

JESUS CHRIST...THE TRUE LEADER OF THE TRUE CHURCH

Matt. 16:13-20

With the recent passing of Pope John Paul II, and the choosing of Pope Benedict XVI the news media whether it be the printed page, radio, or television has made these two events their premier stories. Was John Paul II the 263rd Pope to succeed Peter? The answer is no! According to the Headlines of USA Today's April 20, 2005 issue Benedict XVI is the 264th Pope to succeed Peter. Is this a true statement? The answer is no! Simon Peter was never chosen by God or His Son Jesus Christ to be the leader of the Church. Simon Peter was never chosen by God or His Son Jesus Christ to represent Christ as the "Vicar" or substitute of Christ to the church on the earth. Our text for this message plainly shows that Jesus Christ, not Simon Peter is the Foundation and the Head of the church. "Upon this rock I will build my church" are the words spoken by Our Lord in Matt. 16:18. Later on in the message we are going to examine the text and show that Peter was never the head of the church. Also we must add that Mary the mother of Our Lord has no special place or position in heaven as the Roman Catholic Church puts forth.

Recently I received an e-mail from a good friend of mine, the Rev. Paul Renigar of Burlington, N.C. Bro. Renigar was a missionary to Italy for a number of years and now has what is known as the Italian Literature and Internet Ministry. With Bro. Paul's permission I am going to share with you the contents of an e-mail that I received from him dated April 13, 2005 after the death of John Paul II. This e-mail was composed of course before the selection of Benedict XVI by the Cardinals of the Roman Catholic Church and not by God. The following are the contents of Bro. Renigars' e-mail: "In these days we have been witnessing the reactions and attitudes of millions of people around the world to the death of Pope John Paul II. Year after year he was the most loved and admired man in the world, but because he was blinded by the prince of this world, he never saw the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ.

The religious head over a billion people is dead and who knows who will take his place? Some say that a "great king" died, so much so that even in India the Government proclaimed three days of mourning! In Milano some were heard to say, "now we have no hope! And "who will we look to now?" Some commentators stated that the greatest gathering of world leaders at one place at the same time took place during his funeral. Thus the impact of this man's life and work has been felt worldwide not only in a religious sense but also in a political way as well.

Roman Catholics knew him as the Vicar of Christ, Pontefice Maximus (High Priest), the last link in the chain between them and God. Even many non-Catholics are praising John Paul II for being a great spiritual leader. But why give such honor to the head of an apostate church which keeps over a billion people in spiritual darkness? While he never claimed to be God, he took pleasure in being addressed with titles reserved for the Triune God alone. He usurped the title, "Holy Father," from God the Father; "The Head of the Church," from the Lord Jesus Christ; and "The Vicar of Christ," from the Holy Spirit, who Jesus promised to send in His place. He was known by all for his devotion to Mary. One of the Vatican officials described how he was met in Heaven by Mary who presented him to Jesus saying, "Here is your son." They are even calling him "The Great."

We are all witnesses to the fact of how the religious corruption of Rome has been on constant display for the whole world to see. The splendor and pageantry has been extraordinary. Thousands of deceived people have stood in long lines to venerate a dead man with a rosary in his hands and a twisted crucifix by his side. Bishops and Cardinals were encouraging Catholics to pray for this dead pope whose body was constantly being "blessed" with incense and holy water.

During his 26 year pontificate the global media had become his mouthpiece and willing partner in spreading his perverted theology. Through non-stop television coverage, the pope's church has become the world's stage. Its princes have been masquerading in their purple and scarlet robes as "ministers of righteousness." They have cast a spell over the TV audience with the splendor of their rituals and the pomp and pageantry of their pagan traditions. Unfortunately the magnificence and grandeur of the corrupt religion has bewitched much of the gullible world into believing this is what Christianity is all about.

Many references have been made to his attempts to recognize all the religions of the world beginning with his famous World Peace Prayer Meeting in 1986 at Assisi, Italy. I remember that event quite well as I lived only a few miles from that town. At the time, many faithful Catholics were upset over the fact he would allow the Buddhist priests to put a statue of Buddha on the altar in the church and pray together with them! Everyone was to pray to their god for world peace!

As believers in the Lord Jesus Christ we should see that the passing of John Paul II opens up a tremendous opportunity for us to talk about spiritual issues. We must speak the truth in love and proclaim the Gospel with clarity and completeness! We must also earnestly contend for the faith against everything that stands opposed to God's Word. May God help us to be faithful in these times of great deception and compromise." I thank Bro. Renigar for his tremendous insight on this apostate religion that is carrying thousands to hell daily.

Now with this bit of introduction out of the way let us prayerfully examine the text that we have taken from Matthew 16:13-20. First of all there is the question presented to the Disciples and their answer in verses 13, 14. In the 16th chapter of Matthew's Gospel, the Lord Jesus Christ dealt with four things: The Denial of Foolish Desires (verses 1-4); the Danger of False Doctrines (verses 5-12); The Declaration of a Fervent Disciple (verses 13-20); and The Demands of a Faithful Devotion (verses 21-28).

It is the third part of the chapter that we are looking at in today's text. So here in verse 13 Jesus presents a question to the disciples: "Whom do men say that I the Son of Man am?" This is really a loaded question. Only Jesus has the correct answer to this question.

