

# The Right to Restrict

*Church Membership Series*

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**Bible Text:** Matthew 16:19

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## **Faith Free Presbyterian Church**

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Turn this evening to the New Testament Scriptures to the Gospel of Matthew 16. We have somewhat abbreviated the opening part of the service. I appreciate Tim leading the meeting, doing the announcements. I thought that would save time but there you go.

Last week I began a series on the church. I have two weeks, this is the second week, to complete this series after Cairn has an open-ended series going on Romans. I don't have that opportunity so I have to get everything done this evening that I want to say concerning the church or at least on this particular aspect of the church. Last Lord's day we considered together the mandates for membership that the church of Jesus Christ as a visible organization demands that those that are believers in Christ, those that are part of the invisible church, have their place as members in the church organized. That was our subject last Lord's day evening.

Tonight I want to address the restrictions that the church has the right to set upon those that are members of its communicant organization and we'll address that issue this evening, the right of the church to restrict its membership taking our text from this extremely important declaration that Christ makes in Matthew 16 concerning the church and the authority of the church. Again, immediately after Peter's confession that our Savior was the Christ, the Son of the Living God, in verse 17 the Lord Jesus tells Peter that that was not the conclusion that he came to on his own but that indeed was a truth that was revealed to him by the Father in heaven. On that basis then, he makes this statement in verse 18, "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock," again, the rock of that confession that Peter has just made "that thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God," upon that foundation, "upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

Now, we've addressed the significance of that statement before, that the gates of hell will not prevail against the church means that the gates of hell cannot withstand the advancing of the church. The gates are hell's defensive mechanism and hell ultimately has no defense against the advance of the church of Jesus Christ and every one of us here tonight that are believers in Christ stand as testimony to that truth for we, indeed each one, are brands that have been plucked from the burning and the church of Jesus Christ advanced to claim us. Great power that the Lord gives here to his church.

Then in verse 19, "And I will give unto thee the keys," the authority, "of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." We have emphasized that the church of Jesus Christ is special. As a special organism, the church is that living entity that is comprised of all of the redeemed from all places on earth and in heaven. It is the invisible community of God's elect. That community may be unknown by man but it is invariably and infallibly always known by God. That is the invisible church.

As a visible organization, the church is that visible community, that visible institution whose communicant membership is comprised of professing believers in various locations scattered right across this earth and although the visible church consists of many different congregations, many different denominations, yet ideally and I'm speaking here in ideal terms, ideally every true church strives for a regenerated communicant membership. How closely the visible church corresponds to that invisible church, that body of God's redeemed, is going to vary and ultimately only God knows for sure for we know that the wheat and the tares grow together and that is indiscernible as far as man is concerned but God, indeed, always knows those who are his.

Confessedly. God infallibly knows the heart of every man but it is part of human nature, it is part of our human limitation, that we can see only from the outside. We can make no judgments. We can make no determinations as to the reality of anything in the heart of man. All that we can do as human beings given the limitations of our human nature is make evaluation on the basis of what we see on the outside. We make evaluations of another man's work and we do that evaluation even fallibly for we make mistakes even there. We see only the outside and we make, I say, both determinations on external bases even though determinations that involve spiritual and eternal matters.

Now, that's the essential difference or certainly one of the essential differences between ourselves and God but that essential difference has implications as far as the church is concerned. That essential difference between us and God, that God can see the heart of man infallibly and we can only observe man from the outside, that essential difference has implication for the church as a visible representation of that which ultimately is invisible. I submit to you that we can make determinations concerning the members of the church only as the evidences of grace and the evidences of conversion are observable. Only as we see the evidences of grace, as we see the evidences of conversion can we make any kind of determination at all concerning a man's place in the church of Jesus Christ.

So that raises the essential question that I want to consider this evening: does the church as a visible organization have the right, have the authority, to be more restrictive in its membership requirements than the invisible church as that living organism? To be a member of the invisible church requires the new birth. You must be born again and without that new birth, there is no entrance into that kingdom but it is the new birth as the only criterion established for membership in that invisible body. But I say the question for us who are limited to outward observances, the question for us who can only see men

on the outside: do we have a right as a church to be more restrictive in membership than the invisible church? Or I can put it in these terms: does the church have the right to impose its interpretations and its applications of Scripture upon its membership? That's the question before us.

