



GATHERED

The Empowered Presence of God's People

TEACHER NOTES & DISCUSSION GUIDE

SESSION EIGHT: The Polity of the Church

A Study on the Church by



SMYRNAFIRST
BAPTIST CHURCH



Session Eight

The Polity of the Church

Introduction

The 96-97 Utah Jazz had a stellar line up. Karl “the mailman” Malone was the star and centerpiece of the team, awarded the MVP of the NBA season. Other greats on the roster included John Stockton, Jeff Hornacek, Byron Russell, and Greg Ostertag. They had an overall rating of 104.53 for the season (pretty good) and only lost 18 games out of 82 for the season. They were good.

But they didn’t win the championship. That honor would go to the Chicago Bulls led by Michael Jordan that year. For all their star power and stellar season, they couldn’t pull it together to win the series and they had to go home without a championship to show for all their hard work.

A single great player made the difference against a team that should have had all the pieces it needed to close the deal. But in the end, they failed to execute as a team and it cost them the ultimate prize.

The church can sometimes tell a similar story. Disunity and disorder can derail the mission of many talented and godly congregations. So the Lord has put the church in order through a standard of government. We call this church polity and it can be summed up in this way: The church is led by Jesus Christ, filled with his Spirit, with the seat of authority in the congregation under the godly oversight of pastors and served by deacons.

I. The Keys of the Kingdom

A. The church has been given the keys to the kingdom of heaven.

1. Given to the disciples

a) **Matthew 16:15-19** - (in Ceasarea Philippi) **15** He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” **16** Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” **17** And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. **18** And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. **19** 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.” **20** Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

2. Given to every member

a) **Matthew 18:18-20** - **18** Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. **19** Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. **20** For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”

b) We are ambassadors of Christ in the world - his very body.

(1) As his ambassadors, we represent him and he has given us the authority of the keys.

(2) **Revelation 3:7** “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: ‘The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.’”

B. These keys are the knowledge of the gospel and the person of Jesus Christ.

1. Peter’s confession centered on the person of Jesus Christ, the object of our faith.

a) We believe *in him*.

b) Knowing Jesus is how we enter the kingdom.

- (1) ILL> Jesus answers the lawyers and Pharisees
 - (a) **Luke 11:52** “Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering.”
 - (b) **Matthew 23:13** “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in.”
- C. These keys are used for binding and loosing.
 - 1. Proclaiming the true gospel (knowledge).
 - a) This isn't the first time Jesus has entrusted the keys of the kingdom to someone.
 - (1) **Malachi 2:7** “For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.”
 - (2) But what is the outcome? - it is a chastisement. “But *you have turned aside from the way. You have caused many to stumble by your instruction.* You have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the Lord of hosts” (**Malachi 2:8**)
 - b) Jesus is now giving the keys to the apostles who will pass them down by way of teaching and instructing and entrusting other faithful men.
 - (1) 2 Timothy 2:2 “and *what you have heard from me* in the presence of many witnesses *entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others* also.”
 - 2. Protecting and keeping a pure body (the person of Christ)
 - a) The church is instructed in Matthew 18 in this responsibility of binding and loosing.
 - (1) **Matthew 18:18-20** “Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”
 - (2) This binding and loosing is the testimony of the church concerning the truthful confession of the believer and the holy fruit of faith in their lives.
 - (3) It is a spiritual authority to corporately say who is in the kingdom and who is not.
 - (a) We judge those in the church (**1 Corinthians 5:12**)
 - (b) But we don't do it unilaterally. We only judge corporately.
 - i) Tell it to the church
 - ii) If he does not repent —> then he is a Gentile or tax collector to you.
- D. The keys to the kingdom represent the spiritual seat of authority in the world.
 - 1. Where is it located? In the church.
 - 2. This is slightly different than what we are used to using our congregational authority for, isn't it?
 - a) We think of it primarily in governance of resources (church plant or program management)
 - b) In fact, this authority is much more important.
 - c) God has given the job of oversight to another officer of the church.

