

## ***The Doctrine of the Church (The Keys of the Kingdom)***

Derek Berry  
Calvary Baptist Church  
March 19, 2023

*[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was initially intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions, please contact Pastor Derek at [Derek.berry1990@gmail.com](mailto:Derek.berry1990@gmail.com).*

Are there any older siblings here this morning? For those who just raised their hands, know that from this day forward, I may never treat you the same. If you haven't guessed, I have one brother, and I'm the younger one. I'll be honest; I used to hate when my mom would leave my older brother in charge when she left for work. I don't know if she realized it, but she was basically giving him her authority in her place. That's not to say there wasn't a distinction between herself and my brother because there absolutely was. However, in a sense, she was saying, "in my absence, your older brother will be able to make authoritative decisions on my behalf." Never did I hate being the younger brother more than in those moments. Nevertheless, I have two daughters myself now, and I understand it. I also realize there is a weightiness to holding such authority for someone ultimately in charge. My oldest, Neriah, will be in trouble if there are any issues because she's in charge. So even though older siblings often misuse their authority (you know who you are) or fail to grasp the weight of the task at hand, they're nevertheless tasked by their parents. The best situation would be for them to fully grasp the gravity of the situation so that they can flex their authoritative muscles in a way that will keep their younger siblings safe.

The local church has been tasked with representing the Lord Jesus on earth. During his earthly ministry, he authorized local churches to be in charge after he ascended unto heaven to be with his Father. He did this by giving us the *keys of the kingdom*. And as a local church, we'll have to give an account of how we represented our elder brother while here on earth. My goal in this sermon is to indeed press upon you the sacred responsibility we have as a local church to utilize the keys of the kingdom in a way that will honor God and represent Jesus accurately.

Let's go through a quick recap of what we considered two weeks ago. As I previously stated, each week will build on one another, and the same themes will be revisited almost weekly. In the first message of this series, we looked at the definition of a local church. Consequently, we considered how a local church differs from a voluntary meeting of Christians at a Chick-Fila to study the Bible. Here's a definition that I worked on this past week. *A local church is a group of baptized believers who have covenanted with one another and regularly assemble to disciple one another through preaching the Word and observing the ordinances.* So the local church regularly gathers, yet, attendance at a Bible Study is voluntary. Members within a church are responsible for one another's discipleship; in contrast, Bible study attendees are not. A local church meets to represent Jesus and is thereby endowed with his authority, while Bible study attendees do not, and it's only within the context of a local church should the ordinances be observed.

We ended the first message with the idea of church membership. What is church membership? It's a formal relationship between a Christian and a local church characterized by the church's affirmation and responsibility to disciple said member.

I'd recommend you watch the sermon from a couple of weeks ago, or read the transcript, in case you missed it. In the following three sermons, we'll consider the role of a church member. What does the Bible say is required of church members? Lord willing, you'll discover that as a church member, you have a job to do. We'll consider four job responsibilities tethered to membership:

1. Affirm gospel citizens.
2. Protect the gospel.
3. Disciple other members.
4. Share the gospel with outsiders.

This morning we'll consider the first responsibility, affirm gospel citizens. To do so, we need to discuss church polity. What is polity? Polity has to do with the governmental structure of the church. It seeks to answer the question, "Who is the highest court of appeals on certain matters within the church?" Historically, Baptists have been congregational in their polity. That's one of the distinctions that's set us apart. Unfortunately, that's become less of the case in modern Baptist churches. But what does it mean to be congregational?

I was discussing the issue of ecclesiology, specifically polity, with a pastor friend in town earlier this week. He said, "I must tell you upfront that I'm an elder rule guy." I asked him what he does with Matthew 18 as someone subscribing to an elder-rule form of polity. In his answer, he stressed the importance of elders and shepherds in the Scriptures from both the Old and New Testaments. He thought that the congregational view led to an abdication of the pastor's responsibilities. So, I asked him, "how are you defining congregationalism?" He said, "it's when a church votes on every single decision they make." But is that an accurate view of biblical congregationalism? Does the Bible command local churches to vote on every single decision?

