

What Are the Keys of the Kingdom?

Daniel 11:36; Matthew 16:19

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Lawful authority/government have become foul and nasty words in our culture (and even within the church). People cringe when they hear these words. Why? These words imply accountability and willing submission to those who are lawfully over us (beginning with God). We sinfully struggle with submission to lawful authority because we don't want anyone to tell us what we are to do. It is true that authority and government receive black eyes when they are abused by bullies who push others around to selfishly control them and to promote themselves.

But we must not allow the abuse of something good to define for us what is the lawful use of something good (food, water, family). Lawful authority/government are good because all lawful authority and government come from God. He has given us lawful government to bring order, peace, protection, righteousness, and hope for the future. However, these blessings will not be realized in our life, home, church, or nation apart from willing submission to God-ordained authority and government. For you see, chaos is the result of everyone doing what is right in his/her own eyes rather than what is right in God's eyes.

What does this have to do with our text in Matthew 16:19? It has everything to do with the exercise of the keys of the kingdom in Christ's Church—which is the exercise of Christ's government within His Church. The Church of Rome claims that the Papacy has a supreme authority to exercise the keys of the kingdom over the whole Universal Church throughout the world and even over rulers within nations. According to Vatican I (1869-1870), which the Church of Rome claims is infallible:

... all the faithful of Christ must believe that the Holy Apostolic See and the Roman Pontiff possesses primacy over the whole world, and that the Roman Pontiff is the successor of Blessed Peter, Prince of the Apostles, and is the true Vicar of Christ, and the Head of the whole Church, and Father and Teacher of all Christians; and that full power was given to him, in Blessed Peter, by Jesus Christ our Lord, to tend, to rule, and to govern the Universal Church; as is also contained in the acts of the General Councils and in the Sacred Canons.... This is the teaching of Catholic truth, from which no one can deviate without loss of faith and of salvation.

This gross heresy usurps the authority/office of Jesus Christ as the alone Head of His Church and is squeezed from the words of Jesus in our text.

There are three questions we seek to answer today: (1) What Are the Keys of the Kingdom? (2) To Whom Are the Keys of the Kingdom Given? (3) For Whose Benefit Are the Keys of the Kingdom Given?

I. What Are the Keys of the Kingdom (Matthew 16:19)?

A. Keys were used in ancient times as they are used today—to unlock or to lock a door.

1. The possession and use of keys also came to be used symbolically in Scripture for lawful authority to rule—he who had the keys had the lawful authority to open and close the doors to the house (Isaiah 22:20-22; Revelation 3:7). What was given to Eliakim in the house of David (Hezekiah) is applied to Jesus (the Son of David) over the Church.

2. The keys of the kingdom refer to the government Jesus has established over His own Church here upon earth. The reason Jesus can give the keys of the kingdom is because He lawfully possesses them as God's anointed King over His Kingdom/Church. He alone is the King of the Church, and He alone delegates that authority to His ministers.

3. Any use of the keys of government in Christ's Church without His revealed Word is an unlawful seizure of Christ's authority. Any usurped authority over Christ's Church that lawfully belongs to

Christ is no true authority at all—it is a pretended authority.

4. I'm passionate about this because I'm passionate to see Jesus honored/exalted as the only King/Head of His Universal Church upon earth. As we have seen, "the antichrist" refers to the one who has seized the authority of Christ to reign in His place (2 Thessalonians 2:4). If I, as a minister, introduce into Christ's Church any doctrine, worship, or government that is not revealed by Christ in His Word, I act as though I am king over Christ's Church. This is serious, and not to be taken lightly.

B. Notice that Christ does not give a single key of authority, but rather gives keys of authority (in the plural). There are two keys of authority by which the Lord builds His Church.

1. **The Key of Knowledge (Luke 11:52).**

a. Whereas the Scribes had taken away the key of knowledge by introducing the inventions of man into the Church of God, those who are lawfully given the key of knowledge by King Jesus are appointed to use that key to proclaim in the authority of Christ the whole counsel of God by which He will bring believing sinners to Himself and grow them in His truth (2 Timothy 4:2-4). That is why preaching must not be entertainment/amusement—it is Christ's truth.

b. The key of knowledge is the authoritative declaration of Scripture (the gospel/doctrine/worship/commandments). How can we know Jesus, love Him, and obey Him if we do not know and understand His truth? This is why it is so important that church officers be well-grounded in the truth, be committed to the truth, and be willing to suffer for the truth. To suffer for the truth of Christ is to suffer for Christ.

2. The second key of authority by which King Jesus builds His Church is: **The Key of Discipline (Matthew 16:19; Matthew 18:15-20).**

a. The key of discipline is the application of the key of knowledge to the members of Christ's Church. In other words, that truth of Jesus that is professed must be practiced by the members of Christ's Church. The key of discipline exhorts believers to love and obey the Lord by practicing His gospel/commandments in their lives and families, at work, in the church and nation.

b. The key of discipline is applied by loving exhortation and humble rebuke (Titus 1:9; Titus 2:15), by lawful censures as a loving parent would do to instruct a child (1 Corinthians 5), and by preserving the peace, purity, and unity of the church (Acts 15).

c. Think of what a home is like where the parents and children are taught the truth, but not expected to live the truth. Such a family is courting enmity, disrespect, hypocrisy, rebellion, and self-centeredness. The same is true within Christ's Church. Jesus has given the key of discipline as an expression of His love to His Church. This key ought always to be used in humility before God and love to its members in teaching them to know/walk in the truth of Jesus Christ, our King.