II. Shepherds of the Kingdom

- A. The apostolic nature of the church means she must have leaders who proclaim and manage.
 - 1. “The primary responsibility of church leadership is to safeguard the essential marks and works of a local church.” - Michael Svigel in Retro Christianity



2. Remember the keys are passed down through the church from the apostles to faithful pastors (**2 Tim. 2:2**) and pastors are then to equip the saints for the work of ministry.
 - a) **Ephesians 4:11-12** "And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry..."
 - b) That is why Titus is charged to put the church in order by appointing godly leaders.
 - (1) **Titus 1:5** "This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you..."
- B. First of two offices in the church: Elders/Overseers/Shepherds
 1. The Bible uses four terms to describe the spiritual leader of the local church.
 - a) Elder, pastor, overseer, shepherd
 - (1) **Acts 28** - In **v.17** Paul called the **elders** to himself.
 - (2) He then exhorts them in **v.28** to "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you **overseers**, to **care for** (pastor/shepherd) the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.
 2. These were to be qualified men (**1 Timothy 3:1-7**):
 - a) He must desire the work
 - b) He must be virtuous
 - c) He must manage well
 - d) He must be faithful to his family
 - e) He must be upstanding in the community
 - (1) Aside: the office of pastor is reserved for men:
 - (a) Paul does not permit a woman to teach or exercise authority in the church
 - (b) The apostles appointed by Jesus were all men
 - (c) There is no record in the Bible of the apostles appointing anything other than men in the role of church elder.
 3. Elders are to exercise spiritual authority and leadership to the church.
 - a) Devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word (**Acts 6:4**)
 - (1) They were to watch their lives and doctrine closely (**1 Timothy 4:16**)
 - b) For this work they are to be honored by the saints.
 - (1) **1 Timothy 5:17** "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching."
 - (2) **Hebrews 13:17** "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account."
- C. So Jesus appoints the apostles, the apostles appoint pastors, and the pastors raise up faithful men to lead the church through the generations and around the world as the gospel is spread.
 1. But there is another office of the church.

III. Servants of the Kingdom

- A. The ministerial nature of the church means she must have spirit-filled members who serve.
 1. **Acts 6:1-6** "Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. **2** And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. 3 Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. 4 But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."



- 5** And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. **6** These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.”
- B. Second of two offices in the church: Deacons
1. Qualified as well (**1 Timothy 3:8-13**)
 - a) Filled with the Holy Spirit
 - b) Virtuous and peaceful
 - c) Honest and clear headed
 - d) Faithful to family and the faith
 2. Men or women
 - a) In 1 Timothy, there is a note about women in the text. Some translations render it wives (as in the wife of a deacon), but this could very well mean, and I think it does, that there were women who also served as deaconesses of the church.
 3. Deacons are to serve the body practically and protect the peace of the church.

Conclusion

Thankfully, the church doesn't have to worry about losing the championship at the last minute because Jesus always leads us in victory. He organizes the church in wisdom and care and love and gives us everything we need to finish our race strong. We only need to be diligent to do all that he says as we bring order to the church.

The early church brought herself into order through this form of government.

- The apostles appointed pastors who proclaimed and managed.
- The pastors appointed deacons (and deaconesses) who served and worked unity.
- All the saints were responsible to affirm the leaders of the church and the truthfulness of each others confession and fruit of faith.

The Bible doesn't speak about a democratic church per se, but this is the model Southern Baptists have used for better or worse through the years.

What we can say for sure is that:

- The seat of authority is in the people of God collectively.
- The elders hold the spiritual responsibility to lead and feed the flock.
- The deacons (deaconesses) hold the responsibility to serve the body in ministry.

Since we are given the keys to the kingdom, let us take our responsibility seriously to keep our lives and doctrine pure.

Since we have been given pastors to lead us, let us honor them especially if they labor hard to preach and teach the people.

Since we have been given deacons, let us work alongside one another in peace so that the Lord may be honored.



Session Eight

Discussion Guide

USE AS MUCH OR AS LITTLE OF THIS DISCUSSION GUIDE AS YOU LIKE.

Introduction

Is there an example in your life of something that fell apart because it was not organized correctly?

I. The Keys of the Kingdom

Based on the lesson, what two things are signified by what Jesus calls the “keys to the kingdom of heaven”?

Have you ever felt authoritative in the church? How so? What made you feel authoritative? Do you think you were exercising the authority Jesus meant for you to have or something different? Why?

In the context of Matthew 18, what is the church doing when it binds and looses on earth?

How would you describe the congregations role in the polity of the church? What did Adam mean by “seat of authority” in the church?

II. Shepherds of the Kingdom

Why is it important that the apostles appointed the first pastors?

What is your personal experience with pastors? Is it positive or negative? Why?

According to Acts 6:4 What two things are pastors supposed to devote themselves to?

Why do you think the Bible uses three different words (Overseer, Elder, Pastor/Shepherd) to describe the office of pastor?

III. Servants of the Kingdom

What is the primary role of a deacon in the church?

How have you thought of the role of deacon before? Does anything in this lesson change the way you think or broaden your ideas of what a deacon is?

Why is it important for deacons to be filled with the Spirit and qualified for their work?

Give two examples of faithful deacon service in the church according to the New Testament.