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Church Discipline, Part 2

Church Discipline is a very important pastoral tool that God has given to the body of Christ. In the beginning when God created and established His kingdom in this world, He created man to co-reign with Him over creation. Yet Satan being jealous of God's worship led a coup against this Kingdom. Since he could not attack God directly, the devil leveled his attack against God's princes and princesses, man. By tempting Adam and Eve with the promise of a kingdom of their own, Satan successfully led them in a rebellion against God.

Immediately and not surprisingly the man and the woman did not become an independent nation as promised, but a subject and slave of the devil. Yet in His grace and mercy, God initiated a counter-attack and reestablished His kingdom whereby He Himself would become a man, take upon Himself the penalty of man's rebellion (which was death), and thereby redeem us back to Himself (cf. Genesis 3:15).

Today, there are two kingdoms existing in this world: the Kingdom of Satan which encompasses the nations of this world and the Kingdom of God which has been established in the hearts of His followers! These two kingdoms remain in conflict. The gates of hell clearly are assaulted as the gospel is spread and people are delivered from the dominion of Satan and brought into the Kingdom of God, Matthew 16:18. The church is the special focus of attack by Satan and his followers.

In Revelation 12 we read of Satan's hatred of Christ and so the devil's desire to kill the Lord (Revelation 12: 4-5). Now when Christ ascended into heaven, Satan turned his attention and focus against the people of God.

Revelation 12:13, 17, "And when the dragon saw that he was thrown down to the earth, he persecuted the woman [the church, the body of Christ, the people of God] who gave birth to the male *child*... And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went off to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus."

Now in the redemption of man, God gave His children many promises; one of which was a pledge to protect them from Satan, his demons, and their attack. If you are in Christ, Satan cannot touch you without the providential will of God.

1 Peter 1:5, Peter said, "[We] are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

As such, for Satan to attack us, he must have "permission" from God. Christ told Peter,

Luke 22:31, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded *permission* to sift you like wheat."

Each of us in Christ enjoys the special protection of God. That is a Kingdom right! And that brings us to the "Keys of the Kingdom" of God. These are the keys given to a lawful church court for the preservation and protection of the people of God.

The Keys of the Kingdom

Matthew 16:13a, "Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi..."

Caesarea Philippi was located on a beautiful plateau near the headwaters of the Jordan River. A few miles to the north, snow-covered Mount Hermon rose to a height of more than 9,000 feet above sea level. On clear days the mountain can be seen from northern Galilee towns such as Capernaum, Cana, and Nazareth.

Caesarea Philippi was but a few miles from the ancient Jewish city of Dan, which for centuries had been considered the northernmost boundary of the Promised Land.¹ The location offered Jesus and the disciples welcome relief from the hot Galilean lowlands, the pressure of the Jewish leaders,

and the ever present threat of Herod Antipas.

Matthew 16:13b, "Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He *began* asking His disciples, saying, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?'"

Whether you realize it or not, this passage represents the climax of Jesus' teaching ministry. For two years Christ had been instructing His disciples about the Kingdom of God: its nature, purpose, and place in this world. Now He turned to them directly and asked THE question of time and eternity: Who Am I?

This is a seminal question as entrance into the Kingdom of God is NOT by birth, force, or lottery. Rather, it revolves around one's valuation of Jesus and our submission to Him! For example if one takes Buddha out of Buddhism and do you know what you got? Buddhism. If one takes Mohamed out of Islam, do you know what you have? Islam. But if one takes Christ out of Christianity the entire system falls. There is no Christianity, no Kingdom of God, and no salvation without the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thus this question of "Who Am I" is a huge question. Now when it came to the crowds following Jesus, the opinions were varied and broad.

Matthew 16:14, "And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.'"

