

Sermon for A Year with the Catechism Confession: What is the Office of the Keys

Date: June 5, 2022

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

Old Testament: Isaiah 55:6-13

Epistle Reading: 1 Corinthians 5:1-13

Gospel Reading: Matthew 18:1-6

Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 5:1-13

Sermon Title: Confession: What is the Office of the Keys



Introit: Psalm 139:1-12; Antiphon: Psalm 139:13

Hymns:

LSB 602 – The Gifts Christ Freely Gives
LSB 608 – Lord, to You I Make Confession
LSB 609 – Jesus Sinners Doth Receive
LSB 616 – Baptismal Waters Cover Me
LSB 617 – O Lord, We Praise Thee
LSB 610 – Lord Jesus, Think on Me

Liturgy:

Divine Service I, p. 151

Songs:

Another In The Fire
After All – Crowder
Agnus Dei
The Battle Belongs to the Lord
Good Good Father - Chris Tomlin
Only One Name - (This Hope)

Liturgy:

Creative Worship



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Text: 1 Corinthians 5:1-13

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. And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.

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. When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, 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.

Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. “Purge the evil person from among you.”

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Grace to you, and peace, in Jesus' holy name. Amen.

The Office of the Keys. This is without a doubt the most misunderstood part of God's Word. It is probably the least read and least understood part of Luther's Catechism as it teaches and expounds on God's Word. It is the most misrepresented and poorly explained as well. It is for that reason we will take the next three weeks on Confession to explore this very subject.

The Office of the Keys, as explained by Martin Luther, is:

The Office of the Keys is that special authority which Christ has given to His Church on earth to forgive the sins of repentant sinners, but to withhold forgiveness from the unrepentant as long as they do not repent.

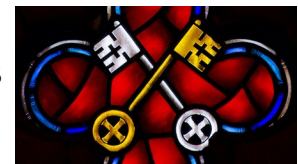
This subject is often more regularly called "Church discipline," but that term falls far short of what this truly entails. The Office of the Keys is about God guarding the purity and holiness of His Church. The purpose is to focus on the peace, purity and unity of the congregation. One means by which God preserves the holiness of His people is by the loving practice of Church discipline or employing the authority of Office of the Keys.

Step one requires an explanation of what the "keys" are. Jesus said:



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.¹

The authority of the Church, and those upon whom the Divine Call has been issued, is to wield two keys. The first key is one you see used so often you probably don't notice it. It is that Key that opens heaven's gates to the repentant sinner. You see that key unlock the chains of sin and unlock the gates of heaven as these words are spoken:



In the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ
I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father, the ✠
Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Right there, in that very moment, you are made pure before your Father in heaven, through the Blood of Jesus the Holy Christ, and the Holy Spirit empowers

1 Matthew 16:19

and strengthens your faith. This practice of Public Confession and Absolution has been part of the Church from the beginning. This is the first “key” of the two held by the Office of the Keys.

The second “key” is the one we don’t see very often, if at all. It is that “key” which is used to lock the chains of sin and the shackles of unrepentant-ness, and to lock the gates of heaven barring the unrepentant from heaven, so long as they do not repent. Continued contempt for God and His Word can and will condemn you eternally. That is true even if you physically appear in a church building every week. Unrepentant sin is a profoundly serious matter.

How serious? That is the very subject we must explore and understand. I want to spend some time exploring that answer as we look at 1 Corinthians 5 today, and focus on this subject of the Office of the Keys.

It should be inherently obvious the Church must be different from the world. The Church cannot make a difference in the world if the Church is not different from the world. The more the Church is like the world the less impact the Church can have on it. When the Church becomes like the world, whether in its message, its worship, or in its lifestyle, it loses its power to attract those who are in the world to the message of salvation in Jesus Christ.

Jesus said:



If the world hates you, know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world

hates you.²

There are many churches whose stated goal is to become as much like the world as possible, with the hope of attracting the world to them. It is important to notice their goal is to attract people to them, not to Christ.

The result: Education is replaced with entertainment. Preaching is replaced with performance. Theology is replaced with theatrics. The unfolding plan of salvation with dramatic arts. All of this lowers the standard of personal and corporate holiness in the Church. It also causes the fear of God to evaporate. “We are to fear and love God...” we read in the Luther’s explanation of all ten commandments.

