

PROPOSITION 4: The congregation has authority and responsibility to exercise the keys of the kingdom, that is, to make formal priestly judgments and declarations concerning *what* is the true gospel and therefore *who* is a right confessor. The means of exercising the keys are baptism and the Lord's table, which the congregation must guard. (As a shorthand, the congregation is to judge, declare, and guard the *what* and the *who* of the gospel.)

- Passages considered in SS hour: Matt 16:13-19, Matt 18:15-20, Matt 28:18-20, 1 Pet 2:4-12

Other passages of Scripture (below) also help us to see examples of Proposition 4 worked out in history. Biblical history is helpful, but we also must be careful, because the New Testament church was in a transitional era: (1) sometimes the apostles did things we cannot individually do now (Acts 8:21, 1 Tim 1:20; 1 Cor 5:4). The same is true for Timothy and Titus, who exercised apostolic authority (they were evangelists, not pastor-teachers). Now to the examples:

1. "The What" (& Teachers of the What) - Gal 1:6-9 - Galatians is addressed to the whole congregation. This passage communicates that they should have competence to stay with true gospel, and tells them to anathematize the false teacher even if it is an apostle – making them equal to an apostle in that regard! Conditional phrasing shows this is a broader principle, not a one-off.
 - Galatians 2:11-14 shows that even an apostle could actually err.
2. "The Who" - 1 Cor 5 - Paul has already judged the man, but that itself doesn't remove the man. Paul calls the *church* to remove the man (loosing). Paul leads them (trains them) in how to use the keys.
3. "The Who" - 2 Cor 2:5-11 - the man was punished by the majority and now has repented, so Paul leads them in bringing him back (binding).
4. Acts 6 – not about the keys, but shows a pattern of the apostles leading while treating the gathered church as equal (in that the church had to agree to do what the apostles suggested).

Some observations:

1. No biblical example of church elders unilaterally exercising the keys.
 - Apostles apparently could (Acts 8:21, 1 Tim 1:20), but they were foundation stones. And even they didn't always exercise the keys unilaterally (see above).
2. Congregations needed teaching and training in exercising the keys.
 - The Holy Spirit is the ultimate teacher and trainer.
 - In the New Testament church, the Holy Spirit used the apostles, their delegates like Timothy and Titus, and local church elders, with the Scripture that was completed and recognized at that time.
 - Now that Scripture is completed, the Holy Spirit uses local church elders as undershepherds to teach and train locally by applying all the Scriptures.

First Class (30 June): Member is an Office with Authority and Responsibility

PROPOSITION 1: Within the local church, the right question is not “who has final authority” but rather “who has authority and responsibility to do what?” or “what lanes (*plural*) of authority & responsibility has God established for the local church?”

PROPOSITION 2: To better understand the lanes of authority and responsibility God has given in the local church, we must analyze God’s Word with an eye for patterns of authority, responsibility, and institutions.

PROPOSITION 3: The office of priest-king given to the federal head Adam, which involved working and watching over the place where God dwelled, was further specified in the life of Israel, fulfilled in Christ, and has now been re-conferred on the membership of the church.

Second Class (14 July): Two Lanes of Authority and Responsibility in the Local Church

PROPOSITION 4: The congregation has authority and responsibility to exercise the keys of the kingdom, that is, to make formal priestly judgments and declarations concerning *what* is the true gospel and therefore *who* is a right confessor. The means of exercising the keys are baptism and the Lord’s table, which the congregation must guard. (As a shorthand, the congregation is to judge, declare, and guard the *what* and the *who* of the gospel.)

PROPOSITION 5a: The Holy Spirit sovereignly appoints elders and gives them the authority and responsibility to teach, shepherd, and oversee a local church.

PROPOSITION 5b: Deriving from its authority and responsibility to judge, declare, and guard the *what* of the gospel, a Spirit-filled congregation will: (1) recognize those who are marked out by the Spirit as elders who will equip the saints for the work of ministry by teaching and practicing the *what* of the gospel correctly; and (2) remove an elder if he becomes biblically disqualified.

The central thesis of Chapters 3-5 in Leeman’s book, *Don’t Fire Your Church Members: A Biblical Case for Congregationalism*, is quoted below, from page 67. It provides a useful summary of how the congregation and the elders work together:

“Having recommissioned members of the new covenant as priest-kings, Jesus gives all believers, when gathered as congregations, the authority to administer their priestly and kingly duties with the keys of the kingdom. The whole congregation employs these keys—through the ordinances—to make formal declarations concerning the *what* and the *who* of the gospel. The elders, on the other hand, have a morally binding authority to lead or instruct a church in its use of the keys through their Spirit-given and congregationally affirmed authority to teach. They will make recommendations on matters pertaining to the *what* and the *who*; the congregation then has an obligation to submit to those recommendations, unless it has explicit or implicit biblical grounds for doing otherwise (which is to say, their obligation to submit is relative (or *prima facie*), never absolute (or *ultima facie*)). This distinction between congregational authority and elder authority is not between *possessing* and *exercising*, which deprives the congregation of the exercise. It is a distinction between *possessing* and *leading in the use*, which means the exercise is shared by the elders and the congregation.”

(There are other aspects of how the congregation and the elders work together, and we will address them in our final two classes (7/21 and 7/28))