Before I answer these questions this evening in the affirmative and I'm going to answer them in the affirmative, that we do have a right. We have a responsibility given the fact that Christ has given to us the keys of the kingdom to exercise his authority upon this earth, that we have the right and we have the responsibility before God to set the parameters and to set the definition at least in practice of what membership in the visible church is to be. But before I answer those questions, I want to address something of the standard objection to the answer that I'm going to be giving. We are often told that because of Christian liberty and because of the freedom of conscience, that no man can tell me what to do. We have the liberty in the Gospel of Christ. After all, we are under grace, we are not under law and as soon as a church or anyone else starts to mandate for me what my practice must be, what my code of conduct must be, that is an infringement upon my liberty in the Gospel; it becomes an infringement against my conscience. Those, I say, are the typical objections that are raised to what I'm about to address this evening so I want to clear the table of those objections before we set the case.

I would affirm that apart from Scripture that there is no authority apart from Scripture revealed to us by God. There is no authority, not even the church, that has the right to bind the conscience of any believer, of a Protestant, and one of the great tenets of reformed theology is the priesthood of the believer and God alone in our confession makes this very clear and you read the confession and the confession makes it clear that God alone is the Lord of the conscience. My conscience is owned by God. We start there and I affirm that truth that God alone is the Lord of the conscience.

But before we rush off with that maverick license, let's consider first of all what the conscience is and why it is that God is the only one that can be as Lord. Proverbs 20:27 says, "The spirit of man is the candle of the LORD, searching all the inward parts of the belly." Searching the inner being: this is not a statement of anatomy but rather a statement of our inner being. And the spirit of man, that conscience speaking here of that inner being that, if you will, conscience of man is the candle of the Lord who then searches those inward parts. In some ways, I suppose, it is difficult to define what conscience is. Theologians will define conscience somewhat in these terms: that it is that sense, that human sense of moral oughtness, that human sense of moral oughtness that gives to us the capacity to distinguish between moral right and moral wrong. It is that little voice within us that speaks to us inaudibly; that speaks to us sometimes with the great prick identified for us and directing us in terms of what is right and what is wrong. In many ways, it is the conscience that makes us distinct from every other creature and it is the Lord, the Scripture teaches, our confession affirms, that it is the Lord therefore that has the absolute authority to determine what is right and what is wrong. Only God, that God who himself is infinitely pure and good. It is only God that has the ultimate right and authority to define what is right and what is wrong. That is the domain of God.

Outside agents can influence conscience. Outside agents can therefore jeopardize conscience in the attempt to control. Conscience can be taught. Consciences can be influenced. They can be seared. They can be perverted. I think certainly we live in a day where the conscience of man has been perverted. We live in a day where, as Isaiah prophesied would happen, the day that was evident even in his day when those things that are good people called bad and those things that are evil people called good. A complete reversal of what is right and what is wrong. And I dare say there are those today in our generation, in our society, that believe they are doing the right thing, that do those things that according to Scripture, according to our conviction of what the Scripture says, is absolute evil but my guess is that they do it with a clear conscience. Their conscience has been so seared, their conscience has been so influenced that they can even do the wrong thing which we know from Scripture to be an evil thing but nonetheless have the clearness of conscience as they define evil and good. It is important therefore, it is vital therefore that our consciences be submitted to the Lord and to the Lord alone.

But there is a significant difference and there is an essential difference and this must be understood this evening. It's not my typical sermon so you'll bear with me but these are important truths that I want us to understand. There is a significant and an essential difference between surrendering one's conscience and surrendering one's will to an organization that requires a code of conduct for its members. Understand that difference. I can surrender my behavior and I can conform my behavior to a certain organization without surrendering my conscience to that organization.

I ministered at BJ for many years, some of you still do. When I was there, BJ had a policy against wearing denim in public. I must say, I have no conscience against wearing denim in public. I have made the public statement and I make it again tonight that I look good in denim. I do. But in all the years, in all the years that I ministered at BJ because of that particular regulation, I did not wear denim in public. I didn't do it. I had no conscience against it but I surrendered my obedience and my will to that particular regulation and I did so without feeling that my liberty was in any way being jeopardized.

We have here a rule for those ladies that come into our communicant membership that you have head covering and every lady that comes into communicant membership in this church knows what the policy is and they submit to that policy and they wear head covering as communicant members. I am not so naïve to believe that every woman that submits to the membership of this particular congregation has their own conviction concerning head covering. Do you? What happens when you are on vacation? What happens when you go to churches outside of this church, do you wear head covering or no? It's none of my business. It's none of my business but if you wear head covering because it is your conviction here, then you will wear it when you go elsewhere as well, even if you are the only one in the crowd. Even if you're the only one. But if you have submitted your will to this particular organization and you don't wear it when you're elsewhere, hey, fine. That's between you and the Lord. We are not asking that you surrender your conscience. It may not be your conviction and if you go elsewhere and don't wear it, you either are violating your conscience or it's not your conscience and that's between you and the Lord. But as you come, do you understand what I'm saying?

