

Immoral Popes

The authority of the Roman Catholic Church depends on the apostolic succession of the Pope. The Pope should be obeyed as the universal and infallible ruler because his authority has been transmitted over the centuries from the apostle Peter in an unbroken lineage of Popes.

Let us then briefly examine this claim from a historical and biblical perspective. It is not particularly edifying to go through all the filth and corruption of papal history. A few examples should suffice.

Pope Honorius was condemned as a heretic by the Sixth Ecumenical Council. Pope Christopher became pope by forcibly dethroning his predecessor, Leo V, and putting him into prison. He was then driven from the chair by his successor, Sergius III. Pope John XII was a coarse, immoral man, whose life was such that the Lateran was spoken of as a house of prostitution, and the moral corruption in Rome became the subject of general odium. Pope Benedict IX sold the papacy to Pope Gregory VI for a large sum of money. Pope Clement VI imposed taxes, sold beneficiaries and squandered the church riches on pompous banquets and receptions. Pope Alexander VI was known for murder, bribery, and selling positions of authority in the Catholic Church. Pope Gregory VII and his successors used forged documents in order to expand the power of the papacy.

Someone may say, "Granted, there were some evil Popes -- what does that prove about the papacy as an institution?"

The Bible warns God's people against false prophets and false teachers. Our Lord Jesus told his disciples: "Beware of false prophets." And he told us how to identify them: "You will know them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:15, 16). The apostle Peter mentions their covetousness: "In their greed these teachers will exploit" the church (2 Peter 2:3); Jude mentions their immoral character: "ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness...walk according to their own ungodly lusts...sensual persons" (Jude 1:4, 18, 19); while the apostle Paul describes the character of a genuine bishop: "blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money" (Titus 1:7).

We do not suggest that all popes were immoral like the ones mentioned above; in fact, most of them were not. Nor do we suggest that immorality only infects the Roman Catholic hierarchy. Pastors and teachers in evangelical churches, as well as Catholic popes, bishops and priests, have been exposed as hypocrites.

But there is a great difference. As evangelical Christians we identify and honour a pastor as a worthy minister of Christ if he faithfully preachers the apostolic message and if his life is consistent with his message. We do not hesitate to identify immoral and greedy ministers as false teachers no matter what they claim to be. They are *false* teachers!

Take Peter and Judas as examples. Both were apostles of Jesus Christ. Both made very serious mistakes -- Peter denied the Lord, and Judas betrayed him. Yet Peter repented and was restored to the ministry, while Judas did not, and was disowned by the church.

But Catholics cannot follow the guidance of Scriptures to expose false teachers. They are not allowed by the magisterium. If a Pope had been lawfully elected, he must be considered a true Pope, the Vicar of Christ and head of the entire church, no matter how morally and spiritually decadent. One Catholic

author wrote in all seriousness: "Even a bad and immoral Pope cannot be deposed. The faithful can only pray for his conversion of heart or that Saint Joseph bless him with a happy and speedy death if his behavior becomes scandalous." Catholics are obliged to submit to "Judas" even after he is exposed as a false teacher by his treachery and impenitence.

Benedict XVI is the 265th Pope according to the current list of Popes – and these include the apostates mentioned above and others like them. They cannot take them out of the list, of course, even though they admit that they were grossly immoral; otherwise the Vatican would have nothing to hang its claim to apostolic authority. The chain must be intact. But what good is a chain if even one of its link is corroded, let alone if there are a score of rusty links? It still breaks down at the weak links and the claimed apostolic authority of the papacy falls to the ground and breaks in pieces.