Perhaps you're here this morning, and that's how you'd describe congregationalism. I'll tell you, as I told my friend, that is not an accurate description of congregationalism. Unfortunately, many Baptist churches choose this form of government not because of a genuine conviction from Scripture but rather because of the western democratic society they live in. So, in my experience, many churches have their polity correct due to chance, as opposed to a deep dive within the Scriptures. I told my pastor friend, "if congregationalism is voting on every single issue, I'd have the same problem with it that you have." This type of governing doesn't leave room for the pastor/elders to do their job of leading a congregation. In a subsequent message, we'll consider the role pastors/elders play within a local church. Just remember the phrase "elder-led congregationalism." I believe this is the most faithful modeling of what the Scriptures have to say about how we should function within the local church.

So, what is a biblical understanding of congregationalism? It's the declaration that the local church has the final authority to affirm and deny members and to place and remove leaders. And congregationalism is far more than just a form of church polity; it's actually a tool for discipleship. That's the thesis. Members have the responsibility to affirm gospel citizens. We'll

spend the rest of our time proving this point from Scripture and considering the practical implications of these truths in our everyday lives.

Let's start by considering a Biblical Theology of the kingly priest role God assigned to his people in Scripture. If you were here a few weeks ago for the Sabbath sermon, you'd know that Biblical Theology is tracing a theme from the Old Testament to the New to see how the theme develops and climaxes in the gospel message. We went on that journey for the Sabbath, and now we'll see how we land on congregationalism by a covenantal trajectory.

We start with Adam. Luke 3:38 refers to Adam as the son of God, and so he was. And like any father, God wanted his son to get a job. Henceforth he assigned him the task of working and watching over the first temple, the Garden of Eden. This opens another can of worms concerning a biblical theology of God's temple. Suffice it to say that a temple is where God meets with man. Therefore, the garden of Eden is the first temple we see in Scripture. Sons in the ancient near east would follow in their fathers' footsteps vocationally, and so does Adam. As God created, subdued, and ruled from the heavens, Adam was to create, subdue and rule on earth in his kingly office.

*<sup>28</sup> And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." -Genesis 1:28*

But he also operates in the office of a priest.

*<sup>15</sup> The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. -Genesis 2:15*

Interestingly, the word for "work" here is the same Hebrew word that Israel's priests were given regarding their responsibilities in the tabernacle/temple. So Adam's job as a priest-king was to watch over and work the temple, all while pushing the garden's borders until it covered all of the earth. This would have been accomplished through procreation and obedience to God's Word. In other words, Adam was to guard the temple against any intruders, such as a lying serpent needing to be cast out, and name what belonged inside it, like dogs and horses. Affirm what should be in, loose whatever shouldn't be, and work the temple for the good of others; this was Adam's job as priest-king in the first temple.

And then the fall happened. Instead of Adam casting out the lying serpent; he allowed it to deceive his wife, so he lost his job. He had to pack his belongings and move out of the temple. Nine chapters later, God chooses one man to birth an entire nation. Abraham's descendants would multiply and be fruitful, and it was through his offspring that the nations of the earth would be blessed. That nation becomes Israel. The Bible also refers to Israel as God's son in Hosea 11:1. With this nation, God separates the office of priest-king into two. There will no longer be one individual who acts as priest-king as Adam was commissioned. In Israel, God distinguished and highlighted the significance of each office. The priests were tasked with working the temple, the same Hebrew word used for Adam working the garden. They were to teach the law and declare what was clean and unclean. The kings ruled as God's representatives,

establishing equity in the land for the good of all covenant people of God. Hopefully, you're seeing how this concept of priest-king is developing in the Old Testament Scriptures.

Unfortunately, these priests and kings didn't fare much better than God's original son, Adam. Whereas Adam failed in one day, Israel's failure would stretch over centuries. And then we have the Lord Jesus, who fulfills Adam's office of priest-king. I like what Gregory Beale writes, "Christ came to subdue and rule, to multiply and create and to fill, and to rest in the way that God originally intended that humanity should have done in the first place."

