

**THE CHURCH'S POWER TO OPEN AND TO SHUT THE KINGDOM**

**Intro:** - Lord's Day 31 is the last Lord's Day of the second section of the Catechism: our salvation.

- It is the will of God that the kingdom be opened to some and closed to others according to his sovereign will with the use of keys.

**I. THE TWO KEYS:****A. The idea of keys.**

1. Matt. 16 speaks of "the keys of the kingdom of heaven."
2. The kingdom of heaven is the church of God. Let not a person say that they love his kingdom if they do not love his church
3. To this kingdom there are spiritual keys, which open the kingdom to believers and shut the kingdom to unbelievers.
4. Although there are two keys, we must understand that they are two keys on the same ring. They work together.
5. The exercise of the keys is so serious because the effects are eternal (Matt. 16:19b, 18:18).

**B. Who hold the keys?**

1. Christ alone holds the key of David (Rev. 3:7), the sentinel authorized by God to open and shut the gate of the kingdom.
2. Christ has authority to declare what will be valid in the kingdom of Heaven.
3. Christ determines who will and who will not have a place in his everlasting kingdom.
4. So it is very important that we see the exercise of these keys is the work of our Lord Jesus Christ!

**C. The power of the keys:**

1. Is the power merely legislative power and authority: determining what is right or wrong?
2. Or is it judicial authority: authority over persons? **BOTH!**
3. Christ determines not only what we believe, but also who shall be included or excluded from the kingdom of heaven.

**D. How Christ exercises this power?**

1. Christ gave and exercised this power through the apostles. They laid down the foundation and the church is built upon it.
2. This power and authority is given to the church of the new dispensation.
3. The church is called to carry out this work through the office bearers that God gives her (Eph.4:11-13, I Pet. 5:1-4).
4. This authority and power is transmitted through the Word of God in Scripture and by the indwelling Spirit.
5. This means that it is Christ who is speaking and ruling through these God appointed men.

**II. THE NATURE OF THIS WORK:****A. The church has the calling to exercise these two keys in obedience to Christ.**

1. The primary key is the preaching of the Word.
2. When we come to church we hear the authoritative Word of Jesus Christ who speaks through his servant.
3. Added to and inseparably connected with the preaching is the key of Christian discipline.
4. Discipline backs up and reinforces what is proclaimed in the gospel. It is not merely good advice, take it or leave it.
5. That would leave us with the situation during the Judges, when everyone did what was right in their own eyes.
6. Notice that it is the PURE preaching and PROPER exercise of discipline that opens and closes the kingdom!

**B. The preaching of the Gospel is official work of the church.**

1. We have in Lord's Day 31 a careful treatment of the doctrine of preaching, the catechism's fullest explanation of it!
2. We do not have men determine **if** they want to preach and **what** they want to say.
3. Rather as we read in Rom. 10, preachers are men who are sent: ie. called, commissioned, and supervised by the church.
4. In the preaching we hear Christ himself.
5. The Catechism says, "according to the command of Christ it is **declared** and publically **testified** to all ..."

**C. Christian discipline (called church discipline) is also the official work of the church.**

1. Christian discipline is excommunication, a cutting off.
2. It is "according to the command of Christ... declared and testified to all unbelievers and unrepentant the wrath of God.
3. These wicked are excluded, cut off from the church and cut off from the kingdom of heaven.
4. This is a weighty matter: God himself excludes a person from his kingdom through the church!
5. This matter of shutting the kingdom is a matter of office, an official work which Christ has given to the church (I Cor. 5:5).

**III. OUR ATTITUDE TOWARDS THIS WORK:****A. How we view the preaching:**

1. The preaching is not first of all a matter of a man's gifts, or of our desires, or a private work.
2. In the preaching, we hear none other than Christ himself (Rom. 10: 14).
3. We need to ask for an "ear to hear what the Spirit has to say to the church" and submit! The kingdom is opened.
4. The wrong attitude towards preaching is having devastating effects on the ministry of the church: truth of office is lost!

**B. How we view Christian discipline:**

1. Christ commands it and accomplishes it through the elders who rule over us.
2. The call to believe and the call to obey is spineless without it, and the gospel is undermined.
3. Absolutely necessary for the correction and reproof of the members and to keep the church pure.

**C. How we treat and view those who are in the offices.**

1. The Belgic Confession, art 31 ( based on I Thess. 5:12,13 gives us good instruction here.
2. These men in their offices are Christ's anointed! Hear and heed them!
3. What an important calling parents have to teach their children to honor those in these offices.
4. The power to open and close is not in the persons or simply in their work. The power is in the gospel brought by these keys

**D. How we view church membership.**

1. Membership in Christ's church is not a willy-nilly free for all!
2. Christ admits, and Christ excludes from membership: and he does it through his church exercising his keys.
3. Church membership is vitally important!