C. "Binding" and "loosing" were used by the Jews at that time to mean closing the door ("binding") or opening the door ("loosing").

1. In other words, as the key of knowledge (gospel/doctrine) and the key of discipline are administered, those who by God's grace receive it upon Christ's authority will be "loosed" and brought into Christ's kingdom to be taught and disciplined in love, but those who by their own unrepentant unbelief, sin, or rebellion reject Christ's truth will be "bound" and forbidden from enjoying the blessings of fellowship and communion within Christ's kingdom.

2. It's the faith/obedience or lack thereof that determines what is bound or loosed upon earth and in heaven by Christ's authority.

II. **To Whom Are the Keys of the Kingdom Given?**

A. The keys are not given:

1. **To Peter alone** (Matthew 18:18). He was used to open the kingdom by way of preaching to Jews/Gentiles in Acts (Jews in Acts 2; Samaritans in Acts 8; Gentiles in Acts 10), but not him alone.

2. **To the apostles alone** (Matthew 18:17; Acts 15).
3. **To the individual members of the Church** (Matthew 18:17; 1 Timothy 4:14).

B. The keys are given to the officers of the Church who as Christ's servants rule on His behalf—not with absolute power, but with delegated power from Christ. Peter and the apostles represent those who are lawfully commissioned by Christ—this is the biblical view of apostolic succession i.e. those who teach/practice the truth that Jesus taught His disciple to pass on to all succeeding generations (1 Timothy 4:14; Acts 15; Hebrews 10:17—“obey” implies a command to cheerfully submit to their lawful authority). This command is always conditional—as long as ministers/elders rule lawfully according to Scripture. Otherwise, we have no lawful authority from Christ to rule (2 Corinthians 13:8).

III. **For Whose Benefit Are the Keys of the Kingdom Given?**

A. The good/benefit that comes from the lawful use of the keys is intended for the Redeemed Church, those who are true believers (not those who only profess). Those who are not true believers may receive certain outward benefits from the ministerial use of the keys, but if it does not bring them to Jesus Christ to receive Him and to grow in Him, the keys actually bring upon them greater condemnation because they had this great blessing, but did not use it. They had the knowledge but wasted it.

B. Thus, it is not true (as claimed by the Church of Rome) that Jesus only grants to Peter the keys of the kingdom, nor is it true that Peter was given (and through him, his successors as Popes) supreme authority over the Universal Church of the whole world. There is no such office of the Papacy (whether in 1 Corinthians 12-14; Ephesians 4).

1. It would appear that James was the presiding officer at the Synod that met in Jerusalem, even though both Peter and Paul addressed the Synod (Acts 15:19).

2. When sinful divisions occurred in the Church of Corinth by way of following different leaders (some following Paul, some Apollos, and others Cephas [Peter]), Paul does not say that Peter has supremacy or is the universal head of the Visible Church upon earth and that to him the church should submit, but rather says that they are not to be mere followers of any man, but of Christ (1 Corinthians 3:21-23).

3. Paul says that to himself was committed by Christ to preach the gospel to the Gentiles and to Peter was committed by Christ to preach the gospel to the Jews (Galatians 2:6-8). There is no supremacy of Peter given there.

4. Peter (Cephas) was one of the pillars (leaders) of the Church in Jerusalem along with James and John (Galatians 2:9).

3. Jesus neither here nor any other place gave to Peter exclusively the keys of the kingdom as the universal King/Head of the Visible Church (Luke 22:31-32; John 21:15-17; 1 Timothy 3:16).

C. Application

1. God-ordained government is like the skeletal system upon which our muscles and flesh are supported. If we had perfect muscles and flawless skin, but had no bones to support them, our muscles and flesh would simply collapse and be unable to move. So likewise, our families, church, and nation will collapse and be unable to move to protect itself or its members if there is not a biblical, God-ordained government in place to lovingly guide and lead it in truth/righteousness.

2. We must understand that all lawful government is subordinate to God, is delegated by God, must be exercised in accordance with God's will revealed in Scripture and to the glory of God.

3. Government is not arbitrary, random, and simply left to our human desires. To the contrary, lawful government is the exercise of God's revealed will in love, truth, and righteousness. And those who will be most faithful in exercising God's lawful government in the home, church, and nation are those who have learned first by way of God's grace to submit themselves under the almighty hand of God and to the God-ordained government He has placed in their lives every day. We cannot lead others, if we have not learned ourselves the importance of being led by lawful authority.

4. We can either make the government in our homes a chaotic mess by how we lead and by how we submit. For the glory of Christ and the good of our family, let us cherish/love the lawful (not perfect or sinless), but the lawful government He has set among us—not destroy it, but establish it.

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