

**Standing we sing:** Psalm 40:3.

*-3- No sacrifice didst Thou, O LORD, require;  
Thou gavest me an open ear.  
Then I said, "Lo, I now appear;  
To do Thy will, O God, is my desire.  
Take Thou my life and mould it.  
I come, the book foretold it;  
'Tis written in its roll.  
Thy will is my delight;  
I cherish day and night  
Thy law in heart and soul."<sup>i</sup>*

Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth<sup>ii</sup>. Beloved, grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ<sup>iii</sup>. By the powerful operation of God the Holy Spirit.

**Amen.**

Psalm of praise 31:1, 15.

*1-In Thee, O LORD, I've taken refuge.  
Let shame not cover me;  
I put my trust in Thee.  
Come in Thy righteousness and save me  
From those who do not fear Thee;  
My God and Helper, hear me.*

*-15-O love the LORD, all you His people!  
The faithful He will spare,  
The proud He'll give their share.  
Be strong and let your heart take courage.  
His own He will deliver;  
He will forsake you never.<sup>iv</sup>*

Prayer

- *Doxology:*
- *Worship:*
- *Confession:*

*Supplication (for pardon of sins):*

- *Thanksgiving:*
- *Intercession (for the need of the congregation, the church, authorities, sinful world and appeal to the promises of God)*
- *General supplication:*
- *Illumination of the Holy Spirit (necessary for the ministry of the Word):*

Amen.

Psalm 38:1, 2.

*1-  
LORD, do not in indignation  
Chide and chasten,  
Nor Your hot displeasure show.  
Deeply have Your arrows pierced me.  
Down upon me  
Your hand pressed and crushed me low.  
-2-  
Filled with sickness is my body  
'Neath Your fury;  
Sin has kept my bones from rest.  
My iniquities rise o'er me,*

*High and heavy;  
Under their great weight I'm pressed.*

Scripture reading: Romans 1: 16, 17<sup>v</sup> and Matthew 16:13 - 23<sup>vi</sup>.

Text: Matthew 16:19; Catechism Lord's Day 31.

**<sup>19</sup>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. (KJV)**

One of the saddest things that could happen to a congregation is when people become angry or take offence when they are admonished for having done something wrong.

- Such admonishment is indeed an encouragement to come and worship with the congregation. Still it happens.
- No person can belong to a church but not worship the Lord with all his heart, or wish to worship according to his own rules.

Hence there must be discernment in the church:

- Those who truly know and worship the Triune God must be included within the church.
- The unrighteous must be warned and be ministered to, so that they may repent.
  - Those who refuse to truly convert must be excommunicated for the sake of God's Holiness and of the holiness of His church.

Which is the meaning when the Lord says to His church that He gives to it, keys to heaven, and that on earth they must open and close (bind and loosen).

Let us pay attention to two facets of ecclesiastical discipline:

### **1. Discipline and preaching (the proclamation of the Word)**

### **2. Practical application of discipline**

#### **1. Discipline and preaching (Word proclamation)**

From the Lord, the church received the responsibility to proclaim the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

- Which is not the same as a responsibility to judge and condemn!
- In the first instance it is an act of love: It pleases God when a sinner repents and the angels in heaven rejoice when one sinner repents<sup>vii</sup>.

Judgement enters only when a person will not allow himself to be admonished in love, and then he has to be excommunicated.

It is not the church council who decides these matters either.

- The Lord Jesus Christ is the King of the church – how things happen in His church is His decision.
- The elders are under instruction from Him In other words; each decision, which they take, must in each instance be in accordance with what the Bible says on that matter.

That is why the Lord Jesus continuously instructs and admonishes us by the proclamation of his Word.

- In the Bible He teaches us that His wrath is kindled over those who persevere in their sin.
- Where the church truly and sincerely teaches and practices these things, it is already the administration of the keys.

Think of the following:

- The preaching unlocks heaven so to speak by teaching and continuously proclaiming salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ.
- The Holy Spirit converts people, who hear the proclamation of God's grace, so that they may believe.

