in offering Isaac his son on the altar? <sup>22</sup> You see that faith was active together with his works, and **by works, faith was made complete**, <sup>23</sup> and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend.

<sup>24</sup> You see that **a person is justified by works and not by faith alone...**<sup>26</sup> For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

### Response:

- Protestant theology has a *high* view of the role of works.
- However, the Reformers taught that works are not the basis of salvation; they are the evidence of salvation
- James' point: a *dead* faith will not save you.
- Good works reveal and *vindicate* saving-faith.

**The Reformers taught:** "Salvation is by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone."

The question of the relationship between faith and works is central to the division between Protestants and Roman Catholics. Throughout the Bible, we see that salvation is received not on the basis of works but on the basis of faith in God alone. Jesus himself emphasizes this through many parables and sayings, and Paul argues explicitly against the inclusion of works in the basis of our salvation. James, though arguing that justification is by works "and not by faith alone," can be harmonized with the rest of the New Testament when it is realized that James still expects us to sin—he is combatting faith *without works*, not faith alone as *the basis* of salvation. So, the entirety of the New Testament teaches that we are justified by faith alone, but the faith that justifies necessarily flowers into good works. — Thomas Schreiner<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> "Faith and Works," *The Gospel Coalition Website*

## What About Grace?

Catholic view: salvation is by *grace*

The Reformers Complaint: While Catholicism affirms the *necessity* of God's grace, it does not affirm the *sufficiency* of God's grace

God's grace is transferred *through* the sacraments of the church

"Those who approach the sacrament of Penance obtain pardon from God's mercy for the offense committed against him, and are, at the same time, reconciled with the Church which they have wounded by their sins and which by charity, by example, and by prayer labors for their conversion."

It is called the *sacrament of conversion* because it makes sacramentally present Jesus' call to conversion, the first step in returning to the Father from whom one has strayed by sin.

It is called the *sacrament of Penance*, since it consecrates the Christian sinner's personal and ecclesial steps of conversion, penance, and satisfaction.

It is called the *sacrament of confession*, since the disclosure or confession of sins to a priest is an essential element of this sacrament. In a profound sense it is also a "confession" - acknowledgment and praise - of the holiness of God and of his mercy toward sinful man.

It is called the *sacrament of forgiveness*, since by the priest's sacramental absolution God grants the penitent "pardon and peace."

It is called the *sacrament of Reconciliation*, because it imparts to the sinner the love of God who reconciles: "Be reconciled to God."<sup>7</sup> He who lives by God's merciful love is ready to respond to the Lord's call: "Go; first be reconciled to your brother." — Catechism of the Catholic Church (Sections 1422–1424)

Christ instituted the sacrament of Penance for all sinful members of his Church: above all for those who, since Baptism, have fallen into grave sin, and have thus lost their baptismal grace and wounded ecclesial communion. It is to them that the sacrament of Penance offers a new possibility to convert and to recover the grace of justification. The Fathers of the Church present this sacrament as "the second plank [of salvation] after the shipwreck which is the loss of grace. — Catechism of the Catholic Church (Sections 1444)

### Three Ways:

1. **Mediation:** The Sacraments are the channels by which God's grace is communicated to people
2. **Maintenance:** Through the Sacraments, the Catholic Faithful maintain their salvation.
3. **Merit:** Through the Sacraments, the Catholic Faithful merit eternal life.

### Key Distinction: Mortal and Venial Sins

- Mortal sins break our fellowship with God and require us to gain priestly absolution through the sacrament of penance.
- Venial sins hinder our fellowship with God, but can be atoned for through participation in the other sacraments.
- Once a person repents and is forgiven, they must still suffer the temporal punishment of their sins.

