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The Canadian *Lord's Day* Association

Advanced Bible Correspondence Course

Lesson 31: Preaching and Christian Discipline

LORD'S DAY 31

Q.83. WHAT ARE THE KEYS OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN?

ANSWER: THE PREACHING OF THE HOLY GOSPEL, AND CHRISTIAN DISCIPLINE, OR EXCOMMUNICATION OUT OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH; BY THESE TWO, THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS OPENED TO BELIEVERS AND SHUT AGAINST UNBELIEVERS.

Keys of the kingdom of heaven

In the Bible, the kingdom of heaven is often compared with a city with gates. The Lord Jesus Himself said: *"All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth."* (Matthew 28:18). Christ is the King of that city and possesses the keys of the kingdom of heaven. A key has a double function: it opens and it closes. The kingdom of God also has keys. That kingdom can also be opened and closed. This is not done by religious leaders, but by the preaching of the holy gospel and Christian discipline.

The name "keys of the kingdom of heaven" stems from the Bible: *"And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."* (Matthew 16:19).

Bearers of the keys

The Lord spoke first to Peter about the keys of the kingdom of heaven and in Matthew 18:18 to the other disciples. They became bearers of the keys of the kingdom of God. Those bearers are all those that are called by the Lord to preach the Word of God, such as ministers, elders, evangelists, chaplains, missionaries. The keys of the kingdom of heaven point to the spiritual authority which Christ gave to His office-bearers.

Two keys

The first key is the preaching of the Word. To believers must be proclaimed that their sins are forgiven if they accept the promises of the gospel by a true faith. To unbelievers and unconverted ones is proclaimed that the wrath of God abides on them as long as they do not repent and turn to God. Thus the preaching includes or excludes.

The second key is church discipline. This is applied when one adheres to a false doctrine or perseveres in a sinful lifestyle. The Lord aims at our salvation in church

discipline. Preaching and church discipline are the spiritual keys. By these keys, the kingdom of heaven is opened to the believer and shut to the unbeliever.

Q.84. HOW IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN OPENED AND SHUT BY THE PREACHING OF THE HOLY GOSPEL?

ANSWER: THUS: WHEN ACCORDING TO THE COMMAND OF CHRIST IT IS DECLARED AND PUBLICLY TESTIFIED TO ALL AND EVERY BELIEVER, THAT, WHENEVER THEY RECEIVE THE PROMISE OF THE GOSPEL BY A TRUE FAITH, ALL THEIR SINS ARE REALLY FORGIVEN THEM OF GOD FOR THE SAKE OF CHRIST'S MERITS; AND ON THE CONTRARY, WHEN IT IS DECLARED AND TESTIFIED TO ALL UNBELIEVERS, AND SUCH AS DO NOT SINCERELY REPENT, THAT THEY STAND EXPOSED TO THE WRATH OF GOD AND ETERNAL CONDEMNATION, SO LONG AS THEY ARE UNCONVERTED (A); ACCORDING TO WHICH TESTIMONY OF THE GOSPEL, GOD WILL JUDGE THEM BOTH IN THIS AND IN THE LIFE TO COME. (A)JOHN 20:21-23, MATTHEW 16:19

Gospel preaching

The first key is the preaching of the holy gospel. In it, the forgiveness of sins is openly declared to everyone who believes in Christ. It is a public proclamation. In the same way as the law indicts us, the gospel reveals to us the acquittal for a guilty person, worthy of damnation. The proclamation takes place according to the command of Christ: *"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."* (Mark 16:15). What is the promise in that preaching? Christ says to Nicodemus: *"That whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."* (John 3:15).

The door opened

This means that all believers who accept the promises of the gospel with a true faith receive forgiveness of sins. If a person truly believes in Christ, his sins are forgiven. This preaching gives comfort. There is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus. It is only by grace, for Christ's sake, that the door of the kingdom of heaven opens to them.

The door shut

However, this preaching also includes the proclamation that the door shall remain shut for unbelievers. God said to Isaiah: *"Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him: for they shall eat of the fruits of their doings. Woe unto the wicked! It shall be ill with him: for the reward of his hands shall be given him."* (Isaiah 3:10&11). The wrath of God and eternal damnation rest on those who do not sincerely repent. It is Christ's own word: *"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."* (Mark 16:16).