At the outset note that it is not that Jesus was unaware of what the masses were saying about Him. Rather, the Lord was leading the disciples here to a very important consideration. Now to Christ's question, the disciples responded with three answers; the first, "Some say John the Baptist." When Herod the tetrarch first heard of Christ, the governor thought that perhaps Jesus was John the Baptist resurrected, come back from the dead to haunt him! Recall that it was Herod's marriage to his brother's wife which drew the public criticism of John the Baptist (cf. Matthew 14:4; Mark 6:17-18; Luke 3:19). So, Herod had John executed (cf. Matthew 14:6-12). That is why when the Roman governor heard of Christ, he immediately thought that John had come back to life. There is no doubt that Herod's superstition was reported to the masses of which many came to hold the same view; that Jesus John the Baptist resurrected. What else could explain Christ's miraculous powers?

Secondly, "Others said Elijah." Malachi 4:5 predicted that Elijah would appear prior to the coming of the Messiah. Now we know from Luke 1:17 that the intent of the prophecy of Malachi was that an "Elijah-figure" would appear prior to the coming of the Christ and that this individual would herald His coming. That in fact was the ministry and work of John the Baptist (cf. Matthew 11:10). Yet the people did not understand this so many thought that perhaps Jesus was the fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy. He was in fact Elijah!

"But still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets..." At the time of Christ, Jeremiah was one of the most revered prophets. In the apocryphal book of 2 Maccabees (2:4-8), Jeremiah is said to have taken the Ark of the Covenant and the altar of incense out of the Temple and hidden them

on Mount Nebo in order to preserve them from the Babylonians. Some Jews thought that before the Messiah returned to establish His kingdom, Jeremiah would return to earth and restore the Ark and the altar to their proper places in the Temple. In fact, 2 Maccabees 15:12-16 says that Jeremiah handed a golden sword to Judas Maccabaeus prior to his overthrowing the Greeks!

No doubt thinking of the era of the Maccabean revolt, many a Jew in Christ's day longed for the return of Jeremiah who would then hand a sword to another Jewish hero, but this time none other than the Messiah! Jesus was thought by many to be Jeremiah!

These were the rumors and thoughts of the masses who daily came out to hear Christ speak, to receive the food He occasionally provided, and to see Him perform the many miracles which characterized His ministry. With this, Christ turned to His disciples directly and posed THE most important question they could ever consider, "He said to them, 'But who do YOU say that I am?'" (Matthew 16:15)

From Mark 8:27 we learn that the group had not yet arrived in the city of Caesarea Philippi proper but were passing through some of the villages on the outskirts. That means that Christ was standing on what was known as "Galilee of the Gentiles" a major trade route through which caravan's from three continents passed. It was at this crossroads of heathenism and Judaism that Jesus confronted His disciples with the question that every person and every religion must one day answer. Who is the Christ?

The Confession

Matthew 16:16, "And Simon Peter answered and said, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.'"

This is a profound statement which prompted Christ to say this:

Matthew 16:17, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven."

Though early on the disciples identified Jesus as the messiah (cf. John 1:41), nevertheless the "messiah" that was in their mind was NOT the messiah of the Bible. Recall that in Judaism, the messiah was believed to be a military leader who would conquer the wicked nations which held Israel in bondage. Like Judas Maccabaeus, the Messiah would free the nation and enable it to exist as it did in the days of David and Solomon!

No doubt this was on the mind of the disciples when first they identified Jesus as the Messiah (so also John the Baptizer, Matthew 11:2-3). Yet two years had passed and, with it, a large amount of teaching and discipleship on the part of Christ. That is why when Jesus asked the question as to who the disciples thought he was, Peter's answer revealed that it was God-given, for now he was answering correctly!

Notice Peter said, "Thou art the Christ." The word for "Christ" in the Greek is the word for "anointed one" or "messiah." Peter once again confesses Jesus as the Messiah here, but in light of

all the teaching he had received, this time the confession was backed by a clearer understanding of the Scriptures. Christ as Messiah was Christ

- The Lamb of God who came to take away His people's sin.
- The Vanquisher of both His and our enemy: Satan.
- The Lord of Glory.

In fact, He was God Himself. Peter said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." This was the title which conveyed the true identity of Jesus as nothing less than God Incarnate! Jesus not only was the Messiah, but He was God in the flesh!

