

INFALLIBILITY

Papal Infallibility... is God's gift that the Holy Spirit *prevents* the Church (the pope and the magisterium as a whole) from formally teaching error, in matters of *faith and morals*. The infallibility is promised by Christ ("... *upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*" [Matt 16:18]), and affirmed in Scriptures ("... *the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of truth.*" [1 Tim 3:15]).

Accepted by the Early Church Fathers... such as Irenaeus, Cyprian of Carthage and Augustine of Hippo, just to name a few, papal infallibility has been essential for the Church to protect and defend the truth against the confusion of myths.

Not to confuse with impeccability... papal infallibility does not mean the pope is not capable of sinning. Peter, the first esteemed leader of the Church, sinned many times. Jesus even called Peter "Satan" once, but after a few verses after that, Jesus built his Church upon Peter. Christ's Church does not stand or fall based upon the perfection of its members. God takes fallible and sinful men (the pope and bishops) and use them to preserve his teaching without error. The infallibility of the Bible is a good example.

Formally defined... in 1870, yet papal infallibility is not an invention, but a tradition long held by the Church. While studying the nature of the Church, the majority of bishops at Vatican I wanted a solemn proclamation that the pope, when he taught *ex cathedra* on matters of faith and morals, was infallible. About 20% of the bishops, however, believed that the time was not right for such a declaration. Most of them were not opposed to the teaching, but just to the wisdom of promulgating it then. Nevertheless, the doctrine was approved. The several bishops who voted against it later submitted to the teaching. Vatican II clarified the bishops' role in defining infallible teachings in collegial communion with the pope.

All Church doctrines are infallible... but not all of them are infallible taught by a definition as outlined in the doctrine of papal infallibility. The last two infallible decrees were the declarations of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception (1854), and the doctrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1950). Both of these dogmas were universally held in the Church centuries before they were defined, and inquiries were made in every diocese to make sure they were.

READING

Papal Infallibility (*Catholic Answers*)

Further Research

- Can an infallible pope still make personal mistakes unrelated to teaching faith and morals, such as Peter's inconsistent behavior in Galatians 2:11-14?
- What factors urged Pius IX to define the doctrine of papal infallibility in Vatican I?
- How do the lessons of the 20th century highlight the need for an unshakable rock of doctrinal stability like the Pope? (What other world leader has stood up for the defenseless unborn, the indissolubility of marriage, the people on death row?)