Confession to a priest is an essential part of the sacrament of Penance: "All mortal sins of which penitents after a diligent self-examination are conscious must be recounted by them in confession, even if they are most secret and have been committed against the last two precepts of the Decalogue; for these sins sometimes wound the soul more grievously and are more dangerous than those which are committed openly. — Catechism of the Catholic Church (Section 1456)

When Christ's faithful strive to confess all the sins that they can remember, they undoubtedly place all of them before the divine mercy for pardon. But those who fail to do so and knowingly withhold some, place nothing before the divine goodness for remission through the mediation of the priest, "for if the sick person is too ashamed to show his wound to the doctor, the medicine cannot heal what it does not know. — The Council of Trent (1551)

According to the Church's command, "after having attained the age of discretion, each of the faithful is bound by an obligation faithfully to confess serious sins at least once a year." Anyone who is aware of having committed a mortal sin must not receive Holy Communion, even if he experiences deep contrition, without having first received sacramental absolution, unless he has a grave reason for receiving Communion and there is no possibility of going to confession. Children must go to the sacrament of Penance before receiving Holy Communion for the first time.

Without being strictly necessary, confession of everyday faults (venial sins) is nevertheless strongly recommended by the Church. Indeed the regular confession of our venial sins helps us form our conscience, fight against evil tendencies, let ourselves be healed by Christ and progress in the life of the Spirit. By receiving more frequently through this sacrament the gift of the Father's mercy, we are spurred to be merciful as he is merciful. — Catechism of the Catholic Church (Sections 1457–1458)

## Key Doctrine: *Purgatory*

- Purgatory is the place where the faithful go to be fully cleansed of their sin before entering into heaven.
- This cleansing occurs through the application of merit accomplished by Christ, Mary, and the obedience of the saints (living or dead) —> Treasury of Merit (see below)
- We aid souls in purgatory through our prayers, attendance in Mass, indulgences (see below), and other works of love on their behalf.

All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven.

The Church gives the name *Purgatory* to this final purification of the elect, which is entirely different from the punishment of the damned. The Church formulated her doctrine of faith on Purgatory especially at the Councils of Florence and Trent. — Catechism of the Catholic Church (Sections 1030–1031)

In doing this he acted in a very excellent and noble way, inasmuch as he had the resurrection of the dead in view; for if he were not expecting the dead to rise again, it would have been useless and foolish to pray for them in death. But if he did this with a view to the splendid reward that awaits those who had gone to rest in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Thus **he made atonement for the dead** that they might be freed from this sin. — 2 Maccabees 12:43–45.

Why would anyone go to purgatory? To be cleansed, for “nothing unclean shall enter [heaven]” (Rev. 21:27). Anyone who has not been completely freed of sin and its effects is, to some extent, “unclean.” Through repentance he may have gained the grace needed to be worthy of heaven, which is to say, he has been forgiven and his soul is spiritually alive. But that’s not sufficient for gaining entrance into heaven. He needs to be cleansed completely.

It is entirely correct to say that Christ accomplished all of our salvation for us on the cross. But that does not settle the question of how this redemption is applied to us. Scripture reveals that it is applied to us over the course of time through, among other things, the process of sanctification through which the Christian is made holy. Sanctification involves suffering (Rom. 5:3–5), and purgatory is the final stage of sanctification that some of us need to undergo before we enter heaven. Purgatory is the final phase of Christ’s applying to us the purifying redemption that he accomplished for us by his death on the cross. — Catholic Answers Website<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> “What is Purgatory?”



## How We Help Those in Purgatory

The doctrine of purgatory entails that we can assist our loved ones in purgatory by offering the Mass, prayers, indulgences, almsgiving, and other works of love for them. This is based on the Christian belief in the communion of saints, which includes the souls in purgatory. — Catholic Answers Website<sup>48</sup>

Any prayer or pious act applied to the souls in purgatory can be a way to pray for them. The most effective manner of praying is to have Masses offered for them or to apply the fruits of your own attendance at Mass. The Rosary, too, is a wonderful way to pray for them. — Simply Catholic Website<sup>49</sup>

“[We define] likewise, that if the truly penitent die in the love of God, before they have made satisfaction by worthy fruits of penance for their sins of commission and omission, their souls are purified by purgatorial pains after death; and that for relief from those pains they are benefited by the suffrages of the faithful in this life, that is, by Masses, prayers and almsgiving, and by the other offices of piety usually performed by the faithful for one another according to the practice [*instituta*] of the Church. — The Council of Florence (1439)

## The Doctrine of Indulgences

An indulgence is obtained through the Church who, by virtue of the power of binding and loosing granted her by Christ Jesus, intervenes in favor of individual Christians and opens for them the treasury of the merits of Christ and the saints to obtain from the Father of mercies the remission of the temporal punishment due for their sins.” The Church does this not just to aid Christians, “but also to spur them to works of devotion, penance, and charity”

Since the faithful departed now being purified are also members of the same communion of saints, one way we can help them is to obtain indulgences for them, so that the temporal punishments due for their sins may be remitted. — Catechism of the Catholic Church (Section 1478–1479).