Brothers and sisters, you must see that this confession is THE foundation and basis of the Messianic reign and rule of the Kingdom of God. God's Kingdom is founded upon Jesus and His twofold identity as:

- The Messiah, the one promised in Genesis 3:15 who would deal Satan a death-blow and so delivered God's people from their sin.
- God, the one and only one who could fulfill the covenant of works.²

This is what Peter confessed,³ and this is the basis upon which the church would be built.

The Cornerstone of the Church

Matthew 16:18, "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it"

Understand that this verse is THE key verse upon which the papacy in Rome rests. The Roman Catholic Church takes this verse to mean that Christ said that the church would be built upon Peter and his lawful successors. As such, Peter/the Pope is the head of the church, the foundation upon which the church is built. The only problem with this view is that it is incorrect. The text doesn't say what Rome teaches!

Notice that there are two different words being used in this verse. The word for "Peter" is petros (pevtro") which means a small stone. The word for "rock" is petra (pevttra/) which means a large mountain. It is the latter, "the rock," upon which Christ said He would build His church, NOT Peter!

Why then did Christ use such a confusing statement, "Thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my church"? If the church is built upon a rock which is NOT Peter, then why did Christ mention Peter at all?

That brings us to a second point; Christ is using a pun to convey an important message. Christ was a Jew of the first century speaking to Jews of the first century. As we've seen, a major tool for conveying truth in the Hebrew language was through the use of a pun, which takes two similar

words and uses them to reinforce a truth in the memory of a person. Puns are sort of like music. Singing something helps us to remember it. Well, when God wanted to convey to the Northern Kingdom of Israel that their judgment was coming, He utilized the Hebrew pun.

Amos 8:1-2, "This is what the Sovereign Lord showed me: a basket of ripe fruit [the word for "ripe" in the Hebrew is קָיִץ (*qayis*)]. 'What do you see, Amos?' he asked. 'A basket of ripe fruit,' I answered. Then the Lord said to me, 'The time is ripe [the Hebrew is קָיִץ (*qēs*)] for my people Israel; I will spare them no longer.'"

By virtue of the pun, the message would be memorable to God's people. That is what Christ is doing in Matthew 16. He utilized the Hebrew Pun in order to convey an important message to His people.

Matthew 16:18, "And I also say to you that you are Peter [petros (pevtro)], and upon this rock [petra (pevtra/)] I will build My church..."

Christ is using a pun, and so a nifty way of bringing to His disciples' minds the basis upon which He would build the church.

The basis upon which Christ would "build His church" is Peter's confession that Jesus is both God and the Messiah! As we've seen, that is "the rock" upon which Christ would build His church! And it is upon this rock that Satan would attack the church. The reason Satan attacks the child of God is that they "keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus." (Revelation 12:17). To attack either the person or work of Christ is to attack the church!

When the church was under attack, John identified the object of Satan's attack, "Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son." (1 John 2:22) And that brings us to keys that Christ granted the church in order to protect and preserve its own.

The Keys of Protection

Matthew 16:19, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven..."

The term "the key" was the symbol of power and authority. To hold the "key" of a household was to act as the representative of the head of the house and so make decisions and so govern. Now Christ has been speaking about the building of His church which is "the pillar and support of the truth." (1 Timothy 3:15) To this church, specifically its leadership by virtue of the term "key," Christ would give authority.

First let us identify what this authority is not. It is not executive or legislative. That is, the authority to...

- Forgive sin.

- Save an individual.
- Condemn one to hell.
- Or write/declare scripture.

These items are the exclusive prerogative of God. RATHER, the authority is administrative (cf. Isaiah 22:22). And thus this authority is declarative. We conclude from this that the leaders of a particular church have the authority/power either to include or exclude people from the visible body of Christ. We see this more clearly defined as Christ continues:

Matthew 16:19b, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

The terms "binding" and "loosing" have reference to a person's standing in the *visible* body of Christ, the *visible* church, the *visible* Kingdom of God (the church after all is defined as the gathering of God's people together into a body). In light of this, we see that this key is an important pastoral tool. Recall that it is to the visible body of Christ, the physical manifestation of His Kingdom on this earth, that the Lord has given His promise of protection and care.

