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Church Discipline, Part 2

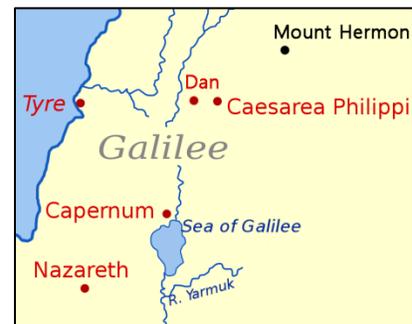
Church discipline is a very important pastoral tool that God has given to the body of Christ. When God created this world, He established a kingdom over which He deigned to rule with man! Yet Satan being jealous of God led a coup against this kingdom. Since Satan could not attack God directly, the devil attacked 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 (cf. Hebrews 2:15)!

Yet in His grace and mercy, God initiated a counter-attack and so 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 His people back to Himself (cf. Genesis 3:15).

As such, today there are two and only 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 God's children! These two kingdoms remain in conflict with the gates of hell being 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. And with the church being the special focus of attack by Satan and his followers. In fact, in Revelation 12 we read of Satan's hatred of Christ and so the devil's desire to kill the Lord (vv. 4-5). Yet 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 people of God, the body of Christ, the church] 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."

This battle rages on today! And that brings us to the "Keys of the Kingdom" of God. These keys given to the leadership of a true church for the preservation and protection of the people of God. As we've seen, the passage is Matthew 16.



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

Caesarea Philippi was/is located on a beautiful plateau near the headwaters of the Jordan River. A few miles to the north, Mount Hermon rises 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 and Nazareth.

The city 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 This location offered Jesus and the disciples welcome relief from the hot Galilean lowlands, the pressure of the Jewish leaders, and the threat of Herod Antipas (who sought to kill Jesus because the governor felt threatened by Him [Luke 13:31]).

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 as to the Kingdom of God: its nature, purpose, and place in this world. Now He turned to them directly and asked THE question

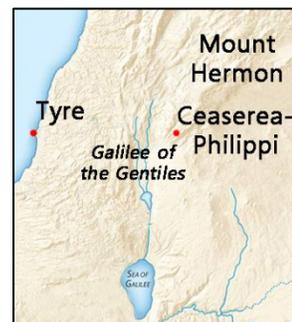
of time and eternity: Who is the Son of Man? Who am I?

This is a seminal question as entrance into the Kingdom of God is NOT by birth! RATHER, it begins with a proper valuation of Jesus and then our trust and submission to Him! In other words, take Buddha out of Buddhism and do you know what you get? Buddhism. Take Mohamed out of Islam, do you know what you have? Islam. But take Christ out of Christianity and the entire system falls. There is no Christianity, no Kingdom of God, no salvation without the Lord Jesus Christ. As such, who He is and what He did is of utmost importance! Now when it came to the general population of Palestine, 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 at this point was leading the disciples to a very important consideration. Accordingly, to Christ’s question the disciples responded with three answers:

1. “Some say John the Baptist...” When Herod the tetrarch first heard of Christ, the governor thought that Jesus was John the Baptist resurrected (which is why he sought to kill Jesus)! Herod married his brother’s wife. This drew public criticism from John the Baptist (cf. Matthew 14:4; Mark 6:17-18; Luke 3:19). As such, Herod had John executed (cf. Matthew 14:6-12). That is why when the Roman governor heard of Christ and His miracles, 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 was John the Baptist resurrected! What else could explain Christ’s miraculous powers!
2. “Others [said] Elijah...” Malachi 4:5 predicted that Elijah would appear prior to the coming of the Messiah. Yet we know from Luke 1:17 that the intent of the prophecy of Malachi was that of an “Elijah-figure”- which was in fact the ministry and work of John the Baptist (cf. Matthew 11:10). Yet the people did not understand this such that many thought that Jesus was the fulfillment of Malachi’s prophecy and so Elijah!
3. “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. As such, many believed that prior to the coming of the Messiah, Jeremiah would return 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 to the Messiah! Accordingly, many thought of Jesus as Jeremiah!

Such were the thoughts and misconceptions of the masses. With this, Christ turned to His disciples directly and posed THE most important question they could ever consider:

Matthew 16:15, "He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?'"

From Mark 8:27 we learn that the group had not yet arrived in the city of Caesarea Philippi proper, but instead 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 caravans from three continents passed. It was at this crossroads of heathenism and Judaism that Jesus confronted His disciples with the question that every person someday will be forced to answer: Who is the Christ?

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, 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 is what was in the mind of the disciples when first they identified Jesus as the Messiah.² Accordingly for Peter to answer so strongly that Jesus was/is "the Christ, the son of the living God" we know that this response only could have come from God! He confessed two things here:

Matthew 16:16b, "...thou art the Christ."

The word for "Christ" in the Greek is the word for "anointed one" or "messiah." Peter once again is confessing Jesus as the Messiah. Yet his understanding went beyond what the disciples confessed a couple of years back. Notice the second truth that he confessed this:

Matthew 16:16c, "...the Son of the living God."