The preaching shuts in or out

Not to believe means to count the blood of Christ as an unclean thing. Faithful preaching proclaims and declares that the wrath of God rests upon us if we do not repent. The preaching tells us if we are children of the kingdom of God, and if we will inherit that kingdom or not. Thus the preaching shuts in or out. The Lord will judge on the basis of the testimony of the gospel. This applies to this life and the life to come.

Q.85. HOW IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN SHUT AND OPENED BY CHRISTIAN DISCIPLINE?

ANSWER: THUS: WHEN ACCORDING TO THE COMMAND OF CHRIST, THOSE, WHO UNDER THE NAME OF CHRISTIANS, MAINTAIN DOCTRINES OR PRACTICES INCONSISTENT THEREWITH, AND WILL NOT, AFTER HAVING BEEN OFTEN BROTHERLY ADMONISHED, RENOUNCE THEIR ERRORS AND WICKED COURSE OF LIFE, ARE COMPLAINED OF TO THE CHURCH OR TO THOSE WHO ARE THEREUNTO APPOINTED BY THE CHURCH; AND IF THEY DESPISE THEIR ADMONITION, ARE BY THEM FORBIDDEN THE USE OF THE SACRAMENTS; WHEREBY THEY ARE EXCLUDED FROM THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH AND BY GOD HIMSELF FROM THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST; AND WHEN THEY PROMISE AND SHOW REAL AMENDMENT, ARE AGAIN RECEIVED AS MEMBERS OF CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH (A).

(A)MATTHEW 18:15-17, I CORINTHIANS 5:4,5&11, II CORINTHIANS 2:6-8

Discipline

The second key of the kingdom of heaven is Church discipline or excommunication.

When speaking of discipline we think of admonitions to save those who stray.

Excommunication takes place only when the sinner persists in sin or false doctrine, and all repentance and improvement of life style are lacking. This second key is applied when someone within the Christian congregation has a false doctrine or is committing a scandalous sin. God ultimately aims at our salvation in church discipline. It not only concerns the upholding of God's law, the soundness of the preaching, and the purity of the sacraments, but also the salvation of the sinner. In all of this, the honour of God and the building up of His church must have the pre-eminence.

In private

The Lord Himself has given rules for church discipline in Matthew 18. The procedure which the Lord prescribes is a loving, confrontational way. When a member of the congregation knows of a false doctrine or offensive way of life of a fellow member, we first of all ought to speak to him or her in private. We must do this prayerfully, with God's honour in view, perhaps also with a blessing for ourselves, and hopefully to the salvation of our fellow sinner. If that person does not listen to God's Word, then we must bring another member of the congregation and talk to the guilty one again.

Steps to excommunication

When that person still does not give heed, the consistory is to be informed. They also are to admonish the person concerned several times. If this does not help, the procedure towards excommunication will officially start. This takes place in three steps.

First of all, this member may no longer partake in the sacraments and in election for office-bearers. The name of the member is not mentioned yet. If this does still not bring repentance, then public admonitions will follow, which means that the congregation is called upon to pray for the guilty one. At that time his or her name will be made known. If this does not help either, the last step follows.

Excommunication

Finally, there is the excommunication. The sinner is not only placed outside of the congregation by the people, but also excluded by the Lord from His Kingdom.

Prayer for salvation

Is the door shut forever after this? We may be thankful to say that it isn't! Prayer must be offered for that person so that we may see the miracle of repentance, evidenced by the fruits.

Consequently, there are two forms in regard to this: one for excommunication and one for re-admitting the excommunicated person. Concerning this, Paul said: *"Therefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him."* (II Corinthians 2:8). There is a way back!

Questions:

1. What are the two keys in the kingdom of heaven?

2. Who is the Owner of the keys of this heavenly kingdom? (Revelation 1:18)

3. What is the work of the key-bearers? (Isaiah 3:10&11)

4. Who became key-bearers in the New Testament? Who are the key-bearers today?

5. What is to be proclaimed publicly in preaching?

6. What declares a man guilty? What points to acquittal?

7. What happens to those who do not sincerely repent?

8. Read Joshua 7. Who caused the curse in the camp of the Israelites? How did his life end?

9. What rules for disciplining one who lives in sin does the Bible teach us?
(Matthew 18:15-17)

10. Is it possible for an excommunicated person to return? If yes, when and how?
(II Corinthians 2:7)

Evaluator: _____