An indulgence is the extra-sacramental remission of the temporal punishment due, in God’s justice, to sin that has been forgiven, which remission is granted by the Church in the exercise of the power of the keys, through the application of the superabundant merits of Christ and of the saints, and for some just and reasonable motive. — Catholic Encyclopedia

Indulgences are part of the Church’s infallible teaching. This means that no Catholic is at liberty to disbelieve in them. The Council of Trent stated that it “condemns with anathema those who say that indulgences are useless or that the Church does not have the power to grant them”(Trent, session 25, Decree on Indulgences). Trent’s anathema places indulgences in the realm of infallibly defined teaching. — Catholic Answers Website<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> “Keeping Up with Loved Ones in Purgatory,”

<sup>49</sup> “How To Pray For Those In Purgatory?”

<sup>50</sup> “Primer on Indulgences”

## The Treasury of Merit

We also call these spiritual goods of the communion of saints the *Church's treasury*, which is "not the sum total of the material goods which have accumulated during the course of the centuries. On the contrary the 'treasury of the Church' is the infinite value, which can never be exhausted, which Christ's merits have before God. They were offered so that the whole of mankind could be set free from sin and attain communion with the Father. In Christ, the Redeemer himself, the satisfactions and merits of his Redemption exist and find their efficacy."

"This treasury includes as well the prayers and good works of the Blessed Virgin Mary. They are truly immense, unfathomable, and even pristine in their value before God. In the treasury, too, are the prayers and good works of all the saints, all those who have followed in the footsteps of Christ the Lord and by his grace have made their lives holy and carried out the mission the Father entrusted to them. In this way they attained their own salvation and at the same time cooperated in saving their brothers in the unity of the Mystical Body." — Catechism of the Catholic Church (1476–1477)

In Roman Catholicism, the treasury of merit is the super-abundant store of righteousness and good works belonging to Christ, the Virgin Mary, and the saints. The treasury of merit is filled with the merit of Christ and Mary (who were sinless), and the saints, who had more than enough merit to enter heaven themselves—they had earned more spiritual rewards than they needed. This merit is now available to others to "supplement" their own meritorious works.

According to Rome, just a drop of Christ's blood would contain enough merit to save the whole world, so the excess blood Christ shed on the cross was stored in a treasury of merit in heaven. Of course, the Bible says nothing about the number of drops of blood Christ shed or how many were sufficient for salvation. The emphasis in the Bible is not on the physical volume of Jesus' blood but on the act of sacrifice. Jesus' blood was spilled to fulfill the Old Testament requirement for blood sacrifices so that such sacrifices were no longer necessary (Leviticus 17:11; Hebrews 9:11–18).

Catholic doctrine teaches that not only is the excess of Christ's meritorious work stored in the treasury of merit, but also the righteous works of Mary and other saints. Mary, Catholicism maintains, was sinless, and she gained far more merit than what she needed for entrance into heaven, and so her "extra" merit was added to the treasury. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, "This treasury includes as well the prayers and good works of the Blessed Virgin Mary. They are truly immense, unfathomable, and even pristine in their value before God. In the treasury, too, are the prayers and good works of all the saints, all those who have followed in the footsteps of Christ the Lord and by his grace have made their lives holy and carried out the mission in the unity of the Mystical Body." — Got Questions Website<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> "What is the treasury of merit?" | This article is provides a great summary

## Summary

- Through faith and baptism, a person is converted to Christ and incorporated into the Catholic Church.
- Once baptized, a person participates in the sacramental economy of the church in order to *maintain & merit* their salvation.
- Salvation = faith + the sacraments.

From the moment that a sacrament is celebrated in accordance with the intention of the Church, the power of Christ and his Spirit acts in and through it, independently of the personal holiness of the minister. Nevertheless, the fruits of the sacraments also depend on the disposition of the one who receives them.