He did this through his life, death, and resurrection. In his life, we see complete dominion over all creation anticipated as he tames wild animals, binds the satanic strong man, walks in the miraculous, and perfectly submits to his Father. We see this in his atoning death, which produces offspring of promise by receiving the wrath they deserve. Therefore, he's indeed fruitful and multiplying the Father's children. And in his resurrection, he anticipates the day when he will bodily resurrect all his people to dwell on a new heavens and new earth. This is the gospel message! Jesus is the perfect king who represents his God and rules for the good of others, and the perfect priest who works the new temple, the church.

And now, the local church has been re-commissioned in Adam's office as priest-kings due to her oneness with Christ. The church receives perfect Adamic sonship through Christ. This is why Greg Beale views the Great Commission of Matthew 28 as a renewal of the first Great Commission of Genesis 1:26-28. Just as Adam was tasked with pushing back the borders of the garden by filling the earth with God's image bearers, the church is to push back the boundaries of the church, so to speak, by making disciples and filling the world with image bearers of Christ. Local churches fulfill this command by operating as the priest-king, which has now been given to every believer.

*<sup>9</sup> But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. -1 Peter 2:9*

It's no longer a particular class of individuals but a priesthood of all believers. Therefore, every member is identified with God as his representative with the intent of "working" for gospel purposes while "watching over" the dwelling place of God, namely the church. And this is the heart of congregationalism. Any church polity that removes this responsibility from its members essentially releases believers from their God-given responsibility. Members of Calvary Baptist Church, you have a job to do, and I'm here that you may be equipped to do your job well. So congregationalism is not about voting on every matter. It's about picking up the role of priest-king that was lost by Adam but then restored in the Lord Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

So, if the role of the members of a local church, priest-kings, is to identify with God as his representative for the purpose of "working" for gospel commitments while "watching over" the dwelling place of God, namely the church, what does that mean practically? That's where the keys of the kingdom come into play.

---

<sup>1</sup> Concept of Congregationalism by "Covenantal Trajectory" taken from Jonathan Leeman's *Don't Fire Your Church Members*

The keys of the kingdom, or congregational polity, is the “watching over,” or declaring clean and unclean, work of the priest-king. We’ll consider what “working the temple” is next week. Turn with me to Matthew 16 as we examine the keys of the kingdom in the life of the local church. We’ll read this section in its entirety before dissecting it.

*<sup>13</sup> Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” <sup>14</sup> And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” <sup>15</sup> He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” <sup>16</sup> Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” <sup>17</sup> And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. <sup>18</sup> And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. <sup>19</sup> I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” <sup>20</sup> Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ. -Matthew 16:13-20*

So, notice that in these verses, Jesus asks the *who* question twice. But he seems to be interested in both the *who* and the *what*. What is the proper confession? And who of you knows it? Peter answers correctly, and Jesus says he’ll build his church on the rock.

For years, evangelicals have hesitated to go with the text's natural reading for fear of crediting the Roman Catholic argument that Peter is the first pope. You’ve probably heard it said that Jesus is referring to the confession here and not Peter himself. However, we can both reject this erroneous teaching by the Catholic Church and affirm the plain reading of this text. Jesus renames Simon as Peter (*Cephus*) and then refers to this “rock” (*Cepha*). Yet as Ed Clowney puts it, “We cannot separate Peter from his confession or the confession from Peter.” In other words, Jesus will build his church on this confessor confessing the right confession. He does this by giving Peter the keys of the kingdom. By the way, I think it can be argued that Peter is a representative of all the apostles here. So Jesus hands the keys of the kingdom to these apostles, who are authentic confessors with the proper confession.

What do these keys do? Usually, keys open and shut doors. However, Jesus speaks of binding and loosing here. So, what does it mean to bind and loose? The key to understanding this is found in Matthew 18. So, let’s turn to that text and discover how these two passages tie together.