Do you see the difference between the surrendering of your conscience and the surrendering of your will to the mandates of an organization for membership in that organization?

So I refuse, I refuse to accept and to receive the accusation as we impose certain restrictions upon our members that we are seeking to be the lord of their conscience. I refuse to accept that as an objection. I am the lord of no man's conscience. I want every conscience to be dictated and surrendered to the Lord himself but do we have a right to ask you to behave in a certain way? Yes we do and we'll see the reasons for that as we go through so don't be talking to me about your freedom of conscience. I love freedom of conscience. And don't be talking to me about the nature of Christian liberty. I get sick and I get sore, I must say, of all of the talk today concerning all of these issues about Christian liberty. Let's forget about who the weak brother is and who the strong brother is. All of these discussions, "Oh, I must be the weak one. You must be the strong one. No, I'm the strong." Let's cut through all of that nonsense. Let's cut through it. If you think you're strong, Lord bless you. If you think you're weak, then grow up. Seriously. I'm getting sick and sore of all of this talk, "You're the weak one. You're the strong one." Cut through it. Just cut through it.

Too often the whole issue of Christian liberty is done in terms of this independent mentality, making it all about self, this maverick spirit that we talked about last Lord's day evening and the Bible has no place for it. The Bible has no place for mavericks as American as that spirit may be. And the whole issue of Christian liberty cannot be defined in this cowboy mentality. You look at the Scripture. You look at the Scripture and I care not whether you see it to be the strong one or the weak one, you look at the Scripture and Christian liberty is never viewed in terms of self. Never. Never. It's always in terms of the welfare and the good of the entire body of Christ.

Liberty does not mean freedom from restraint and New Testament liberty, the liberty that we have in the Gospel, the liberty that we have in these, I'm going to give you a Greek word, the liberty that we have in these *ideo pra*, the liberty that we have in these indifferent things, in these indifferent things always and I underline the word "always" here, the New Testament liberty that we have always expresses itself in the willingness – listen to me – it expresses itself in the willingness to refrain from doing what conscience may allow. Always, rather than in the demand to do what conscience may permit and this whole issue of Christian liberty is reversing things. "I have the right to do it. My conscience allows me to do it therefore let me do it." No, read your Bible, people. Just read your Bible one time and you will find that Christian liberty is always, it is always the willingness to refrain from what my conscience may permit me to do rather than in the demand of my personal rights of what conscience may permit.

A willful permission or a willful submission to authority, a willful submission to an authority outside of myself is not a violation of conscience but it is a biblical exercise of liberty. Put it in the biblical form. A willful submission. I'll repeat that statement. A willful submission to an authority outside of myself and I'm speaking here in regard to the church particularly, is not a violation of conscience but it is rather a biblical exercise

of liberty. Grace is always happy with restraints. Grace is not bothered by restraints, you know, and liberty always recognizes limitations. When Christ gave the invitation to come, "You come unto me, your tired, your weak and your heavy laden. You come unto me and you take my yoke upon you. You take my yoke upon you." Oh, there is grace in that invitation. What freedom there is in coming to Christ. Christ says, "When you come to me, you take my yoke upon you." I know enough about yokes to know that they confine what that animal does. That yoke limits what that animal does. Christ says, "You take my yoke. It's an easy yoke. You're going to like this yoke. You're going to like this yoke." It's a light burden but it's nonetheless a yoke. It is nonetheless a yoke that we take when we come to Christ.

Resisting authority therefore, resisting the authority that God has established, if I could put it in the words of our confession here, that resisting authority on the pretense of Christian liberty is resisting the ordinance of God and we recognize that the purpose of Christian liberty is the mutual upholding, the preserving of the body. We recognize that it should lead to a happy willingness to conform our behavior to whatever the church recognizes as being most conducive to maintaining that so don't be talking to me about your Christian liberty. If you have Christian liberty, you are willingly going to submit your behavior, not to whatever you think you want or what you have the right to do, but you'll submit your behavior to what is good for the welfare of the body. Now that's the biblical precept. If you want to call me the weak brother, I can take it. I can take it but that is the issue of what Christian liberty is about.

