

THE KEYS OF THE KINGDOM

HOW CHRIST DISPLAYS HIS GLORY THROUGH THE CHURCH

THE DISPLAY OF GOD'S GLORY

God does all things for the revealing of the glory of God for the joy of all peoples. The glory of God is particularly revealed in the redemption of sinners (Eph. 1:3-14). Christ gathers those he saves into the church, made visible on earth in local churches, that through the church, the glory of God's wisdom, grace, and power might be made known (Eph. 3:8-10).

CHRIST'S ZEAL FOR THE PURITY OF THE CHURCH

Therefore, Christ is zealous that his church be pure, lest the name of God be blasphemed among the nations on account of those who bear his name unworthily (Rom. 2:24). For this reason, the New Testament contains a great deal of teaching to the church as to how we might properly recognize and identify those who truly belong to Christ from those who do not (Mat. 7:15-23; Rom. 16:17-18; 1 Cor. 5:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:5; Tit. 3:10-11).

THE KEYS OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

Christ has given the church the keys of the kingdom of heaven, the authority and responsibility to bind and loose on earth what is bound and loosed in heaven (Mat. 16:18-19, 18:15-20). Through proper examination, the church is called to declare who belongs to the kingdom of heaven. And, if one previously recognized as a brother falls into unrepentant sin, the church is called to gather in Christ's name and identify him as one who is *outside* the kingdom of heaven (Mat. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 5). Christ is present in the church to exercise this authority so that through the church, his church may be kept pure. A pure church will faithfully reveal the glory of Christ in the world.

THE SIGNS OF THE KEYS OF THE KINGDOM

How does the church identify the citizens of the kingdom of heaven?

Baptism is the sign given to the church to mark off those who have entered the kingdom of God by faith (Mat. 28:18-20). One does not baptize themselves but is baptized by the church acting on the authority of Christ. Baptism identifies the believer as belonging to Christ and the church.

The Lord's Supper is the sign given to the church to mark off those who continue in good standing in the kingdom through ongoing faith and obedience to Christ. It identifies the members of the body (1 Cor. 10:17). When one is removed from the body due to sin, he is no longer received at the Lord's Supper which identifies the members of the body (1 Cor. 5:11).

How is the church, the revelation of Christ's glory, marked off from the world? Is it not through baptism that the church, under the authority of Christ, marks off those who bear his name? Is it not through the Lord's Supper that the church, under the authority of Christ, marks off those who are members of his body? For this reason, it is the members of the local church, those who are accountable to the local church and commended in good standing *by* the local church that partake in the Lord's Supper. The assembled local church alone has been given the authority on earth to visibly mark off the church as separate from the world so that through the church, the glory of God might be displayed.

THE BREAD THAT WE BREAK

WHAT IS THE LORD'S SUPPER?

INTRODUCTION

The Lord's Supper is the only fellowship meal established under the New Covenant and, being a true partaking in the body and blood of Christ, is most holy to the Lord. Christ alone, through the Scriptures, ascribes its meaning and function, delineates its proper participants, and defines worthy participation.

MEANING AND PURPOSE

The Lord's Supper is a bond and pledge of the believer's communion with Christ's body and blood. As a bond, it is a true communion in the body and blood of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16). As a pledge, it is a commitment to follow Christ in all that he commands.

The Lord's Supper is also, therefore, a bond and pledge of the believer's communion with the church, which is Christ's body. As a bond, it establishes and reveals membership in the body (1 Cor. 10:17). As a pledge, it is a commitment to the members of Christ's body in all that he commands (1 Cor. 11:17-34).

PROPER PARTICIPANTS

The Lord's Supper is celebrated by the members of the local church when they come together as a church (1 Cor. 11:17-34). Members are those who are subject to the discipleship and authority of the church (1 Cor. 5:9-13), who by that same authority are affirmed as true citizens of the kingdom of heaven (Mat. 16:18-19, 18:15-20), and who themselves share in the discipleship and authority of the church. This membership in the visible local church is normative for all believers. When the church comes together, those outside the church are certainly welcome to be present (1 Cor. 14:23-25), but Scripture does not indicate that they partake in the Lord's Supper. Visitors who are members in good standing of another local church do partake (Acts 20:5-7; cf. Rom. 12:1-2).

WORTHY PARTICIPATION

All who partake in an unworthy manner, without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment upon themselves. Therefore, Christ commands the members of the church to examine themselves before partaking (1 Cor. 11:27-30). The call to self-examination is not merely to discern one's inner affection for Christ but to discern one's true obedience to Christ's commands concerning life in his body, the church (1 Cor. 11:17-34; Mat. 5:23-24).

CONCLUSION

In Scripture, the Lord's Supper is the sign of faithful membership in the local church. It is given to the local church, to be celebrated when its members come together as a local church, and to be a sign for the members of the church of their membership in Christ and his body. As a sign of membership, it assures the members, it reestablishes the commitment of the members to Christ and one another, and it marks off the church from the world as holy to the Lord that in the church, the wisdom and saving power of Christ might be displayed.