2 John 15:18-19

Instead of preaching the Word, and holding its members accountable to the straightforward teaching of the Holy Word of God, such churches become more like clubs, or fraternities, rather than a house of holy worship. The truth is without the practice of Church discipline, without employing the Office of the Keys, the preaching of the Word of God is reduced to nothing more than suggestions and a potential or possible alternative lifestyle.

In 1 Corinthians 5 the Apostle Paul confronts the church in Corinth with their failure to exercise loving Church discipline. He charges them to confront the sin, and call for repentance, and if needed removal of sin through putting out a member who continues to live in unconfessed and unrepentant sin.

The church in Corinth chose to do nothing, or perhaps worse chose to tolerate the sin in the name of “Christian love.” In doing so the greater scandal was not this man who was in sin. The greater scandal was the church that failed to deal with sin. They chose to coddle sin rather than confront it. They chose to remain with sin rather than to remove it. This entire chapter speaks to this very issue.

In verse 2 Paul says: Let him who has done this be removed from among you.

In verse 5 he says: “Deliver this man to Satan, for the destruction of the flesh.”

In verse 9 he says we are “not to associate” with such immoral people.

He then explains that more thoroughly in verse 10 with: Not dealing with or judging the immoral people of the world. Jesus spent time with tax collectors, prostitutes and sinners of all kinds. Jesus’ example was to expect the world to act like the world. It is they whom we are called to reach with the Gospel. We are not to associate with the immoral people who have been put out of the Church; the “so-called brother or sister in Christ.”

In verse 11 Paul says we are not to associate with any brother (or so-called brother, meaning a church member.)

In verse 12 he says, we are to judge those who are within the Church.

It is very clear in this chapter God calls for the Church to discipline its members for the purpose of saving their souls. When sin is openly tolerated Satan is openly tolerated. As brothers and sisters in Christ we should hold each other accountable, to protect each other, have each other’s back, to prevent Satan from getting a foothold.

This is consistent with what Paul teaches over and over. In Galatians 6:1-2 Paul teaches:

If anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep

watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the Law of Christ. (*That is: love your neighbor as yourself.*)

In 2 Thessalonians 3:6-7 Paul says the same thing.

Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother [*church member*] who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition [*doctrine and faith*] that you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us.

In 1 Timothy 1:19-20 Paul writes:

...holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, among whom are Hymenaeus {*HIGH-men-ee-us*} and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.

The members of a church need to be taught. They need to be directed in the conduct that the Christian faithful should produce. A Christian is one in whom the Holy Spirit is at work. Where the Holy Spirit is, there the works of the Spirit are displayed. They being:

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.³

Paul teaches this comes in one of two ways:

1) Either through the hearing and reception of God's Word.

Or if they reject that,

2) Brought about as we cut them out of the fellowship of the Church, and turn them over to the realm of Satan.

Unrepentant sin is a profoundly serious matter. Those who continue in sin should be corrected. Privately first, but if necessary in the presence of all. Always in Christian love. This serves two purposes:

1) It is intended to bring the sinner to repentance.

3 Galatians 5:22-24

and

2) It will causes others to reflect and reevaluate on their own sinful conduct.

In Titus 3:10-11 Paul again teaches:

As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.

Church discipline is not judging a person. It is speaking God's judgment and God's truth from God's Word. Paul regularly calls on the entire congregation, as well as the spiritual leadership of the Church, to exercise Church discipline where there is continued, unconfessed, unrepented sin. It is most especially true when that sin harms the members, and the witness of the Church in the community. The Church must be different from the world if we are to win the world to Christ.

It is in confession and repentance that the wonders of God, and the treasures of the Means of Grace, are found. There is no more freeing force than to faithfully admit your faults and find in that true freedom. Forgiveness is always and immediately available to every repentant heart. God is desperate to save, and it is God's desire that all would be saved.⁴ To truly bask in the glory and wonder of God,



Seek the Lord while He may be found;
call upon Him while He is near;
let the wicked forsake his way,
and the unrighteous man his thoughts;
let him return to the Lord,
that He may have compassion on him,
and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.⁵

It is through God's Holy Word, Holy Baptism, Holy Communion and Holy Absolution that God's riches and grace come. Where your conscience is plagued come here, to this place, confess your sins and be free.

In Jesus' name.

Amen.

Proclaim God's Word,
Encourage one another in faith,
Witness to God's love and
Serve all people



4 1 Timothy 2:4

5 Isaiah 55:6-7