*<sup>15</sup> “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. <sup>16</sup> But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. <sup>17</sup> 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 collector. <sup>18</sup> Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. <sup>19</sup> Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. <sup>20</sup> For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”*

So Jesus envisions three rounds in this process of church discipline. He draws from Deuteronomy 19 regarding the evidence of two or three witnesses. And then, we see that the final court of appeal is the local church. Remember, in the first message, we determined that the context of a passage will decide whether or not the word church is being used in a local or universal sense. Here we see Jesus referring to a local church. Notice there's no mention of pastors or elders here. This word for assembly (church) never means a sect of the church anywhere in the New Testament. So if an individual fails to listen to the church, they're to be treated as if they're not a part of the covenant community of God's people.

Take notice of verse 18. We've seen this before when referring to Peter and the Apostles, but now it's given to the local church as a whole. Therefore, the gathered church has the authority to remove someone from membership because it possesses the keys of the kingdom of binding and loosing. Not the pope. Not the elders. Not a general assembly. The local church has been given this authority. So what does this mean? The authority of the keys to bind and loose is the authority to pronounce heaven's judgment on the *what* and the *who* of the gospel-confessions and confessions.

Jesus models this with Peter. After Peter makes the correct confession, Jesus mentions that heaven has revealed this unto him. In other words, a credible confessor has just made the right confession. Jesus was making a heavenly pronouncement. And then he tells Peter that he'll do the same. And now, in Matthew 18, he gives this same authority to the church. Jesus gives the example of loosing or excommunicating someone from fellowship. And the opposite, binding, is bringing someone into membership. In other words, the local church states that this individual is living life in light of the gospel, right confessor. And also, this individual is confessing the correct gospel, the right confession. Therefore, we bind him into membership. Or, this person may have the right confession; however, their lives don't match; consequently, we refuse to bind, or we loose one who is already bound; an example is 1 Corinthians 5, which we'll consider soon. Or, this person's life may be in order, but they confess the wrong gospel; Galatians 1 is a good example.

Do you catch the weight of what Jesus is saying here? Let's reread verses 18-20 in chapter 18. To be clear, Jesus is not saying that the church makes someone a Christian. We don't have the power to determine someone's eternal standing before God. The work is comparable to a judge's and jury's work. They don't make anyone guilty or innocent. They interpret the law and the person and then pronounce a judgment based on both. The judge will pound the gavel and pronounce "guilty" or "not guilty." So it is with key-wielding churches. We don't make the gospel what it is, and we don't create Christians. We do, however, judge the confession and life of an individual and render a judgment on behalf of heaven. Jesus has given the church the authority to make judgments on behalf of heaven. Do you grasp the weight of this?

Imagine being invited to the White House to stand behind the podium in the press room. I think they allow tours and people to take pictures in that area. However, to actually stand behind the podium and speak on behalf of the President himself is a different category. He would have to authorize you to represent his mind. And imagine how high the stakes would be in this case. Well, there is an office higher than the president, and that's king Jesus, ruler of all! And he has authorized you church to represent him. We speak on his behalf when we vote in members and

remove them. I like what Jonathan Leeman says, “The keys are the institutional authority given by Christ to make membership in the new covenant and citizenship in Christ’s kingdom “visible.” It’s the institutional authority to make the new covenant membership and citizenship “go public.” It’s the authority to make sure the peoples of the earth know who belongs and who doesn’t, and for Christians themselves to know who “we” are.”

This is the priestly-king work of every Christian. Just as Adam was commissioned to name what belonged in the temple (garden) and what should have been outside it, we’re commissioned to do the same! This is why church membership is vital. God hasn’t designed it for you to declare yourself a Christian. You must join a gospel-preaching local church with authority to affirm your heavenly standing. With that in mind, let’s consider the Great Commission passage. Please turn with me to Matthew 28.