Now, those are the objections. I've handled the objections. I haven't started yet. You've heard that many times from this pulpit. I haven't started yet but those are the objections and we want to clear the table. Those are not excuses and they are not reasons against the church restricting its behavior and the behavior of its communicants as a requirement for that membership. There are three things, then, and I will touch on these as quickly as I can but I want us to get the point. There are three reasons that I would set before you this evening why the church has the right to restrict. I would say first of all: the church has the right to restrict because and based on the very purpose of the church. The very purpose of the church.

There is a threefold function of the church as we see the New Testament revelation. It is the primary purpose of the church, obviously as in all things, to glorify God. Paul says in Ephesians 3:21, "Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen." Unto him be glory in the church. It is the principal purpose of the church of Jesus Christ to glorify God. The heavenly church does that without failure. The heavenly church now is doing that in absolute perfection there in the glory. All of the redeemed from every age now in the presence of their Savior, worshiping him, praising him, glorifying him in that undefiled beauty of holiness. The heavenly church does this without any failure. The visible church must seek to do so as well. In that text I read in Ephesians 3 was part of Paul's prayer for the visible church, that they might so glorify God. The way we glorify God will be multifaceted in its manifestation but it is the purpose of the church to glorify God.

It is the purpose of the church to evangelize. This is the Great Commission that Christ has given to us to go into all the world and preach the Gospel. The Lord Jesus has set the church as that light upon a hill and if sinners cannot find Christ in the ministry of the church, then there is a failure in the church to fulfill its mission. We have the purpose to evangelize.

But we have the purpose and this is the one that is particularly germane to our consideration this evening, we have the purpose to edify believers. You read Ephesians 4, there the apostle sets down the various gifts that the Lord has given to his church: apostles, evangelists, pastor teachers. And the reason that the Lord has given those gifts unto his church is that the church might be edified; that the church itself might be built up; that the church itself might be engaged in the ministry. Perfecting the saints. Perfecting the saints for the work of the ministry and that, I say, is the purpose of the church and the officers, the ministers, that the Lord has given to the church to lead them; to bring them to spiritual maturity; to fit them for the work of the ministry; to fit the people to the work of service under the Lord; to inspire; to equip for duty. We minister to people where they are. We minister to people where they are but it is not our objective to lead people where they are. It is our purpose to take the people that the Lord brings our way and to teach them and to instruct them, to bring them to that spiritual maturity whereby they then, in turn, become the ministers and the servants of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

We don't rule the conscience but I do submit that if we are going to fulfill that aspect of our purpose to edify believers, that we do have the right as the ministers of the church, as the leaders of the church, we are Presbyterians, the Presbytery has, our elders have, we do have the right to instruct, not to lord and not to rule, but the right to instruct the conscience in order to perfect, to build up, to guide the body into that belief and that practice that we believe is harmonious with the Scriptures and doing that requires setting up parameters. Parameters of personal purity to declare God's glory, to maintain a pure witness. If it is the responsibility of the local assembly, if it is the responsibility of the denomination of the church to glorify God, to evangelize the lost, to edify believers, then it is the responsibility of the church in fulfilling that mandate and fulfilling that purpose to identify, to set the parameters of what holiness is, of what godliness is, of what mature Christian behavior and belief is all about so that that ministry, indeed, might be maintained in all of its purity.

So I submit, first of all, that we have a right to restrict based upon the very purpose of the church but I say, secondly, that we have a right to restrict demanded by the very ministry of the church. The ministry of the church. Last Lord's day evening, we considered something of what that ministry is and I set down for you, not only from the Scripture but in traditional reform theology, what it is that marks the true church of Jesus Christ and I encouraged you to make sure that the church under which you will submit, that church to whom you will give your allegiance and submit to its authority, is marked by those characteristics of a true church and they were three. A true church is marked by the faithful and true preaching of the word of God. I repeat that from last week: any church that does not proclaim, "Thus saith the Lord," any church that does not use its only

authority as the word of God has no right to exist. As a minister, I have nothing that I ought to be saying to you people apart from "Thus saith the Lord." This is the only authority that I have as a gift that God has given to the church as a minister of the Gospel. I have no authority, an elder has no authority, a church has no authority apart from "Thus saith the Lord," and a true church must be marked by that faithful and that true preaching of the word of God.

