

Is the Papal Office Biblical?

Can you believe it, the voice on the other end of the phone asked, *CNN has just reported that the Pope is still dead!* With wall to wall coverage on network and cable news, it would be very surprising by now if anyone in the world has yet to hear that the head of the Roman Catholic Church died on Saturday April 2. Pope John Paul II filled his position for twenty-six years. The funeral took place at 3 AM Indianapolis time on Friday. Attending was perhaps the largest collection ever of world leaders for a single event. The news of his death and the Catholic Church's efforts to elect a new pope will capture the attention of the main stream media for weeks to come.

By worldly standards, there is little doubt that the pope was a good man. He probably touched many lives in a positive way. On Friday afternoon, one radio news report played a clip of a woman who mentioned that since she had lost her father and grandfather, she considered the pope to be her father. She, no doubt, was one of millions who passed by his coffin last week. While we do not doubt people's religious sincerity, there are some things we should know about Catholic Church hierarchy and doctrine.

The position of one, single human being serving as the universal leader of the church on earth is unknown of in the scriptures. There is no such office as "pope" in the New Testament. Ephesians 4:11-12 says, *and He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;* It is obvious that the papal office is an invention of the Catholic Church. But this matters not to an institution that tells its adherents that its traditions are just as important as the books of the Old and New Testaments (Council of Trent, 1545-1563).

I was amazed at media reports last week that treat Catholic Church teaching on Peter being the first pope as fact. In other words, if the Catholic Church declares that Peter was the first pope, he must have been. End of story. Catholics claim that Peter was appointed by Christ to be the chief successor and head of the church. They believe he went to Rome and established the dioceses and that his successors began a long line of popes—stretching to this day. Never mind the fact that **Peter never claimed authority or superiority to any of the other apostles.** John 20:23 says, *If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained.* The ability to remit and retain sins was given to **all** the apostles, not just Peter. **All** the apostles had the same authority as Peter had. Scripture says the **church was built on Jesus Christ.** He is the foundation stone, the rock, that holds up the church. Without Him the church would not exist! Isaiah prophesied about this in 28:16: *Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone, A costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed. He who believes in it will not be disturbed.* This prophecy was fulfilled by Jesus. In making reference to the church, Paul, in Ephesians 2:20-22 said, *having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.* Perhaps the best reason that Peter could not have been the first pope is that he was a married man. Catholic Church hierarchy are required to practice celibacy, but from Matthew 8:14 and 1 Corinthians 9:5, we know that Peter had a wife.

While we do not doubt the sincerity of Roman Catholic adherents, their religion is one that does not match up with New Testament teaching in a variety of areas. If we are going to be a people in search of truth, we need to search for that truth from God, through the Scriptures, not in an institution governed over by imperfect men who have changed their doctrines several times in the course of 1500 years. *Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son.* (2 John 9)

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