

## Church Government and the Pope

Barry O'Dell

**A**s I write this article, the Catholic Church has had a new leader for two days. Cardinal Robert Francis Prevost was chosen to serve, according to the Roman Catholic Church, as the 267th Pope and his chosen named is Pope Leo XIV. We are told that there were no clear “front-runners” to win the papacy, although there were several candidates. There were 133 cardinal electors who voted inside the Sistine Chapel and, in order to win the vote, a candidate must obtain a two-thirds majority vote. For Prevost, it required at least 89 votes. It was one of the shortest conclaves ever, taking only two days to decide the winner. Catholic historians tell us that no conclave has lasted more than four days since 1831. The longest lasting conclave was in the 13th century. It lasted 1,006 days to elect Gregory X - from November, 1268 to September, 1271. We are also told that there were at least three ballots before Prevost was elected. According to the Vatican News website, when casting a ballot each elector says, *“I call as my witness Christ the Lord, who will be my judge, that my vote is given to the one whom I believe should be elected according to God.”* If there are not enough votes (two-thirds majority) to elect the new pope, the ballots are burned with additives: black smoke if no pope has been elected; white smoke if one has. If no pope has been elected after twenty-one votes, the number of candidates is reduced to two while still requiring a two-thirds majority for election.

Does this sound biblical? Can we turn to the pages of Scripture and find a process whereby a single man, by winning a two-thirds majority vote is “elected” to become the visible leader of Christ’s church on earth? The pope is referred to as the “spiritual Vicar (a representative or substitute for a superior) of Christ” and the “successor of St. Peter.” Do we find this type of structural organization within inspired writ?

The structural organization of the church for which Christ died to establish, as revealed in Scripture, is very simple and non-political. There is no short or long, drawn out process of electing one, singular leader of the world-wide church. There is no two-thirds vote necessary. There is no conclave (private meeting) of church leaders from all over the world to select only one individual. “Apostolic succession” is foreign to the word of God. Here is what the Biblical church looks like...

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***“May God’s people remain true to the Scriptures and implement His revealed will in each locale.”***

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- There is a universal use of the term “church,” such as in Matthew 16:18.
- There is a local use of the term “church,” such as in Paul’s greetings to Corinth (1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1).
- There is a use of the word “church” in connection with the assembly of believers (1 Cor. 11:18).
- Paul addressed the church in Philippi as, *“...all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons”* (Phil. 1:1).
- Paul summoned the *“elders of the church”* from Ephesus to Miletus (Acts 20:17).

Acts 20:17-38 is an important text on identifying the organization of the church of the Bible. While we are told that Paul called for the *“elders of the church,”* we also learn that they were the *“overseers”* and were to *“feed”* the church of God (Acts 20:28). Notice these terms from the original language...

- Elder (πρεσβύτερος) - also translated as presbyter in 1 Timothy 4:14.
- Overseer (ἐπίσκοπος) - also translated as bishop in 1 Timothy 3:2.
- Pastor (ποιμήν) - also translated as shepherd or feed in 1 Peter 5:1-2.

These terms are used interchangeably in the New testament and they all refer to the same work. Not only that, but the qualifications to serve in such a capacity are given in multiple passages (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-16; 1 Pet. 5:1-4). Not just any man can serve in this way in Christ’s church. However, according to various Catholic websites, *“any male in good standing with the church could be elected. If he is not a bishop, he must first be ordained. A layman could be chosen”* (<https://catholicreview.org/on-electing-a-pope-10-frequently-asked-questions-answered/>). It should be very obvious to anyone who respects Scripture that the process of “electing” a pope (Bishop of Rome as head of the Roman Catholic Church) is antibiblical.

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What about apostolic succession? *"Apostolic succession is the line of bishops stretching back to the apostles"* according to catholic.com. That article goes on to reference Second Timothy 2:2 which reads, *"And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also."* The article then states *"In this passage, he refers to the first three generations of apostolic succession - his own generation, Timothy's generation, and the generation Timothy will teach"* (catholic.com/tract/apostolic-succession). Also, the account of selecting Matthias (Acts 1:15-26) is used as supposed evidence of the doctrine of apostolic succession. Roman Catholicism acknowledges that women cannot serve as a pope, yet the term *"men"* in Second Timothy 2:2 is ἄνθρωπος, which is the generic term for humanity. By implication, if you're going to use that verse as evidence for apostolic succession, a woman could be pope! In regard to Acts 1 and the selection of Matthias, there were specific requirements to be met in order to serve as an apostle. He was to be selected from among that number (Acts 1:21), who were with them from the time of Jesus' baptism until His ascension (Acts 1:22). No one meets those qualifications today! Apostolic succession is not Biblical, but it has been adopted by man-made traditions throughout Catholic history.

The point of the article is this - while the RCC was busy enacting man-made traditions in order to ordain the supposed 267th pope, Jesus Christ was still on His throne. While the RCC claims that they believe Christ is the head of the church, their actions speak differently. The New Testament pattern of the structural organization of Christ's church is simple and repeatable. The church of the Bible consists of local, autonomous congregations that were led on a local level by a plurality of bishops and deacons. There was no grand, centralized governing body located in Rome within protective walls. May God's people remain true to the Scriptures and implement His revealed will in each locale.