The second mark, the second ministry of the church, involves the administration and the right administration of the sacraments. Now, we established this last Lord's day as well, that the sacraments, baptism, the Lord's supper, these are wonderful visible proclamations of the Gospel that Christ has given to his church and to his church alone. The Bible knows nothing of private baptisms. The Bible knows nothing of private celebrations of the Lord's table. It is the operation of the church. The operation of the church and this great responsibility, this great privilege that the Lord has given to his church, weighs heavily and must weigh heavily upon those who are the administrators in that local assembly in that church to ensure the right administration of the sacraments.

And the third aspect, the third mark of a true church is faithful and consistent discipline. Faithful and consistent discipline. All of these are interrelated but it is the third of these that is the key issue for our subject this evening. It is a discipline that strives to maintain the purity of doctrine that is required for faithful preaching. It is the discipline of the church that makes sure that the preaching of the word is according to right doctrine to maintain the faithful preaching of the word. It is discipline that serves to guard the practice that is necessary for the protection of the sacraments, for the right administration of the sacraments. There cannot be the faithful preaching, there cannot be the right administration of the sacraments unless we have this exercise of the church discipline to ensure, to protect, to guard both the doctrine and the practice that belong to the church.

Now, we believe in a holiness. We believe in a holiness, a holiness that is purposed in our election; a purpose that is predicated upon our justification; a holiness that is proclaimed in Scripture; a holiness that is patterned after Christ; and a holiness that is practiced in life. How's that for a bunch of "p's," Brad? That's good. But a holiness that is not in the abstract. A holiness that must translate into the issues of life. And if the church, and follow my reasoning here please, follow my logic, if the church has the right and the authority to discipline, that cannot be disputed for the Bible makes it clear that the church has the right to exercise discipline. If the church has the authority to discipline, then there must be some standard by which judgments are made concerning orthodoxy, that is right doctrine, and orthopraxis which is right behavior. If the church has the right to discipline, and it does, then I submit to you that there must be some standard. There must be some standard by which judgments are made concerning right doctrine and concerning right practice. If those standards are not in place, then discipline becomes impossible to implement and if it is impossible to implement discipline, it is impossible for us then to fulfill the mandate that Christ has given to his church.

Now, the word of God is our standard, part of our confessional affirmation. The Bible is our only rule for faith and practice but the Bible is not a book of theory and how the



Bible is preached, how the Bible is preached is going to have a great influence upon how the Bible is practiced. If it is the mark of a true church to faithfully preach the word, faithful preaching always links doctrine and practice. It must. Faithful preaching always links doctrine and practice. The problem with many of our reformed brethren and the problem with many of our fundamentalist brethren is the disconnect between doctrine and practice. We have many in the reformed camp who emphasize doctrine and leave it, as it were, to the Holy Spirit to make whatever application he might see fit. And we have those in our fundamentalist camp who emphasize practice without ever linking that to the truth of doctrine: just do, just do, just make sure you do. And I submit to you that both of those disconnects are dangerous. They are both dangerous. It is an error to declare truth without specifying its relevance for life. It is an error to declare truth without specifying its relevance to life. It is also an error to set up standards of living divorced from truth. It's error. Truth apart from ethics is theory and ethics apart from truth is legalism. It's true. It is the prerogative, then, of the church to make compliance with truth determine practice, a prerequisite for membership if it take seriously its charge to discipline. Its charge to discipline with the view to preserving and manifesting holiness. Its charge to discipline with the view to give incredible visibility to the body of Christ.

I agree that this, then, goes beyond the requirement of the new birth but it is the only logical way. It's the only feasible way for the organized church to fulfill its mandate and ministry commissioned by Christ. Members, communicant members, voluntarily submit to the rule of the church. I emphasized that last Lord's day evening as we considered the mandates for membership. I made no appeal and I make no appeal this evening for anybody to join this church. I'm not concerned about your joining this church. My concern is do you understand the significance of the church and be sure that you are under the discipline of a church, whatever that church is. But anybody that comes into a church does so voluntarily. Not a member here that was ever coerced to join this church. Not one of you. Many of you would come and after the first or second week you were here, you were impressed with the ministry and whatever and you wanted to join and we put you off. We put you off and many right across this room tonight remember that you were put off. "Just hang around for a while. Check us out." You don't come to this unadvisedly. You don't come to it casually. But everyone that has come has come voluntarily. I don't know of any church, Protestant church, fundamentalist church, that coerces membership. You come unto this rule voluntarily.