The Church affirms that for believers the sacraments of the New Covenant are *necessary for salvation*. "Sacramental grace" is the grace of the Holy Spirit, given by Christ and proper to each sacrament. The Spirit heals and transforms those who receive him by conforming them to the Son of God. The fruit of the sacramental life is that the Spirit of adoption makes the faithful partakers in the divine nature by uniting them in a living union with the only Son, the Savior. — Catechism of the Catholic Church (Sections 1128–1129)

The sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us. The visible rites by which the sacraments are celebrated signify and make present the graces proper to each sacrament. They bear fruit in those who receive them with the required dispositions. — Catechism of the Catholic Church (Section 1131)

## Key Reformation Doctrines: Sola *Gratia* & Sola *Fide*

“Salvation is by *grace alone* through *faith alone*”

### Key Distinction:

- *Infused* Righteousness vs. *Imputed* Righteousness

Canon 11.

If anyone says that men are justified either by the sole **imputation** of the justice of Christ or by the sole remission of sins, to the exclusion of the grace and the charity which is poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Ghost, and remains in them, or also that the grace by which we are justified is only the good will of God, let him be anathema.

Canon 20.

If anyone says that a man who is justified and however perfect is not bound to observe the commandments of God and the Church, but only to believe, as if the Gospel were a bare and absolute promise of eternal life without the **condition** of observing the commandments, let him be anathema.

Canon 24.

If anyone says that the justice received is not preserved and also not **increased before God through good works**, but that those works are merely the fruits and signs of justification obtained, but not the **cause** of its increase, let him be anathema.

Canon 30.

If anyone says that after the reception of the grace of justification the guilt is so remitted and the debt of eternal punishment so blotted out to every repentant sinner, that **no debt of temporal punishment remains** to be discharged either in this world or in purgatory before the gates of heaven can be opened, let him be anathema.

Canon 32.

If anyone says that the good works of the one justified are in such manner the gifts of God that **they are not also the good merits of him justified**; or that the one justified by the good works that he performs by the grace of God and the merit of Jesus Christ, whose living member he is, does not truly merit an increase of grace, eternal life, and in case he dies in grace, the attainment of eternal life itself and also an increase of glory, let him be anathema.” — Decrees of the Council of Trent (1545–1563)

In short, the Church teaches that God inwardly heals and transforms us by his grace, making us children of God (CCC 1262ff.). This is initial justification, which takes place in baptism. So baptism gives us a share in divine love or “righteousness,” **an infused “theological virtue”** which enables us to become like Jesus and do his will in a lovingly obedient way (CCC 1991). Baptism restores our communion with God and is the beginning of our salvation, the first step on a lifelong journey. — Catholic Answers Website<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> “Catholic and Protestant Views on Justification and Sanctification,”

## Infused vs. Imputed Righteousness

- Catholic Theology: justification is a *process*
- Reformation Theology: justification is an *event*.
- Catholic Theology: God's grace + our own merit
- Reformation Theology: God's grace *alone*

The *material cause* of the Reformation—that doctrine out of which the Reformation was made—is the doctrine of justification by grace alone through faith alone. As Luther said, “if this article [of justification] stands, the church stands; if this article collapses, the church collapses” (WA 40/3.352.3). — Justin Taylor

<sup>53</sup>

When Paul develops the doctrine of justification by faith alone, he is saying that when God counts somebody righteous on the basis of faith, it is not because He looks at them and sees that they are inherently righteous. Rather, they have been clothed by the imputation, or transfer, of the righteousness of Christ to that person by faith.

This is why we say that the single meritorious cause of our salvation is the transfer, or counting, of Jesus' righteousness for me. Not only did He die to pay the penalty for my sins, but He lived a perfect life of obedience and fulfilled the law for those who put their trust in Him. This is what we're talking about in imputation. That was the single, central, most important point of the sixteenth century Reformation. — R.C. Sproul<sup>54</sup>

At the heart of the gospel is a double imputation: my sin is imputed to Jesus. His righteousness is imputed to me. And in this twofold transaction, we see that God, who does not negotiate sin, who doesn't compromise His own integrity with our salvation but rather punishes sin fully and really after it has been imputed to Jesus, retains His own righteousness. And so, He is both just and the justifier, as the Apostle tells us here. So my sin goes to Jesus; His righteousness comes to me in the sight of God. — R.C. Sproul<sup>55</sup>

