

# Understanding the Congregation's Authority

## by Jonathan Leeman

### Chapter 4

### Now Jesus Gives the Job to Your Church (Part 3)

#### Review

#### *Introduction* (p. 29)

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

(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?”

#### **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.

**How Does the Church Exercise Its Authority?** (Matthew 28:18–20; 1 Corinthians 10:16–18 & 1 Corinthians 11:20–34)

(p. 38) “If baptism is our inaugurating ceremony into the church, the Lord's Supper is the ongoing ceremony. One is the doorway, the other is the regular family meal. And both proclaim to the nations *who* the people of Christ are.”

**The Church in Motion** (1 Corinthians 5:3–5; 2 Corinthians 2:6–8)

#### **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.

## New Material

**When Should the Church Exercise Its Authority?** (not time but occasion)  
“Only one question is left in this chapter: when does the church exercise its authority? Surely Jesus did not give churches the keys of the kingdom so that they would bother themselves with photocopier purchases or curtain colors!”

### When Should the Congregation Vote?

1) In receiving, dismissing, or disciplining members. 2) In selecting elders and deacons. 3) In anything else that significantly impacts the integrity and viability of the church as a gospel ministry.

“...the Bible says nothing about church budgets, but insofar as a church’s budget shapes the nature of gospel ministry in a time and place, it may be wise to obtain approval from the church on an annual budget.

To some extent, context will impact which decisions the whole church must make. A fifty-member church with a \$ 100,000 budget may recognize that purchasing a \$ 20,000 church van will impact its ability to pay a pastor and therefore the durability of their gospel ministry. A church with a \$ 4 million budget will not feel this pressure. One church might want to vote on the van, while the other would leave it to the leaders.”

### Steve

In view of this teaching, which things should be voted upon at RBC?

- The church driveway
- New members
- Who should serve as a deaconess
- New church cushions
- Hiring of a church secretary
- Making a change to our statement of faith

### The Epic Story

“We can now put chapter 3’s story line together with our elevator ride proof texts, having just unpacked them. Do you see the epic story?

God created you like Adam to be a priest-king, mediating God’s own rule through your rule over creation. Yet like Adam you rebelled and cast off God’s rule. Salvation came when Christ united you to the new covenant in his blood and granted you his Spirit. You were born again. You repented of your self-rule and followed the second Adam, the King and High Priest Jesus, putting your trust in his perfect life, sin-paying death, and death-defeating resurrection. Jeremiah’s promise now applied to you: “No longer will one teach his neighbor or his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they will all know Me, from the least to the greatest.”

In order to be visibly recognized as a follower of Christ and a citizen of his kingdom, you submitted yourself to baptism in a local church, because Jesus has granted such covenanted gatherings of believers the authority to represent heaven's rule on earth. They baptized you into his name, united you to themselves, and publicly re-installed you into Adam's office of priest-king. You therefore joined them in the work of affirming heaven's rule on earth and keeping the temple consecrated to the Lord, which means pronouncing together with the church, "This is a true confession" and "These are true confessors."

You remain accountable to Christ and his people on an ongoing basis through participating regularly in the Lord's Supper, which both declares Christ's death and affirms your membership in the one body, the church. To that end you "examine yourself" while also "recognizing the body" because you know that your job, like a priest, is to protect the line between holy and unholy (1 Cor. 11: 28– 29; also 2 Cor. 6: 14— 7: 1).

Your membership in the church and participation in the Supper means that, outside the gathering, you wear his Name and that everything you do speaks of him. Like a king, furthermore, you want to conquer territory and bring all things under the rule of God. So you strive to make and build up disciples, living out the gospel in word and deed among fellow believers and unbelieving neighbors.

Such is the life of a priest-king. Such is the work of a church member."

## Questions?

### CHURCH COVENANT:

Having been led by the Spirit of God, I have received Jesus Christ as my Savior and Lord (John 1:12). I have been born again through the Holy Spirit (John 3:6,7; 1:13) and have publicly confessed my faith by word and in baptism (Romans 10:8-10, 6:3-5). I subscribe to the Articles of Faith of my church and do now with other members of Rehoboth Baptist Church commit myself as a member of this local expression of the body of Christ to:

Walk lovingly (John 13:34,35) and humbly with my brethren (1 Peter 5:6; Romans 12:3), pray for them (James 5:16), and separate myself from such practices that would be detrimental to the church, my Christian character, and to my brethren (Titus 2:12; 1 Corinthians 8:1-9, 9:23).

Pray for the advancement of the church in spiritual knowledge and fruitfulness (John 15:8,16).

Support its ministries of worship, training and teaching, faithfully observe its ordinances (Matthew 28:19,20; 1 Corinthians 11:24-27), and affirm its teachings (1 Peter 3:15; Jude 3).

Give regularly and cheerfully to the church as God prospers for the support of its ministries (2 Corinthians 9:6,7; 1 Corinthians 16:2), for the relief of the needy (Proverbs 19:17), and for the spread of the Gospel both here in Rehoboth and over all the earth (Matthew 28:19,20).

Serve faithfully in a ministry of the church according to my spiritual gifts and abilities (Romans 12:4-8; James 1:22-24; 2:18) taking care to assume only such duties as can be effectively performed (1 Corinthians 4:2), and to improve my service by prayerful study of God's Word (2 Timothy 2:15).

Maintain family worship, training and discipline in my home and encourage family prayer, Bible study and spiritual growth for any under my care (Ephesians 6:1-4; Proverbs 22:6).

Endeavor by my example (Matthew 5:16), effort and word (1 Peter 3:15) to point people to Christ, and help them to mature in the faith (Matthew 28:19,20; Ephesians 4:11-16; Colossians 1:28).

Follow the Bible as my rule of faith and practice in every area of life (2 Timothy 3:16,17; Romans 12:4-16; Ephesians 4:11-16).

Has this study changed how you look at church membership?

How can you begin to help spread this understanding throughout the members here at RBC?

## Chapter 5

### Your Pastors Train You for Your Job

#### Prayer:

❖ Help us be true to the covenant bond with Jesus and one another