Now here's where your conscience must kick in: if you submit to this body voluntarily and it must be your conscience as a believer to submit your behavior and your will and your conscience to the word of God for he does own our conscience. It becomes your conscience then and it becomes a matter of your conscience then to submit to those that have the rule over you. We considered that last Lord's day evening. It must be your conscience. You violate your conscience, you sin against your conscience, if as a voluntary member of this body you do not obey those that have the rule over you. You don't have to agree with us. You don't have to surrender your conscience to what we say but it is your conscience to obey, to submit your will to the parameters that are set in terms of what holiness is as we believe that holiness to be.

When you come under the leadership of the church, there is a certain trust that you place on those who lead. You submit yourself to those who themselves are accountable to God and who must give an account for how they conduct their ministry. But there is a certain confidence that I trust that the members of this church have to those that God has put in the leadership of this church. God has given gifts to the church and the pastors, teachers, the elders, are God's gift to this church. We trust that those that are in leadership who themselves are most conscious of their responsibility before God will lead the people according to truth. Will lead the people into truth. Will take the promise that Christ has given to the church concerning even the very gift of the Holy Spirit. Remember the promise that the Lord gave to his disciples in John 16 concerning the Spirit of God that would lead them into all truth.

That has implications, I'm well aware, for the apostolic ministry and the giving of Scripture but I don't think it's limited to that. It's the promise of the Spirit of God that will lead into all truth and as we open our books, our Scriptures, as we seek a word from God to be the message for this people, we are trusting the Spirit to lead us into that truth. To lead us into the comprehension of the truth. To be the teacher of what that truth is. And understand, please, that leading into truth is not just the theory of truth but it involves the application and the relevance of that truth as well, for truth apart from application is nothing but theory. That's all it is. Truth apart from application is nothing but theory and I believe that when the promise is, the Spirit of God will lead us into all truth, that the promise is that he will lead us into the implications and the applications of that truth in the society in the day in which we live. It's the promise. The church is the pillar in the ground of truth and the Holy Spirit has been promised to lead us into all truth.

So I say then that if the church is to exercise its ministry to truly preach the word, to properly administer the sacraments and to discipline, there must be standards and there must be restrictions that are placed upon the communicant membership to define what right doctrine is and what right practice is otherwise it is absolutely impossible for the church to discipline; it is impossible for the church therefore to fulfill what Christ has defined the church to be. We have the right so to restrict.

The third thing, then, that I say this evening is this: that we have the right to restrict as illustrated by the type of the church. The type of the church illustrates our right for restriction. It is a fundamental truth of the church about the church that Jesus Christ is the sole head and King of the church. You look at Colossians 1, Ephesians 1, Christ is the head of all things but especially is he the head of the church. As I emphasized last Lord's day evening, we believe that the church of Jesus Christ is a monarchy. It is not a democracy where free wills run wild. It is not any kind of a hierarchical system in which administrators take the reins and enforce their wills and their agendas. The church of Jesus Christ is a monarchy and the Lord Jesus Christ is the sole head and King of the church. There is a sense in which the church of Jesus Christ is a theocratic kingdom. It's a theocratic kingdom and being part, then, of the visible church is to acknowledge and to submit to Jesus Christ as the King of the church.

Now, I say there are lessons that we can learn here from the Old Testament dispensation, lessons from the type of the church in the Old Testament where the Old Testament reveals to us what life was like in a theocratic kingdom. Israel, particularly in that dispensation of Israel's history when they were immediately redeemed from Egypt, when they spent that time wandering around in the desert for those 40 years, Israel was under a theocratic administration. That changed. Even in Israel's history there was a time, then, when the theocracy gave way to monarchy. I'm looking at that time in Israel's history that was the theocratic kingdom, when the Lord himself was the immediate ruler of the people and we have an example, we have an illustration of what life was like in a theocratic kingdom.

Israel was saved from bondage. There they were in the land of Egypt, held there slaves against their wills, held there as slaves by their wills but in bondage and the Lord came down in his grace, the Lord came down in his almighty power, the Lord came down with the blood of the sacrifice and he redeemed those people. He brought those people from bondage to freedom. He liberated them. At the Exodus, he led the way out from their bondage to the new place of freedom. But Israel soon learned that that new liberty was divinely restricted. Redeemed, liberated but, I say, they soon learned that that newfound liberty had a whole bunch of restrictions for the Lord led them straight through various turns but straight to Sinai. When they reached Sinai, they learned their limits, what the limits of holiness were all about. And there at Sinai they learned how it was that a redeemed people were supposed to live and, again, it's imperative that we keep Sinai on the right side of Egypt. I've often thought that I was so glad, I am so glad that God did not in Scripture write the Ten Commandments for Moses at the burning bush and tell Moses at the burning bush, "Take these tablets and go to Egypt and tell the people, 'Do this and we'll bring you out.'" No. God delivered them by grace and by power and by blood.