The concept of righteousness is closely associated with both judgment and salvation in the Bible. In both, God shows the uprightness of his character: in judgment, by displaying his holy and just character in punishing the wicked; in salvation, by graciously rescuing his people to whom he has promised salvation. In salvation, God's righteousness plays a dual role, both as what is shown to the world as an attribute of the God who saves his people and as the gift of salvation to his people, who receive his righteousness as their own through Christ's death and resurrection on their behalf. The justification of ungodly sinners, then, is the justification or vindication of God, for it vindicates his holiness and righteousness, while at the same time it discloses his mercy and love. — Thomas Schreiner<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> “Why Do We Call Them the “Formal” and “Material” Principles of the Reformation?,” *The Gospel Coalition Website*

<sup>54</sup> “What is Imputed Righteousness?” *Ligonier Ministries Website*

<sup>55</sup> “Double Imputation: Our Sin For His Righteousness,” *Ligonier Ministries Website*

<sup>56</sup> “The Righteousness of God in Justification,” *The Gospel Coalition Website*

## Scripture Says

We know that a person is **not justified by the works of the law** but by **faith in Jesus Christ**...we ourselves have believed in Christ Jesus. This was so that we might be **justified by faith in Christ** and **not by the works of the law**, because **by the works of the law no human being will be justified**. — Galatians 2:16

For you are saved **by grace through faith**, and this is not from yourselves; it is **God's gift**— <sup>9</sup>**not from works**, so that no one can boast. — Ephesians 2:8–9

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He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that **in him we might become the righteousness of God**. — 2 Corinthians 5:21

<sup>21</sup> But now, **apart from the law**, the righteousness of God has been revealed, attested by the Law and the Prophets. <sup>22</sup> The righteousness of God is **through faith in Jesus Christ** to all who believe, since there is no distinction. <sup>23</sup> For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; <sup>24</sup> they **are justified freely by his grace** through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. <sup>25</sup> God presented him as an atoning sacrifice in his blood, **received through faith**, to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his restraint God passed over the sins previously committed. <sup>26</sup> God presented him to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so that **he would be just and justify the one who has faith in Jesus**. — Romans 3:21–26

For we too were once foolish, disobedient, deceived, enslaved by various passions and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, detesting one another. But when the kindness of God our Savior and his love for mankind appeared, **he saved us—not by works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy**—through the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit. He poured out his Spirit on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior so that, **having been justified by his grace**, we may become heirs with the hope of eternal life. — Titus 3:3–7

Now to the one who works, pay is not credited as a gift, but as something owed. But **to the one who does not work, but believes on him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited for righteousness**. — Romans 4:4–5

And be found in Him, **not having a righteousness of my own from the law, but one that is through faith in Christ**— the **righteousness from God based on faith**. — Philippians 3:9

**Key Reformation Doctrine: *Soli Deo Gloria* — Glory to God Alone!**

## The Essence of Protestant Theology

- The “5 *Solas* of the Reformation”
  1. *Sola Gratia*: Salvation is by Grace Alone
  2. *Sola Fide*: through Faith Alone
  3. *Solus Christus*: in Christ Alone
  4. *Soli deo Gloria*: to the Gory of God Alone
  5. *Sola Scriptura*: based on Scripture Alone
- These form the convictional and theological *foundation* of Protestant Theology
- They were articulated specifically to *contrast* the Protestant Reformation with Roman Catholic Church

These five statements of the evangelical faith lay at the center of what distinguished the theology of the Reformation from the theology of the Roman Catholic church in the 16th century. *Sola scriptura* is the belief that because Scripture is God’s inspired Word, it is the only inerrant, sufficient, and final authority for the church. *Solus Christus* is the assertion that Christ alone is the basis on which the ungodly are justified in God’s sight. *Sola fide* maintains that the believer receives the redemption Christ has accomplished only through faith. *Sola gratia* proclaims that *all* of our salvation, from beginning to end, is by grace and grace alone. Because of these things, the Reformers held fast to the phrase *soli Deo gloria*, that only God receives glory for our salvation. — Matthew Barrett<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> “The Five Solas,” *The Gospel Coalition Website*

## D. Practical Application

**Question to Consider:** How important are these 5 doctrines to *your personal discipleship*?

### Having the Conversation

1. Help me understand: why does the Church mean so much to you?
2. Have you ever read what the Bible says about \_\_\_\_\_?
3. Would you be willing to read about this with me?

