

**CHRIST FELLOWSHIP'S VIEW  
ROMAN CATHOLICISM  
PART III - THE POPE**

In [Part I - Differences](#), we covered four important differences: The Bible, spiritual authority, justification (how one obtains God's mercy) and the sacraments. If you have not read Part I, it would be wise to do so, because the discussion that follows will depend upon the views discussed there. In [Part II - Mary](#), we presented differences in belief concerning Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Christ Fellowship (CF) warmly welcomes those of Roman Catholic Church (RCC) background. While you are with us, you will not be asked to renounce Roman Catholicism or to repudiate your spiritual heritage. We do ask that you keep an open mind about what you learn from the Bible at Christ Fellowship. The Holy Spirit will guide you into all truth, just as Jesus promised (John 16:13).

According to the RCC, the Pope is only one who can speak infallibly for God when he speaks *ex cathedra* (from the chair). This is known as the doctrine of papal infallibility, where infallibility means immunity from error.

The RCC believes and teaches that Peter was appointed by Jesus to be the first in the line of popes. This is the result of an uncertain interpretation of Matthew 16:18 in which Jesus declared, "And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it." The grammar of the verse in the original Greek of the New Testament makes it impossible that the word translated "rock" refers to Peter. Most biblical scholars see it as a reference to Peter's statement of faith in Jesus, when in the immediate context he said to Jesus, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16).

There are a number of biblical objections to the RCC concept of Peter as the first pope:

1. The Bible is silent about the establishment of a papal office. Indeed, the only one said to be head of the church is Jesus himself: "Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior" (Ephesians 5:23b).
2. Peter is never described in the New Testament as acting in authority over the church or with infallibility. Indeed, the Apostle Paul had to confront Peter over compromising with those trying to move the early church back toward imposition of the law of Moses (see Galatians 2:11-14).
3. Peter described himself as an "apostle" (1 Peter 1:1) or "fellow elder" (1 Peter 5:1) but never as a pope or one in authority of the entire church.

The RCC points to authoritative pronouncements of the RCC and treats them as having spiritual authority equal to or greater than the Bible. Indeed, papal infallibility did not become official RCC doctrine until 1870 as part of the first Vatican Council.

Because it lacks biblical support, CF does not believe in the concept of the papacy and the doctrine of infallibility.

### **A FINAL WORD**

Perhaps we can summarize what we have learned in these three short studies on differences between the RCC and CF by using four phrases taken from the Protestant Reformation:

1. "The Bible alone"  
The Bible is our complete and final authority on all matters of faith and practice -- not the Pope, not the church, not tradition.
2. "Grace alone"  
Salvation comes solely by God's gracious gift -- not by works, not by sacraments, not by Mary.
3. "Faith alone"  
Only by faith in Jesus, and not by works, can we gain God's mercy -- not by works, not by sacraments, not by Mary.
4. "Christ alone"  
The death and resurrection of Jesus are the only basis for salvation -- not by works, not by sacraments, not by Mary.

*Christ Fellowship's views on this subject are guided by the authoritative Word of God.  
Not all biblical references in the Word of God relating to each principle are listed.  
Biblical references quoted are from the New International Version (NIV) 2011 unless otherwise noted.*