

Matthew 16:13-20, 18:15-20

Sec 1. “The Lord Jesus, as King & Head of His church, hath therein appointed a government, in the hand of church officers, distinct from the civil magistrate.”

A. The fact that Jesus established a church government fulfills what was foretold by the prophet Isaiah:

1. **Isa 7:14** “The Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child & bear a son, & she will call His name Immanuel.”
2. **Isa 9:6** gave more specific prophecy about what the importance of this Holy virgin-born child: “For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; & the government will rest on His shoulders.”

B. Paul told us how Christ appointed a government for the maturity, stability, & blessing of His church.
→ **Eph 4:7-16**

C. **Sec 1** tells us that Christ’s appointed church government is “distinct from the civil magistrate.”

1. Consider a man or woman who has been sworn-in to the position of a city mayor, state governor, or national president. That does not give him or her any authority whatsoever in the church.
2. The same is true for the man ordained as a deacon, elder, or gospel minister in the church. His ordination does not give him any authority whatsoever in his city, state, or nation.
3. It is permissible for church officers to hold an office as a civil magistrate & vice versa.
4. **Sec 1** was born out of a time when civil magistrates had often used their authority to persecute the church. Even after the Westminster Standards were completed in 1647, the English government suppressed Presbyterians & Independent Protestants in favor of Episcopacy. Our Standards were written to help prevent that from happening again.
 - a. If you think persecution cannot happen in America, you are mistaken.
 - b. Canada has passed & enforces hate speech laws that restrict the publication & preaching of certain texts of Scripture such as **Rom 1:27f** which clearly says that homosexuals are “**given over to a depraved mind**” by God.
 - c. Such legislation could be passed in the USA if Christians don’t care to vote at all or vote according to a Christian worldview.

Sec 2. “To these [church] officers the keys of the kingdom of heaven are committed; by virtue whereof, they have power, respectively, to retain, & remit sins; to shut that kingdom against the impenitent, both by the Word, & censures;...”

A. Living in Louisiana, we must 1st deal with the claim of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) that the keys of the kingdom of Christ were given to Peter alone.

1. This wrong interpretation comes from the RCC using **Mat 16:13f** to support their position while ignoring what **Mat. 18:15f** says about the matter.

2. → **Matthew 16:13-20, 18:15-20**

- a. If one-on-one effort at reconciliation fails, you are to take 1 or 2 more with you as both peacemakers & witness. **Mat 18:17** that fails, you are to take the matter to the church— not to Peter or Peter’s successor.
- b. Notice what **Mat 18:18** says to the church— not to Peter. → **Mat 18:18**

B. When a session or Presbytery exercises church discipline, “to shut that kingdom against the impenitent,” it is doing so with delegated authority coming from Christ.

1. I do believe **Mat 18:20** can be used to support a very small prayer meeting or church meeting; however, that is not the proper context in which it was given.
2. In context, **Mat 18:19-20** was written concerning church discipline. → **Mat 18:19-20**.
 - a. Because this is written immediately after the mention of excommunication in **v17**, we should read it this way: “**Where 2 or 3 have gathered together in My name [to exercise church discipline], I am there in their midst.**”
 - b. When a Session exercises church discipline according to the Word of Christ, Jesus Himself is present & approves. It is not the Session alone giving over a person over to Satan. Christ has given such a one over to Satan by the means of His delegated under-shepherds.

C. Church discipline is not for the purpose of condemning a person to hell. Concerning the man guilty of incest in **1 Cor 5**, Paul gave hope of salvation for even such a one who is excommunicated. In **v5**, he wrote, “***I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.***”

1. Written much later,¹ **2 Cor 2:6-8** is likely concerning this same incestuous man who was excommunicated earlier: “**Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which *was inflicted by the majority, so that on the contrary you should rather forgive & comfort him, otherwise such a one might be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. Wherefore I urge you to reaffirm your love for him.***”
2. **Sec 2** closes by giving hope for those who repent. It says that church officials are to “to open it [the kingdom] unto penitent sinners, by the ministry of the gospel; & by absolution from censures, as occasion shall require.”

¹ esv.org says “The apostle Paul wrote 2 Corinthians from Macedonia around a.d. 55/56. This was approximately a year after he wrote 1 Corinthians and a year before he wrote his letter to the Romans.”