### For All of Us

1. Have the conversation
2. Ask Questions
3. Study your History and Theology (See Resources!)
4. Tell the *next* generation

Beloved...I found it necessary to write appealing to you to **contend for the faith** that was **once for all** delivered to the saints. — Jude 3

My people, hear my instruction; listen to the words from my mouth. I will declare wise sayings; I will speak mysteries from the past— things we have heard and known and that our ancestors have passed down to us. We will not hide them from their children, but will **tell a future generation** the praiseworthy acts of the Lord, his might, and the wondrous works he has performed. — Psalm 78:1–5

In a fair bit of Western evangelicalism, there is a worrying tendency to focus on the periphery. [My] colleague . . . Dr. Paul Hiebert . . . springs from Mennonite stock and analyzes his heritage in a fashion that he himself would acknowledge is something of a simplistic caricature, but a useful one nonetheless.

One generation of Mennonites *believed* the gospel and held as well that there were certain social, economic, and political entailments.

The next generation *assumed* the gospel, but identified with the entailments. The following generation *denied* the gospel: the “entailments” became everything. Assuming this sort of scheme for evangelicalism, one suspects that large swaths of the movement are lodged in the second step, with some drifting toward the third.

. . . What is it in the Christian faith that excites you? . . . Today there are endless subgroups of confessing Christians who invest enormous quantities of time and energy in one issue or another: abortion, pornography, home schooling, women’s ordination (for or against), economic justice, a certain style of worship, the defense of a particular Bible version, and countries have a full agenda of urgent, peripheral demands. Not for a moment am I suggesting we should not think about such matters or throw our weight behind some of them. But when such matters devour most of our time and passion, each of us must ask: In what fashion am I confessing the centrality of the gospel? — D.A. Carson<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Justin Taylor, “It Only Takes One Generation for a Church to Die,” The Gospel Coalition Website



## E. Resources

### 1. Reformation Confessions

- Heidelberg Catechism (1563)
- London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689)
- Westminster Confession of Faith (1647)

### 2. Introductions to Roman Catholicism

- *40 Questions about Roman Catholicism* by Gregg Allison (Protestant Author)
- *The Unfinished Reformation* by Gregg Allison (Protestant Author)
- *Defending Catholicism* by Trent Horn (Catholic Author)
- Catholic Answers Website (Catholic Authors)
- *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Official Doctrine of the Catholic Church)

### 3. History of the Reformation

- *The Unquenchable Flame* by Michael Reeves
- “Luther in His Time” (Podcast by Ligonier Ministries)
- “Luther: The Life and Legacy of the German Reformer” YouTube Documentary
- “The Reformation” by Carl Truman (Seminary Class on Youtube)
- *The Swans Are Not Silent* (Vol. 1) by John Piper

### 4. The Five Solas

- *Faith Alone* by R.C. Sproul
- *Scripture Alone* by R.C. Sproul
- *What is Reformed Theology?* by R.C. Sproul
- *Counted Righteous in Christ* by John Piper.
- *The Heart of the Reformation: 90 Day Devotional Through the Five Solas* by Ligonier Ministries

### 5. Online Websites

- Ligonier Ministries
- The Gospel Coalition
- Desiring God
- Canon Fodder
- Truth Unites with Gavin Ortlund (YouTube Ministry)

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## Appendix 1: Traditions in the Bible

**Objection #1:** What about the oral traditions in the Bible—does that indicate God reveals things to the apostles that were not written down, but are still passed down to us today?

**Answer:** *No*—here's why:

- The NT does speak about traditions the apostles passed on the churches (1 Cor. 11:2; 2 Thess. 2:15; 3:6)
- However, there is no evidence that these oral traditions were substantially different than what was eventually written down.