Sinai came after redemption. Sinai came after the Exodus. But now that they were redeemed, now that they were bought by the blood and liberated from that terrible bondage, the Lord brought them to Sinai and he taught them how a redeemed people were supposed to live. He gave to them the Ten Words. He inscripturated. That was not the beginning of the Ten Commandments but I'm not going to go into that this evening. You know that. But at Sinai, we have the inscripturation of the Ten Words, the Ten Commandments for the first time. We have there in those Ten Words the sum of God's moral law, those two great commandments: to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, with all of our soul, with all of our might; to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. Those two great demands of God's law and God expects his people, God demands his redeemed people to love him totally and God expects his people redeemed by his blood and power and grace to love their neighbors as they love themselves. He gave them the Ten Words that specified how to behave toward God and how to behave toward your neighbor.

But it's not without significance that God did not give the people the moral law in that Ten Worded code and say, "On your way now. Live like you're supposed to live. On your way." God did not leave the subjects of the kingdom to figure out for themselves how to apply that law, how to live in the light of that law, without giving them specific examples

of how to do it. The Lord did not leave them just with the Ten Commandments. After the Ten Commandments, we have that what we often refer to as the civil code. The civil code were specific applications of the moral law in that historic and that cultural setting. Those civil laws were not exhausted. God didn't tell them everything to do in every particular situation, in every particularly conceived environment but in those civil laws there was a sufficient degree of instruction, a sufficient degree of telling them, "Do this. Don't do this here, there, in this environment, in this circumstance," to make it clear that holiness pervades the totality of life. Holiness must pervade the totality of life.

And the Lord detailed for them precisely how they were to live in that new environment and the Lord gave them many specific applications as to how to apply the law of God and grace and their newfound liberty where they were now living. Some of the laws appear to us to be very mundane. It's a part of the Old Testament we like to skip over because it just seems to be so outdated and so irrelevant to us. When God got down to where they lived, God gave instruction as to what kind of clothes they were going to wear. "Make sure that you don't wear garments of mixed material. If you're going to wear wool, wear wool. If you're going to wear linen, wear linen. But don't you be mixing them." Why? "I'm the Lord your God." Good reason. "Be careful how you shave. When you shave, now, I don't want you to round off the corners of your beard." God was concerned with their grooming habits and he applied his law even to how they were to shave in that wilderness experience. He told them how to farm, "Don't pick the end of your bean rows." God gave them very specific instructions concerning issues of life that appeared to be so insignificant, to be so unrelated to anything that we would be interested in. But he made it very clear, but he made it very clear, "You are a redeemed people. You are a redeemed people. I have bought you. I have saved you. I have taken you from bondage and you now have this liberty and in this liberty you're going to look this way in the world. The world looks this way, you're going to look this way." The world shaved that way, that's why the shaving instructions. "Canaanites shave that way. You're not going to shave like the Canaanites. You're going to have an appearance that is different than the Canaanites. I'm the Lord your God." And the Lord made it very clear that as a redeemed people you live this way or else and we have those instances where we have people being cutting off from the community because they refused to comply with some specific instruction that God gave them, "Here is how a redeemed people is supposed to live."

Many of those civil laws are culturally and historically limited and they are no longer relevant for us. As I look across the congregation tonight, if they were applicable to us virtually every one of us here tonight would be cut off from the kingdom. We're wearing garments of mixed material, most of us. Who can afford all wool? I trim my beard. Some of you don't have beards. Violating? No, we miss the point. But what do we learn? What do we learn from those Old Testament civil applications? Two things: 1. We learn that there are universal and timeless truths of the moral law that have temporally and culturally specific application. There are moral truths that are universal and timeless but they have temporal and culturally specific applications. Truth is constant but application varies. That's the first thing that I learned and that's an important lesson. 2. I learned this: that God expects those who live in the covenant community to live in a way that distinguishes them from the world. God expects those in the covenant community to live

in a way that distinguishes them from the world and he has a right to tell them how to do it. He has the right to tell them how to do it.