God said to Abraham and his children, "And I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse." (Genesis 12:3) Based on the rest of the Old Testament teaching, we conclude that this promise was given to the people of Abraham gathered together as the people of God to be part of this community was to enjoy the protection of God and to be outside of this community was to be as a gentile, bereft of such care. It is further shown in Revelation 12.

Revelation 12:12b-14, "...Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has *only* a short time. And when the dragon saw that he was thrown down to the earth, he persecuted the woman [today this is nothing less than the people of God, the body of Christ, the visible church] who gave birth to the male *child*. And the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, in order that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she was nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent."

Though the body of Christ continues to be the special object of hatred and attack by Satan, nevertheless God has and continues to protect it. That is why church membership is so important! Ordinarily to be outside of the body of Christ is to be outside of the Kingdom of God, and bereft of the covenant promises of protection and care. A member of the visible body of Christ receives special protection by God from Satan. Yet this is removed when the keys of the Kingdom are exercised.

Matthew 18:15-18, "And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen *to you*, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer. [Now at this point, Christ repeats the

exhortation He gave in Mt. 16...] Truly I say to you, whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven”:

Here Christ explains what He means by “binding and loosing.” It has to do with a person’s covenant status before God. In dealing with the sin of an unrepentant person, the church leadership can remove the individual from the blessings and prerogatives of a covenant community such that before God, they have the same status as “a Gentile or tax-gatherer.”

This does not mean that the covenant child has lost their salvation; that is impossible. Rather, it means that they have lost the blessings of being a member of a covenant community, one of which is protection! As such they are abandoned, exposed, and therefore at the mercy of Satan.

Satan who is “enraged with the woman” (Revelation 12:17 and who has “come down to [the earth], having great wrath, knowing that he has *only* a short time.” (Revelation 12:12).

From all of this we conclude that the “keys of the Kingdom” given to the church leadership are...

1. Administrative and so declarative, they are not legislative as if the church had the authority to give salvation or take salvation from an individual.
2. The authority to admit and dismiss from the visible body of Christ.
3. An important pastoral tool given to the shepherds of a church for the benefit of the believer unto the glory of God.
4. The literal handing over of a citizen of the Kingdom of God to Satan.

1 Corinthians 5:5b, “...for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.”

In light of this, a particular church leadership does NOT have an option when it comes to using these keys. In fact, to refuse to use them is to be guilty of neglect, arrogance, and hatred toward God. In this context, I want you to consider three passages.

Ezekiel 34:2-4, “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy and say to those shepherds, ‘Thus says the Lord God, “Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock? You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat *sheep* without feeding the flock. Those who are sickly you have not strengthened, the diseased you have not healed, the broken you have not bound up, the scattered you have not brought back, nor have you sought for the lost; but with force and with severity you have dominated them.””

This passage was written to a leadership which viewed their pastoral office as a vehicle of self-gain. Rather than caring for the people of God (those lost, hurting, or in rebellion), they adulterated their calling and so used it to...

- Stroke their ego.
- Advance their cause.

- Satisfy their needs.
- Earn their living.

Rather than going after straying or lost sheep, they neglected their calling and the tools which God had given for the preservation of the body (one of which was church discipline). As a result God indicted them with the sin of neglect! Truly, any church which does not address the needs of a body by refusing to discipline their own is guilty of neglect. Yet it is not just neglect, they also are guilty of arrogance.

1 Corinthians 5:1-2, "It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife. And you have become arrogant, and have not mourned instead, in order that the one who had done this deed might be removed from your midst"

When the Lord gives a calling, and prescribes how that calling is to be undertaken (in this case, formal church discipline), AND when we refuse to serve God according to His will opting for our own plans or devices, the charge is arrogance for we are living as if we know better than God! Yet and again, when it comes to the discipline of God's people so many church leaders are guilty here.