The binding of the Word proclamation resides therein that in God's Word, all people are immediately taught that they have a particular responsibility towards the Lord.

- The Lord commands that in our worship of Him, we must pay Him the necessary honour.
- We are also commanded to hold to the order for His church, which He instituted.
- Those who do not wish to hold to the worship and order He teaches must be excommunicated.

***The Lord expels everyone from His kingdom that rebels against Him – the devil and his expulsion is an example thereof.***

It is not only in each sermon that the Lord proclaims His grace.

- He also does so visibly when the sacraments are administered.
- That is when one hears, and sees and tastes the Lord's grace over one.

But the unruly may not partake therein.

- They are to feel and experience the consequences of their rejection of the Lord, so that they may be moved to repent of their sin.
- When a person is made to feel first hand what it is like to be treated as if he were unrighteous, it will lead him to realise what the love of God is worth to him.

For the Lord, the exercise of ecclesiastical discipline is equal to legal action being taken.

- He thereby quite clearly expresses that people who trample His love under foot are not entitled to the same benefits as those who wholeheartedly love the Lord.
- One cannot exhibit with one's life that one hates the Lord, but still lay claim to His grace.

The Bible teaches: **The righteous will live by faith.**

- Logically the inverse is equally true: The unrighteous man will perish in his unbelief.

The elders must ensure that the minister preaches all of these things to the congregation; because in God's church both are gathered: the righteous and the unrighteous. Think of the Lord Jesus' words to His people when He said: " they are not all Israel, which are of Israel" (Romans 9:6 KJV)

## **2. Practical application of ecclesiastical discipline**

*God wants to keep His congregation pure. If all the loving exhortations bear no fruit, then the unrighteous stands before God's judgement seat.*

This disciplinary action is most evident in the administration of the Lord's Supper.

- Sometimes there are congregants who live similarly to unbelievers, and if they were to partake in the Lord's Supper they would defile the holiness of the Lord and of His sacrament.
- Their public sins are oftentimes also offensive to the other congregants.

The Lord demands that such people are to be lovingly warned to mend their ways.

- If they wish to not heed the warning, and continue to defile the congregation of the saints with their sins, then the process of excommunication commences. In other words: to expel them from the kingdom of God.
- Which is a terrible matter, because from the passage read together, it is evident that when, in the Name of the Lord someone has lawfully been excommunicated from the church on earth, that person has also been expelled from heaven.

One can therefore not merely go over to another church once one has been excommunicated, or while ecclesiastical disciplinary processes are under way.

- The reason is that it is the Lord of the church who chastises such a person, and no other congregation can nullify the actions of the God of the church.

- Once a person is excommunicated from the church, he is also excommunicated from heaven.

What is this all about? ***It has to do with the fact that we are inside of the church precisely in order to worship the Lord and to glorify Him.***

- The Lord must be honoured.
- Each one who wishes to be a member of the church must partake in glorifying the Lord – and naturally in the manner which He has prescribed.

*When there are congregants who wish to not do so, it is after all evident that they are in the wrong place, and therefore they must either repent, or leave the church.*

In the first instance ecclesiastical discipline has to do with the honour of God.

- And it is logical that God's honour includes the honour of His church.
- **A church is not honourable if it houses people who rebel and revolt against God! Such people vex God, because they call to question His honour and the worship of Him by His members.**
- This offence must be removed from God's church.

Now just do not get the impression that ecclesiastical discipline is a broom with which the church council may sweep out each congregant whom they disapprove of.

- Such a thing is not possible, because the church does not belong to them.
- It is God's church, and there God's people may be dealt with only in accordance with God's precepts.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the only Head of the church, and the people in the church belong to Him.

- That is why He disciplines people who do not listen to Him.
- The church council must be merely the instrument in the church, by which the will of the Lord is executed.

The church council must at all times ensure that they do not err when exercising ecclesiastical discipline. In order to remain objective, the church council then always calls in the help of other congregations!

- That is why, in the case of suspension or removal from office of an elder or deacon, two neighbouring churches are called on to help;
- In the case of a member's excommunication the help of the entire classis is called upon.
- In the case of a minister's removal from office, or his excommunication the entire regional synod is called upon – then all the churches are jointly involved.

