

## CONFESSION OF FAITH.

### CHAPTER 30.-Of Church Censures.

II. To these Officers, the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven are committed: by vertue whereof, they have power, respectively, to retain, and remit sins; to shut that Kingdom against the impenitent, both by the Word, and Censures; and to open it unto penitent sinners, by the Ministry of the Gospel, and by Absolution from Censures, as occasion shall require<sup>1</sup>.

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Question 1.—*Has the Lord Jesus, committed the keys of the kingdom of heaven to these officers?*

*Answer.*—Yes. Matt. 16:19. Thus do the Independents, Brownists, and Anabaptists err, who maintain, that the right and power of governing the church, belongs no less to the multitude and community of believers, than to the officers of the church. They are confuted by the following reasons: 1.) Because the Scripture expressly teaches, that God has committed the government of his church, and the care of his people to certain chosen persons, and not to all and every one, Eph. 4:11-13; 1 Cor. 12:28. 2.) Because if the power of the keys were given to believers in common, either they are given to them as believers, or as they are gifted by God with gifts and qualifications above others, for governing the church, and chosen out of the rest, for performing that office, *cf.* Rom. 12:6-8. If the last is affirmed, it follows that the power and right of the keys is committed not to a community of believers, but to some select persons; which we own and maintain, but the Independents deny; 1 Cor. 12:29. If the first is asserted, then it follows first, that the care of governing the church is committed to women and children, being believers; and so they must necessarily have the power of seeing, as being eyes and watchmen to the church; the power of hearing, as being the ears of the church; and the body of the church must be deformed, because the whole body is the eye, and the whole body is the ear, and whose many members are made one member, 1 Cor. 12:12-19. Second, it follows, that the power of the keys is not only given to all, but to believers only; but it is evident by the example of Judas, and other reprobates, that many in Christ's name have preached, who were not believers, Matt. 7:22, 23; Phil. 1:16-18. 3.) Because to whom Christ has given the power of governing the church, to them also he has promised to give gifts and endowments largely for performing that office, John 20:21-23; 1 Cor. 4:6, 7; Matt. 28:19, 20. But to a community of believers, God has never promised a spirit for ministry, nor gifts for that employment; nor did he ever bestow or confer any such endowments. 4.) Because Christ our Mediator appointed ecclesiastical officers and church governors, before there was ever a formal church under the New Testament gathered and set up, Luke 9:1; 10:1-3; John 20:21-23; Matt. 28:16, 20. This was all done before his death. And before his ascension he did the like, Eph. 4:8, 11, 12; Acts 1:2; 1 Cor. 12:28. Now it is evident, that there was no formal gathering of a church before the feast of Pentecost, Acts 2. Ecclesiastical ministers and officers were appointed for calling in, and gathering together the mystical body of Christ—his members. Therefore it was needful, that

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<sup>1</sup> Matt. 16:19; 18:17, 18; John 20:20-23; 2 Cor. 2:6-8.

ministers baptizing, ought to be before persons baptized, Matt. 28:19; that gatherers of the church, ought to be before persons gathered; that callers and inviters to Christ, ought to be before persons called and invited, Rom. 10:14. 5.) This democracy or popular government, cannot but bring in great confusion, whence many absurdities will follow. As the church of God should be an organical body; that women who are forbidden to speak in the church, must have the keys of the kingdom; all must govern, and none must be governed; all must attend the government of the church, 1 Cor 14:34; all must be rendered incapable for going about their particular callings, which God calls them to every day. Therefore, seeing this sort of government brings so much confusion with it, it is most probable that it is not of God, who is a God of order, and not of confusion, 1 Cor. 14:33.

Question 2.—*Do these officers, by virtue of these keys, have power, respectively, to retain, and remit sins; to shut that kingdom against the impenitent, by the Word; and to open it unto penitent sinners, by the ministry of the Gospel, as occasion shall require?*

Answer.—Yes. Matt. 18:17, 18. Thus do the Socinians, Anabaptists, Quakers and many Independents, and others err, who maintain, that the key of doctrine, or the public preaching of the Word, is proper to any man furnished with suitable gifts, though not called and sent to this employment. They are confuted for the following reasons: 1.) Because no man can believe in Christ of whom he has not heard, and how shall he hear without a preacher, and how shall he preach unless he be sent?, Rom. 10:14, 15. 2.) Because women may have suitable and competent gifts of preaching, and yet they are forbidden to speak in the church, 1 Tim. 2:12. 3.) Because the Scripture blames such as have run, and yet have not been sent, Jer. 23:21, 32. 4.) Because no man taketh this honour to himself (that is, he ought not to take it) but he that is called of God, as was Aaron, Heb. 5:4. 5.) Because the Scripture mentions, that God has set apart certain peculiar ministers, for the preaching of the Word, Rom. 1:1; Eph. 4:11; Tit. 1:3. 6.) Because he that takes upon him this office, without a call, he usurps authority in the church, seeing preaching is an act of authority, 1 Thess. 5:12.

Question 3.—*Do these officers, by virtue of these keys, have power, respectively, to retain, and remit sins; to shut that kingdom against the impenitent, by censures; and to open it unto penitent sinners, by absolution from censures, as occasion shall require?*

Answer.—Yes. John 20:20-23; 2 Cor. 2:6-8. Thus do the Erastians and many of the Sectarians err, who maintain, that the key of discipline is removed to the hands of the magistrate. They do also err who deny this key of discipline in the church at all. They are confuted for the following reasons: 1.) Christ has given to his officers the keys of the kingdom, among which one is evidently discipline, Matt. 16:19; 18:17, 18. 2.) The apostle Paul commands the church (through her officers, as we have seen) to reprove the works of darkness, Eph. 5:11. 3.) The same apostle also supposes that this disciplinary judging was being implemented, 1 Cor. 5:12; 1 Tim. 5:20. 4.) Scripture commands the church (again, through her officers) to condemn and remove those infected with heresy or wickedness, who having been reprov'd, remain steadfast in their iniquity, Tit. 3:10; 1 Cor. 5:11; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14. 5.) Elsewhere, Scripture commands those who would be accounted faithful, to submit to the just judgments of church rulers, Heb. 13:17; 1 Thess. 5:12. 6.) One end of discipline is to restore such an one as has offended, Tit. 1:13; 1 Cor. 5:5. 7.) Church officers are to receive and restore an offender, even an excommunicated person, upon evident marks of humiliation, repentance and reformation, for a sufficient length of time to satisfy the church that his habits of virtue are confirmed, 2 Cor. 2:6-8.