This title conveyed the identity of Jesus as nothing less than God Incarnate! Jesus NOT ONLY is the Messiah, BUT He is God in the flesh! 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:

1. The Messiah- the one promised in Genesis 3:15 who would deal Satan a death-blow and so deliver God's people from their sin by dying on the cross in their place.
2. God- the one and only one who could fulfill the covenant of works.³

This is what Peter confessed,⁴ and this is the basis upon which the Kingdom of God rests! And this is 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."

This verse is THE key verse upon which the papacy in Rome rests. The Roman Catholic Church takes this verse to mean 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, once again, it is wrong. The text doesn't say what Rome teaches!

First notice that there are two different words being used in this verse. The first word is the word for "Peter" is πέτρος (*petros*) which means a small stone. The word for "rock" is πέτρα (*petra*) 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?

Notice that Christ is using a pun, or a play on words 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 the pun. A pun in Hebrew takes two similar words and uses them to reinforce a truth.

Genesis 2:7, "Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground..."

We actually read, "Then the Lord God formed אָדָם (*adam*) of dust from the אֲדָמָה (*adamah*)..."

Mark 4:26, "The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil."

This verse reads, "The kingdom of God is like אָדָם (*adam*) who זָרָה (*zarah*) זָרַע (*zera*) upon the אֲדָמָה (*adamah*)."

This is what Christ is doing in Matthew 16. He utilizes the Hebrew pun in order to convey an important message to His people.

Matthew 16:18a, “And I also say to you that you are Peter [πέτρος (*petros*)], and upon this rock [πέτρα (*petra*)- which on account of the pun was intended to be distinct from Peter] I will build My church...”

Based on this we ask, on what would Christ build His church? In the context, the only possible “rock” upon which Christ would build His church is the confession Peter just made: *that Jesus is both God and the Messiah!* This is “the rock” upon which Christ would build His church! And not surprisingly, that is “the rock” that Satan would attack when it came to the church. Revelation 12 details Satan’s attack against the church. Notice what a faithful church does and so this becomes the objective of Satan’s attack.

Revelation 12:17, “[They]...hold to the testimony of Jesus.”

In light of this, Satan attacks the church by attacking “the testimony of Jesus”! We see it in action in 1 John 2.

1 John 2:22, “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.”

With all of this in mind, consider with me the keys that Christ granted the church in order to protect and preserve its own.

Matthew 16:19a, “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven...”

In Bible times “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 on their behalf.

Now Christ has been speaking about the building of His church. To this church, specifically its leadership by virtue of the term “key,” Christ gave authority. What is this authority First let’s identify what it is NOT. It is NOT executive or legislative that is, the authority to:

a. Forgive sin.

b. Condemn to hell.

OR

c. Write/declare scripture.

} **NOT**
Executive
or
Legislative

These things are the exclusive prerogative of God!

RATHER, the authority is administrative⁵ and so DECLARATIVE. In other words the leaders of a particular church have the authority/power to include or exclude people from the visible body of Christ. We see it as Christ continued.

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 "binding" and "loosing" here have reference to a person's standing in the *VISIBLE* body of Christ, the *VISIBLE* church, the *VISIBLE* Kingdom of God. 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.

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

1 John 5:18b, "...He who was born of God keeps [the believer] and the evil one does not touch him."⁶

From these passages we see that 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. [At this point, Christ repeats the exhortation He gave in Matthew 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 relation to the visible body of Christ and so the Kingdom of 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."

Again, that doesn't mean that the sinning Christian has lost their salvation (if he was a genuine believer); that is impossible. Rather, it means that they have lost the blessings of being a member of a covenant community: one of the blessings being protection!

From all of this we conclude that the "keys of the Kingdom" given to the church leadership are: First, administrative and so declarative- they are NOT legislative as if the church had the authority to give salvation or take salvation from an individual. Rather, they are the authority to admit and dismiss from the visible body of Christ. Second, they constitute an important pastoral tool given to the shepherds of a church for the benefit of the believer unto the glory of God. Finally, they involve the literal handing of a citizen of the Kingdom of God over to Satan, "...for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (1 Corinthians 5:5b)!

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 and arrogance. In Ezekiel's day rather than care for the people of God, the leaders were caring for themselves:

Ezekiel 34:4, "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..."

From this we must see that 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 according to this calling, the charge is arrogance — for we are living as if we know better than God!

Today the church is so guilty of this before God! Rather than minister to each other according to God's command (for that seems harsh), we opt for inactivity, thinking that we'll draw them back with love — as if inactivity is love. And we trust God to bring them back without our involvement. Or we go in the opposite direction, we shun them.

Family of God, do you understand that God has given us very specific instruction on how to deal with an unrepentant brother or sinner? To 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).

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!

Now, we are going to look at the reasons behind God's choice of this pastoral tool. For now, 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! And so let us involve ourselves in each other's lives!

End Note(s)

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

² So also, John the Baptist, Matthew 11:2-3!

³ 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!

⁴ 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.

⁵ cf. Isaiah 22:22.

⁶ It is on account of this that Satan must get permission from God to attack a Christian. Recall Luke 22:31-32a and Christ's words, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat..."