*<sup>18</sup> And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”-Matthew 28:18-20*

Christians often read this passage in isolation, but it should be read with Mathew 16 and 18 in mind. Remember that keys are a symbol of authority for binding and loosing on earth what’s bound and loose in heaven, and Jesus claims to possess all authority on earth and heaven. So, who has this authority? The church. So this commission should be in light of local churches. So those who gather in Christ’s name with keys in hand possess the authority to baptize in Jesus’ name. Therefore Matthew 28 shows how the authorized churches of Matthew 18 get to work. So this commission is given to local churches, not just individual Christians. Isn’t this stunning?! That Jesus has left the authority to represent him and heaven’s judgment in the hands of ordinary individuals like us?! I pray this rocks you to the core!

We see examples of the apostles wielding the keys in the New Testament (Acts 8:13-23, 1 Tim 1:20) and examples of the church wielding the keys, which we’ll consider a few examples now.

*It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father’s wife. <sup>2</sup> And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. <sup>3</sup> For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. <sup>4</sup> When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, <sup>5</sup> you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. -1 Corinthians 5:1-5*

Perhaps this individual was restored based on his second epistle.

*<sup>6</sup> For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, <sup>7</sup> so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. -2 Corinthians 2:6-7*

So we see the who of the gospel emphasized in these texts. However, Galatians 1 deals with the *what* of the gospel. Notice that this letter is written to the congregation and not the leaders.

*‘I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—<sup>7</sup> not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. <sup>8</sup> But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.’ As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. -Galatians 1:6-9*

This refers to not only members, which is implied, but also leaders. Therefore, if I begin to preach a different gospel, you, as the congregation, should be able to remove me.

Let’s end with some practical applications. What does this all mean for everyday church membership life? We’ll start here: when should the congregation use this authority? Call me crazy, but I don’t believe Jesus gives local churches representative authority to choose carpet colors. That’s not to say that a church can’t decide, “hey, we think it’s best if the church votes on these issues.” I think God gives us liberty on these issues. Voting on a church budget may serve as a good example. Scripture is silent regarding how budgets should be passed within local churches. Therefore, this is a matter of prudence. I believe it’s wise for a church to vote on an overall budget since the church’s money is being spent. This is an area of freedom. However how we operate must leave room for pastors/elders to be able to lead effectively without hindrances. We’ll consider this in more detail in a subsequent message.

But we can confidently say that the congregation should use this authority when voting individuals into membership. Guess what that means? Church, you’re responsible for getting to know prospective members seeking membership. Remember, when you cast a vote, you’re utilizing the kingdom’s keys and therefore represent heaven with your voice. Consequently, you must know the gospel. Churches that leave the responsibility of taking in members and removing them to the elders eradicate this God-given responsibility from the church. It ultimately allows the congregation to sit on the sideline while ministry occurs. Perish the thought! Church, you must know the gospel! Meaning you must study your Word! You must be able to identify a false gospel and a false convert. You must be aware of whom you vote into membership. So many have issues with congregationalism because regenerate church membership hasn’t been an emphasis. This is why the Old Covenant Israelites were so foul! And it’s my job as the pastor to prepare you for this ministry. This is why such an emphasis is placed on disciplining one another. Most of the ministry here will be done by you all.

This is also why membership classes and pastoral membership interviews will be necessary. So, whenever you have questions regarding a member candidate, you can ask them in a ministry meeting. So, when should the congregation use this authority? Voting members into membership and removing them. We’ll discuss ex-communication in greater detail in another sermon. Another practical application, it is your responsibility, church, to affirm gospel preachers as well. Galatians 1 clarifies that you must remove anyone who preaches a false gospel.



Another implication is that we must be aware of one another's spiritual state, leading us back to disciplining one another weekly. We can't utilize these keys if we're not having these spiritual conversations with one another. This is what I mean when I say the whole church has a job. And a final practical implication is our statement of faith. We need to have a clear statement of faith that communicates the essentials so that prospective members can upfront make clear that we believe the same gospel.

In summary, congregations should be involved/exercise their authority:

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

Church, we have a job to do. We have a king to represent. Let's do both well to the glory of our King Jesus.

Let's pray.