

Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 31, "The Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven"

Scripture Lesson: Matthew 16:13-20

Lesson Aim	To understand that the church's leadership is given the responsibility to fence the Lord's Table.
Steps to Learning	Read the Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 31 and Matthew 16:13-20 . Discuss the sermon and the particulars of the lesson below. It may be best to work through the material over several days or sessions.
Discuss	<p>Why is the visible church necessary for people to belong to? Because Christ commands it and because Christ uses the ministry of the church in our lives. That is, through preaching and through discipline, heaven is opened to believers and closed to unbelievers.</p> <p>What does Jesus teach about the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven in Matthew 16? He teaches that the church is given the power to loose on earth (to let people into the Kingdom of Heaven) and to bind on earth (to bind people from entering the Kingdom of Heaven). As Jesus teaches in Matthew 18, he is with the church in this process.</p> <p>How specifically does the church let people into the Kingdom of Heaven and keep others out? This is done, first, by preaching. When the Word is preached on Sundays and received through faith, people are loosed into heaven. When the Word is preached and people reject the Word, they are bound from heaven. But also, second, people are bound from entering heaven when the church disciplines members who don't repent from their sin.</p> <p>What does this process prove? It proves that there is a relationship between the ministry of the church on earth and heaven itself. Christ rules the church from heaven through the ministry of the Word and discipline. This also proves that Christianity is not individualistic; we need each other, and we need the ministry of the church to know Christ and to grow in our faith.</p> <p>While there is a necessary connection between the visible church on earth and heaven, will the church always rule perfectly? No. The church can and does err in letting people into the church (and heaven itself) and keeping others out. Sometimes people will make a false confession of faith, or they may be deluded about having true faith. Other times, the church may misunderstand the sin of others and discipline them. But the church must continue to follow Christ's command to use the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven and does use them effectively when it follows the Scriptures. Ultimately, Jesus has the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and all will be reconciled on the Final Day.</p>
Bible Reading	Psalm 142-150 (Reading through the Psalms)