

Understanding the Congregation's Authority

by Jonathan Leeman

Chapters 3: Focus on the big picture: How did your job become yours.

Chapters 4: Focus on the specifics: What is your job. How & when do you do it?

Chapter 4

Now Jesus Gives the Job to Your Church (Part 1)

Introduction (p. 29)

Church membership makes your priest-king job assignment public and practical.

“Protestants love to talk about the great commission in Matthew 28. But there are two other chapters in Matthew that they don’t talk so much about, yet are crucial for rightly understanding the work of the church. Those are Matthew 16 and 18, where Jesus teaches about something called ‘the keys of the kingdom.’ The thing is, Matthew 16 and 18 are the only places that Jesus ever uses the word *church*, which tells me we should pay closer attention to those chapters than we usually do. Not only so, but those two chapters are actually crucial for understanding Matthew 28 rightly because the same themes surface in chapters 16, 18, and 28.”

(p. 30) “The four questions this chapter attempts to answer are:

- What authority does Jesus give to a congregation?
- What exactly is a church?
- How does the church exercise authority?
- When does the church exercise its authority?

By answering those questions, we will get a better grip on the nature of your job and how you show up for work.”

What Authority Does Jesus Give to a Congregation?

Read Matthew 16:13–19

What does Jesus mean by the phrase, “this rock?”

What do you think the “keys of the kingdom” are? What is being bound or loosed? Why did Jesus give them to Peter?

Can you see how the idea of apostolic succession could be derived from this text? What is wrong with such an interpretation? (Cf. v. 21ff; Galatians 2:14; 1:8)

This is the only passage that uses the phrase, “keys of the kingdom, but is there another place that speaks of “binding” and “loosing?”

Read Matthew 18:15–20

Who is doing the “binding” and “loosing” in this text?

What does the binding and loosing refer to here?

(p. 32) “The gathered church has authority because Jesus gave it the keys of the kingdom. Not the Pope. Not the elders. Not the general assembly. None of these characters show up in Matthew 18, and nowhere else in the New Testament are such groups connected to the keys.

...what does it mean to say that churches possess the authority of the keys to bind or loose? ...It means that churches can exercise the same authority that Jesus exercised with Peter in chapter 16, or that the local church exercises in chapter 18: the authority to stand in front of a gospel confessor, to consider his or her gospel confession and life, and to announce an official judgment on heaven’s behalf: ‘That is/isn’t a right gospel confession’ and ‘That is/isn’t a true gospel confessor.’ Exercising the keys is rendering judgment on a ***gospel what*** add a ***gospel who***, a confession and a confessor.”

What Is the Authority of the Keys?

It is the authority to pronounce Heaven’s judgment on the *what* and *who* of the gospel—confessions and confessors. More concretely, it is the authority to write and affirm statements of faith and to add or remove names in the church membership directory.

Does everyone understand the authority of the keys? Do you agree with his conclusion?

(p. 33) “...key-wielding churches...don’t make the gospel what it is. They don’t make the person a Christian or not. Rather, they listen to what the Christian is confessing; they consider the confessors life, and they render a judgment on heaven’s behalf. They make a public announcement with the ‘Bam!’ of a gavel: ‘Member of the church’ or ‘Not a member.’”

“...the keys make membership in the new covenant and citizenship in Christ’s kingdom ‘visible.’ Think about it: the nation of Israel could be publicly identified among the peoples of the earth by circumcision, Sabbath-keeping, and eventually a land. Israel was visible. But membership in the Spirit-given, Christ-won new

covenant and kingdom is invisible. How do you make membership visible? How does it 'go public' so that the peoples of the earth know who belongs and who doesn't? And how do we Christians know who 'we' are? Answer: gatherings of Christians employed the keys of the kingdom for binding and loosing."

Does this help you better understand the role of the church exercising the keys?

Where Are the Keys Exercised? (p.34; Short answer: in the Church)

"Having said all that, it can feel like the church sort of just shows up in these verses. What exactly is the church? Does Jesus define it anywhere?

In fact he does—in Matthew 18:20: 'For where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am they're among them.' "

What Is Church Membership?

A covenant between believers whereby they affirm one another's professions of faith through the ordinances and agree to oversee one another's discipleship to Christ.

Read Deuteronomy 19:15

How do the witnesses function in this context?

(p. 35) "But now Jesus takes that old law and applies it to a new situation. These two or three gathered to testify to Jesus name: 'where two or three are gathered in My name.' But by testifying to Jesus name, they have to testify to their agreement with each other. Like this:

Person 1: 'Hey, you just said you believed in Jesus. I do too!'

Person 2: 'That's great. But wait a second. Are we talking about the same Jesus? I mean, I'm talking about the Mormon Jesus for the Jehovah's Witness Jesus or that he's-just-a-great-teacher Jesus.'

Person 1: 'That's exactly who I'm talking about!'

Person 2: 'Great, let's regularly gathered in his name to proclaim it.'

Person 3: 'Hey guys, I've been listening to you talk. Can I join you? This is the same Jesus who redeemed me to.'

Persons 1 and 2: 'Wonderful!' "

"Jesus then seals the covenant by saying he is 'there among them.' That doesn't mean he hovers in the room like some mystical fog. No, it means he identifies his person and authority with those people, just like God did with the people of Israel through the temple. ... The context, remember, is exercising the keys and speaking on behalf of heaven. These two or three become...drumroll, please...a church! And

as a church, they are licensed to exercise the keys and officially speak on Heaven's behalf."

(p. 36) "So what exactly is a church? ... A church is a group of Christians who, with the authority of Christ's keys, covenant together as Christ followers and fellow citizens of his kingdom by gathering together to proclaim his name."

Have you ever thought about the church this way? How does this change the way you think about church membership?

How is this related to our identity as priest-kings?

How Does the Church Exercise Its Authority?

The Church in Motion

When Should the Church Exercise Its Authority?

The Epic Story

Prayer:

- ❖ Forgive us for the, often, lax way we have approached our corporate duties
- ❖ Moving forward may we be diligent stewards of this God-given authority