Why are so many other congregations called upon? To ensure that not the caprice of a local church council, but the will of the Lord over that particular person, is obeyed.

Because God is a God of love, discipline also always first works with love.

- Discipline first aims towards the repentance of the sinner.
  - Practically the procedure is that the church council visits the member, and speaks with him so as to move him to abandon those things which do not serve to advance God's holiness.
  - Perhaps the sinner needs assistance to overcome his particular problem, and then he has every right to ask assistance of the church council.
- The end result must be true repentance.

The purpose of discipline is to shame the sinner into wanting to cease his evil doing.

- That is why the sinner is also not admitted to the Lord's Table.
- He must observe practically that God has established certain principles, and that God maintains His order by always remaining with those same principles.

This principle is written down in the Bible, in amongst others John 3:18:

***<sup>18</sup>He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. <sup>19</sup>And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.***

The Lord Jesus guarantees two things<sup>viii</sup>:

- The redemption of the righteous
- The unrighteous will be cast out.

To all people, the church proclaims redemption and grace in the Lord Jesus Christ.

- It is self-evident that those who do not accept this are those with whom we do not have communion.
- It is those who must be cast out of the church.

Let us examine ourselves to see if we know and experience in our heart the peace of eternal life, and have the will to serve the Lord whole heartedly. Then we are indeed at home in the congregation and in family of our Lord.

Let us read Catechism Lord's Day 31.

**Question 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.*

**Question 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.<sup>ix</sup>*

**Question 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)<sup>x</sup>*

**Amen.**

Prayer.

Psalm 32:1.

*1-Blest is the man whose trespass is forgiven,  
Whose sins are covered in the sight of heaven.  
Blest is the man against whom, LORD, Thou wilt  
Not count all his iniquity and guilt.  
How happy he, contrite of heart and lowly,  
Who has confessed his sins, O LORD most holy;  
Who does not secretly Thy laws transgress,  
Whose spirit harbors no deceitfulness.<sup>xi</sup>*

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all.<sup>xii</sup>

**Amen.**

Dr. M.J. du Plessis  
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Date: 8 August 2010

<sup>i</sup> [http://www.genevanpsalter.com/attachments/GenPs040\\_vanderKamp.HTM](http://www.genevanpsalter.com/attachments/GenPs040_vanderKamp.HTM)

<sup>ii</sup> Psalm 124:8

<sup>iii</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:3

<sup>iv</sup> [http://www.genevanpsalter.com/attachments/GenPs031\\_vanderKamp.HTM](http://www.genevanpsalter.com/attachments/GenPs031_vanderKamp.HTM)

<sup>v</sup> <sup>16</sup>For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. <sup>17</sup>For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

<sup>vi</sup> <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=matthew%2016:13-23&version=KJV>

<sup>vii</sup> <sup>10</sup>Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth. Luke 15:10  
KJV

<sup>viii</sup> John 6:37

<sup>ix</sup> (a) Matt. 16:18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Matt. 16:19 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. Matt. 18:15 Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. Matt. 18:16 But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. Matt. 18:17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Matt. 18:18 Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Matt. 18:19 Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. John 20:21 Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. John 20:22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: John 20:23 Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.

<sup>x</sup> (a) Matt. 18:15 Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. Matt. 18:16 But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. Matt. 18:17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Matt. 18:18 Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. 1 Cor. 5:2 And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you. 1 Cor. 5:3 For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed, 1 Cor. 5:4 In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, 1 Cor. 5:5 To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. 1 Cor. 5:11 But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. 2 Thess. 3:14 And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. 2 Thess. 3:15 Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother. 2 Cor. 2:6 Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many. 2 Cor. 2:7 So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. 2 Cor. 2:8 Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him.

<sup>xi</sup> [http://www.genevanpsalter.com/attachments/GenPs032\\_Helder1980.HTM](http://www.genevanpsalter.com/attachments/GenPs032_Helder1980.HTM)

<sup>xii</sup> 2 Corinthians 13:14