- Today we've come up with a variety of responses to unrepentant children of God which are nothing short of pride.
- When the process of Matthew 19 is followed and the offending party remains unrepentant, there will come a time when the church leadership must hand the unrepentant brother or sister over to Satan.
- Yet today, we've determined that this is harsh, judgmental, or mean. As such some say
 - "We'll draw them back with love." As if inactivity is love.
 - "We'll entice them by accepting them."
 - "We'll handle the problem hoping that God at some point will change them."
 - **or the other extreme**
 - "We'll shun them."

All these responses are representative of how many in the church today respond to sinning brethren. Yet, God has given us very specific instruction on how to deal with an unrepentant brother or sinner. If we neglect this or refuse to follow it is NOT love, BUT in the words of Paul, arrogance (for again we are acting as if we know a better way than what God has given us in His word).

And yet it is not just neglect and arrogance. When a leadership refuses to follow God's way in caring for the flock of God, they also are guilty of hatred toward God.

Matthew 16:19, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven"

The tense of the verbs for “shall be bound” and “shall be loosed” are future perfect passives, more accurately rendered “will have been bound” and “will have been loosed.” This is an important distinction. The idea is NOT that God is compelled to conform to the church’s decisions BUT that, when the church follows Christ’s pattern for discipline, it conforms its decisions to what God has already done or is doing!⁴

Recall the multiple pleas of Moses during the wilderness wandering when on account of Israel’s sin, God promised severe judgment.

Numbers 32:11-12a, “Then Moses entreated the Lord his God, and said, ‘O Lord, why doth Thine anger burn against Thy people whom Thou hast brought out from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians speak, saying, “With evil *intent* He brought them out to kill them in the mountains and to destroy them from the face of the earth”?’” (cf. also Num. 14:15-16; Deut. 9:28).

God’s treatment of us reflects upon Him. That is why Joshua exhorted Achan when he was found out to be guilty of sin.

Joshua 7:19, “Then Joshua said to Achan, ‘My son, I implore you, give glory to the Lord, the God of Israel, and give praise to Him; and tell me now what you have done. Do not hide it from me.’”

When we hide our sin and God punishes us, we give the world the opportunity to say, “Look at how God has treated that innocent servant!” By confessing our sin, by exposing sin, we exonerate the Lord!

With this, consider a church that refuses to deal with their unrepentant brothers or sisters. If God deigns to hand a covenant child over to Satan for the preservation of His soul, and we know it, but we keep our mouths shut and do not act according to God’s word, are we being loving toward God or hateful?

From all of this I hope you see that Church Discipline, the right exercise of the Keys of the Kingdom, is not an option for a people who love the Lord or one another. This is a pastoral tool God has given for the preservation of the sinner and the glory of God!

May God give us the grace boldly and lovingly to do God’s work in God’s way unto the care and preservation of our souls!

End Notes

¹ The southernmost being Beersheba, cf. Judges 20:1; 1 Chronicles 21:2.

² Recall: More than anything the fall teaches that even a perfect man falls short of God’s glory. As such, what man could not do in his perfection, God did! He fulfilled the obligation that accompanies a relationship with God: perfection!

³ At the time this still was beyond his own understanding; he didn’t realize in full what he just said. And for that matter, nor do we.

⁴ So it is when it comes to the forgiveness of sins- the future perfect passive is used. In John 20:23, Christ said, "If you forgive the sins of any, *their sins* have been forgiven them; if you retain the *sins* of any, they have been retained." Understand what Christ is saying here: (1) If a person is trusting in the sacrifice of Christ as the payment for their sin, the church can tell him with perfect confidence that his sins are forgiven! (2) But if, on the other hand, a person refuses to trust in the sacrifice of Christ, the church can tell him with equal confidence that his sins are not forgiven. In this case, the church is NOT determining the state of a person's soul, but simply declaring it!

VISIT US WHEN IN Broomfield, COLORADO

Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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About the Preacher

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