

All,

From our conversation yesterday a question was asked about papal infallibility. I directed all of you to Mt 16:18 (I may have misspoke and said Luke in class). That as stated in class is the most direct biblical statement on the subject. I did not reference John 21 15-17 nor Luke 22: 31-32; these are indirect references to papal infallibility. Below will provide you with "outside the Bible" sources to infallibility. Vatican II *Lumen Gentium* 25 speaks to the point as well (referenced in the Catholic Answers reply).

From Catholic Answers:

The Catholic Church's teaching on papal infallibility is one which is generally misunderstood by those outside the Church. In particular, Fundamentalists and other "Bible Christians" often confuse the charism of papal "infallibility" with "impeccability." They imagine Catholics believe the pope cannot sin. Others, who avoid this elementary blunder, think the pope relies on some sort of amulet or magical incantation when an infallible definition is due.

Given these common misapprehensions regarding the basic tenets of papal infallibility, it is necessary to explain exactly what infallibility is not. Infallibility is not the absence of sin. Nor is it a charism that belongs only to the pope. Indeed, infallibility also belongs to the body of bishops as a whole, when, in doctrinal unity with the pope, they solemnly teach a doctrine as true. We have this from Jesus himself, who promised the apostles and their successors the bishops, the magisterium of the Church: "He who hears you hears me" (Luke 10:16), and "Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven" (Matt. 18:18).

Vatican II's Explanation

Vatican II explained the doctrine of infallibility as follows: "Although the individual bishops do not enjoy the prerogative of infallibility, they can nevertheless proclaim Christ's doctrine infallibly. This is so, even when they are dispersed around the world, provided that while maintaining the bond of unity among themselves and with Peter's successor, and while teaching authentically on a matter of faith or morals, they concur in a single viewpoint as the one which must be held conclusively. This authority is even more clearly verified when, gathered together in an ecumenical council, they are teachers and judges of faith and morals for the universal Church. Their definitions must then be adhered to with the submission of faith" (*Lumen Gentium* 25).

Infallibility belongs in a special way to the pope as head of the bishops (Matt. 16:17–19; John 21:15–17). As Vatican II remarked, it is a charism the pope "enjoys in virtue of his office, when, as the supreme shepherd and teacher of all the faithful, who confirms his brethren in their faith (Luke 22:32), he proclaims by a definitive act some doctrine of faith or morals. Therefore his definitions, of themselves, and not from the consent of the Church, are justly held irreformable, for they are pronounced with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, an assistance promised to him in blessed Peter."

The infallibility of the pope is not a doctrine that suddenly appeared in Church teaching; rather, it is a doctrine which was implicit in the early Church. It is only our understanding of infallibility which has developed and been more clearly understood over time. In fact, the doctrine of infallibility is implicit in these Petrine texts: John 21:15–17 ("Feed my sheep . . ."), Luke 22:32 ("I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail"), and Matthew 16:18 ("You are Peter . . .").

From the Catholic Encyclopedia:

Explanation of papal infallibility

The [Vatican Council](#) has defined as "a [divinely revealed dogma](#)" that "the [Roman Pontiff](#), when he speaks [ex cathedra](#) — that is, when in the exercise of his office as [pastor](#) and teacher of all [Christians](#) he defines, by virtue of his supreme Apostolic authority, a [doctrine](#) of [faith](#) or [morals](#) to be held by the whole [Church](#) — is, by reason of the Divine assistance promised to him in [blessed Peter](#), possessed of that infallibility with which the [Divine Redeemer](#) wished His [Church](#) to be endowed in defining doctrines of [faith](#) and [morals](#); and consequently that such definitions of the [Roman Pontiff](#) are irreformable of their own nature (*ex sese*) and not by reason of the [Church's](#) consent" (Denzinger no. 1839 — old no. 1680). For the correct understanding of this definition it is to be noted that:

- what is claimed for the [pope](#) is infallibility merely, not impeccability or inspiration (see above under [I](#)).
- the infallibility claimed for the [pope](#) is the same in its nature, scope, and extent as that which the [Church](#) as a whole possesses; his [ex cathedra](#) teaching does not have to be ratified by the [Church's](#) in order to be infallible.
- infallibility is not attributed to every [doctrinal](#) act of the [pope](#), but only to his [ex cathedra](#) teaching; and the conditions required for [ex cathedra](#) teaching are mentioned in the [Vatican decree](#):
 - The pontiff must teach in his public and official capacity as [pastor](#) and doctor of all [Christians](#), not merely in his private capacity as a [theologian](#), preacher or allocutionist, nor in his capacity as a temporal prince or as a mere ordinary of the Diocese of [Rome](#). It must be clear that he speaks as spiritual head of the [Church](#) universal.
 - Then it is only when, in this capacity, he teaches some [doctrine](#) of [faith](#) or [morals](#) that he is infallible (see below, [IV](#)).
 - Further it must be sufficiently evident that he intends to teach with all the fullness and finality of his supreme Apostolic authority, in other words that he wishes to determine some point of [doctrine](#) in an absolutely final and irrevocable way, or to define it in the technical sense (see [DEFINITION](#)). These are well-recognized formulas by means of which the defining intention may be manifested.
 - Finally for an [ex cathedra](#) decision it must be clear that the [pope](#) intends to bind the whole Church. To demand internal assent from all the [faithful](#) to his teaching under pain of incurring spiritual shipwreck (*naufragium fidei*) according to the expression used by [Pius IX](#) in defining the [Immaculate Conception](#) of the [Blessed Virgin](#). Theoretically, this intention might be made sufficiently clear in a [papal](#)

decision which is addressed only to a particular Church; but in present day conditions, when it is so easy to communicate with the most distant parts of the earth and to secure a literally universal [promulgation](#) of [papal](#) acts, the presumption is that unless the [pope](#) formally addresses the whole Church in the recognized official way, he does not intend his [doctrinal](#) teaching to be held by all the faithful as [ex cathedra](#) and infallible.

It should be observed in conclusion that [papal](#) infallibility is a personal and incommunicable [charisma](#), which is not shared by any pontifical tribunal. It was promised directly to [Peter](#), and to each of Peter's successors in the primacy, but not as a prerogative the exercise of which could be [delegated](#) to others. Hence [doctrinal](#) decisions or instructions issued by the [Roman congregations](#), even when approved by the [pope](#) in the ordinary way, have no claim to be considered infallible. To be infallible they must be issued by the [pope](#) himself in his own name according to the conditions already mentioned as requisite for [ex cathedra](#) teaching.

In Christ's Unfailing Love,

Deacon bob.

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