I submit to you that a failure, then, to apply truth, a failure to apply truth in a way that is temporally and culturally relevant is a failure to apply truth at all. It's a failure to apply truth at all. Truth is not situational. It's not, but situations do dictate how truth is to be applied. We live in a day that is unlike Israel's day. We have no mandates and no restrictions for membership in this church as to how you are to shave. Not a one. But we do have restrictions defined by the environment in which we live, defined by the culture in which we are a part, that we believe are the evidences of holiness. Do we have the right? Do we have the right to make those restrictions? I say when we look at the theocratic kingdom in the Old Testament when they were under the rule of the Lord King, he told them. He told them precisely how they were to live in the most specific details of their lives.

Now, what implications does that have, then, for the antitype for the church? God's expectations are no different. Christ as the King of the church and the church is a theocracy, Christ as the King of the church has the authority to demand his subjects who have been conquered by grace to live distinctly in this world. I think we would agree that Christ as the King of the church has the right and he has the authority to tell us as his redeemed people how we are to live and how we are to behave in this old world. If I believe that, we come to our text finally. Christ says to the church, "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven. I will give to you the authority of the very kingdom of heaven. Whatsoever shall be bound in heaven, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven." I explained that language last Lord's day evening. Earth does not dictate heaven but heaven dictates earth. "Whatever you bind on earth is that which has already been bound in heaven. Whatever you loose on earth is that which has already been loosed in heaven." The church and its administration is just the evidence of the will of God, the will of King Jesus being done and he has given to the church the keys. He has given to the church the authority. He has appointed representatives as the leaders to govern the church. As we are the administrative rulers, the representative rulers of this theocratic kingdom of Christ, it is our responsibility to execute the laws of Scripture. It is our responsibility to execute the laws of Scripture that includes the culturally and the temporally relevant applications that are necessary to express and to maintain holiness in this world.

There are some of the rules and regulations and restrictions that we place on this church for membership that some of you may not like, may not agree with, may not be your conscience, okay? If you're not a member of this church, then that's fine. That's fine, but to become a communicant member of this church, we have these restrictions that we believe, that we believe as the leaders of this church, as the administrators of this part of the kingdom that we have a right, that we have an obligation before God if we are going to exercise the mandate that Christ has given to us, to set the parameters of what we believe holiness is to be so that the church glorifies God and so that the lost see something attractive in Christ. We have a right. We have a responsibility. We have a duty so to do.

I'm not going to address tonight all the specifics. In due course, perhaps we will because I think it is important. I think it is important as I've emphasized that we link our doctrine and our duty. It is vital that we see our practice in the light of truth. Why is it? Why is it that we in the free church are teetotalers? Why is it? Why is it in the free church that we ask our members not to occasion the movie theaters? Why is it? Why is it? Do we have the right to do it? Oh, we have a right to do it but it's not arbitrary. These rules and these restrictions are not coming out of a hat, "Oh, let's do this." I used to think my parents would just do that, "You know, what can we do now?" and I'm sure my sons thought the same. There are reasons. There are reasons but you trust me that behind every one of those is the reason that we take seriously the mandate that Christ has given to us. We take seriously the mandate that Christ has given to us to maintain the true preaching of the word. To protect the holiness. To protect the sanctity of this table that is before me. Take it seriously. Take it seriously.

And based on our limitations, based upon the limitations that all that we can see about the credibility of your faith and all that you can see about the credibility of mine is what you can see on the outside. That's all you can see. We make judgments of holiness. I trust our hearts are right and our consciences are clear before God. I must answer to God for my conscience and so must you. But yet at the same time there is the external judgment of holiness which is all we can do, which is all the world can do.

Do we love the church? Do we love the church? Is the church important to us? It is to Christ. It is to Christ and I trust it will become important to us and that we'll come to profess in our heart as well as we have sung with our voices this evening again, "I love thy kingdom, Lord, the church of thine abode. I love thy kingdom." And if I love it, if I love the body of the church that Christ has purchased, that Christ has redeemed, then how foolish it is for me to be arguing about this liberty that I have or this liberty....I don't have a liberty at all that Christ has not purchased for me. You don't have a liberty at all that Christ has not purchased and therefore you must submit to him for his glory and for the good of his body. May God help us and may God establish us and may God cause his church to grow for his glory's sake. Amen.

Let's pray.

*Our gracious God and loving heavenly Father, we pray, Lord, that the word of God would be indeed our sole rule for faith and practice. We pray, Lord, that we would submit ourselves to it and that we, Lord, in our desire to glorify God and our desire to see the lost saved, in our desire, Lord, to see each of us built up in the faith, that we would be willing, happily willing, to set aside any particular practice or whatever that would jeopardize the whole. Lord, apply your word by your Spirit, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*