## ***The Wise Man Built His House***

*Johnie Scaggs Jr. - Bellevue church of Christ - Dublin, GA*

☞ *Every one therefore that heareth these words of mine, and doeth them, shall be likened unto a wise man, who built his house upon the rock: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon the rock"* (Matt. 7:24-25). The context of Matthew 7:24-27 goes back to Matthew 7:21-23. On the Day of Judgment, many will say they had done many wonderful works for the Lord. However, the Lord tells them that instead of following His teachings, they were listening and following the advice of men. For one to gain heaven as their eternal home, one must do the will of the Father. *"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven"* (Matt. 7:21). Hence, we need to build according to the Word of God instead of the teachings of men. Luke says it in this manner:

*And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? Every one that cometh unto me, and heareth my words, and doeth them, I will show you to whom he is like: he is like a man building a house, who digged and went deep, and laid a foundation upon the rock: and when a flood arose, the stream brake against that house, and could not shake it: because it had been well builded. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that built a house upon the earth without a foundation; against which the stream brake, and straightway it fell in; and the ruin of that house was great* (Luke 6:46-49).

It is essential to watch and be very careful as to how we build. If we are not building on a solid foundation, we will fall when the storms come. The wise man of Matthew 7:24 digs deep and finds the bedrock on which he will lay the foundation. He understands without a proper foundation, the house will not stand the test of time. It will be faulty and collapse. The foundation we are to build upon is Jesus. Paul wrote, *"According to the grace of God which was given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder I laid a foundation; and another buildeth thereon. But let each man take heed how he buildeth thereon. For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ"* (1 Cor. 3:10-11). Paul warns us to be careful how we build upon the foundation. To build upon any other foundation is foolish and will eventually cause one's downfall.

There are far too many in our world today who are building on foundations erected by men and not by God. Men today are bringing in all kinds of innovations that are not of God but rather are grounded in the false interpretations of men. Many today are claiming they have "restudied" the question of instrumental music in worship and have concluded that God would be pleased with the use of such like in our worship to Him. Hence, many today are adding instrumental music to their worship. Also, some of the same people have "restudied"

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women elders and women preachers. They have come to the conclusion that preachers of the past were wrong in their interpretation of these subjects, and they now have concluded that it is permissible to have both women elders and women preachers.

One can study until the Lord comes back, but you will not find any authority for the use of instrumental music or women elders and women preachers. No matter how many times you study it, it will still say the same thing. God condemns any other kind of music that is not in agreement with His teachings on vocal music. Furthermore, there is no authority for women elders or women preachers. One cannot find it in the Scriptures. To build upon these false teachings and others like them is to build upon the wrong foundation. One day, many will say to the Lord, "...*Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by thy name, and by thy name cast out demons, and by thy name do many mighty works*" (Matt. 7:22)? Then they will hear these words from the Lord, "*And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity*" (Matt. 7:23).

It is the words of our Lord that will judge us. Jesus said, "*He that rejecteth me, and receiveth, not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day*" (John 12:48). Because we will one day hear His words (either "well done" or "depart from me; I never knew you"), we need to be careful how we build.

# Thank You!

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## *What We Need From Bible Class Teachers*

*Barry O'Dell*

**M**ost congregations of the churches of Christ hold Sunday morning and Wednesday evening Bible study sessions for various ages - from Cradle Roll to Adult. This is an extremely important work within a local congregation as it feeds young and old in a variety of ways. Those who teach the classes have been entrusted with the great responsibility of not only teaching accurately God's word, but also being a living example of the lessons they teach. Here are things we need from our teachers...

- \* Reverence for God, His word, and the church. If the teacher does not hold these in proper esteem, he will not be able to pass it on to his students.
- \* The teacher must first be a student. Ezra 7:10 sets a good precedent for Bible class teachers today: "*For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.*"
- \* Teachers must set a proper example of Christian faithfulness for the students. Paul told the Philippians, "*Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do; and the God of peace shall be with you*" (Phil. 4:9).
- \* As a teacher, you must understand the weight of the responsibility you have. This is not a "scare tactic," but a reminder of your obligation. "*My brethren, be not many masters (NKJ - teachers), knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation*" (Jam. 3:1).
- \* Teach the word of God accurately. Scripture must be handled properly (2 Tim. 2:15). *The faith* has been once and for all delivered (Jude 3). For an easy example, if you are teaching on the subject of baptism, gather all the information from the Bible on the subject before you get to the classroom. Come to the proper conclusions based on all the available evidence. If you're not prepared, God knows it and your students will be able to see it.
- \* If you use material that someone else has compiled, make it your own. In other words, know the material so well that you could rewrite it in your own words. If you are currently using some type of prewritten, uniform material, don't show up to class and read to your students. That's reading, not teaching. Preparing to teach takes time.
- \* Realize that every class is important. Whether you have one student or one-hundred, your time and their time is important. Souls are at stake and you will be held accountable by God.

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### The Churches of Christ

- Bible only (2 Pet. 1:3)
- Name of Christ (Rom. 16:16)
- Began in Jerusalem (Isa. 2:2-3; Acts 2:1-4)
- Established by Jesus (Matt. 16:18)
- Purchased with Jesus' blood (Acts 20:28)
- Married to Christ (Rom. 7:4)
- Established in the 1st century (Acts 2:47)
- Jesus the Head of the One Body (Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4; 5:23)
- Added to the church by God (Acts 2:41, 47)

#### Salvation

- Saved by grace, through faith (Eph. 2:8-9)
- Not by faith alone (Jas. 2:14-26)
- Not by grace alone (Matt. 7:21)
- Belief and baptism (Mk. 16:16)
- Repentance and baptism (Acts 2:37-38)
- Belief, confession, and baptism (Acts 8:37-38)
- Heard, believed, baptized (Acts 18:8)
- Baptized into Christ's death - raised to a new life (Rom. 6:3-4)
- Baptism - faith in God's working/operation (Col. 2:12)
- Faith and baptism (Gal. 3:26-27)
- Baptism does save us (1 Pet. 3:21)

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