Now I want to make clear for you, brothers and sisters, ***the gospel*** I preached to you... For I ***passed on*** to you as most important what I also ***received***: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup> and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve.  
– 1 Corinthians 15:1–5

Be careful that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit ***based on human tradition***, based on the elements of the world, *rather than Christ*. – Colossians 2:8  
1: The Canon of Scripture

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## Appendix 2: The Canon of Scripture

Many have been convinced by the argument in the *The Davinci Code* which claims that the Roman Emperor Constantine presided over the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD in order to force certain books into the Bible that would give him a political advantage over the church. Dan Brown argues:

Constantine upgraded Jesus' status almost four centuries after Jesus' death... thousands of documents already existed chronicling His life as a mortal man. To rewrite the history books Constantine knew he would need a bold stroke. From this sprang the most profound moment in Christian history... Constantine commissioned and financed a new Bible, which omitted those gospels that spoke of Christ's human traits and embellished those gospels that made him godlike. The earlier gospels were outlawed, gathered up, and burned.<sup>59</sup>

However, these claims are completely unfounded. The best scholarship on the subject shows that the four Gospels we have were considered the best, most reliable sources for the life and ministry of Jesus. There were no genuine Christian communities who believed they should be reading about, preaching, or worshipping Jesus based on the information they received from 'other Gospels'.

Rather, the entire collection of New Testament documents were already being circulated in various Christian communities long before a church council ever convened. These communities recognized a bulk of these documents as God's Word for decades, even centuries before there was any church council.<sup>60</sup>

As Charles Hill, an expert in this subject, observes, "At the dawn of the fourth century the four Gospels...had long been functioning as the church's acknowledged sources for the life and teaching of Jesus."<sup>61</sup> The best scholarship on this subject shows us that the certainty of four—and only four—Gospels was highly developed in the conscious of the early church prior to any council's decisions. These councils merely *affirmed* what was already believed by the early Christian communities.

These early Christian communities believed God had spoken through Jesus Christ and His apostles and were developing their communities around the message they taught. But, they never formally met for a council because the threat of persecution was so great. Eventually, the persecution stopped because Constantine declared Christianity an accepted religion. Only then did Christian scholars begin to meet at formal councils.

At these meetings, the primary issues were not about *which books* belong in the Bible, but rather about *which doctrines* the Bible clearly taught. In other words, the New Testament was already *the assumed source of written authority* to guide and adjudicate these theological issues.

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<sup>59</sup> Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 234.

<sup>60</sup> Andreas J. Kostenberger and Michael J. Kruger, *The Heresy of Orthodoxy: How Contemporary Culture's Fascination with Diversity Has Reshaped Our Understanding of Early Christianity* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 127–175.

<sup>61</sup> C.E. Hill, *Who Chose the Gospels? Probing the Great Gospel Conspiracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 227

Nicaea is actually a good example of this. While Constantine was present at the council meeting, the meeting had nothing to do with which books were to be included in the New Testament. Rather, it was to settle a theological dispute about the deity of Christ (known as the Arian controversy).<sup>62</sup>

Constantine's presence at the council was as the chief magistrate who called and assembled the council, but it was for the purposes of promoting unity amongst the Christian church. Because Rome was now dominated by the Christian religion, a severe theological division could mean more persecution and war— both of which the empire had already had its fair share. History shows us he had no say in answering the theological questions on the table, leaving him completely out of the question concerning the deity of Christ or which books to include in the New Testament.

Rather, as we've seen, the canon of Scripture developed within the conscious of the early church as God was delivering His revelation through the ministry of the apostles.<sup>63</sup> Nicaea didn't even address the issue of Scripture, because there was an already established belief about which documents were inspired by God. It was only later at the councils of Laodicea (363–364AD), Hippo (393 AD), and Carthage (397AD) that issued a formal statement on the books that were canonical.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> See James R. White, "What Really Happened at Nicaea?" *Christian Research Institute Online*, June 10, 2009, accessed August 13, 2015 <http://www.equip.org/article/what-really-happened-at-nicaea/>

<sup>63</sup> White, "What Really Happened at Nicaea?"

<sup>64</sup> Norman Geisler, "The Canonicity of the Bible" in *Systematic Theology in One Volume* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Bethany House, 2011), 383–402.