Was this question asked by Jesus as a method of encouraging testimony, or was it to strengthen their convictions and prepare them for the future? What Jesus was teaching them was that secret faith is of no help to a lost and dying world. Notice how the disciples answered this question in verse 14: "And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets." My friend every man, woman, boy, and girl sooner or later will be confronted by the claims of Jesus just as these disciples were. But they did not give the answer that Jesus was looking for. They gave the opinion of others rather than that of their own. Too many times people are always ready to say something about where someone else stands on something, but never where they themselves stand on the matter. But in verse 15 Jesus wants to know what they think of Him: "But whom say ye that I am?" Friend where do you stand pertaining to the Lord Jesus Christ?

Notice if you will the answer of Simon Peter in verse 16: "And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." It was Simon Peter who was the first of the disciples to confess Christ. Simon Peter was also the first of the disciples to deny Christ. In verse 17 we find the response of Jesus to the statement of Peter. "And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my father which is in heaven." What Jesus is telling Peter is that he is blessed because he had received this insight through divine revelation and not through human influences. Sad to say a great many people are following religions that are nothing but human influence instead of true religion which comes through divine revelation from God.

Gal. 1:15, 16 the apostle Paul states his feelings about what has been revealed to him by God: "But when it pleased God who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood." All true revelation comes from God, and each time He speaks listeners are directed to Jesus. Never will God take glory away from His Son. Any preacher that does not present Christ, instead presenting himself or someone else is a false prophet.

Now let us look at the statement of the Lord Jesus Christ in verses 18 and 19. This statement is possibly the most misinterpreted and misunderstood statement in the Bible. In the first part of verse 18 Jesus says, "Thou art Peter," coming from the Greek word "Petros" which means rock or rock-man, or a stone that one could throw with their hand making it an unstable stone. Notice if you will what Jesus said to Simon Peter when He first met him in John 1:42, "Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cehpas, which is by interpretation, A stone." In fact the name "Peter" is mentioned 156 times in the New Testament and 155 of those times it is the Greek word "Petros" or a little stone. The only place in the New Testament that the name Peter does not refer to him being the stone is in John 13:6 where his name is mentioned in the same verse twice. Jesus goes on in verse 18 to say, "and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." When Jesus uses the word "rock" here He not using the Greek word "Petros" previously mentioned, but the Greek word "Petra" which speaks of a massive rock or foundation. It is the same type of foundation that Jesus talked about in the conclusion of His Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7:24. So we see that while "Petros" speaks of a detached stone or boulder, a stone that might be thrown or easily moved; "Petra" speaks of a mass of rock on which one can build a great defense. The term "my church" refers to that spiritual building which belongs exclusively to the Savior and to no one else. Notice how Jesus finishes His statement in verse 18; "and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." If the church was to be built on Simon Peter it would have went under when Peter denied Jesus three times at the trial of Jesus.

Another statement that is misunderstood and misinterpreted by many is that in verse 19. In the first part of the verse Jesus tells Peter that He will give to him the "keys of the kingdom." This speaks of the gospel and not authority to let people go to heaven or hell, nor did it give Peter the authority to forgive sin. In fact the Lord Jesus Christ and only the Lord Jesus Christ has those keys. Revelation 1:18 states, "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and death." If you read the introductory chapter of Revelation you will find out that the person making this statement is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. What Jesus is giving to Peter here is the authority to open the doors of Christendom and this was done by Peter on the day of Pentecost when he preached to the Jews, and at the house of Cornelius when he preached the gospel to the Gentiles. While we are on this let's see the response of Cornelius and the reaction of Peter when they met in Acts 10:25, 26. "And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him. But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up, I myself also am a man." Peter would not allow this man or any other man to worship him because he knew that worship was for the Triune God only. As for the rest of the statement in verse 19 "and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Heaven, not the apostles, initiates all binding and loosing. And by the way all of the apostles had this power according to Acts 15:28. The binding also spoke of agreeing with something that had already been settled in Heaven.

So we see in examining these verses in the right way we cannot see the apostle Peter being the head of the church. Notice if you will four things about Peter:. First of all, Peter was never meant to be the foundation upon which the church was to be erected. In 1 Cor. 3:11 the apostle Paul states, "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." Secondly, Peter was not even the leader of the apostles. James seemed to be in charge at the first church council (Acts 15:13). Thirdly,

though Peter preached to the gentile Cornelius, it was the apostle Paul who opened the kingdom to the gentile world (Acts 22:21). And finally Peter was not the only apostle to whom “the gift of remitting sins” was granted. John 20:22, 23 says that Jesus gave this ability to the other ten apostles also. Remember only God can forgive sins. It was the apostles and the church that declared this wonderful truth of what God does when a man either accepts or rejects His Son. So what Jesus was doing in verse 19 was to place in the hands of the apostles the means to which they could open doors of understanding, and so make it possible the entry of lost sinners into the kingdom of God.

In closing we see that all the religious hoopla displayed by the news media from Rome in these days is not of God but of man. Let me say to you who might be listening to this message or who might be reading it on the web page: My hope is built upon and in the Lord Jesus Christ and His finished work at Calvary. It is not built upon some man-made office that full of lies and deceit. On what is your hope entrusted?