

04-The Pope

Christ Alone: No Vicars Needed

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Intro: Unless you've been living in a bubble, you're aware of the fact that there is a new Pope.

- A. Pope Francis died on April 21st at the age of 88.
 - 1. A conclave, or meeting of cardinals, occurred behind closed doors and a new pope was elected. He is Robert Prevost who now calls himself pope Leo XIV.
 - 2. During the time between Francis' death and Leo's election, Catholics worldwide were in distress, many lamenting that they were "leaderless."
 - 3. Television and the internet were running stories that said "The Church has no head."
- B. Is that true? Is the church leaderless when a pope dies
 - 1. What makes him the church's leader in the first place?
 - 2. Though other denoms have their "head honcho," Catholicism places an extraordinary amount of authority in their supreme leader.
 - 3. Again, This has been thrust before the public with the death of pope Francis & election of pope Leo XIV. Before that the Catholic world was rocked with the resignation of pope Benedict XVI.

I. The Pope: Head of the church?

- A. **How did it get to this point? How did it all begin?**
 - 1. In the beginning, elders were appointed in local churches and those elders *only* had oversight of the congregation in which they were members.
 - a. **1 Pet 5:2**
 - 2. But in 2nd century, subtle changes began to be made in the organization of the Lord's church
 - 3. First, title "bishop" became reserved for one man in the eldership, the "head elder"
 - 4. Then, there came to be one "archbishop" over many congregations.
 - 5. Pattern continued until one man became head over all the apostate church.
 - a. The pattern led to the early formation of various denoms: Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox
 - 6. Local churches lost their autonomy and identity until they were no longer recognizable as NT churches.
- B. Did Scripture predict this?
 - 1. Paul's meeting with the Ephesian elders warned that there would be division because of a thirst for power – **Acts 20:28-30**
 - 2. His letter to the Thessalonians included a similar warning – **2 Thess 2:3-4**
 - a. There are debates concerning to whom this refers and it deserves its own study, but at the least, we can see a similarity between the man here and the office of pope.

II. The Truth About Leadership in the Church

- A. Is the Pope Peter's Successor?
 - 1. One place they conclude this is from **Matt 16:18-19**
 - a. 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." (CC 882)
 - b. All the faithful must believe that the Holy Apostolic See and the Roman Pontiff [the Pope] possesses the primacy over the whole world, and the Roman Pontiff is the successor of blessed Peter (Vatican Council, 1870)
 - 2. But Peter could not have been the first Pope because
 - a. He never accepted worship (**Acts 10:25-26**)
 - b. He was a married man (**1 Cor 9:5**)
 - c. He never called himself pope (**1 Pet 5:1-3**)
 - d. He was not *the* rock on which the church was built (**Eph 2:20; 1 Pet 2:6-7; 1 Cor 10:4**)
- B. Is the Pope The Vicar of Christ?
 - 1. There are many titles given to the pope: Pontiff Maximus, Holy Father, but most telling is "vicar of Christ"
 - a. A title given to St. Peter, head of the Twelve Apostles, and to his successors, the popes; "vicar" means one who stands in for or acts for another. (CC Glossary)
 - b. 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.” (CC 882)

- c. Tho not officially codified until 1870, it was Innocent III (1198-1216) who first claimed the title and Nicholas III (1277-1280) who styled himself “vicar of God” (Cath Encyc XV, 403)
 - d. He is *the substitute for Christ on earth!*
2. Has Christ relinquished His headship?
- a. Not according to **Col 1:15-20** (also Eph 1:22-23)
 - b. Consider also that at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), James, not Peter, delivers the final judgment. At the least, this challenges the notion that Peter (and by extension, the pope) had unilateral authority.
 - c. *Christ* is the head of the church, not any man.
- C. Is The Pope An Infallible Man?
1. Naturally, a man with such titles would eventually be seen as the ultimate Mr Right!
 2. He’s declared to be infallible when he sits “ex-cathedra”, when he sits in the chair (the Apostolic chair) and issues his edicts. When he does that, he’s said to be infallible; everything he says is perfectly without error.
 - a. But it wasn’t until 1870 that the doctrine of papal infallibility was codified.
 - b. 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—the proclaims by a definitive act a doctrine pertaining to faith or morals... 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.” This infallibility extends as far as the deposit of divine Revelation itself.(CC 891)
 - c. We teach and define that it is a divinely-revealed dogma: that the Roman Pontiff, when he speaks ex Cathedra, that is, when in discharge of the office of Pastor and Teacher of all Christians, by virtue of his supreme Apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine regarding faith or morals to be held by the Universal Church, by the divine assistance promised to him in blessed Peter, is possessed of that infallibility with which the divine Redeemer willed that His Church should be endowed for defining doctrine regarding faith or morals: and that therefore such definitions of the Roman Pontiff are irreformable of themselves, and not from the consent of the Church.” (The Dogmatic Constitution of the Church of Christ, 1870)
 3. Scripture emphasizes the fallibility of ALL humans
 - a. **Rom 3:23**
 - b. Even Peter was rebuked - **Gal 2:11-14**
 4. Further, the Bible emphasizes Christ and Scripture as all-authoritative
 - a. **Matt 28:18-20; 23:8-10**
 - b. **2 Tim 3:16-17**
 5. Remember back in school when you had a substitute teacher for the day? Most subs handed out worksheets and prayed for survival. But imagine if one came in, sat in the teacher’s chair, changed the seating chart, rewrote the test, and declared, “From now on, I’m the real teacher.” That’s a bit like what happened with the papacy. Jesus said, “I will build my church,” and gave the Spirit as our guide. But along the way, someone pulled up a chair, put on a crown, and said, “I’m in charge now.” The real Teacher never left the room—He sent His Spirit to stay with us (**John 14:26**).
 6. The Holy Spirit-inspired Word, not the pope, is Christ’s representative on earth (**John 16:13-15**)

Conc: The church has one Head, and He doesn’t sit on a throne in Rome.

- A. We have a perfect, infallible leader who guides us, provides for us, and leads us precisely and completely to heaven. Who needs a pope? Who needs a substitute, a *vicar* when we have the original?
- B. **INV**