

Power of the Church

Definition: The power of the church is its God-given authority to carry on spiritual warfare, proclaim the Gospel, and exercise church discipline.

A. Spiritual Warfare

- The church possesses weapons against demonic forces attempting to hinder the spread of the Gospel and the progress of the church. (2 Cor 10:3-4, Eph 6:10-18)
- Gospel has the power to break through sin and awaken faith. (Rom 10:17, James 1:18, 1 Pet 1:23)
- NT examples of subduing demonic opposition: Acts 13:8-11, 16:16-18, 12:1-17
- This can also be used against those in the church that oppose God. (1 Cor 4:19-20, 2 Cor 13:2-4)
- However, Paul was reluctant to exercise this kind of power. (2 Cor 13:10)

B. Keys of the Kingdom

- The NT uses “key” to imply *authority to open a door* and give entrance to a place. (Luke 11:52)
- “whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven ...” is an idiom reflecting a popular Jewish belief that things done by God’s people on earth had heavenly consequences. Also, the unique verb tense indicates that God had already started the process being enacted by His people.
- Jesus giving Peter the “keys to the kingdom” (Matt 16:19) means that the church has the power, by the preaching of the Gospel, to affect who enters heaven.
 - ♦ Grudem: Matt 16:19 also refers to church discipline
 - ♦ JH: Matt 16:19 is only the Gospel. Church discipline is covered in Matt 18:18.
- The church is given the authority to levy church discipline. (Matt 18:17-18)
- This is related to the forgiveness of sins. See John 20:23.
- This authority is only legitimate when conducted according to Biblical teaching.

C. Power of the Church Versus Power of the State

- The church doesn’t use violence (e.g. war) to carry out its purpose. (John 18:36, 2 Cor 10:4)
- In contrast, God gives civil governments the right to bear arms, to restrain evil. (Rom 13:1-7)
- Jesus refused to use physical force to compel people to accept the Gospel. (Luke 9:54-55)
- Jesus made a clear distinction between civil & spiritual authority. (Matt 22:21, Luke 12:13-14)
- Saving faith is a voluntary choice; it cannot be compelled by the state or one’s family.
- Thus, the authority of the church and the authority of the state belong to different spheres.
- However, Christians are free to attempt to influence the state to enact laws that are consistent with Biblical moral teaching.

D. Church Discipline

1. Purpose of Church Discipline

a. To Restore a Backsliding Believer

- The primary purpose is *restoration* (of the offender to right behavior) and *reconciliation* (between believers and with God).
- Church discipline is done in love for the offender. (Heb 12:6, Gal 6:1, James 5:20)
- If church members follow Matt 18:15, then church discipline will rarely be necessary.
- Even in excommunication, we hope the offender will return to God. (1 Tim 1:20, 1 Cor 5:5)

b. To Keep Sin from Spreading

- Another purpose is that sin will be kept from spreading to others. (Heb 12:15, 1 Cor 5:2 & 6-7)
- Public rebuke of elders will let others know that sin will not be tolerated. (1 Tim 5:20, Gal 2:11)

c. To Protect the Honor of Christ

- When Christians sin outwardly, Christ’s reputation is damaged. (Rom 2:24, 1 Cor 5:1-2)
- If the church fails to exercise discipline, God will do it. (1 Cor 11:27-34, Rev 2:14-15, 2:20)

2. Sins Leading to Church Discipline
 - Church discipline should follow the other steps in Matt 18:15-17, if necessary.
 - Church discipline is appropriate for public sins that have continued for a long time.
 - We must exercise mature judgment in deciding whether or not church discipline is needed for a particular situation.

3. How Should Church Discipline Be Carried Out?
 - a. Localization of Knowledge
 - As Matt 18:15-17 suggests, sin should be kept private, if possible.

 - b. Increasing in Strength
 - As Matt 18:15-17 suggests, there is an escalation of audience and consequences.
 - Christ tells both parties (e.g. offender & offended) to initiate a resolution. (Matt 18:15, 5:23)
 - The final decision body is the church. (Matt 18:17)
 - Christ is present at such a church meeting. (Matt 18:19-20, 1 Cor 5:4)
 - The church may decide to cut off fellowship. (1 Cor 10:17, 5:11, 2 Thess 3:6, 3:14-15)

 - c. Discipline of Church Leaders
 - There are special procedures to handle the case of church leaders sinning in 1 Tim 5:19-21.
 - ◆ The charge requires evidence from two or three witnesses.
 - ◆ If a rebuke is necessary, then such a rebuke is publicly made.
 - ◆ Such a rebuke will let the congregation know that sin will not be tolerated.
 - ◆ Decisions must be made with impartiality.

 - d. Other Aspects
 - If there is repentance at any stage of the process, Christians who know about the discipline should welcome the repentant brother back into fellowship. (2 Cor 2:7-8)
 - Church discipline must be done with gentleness and humility. (Gal 6:1)
 - Jesus speaks on forgiveness immediately after discussing church discipline. (Matt 18:21-25)
 - Unless a church member is being excommunicated, there seems to be no NT requirement for member (except church leaders) to publicly disclose sin.
 - ◆ James 5:16 says “confess your sins to each other ...”; however, this is in the context of receiving prayer and there is no prescription of how detailed the confession must be.
 - ◆ 1 John 1:9 says “If we confess our sins ..”; however, this is in the context of not pretending that we are sinless.
 - ◆ The word “confess” is mostly used in the NT as a public profession of faith. (John 12:42, Rom 10:9-10, Phil 2:11, Heb 3:1, Heb 13:15)

Church Government

A. Church Officers

- **Definition:** A church officer is someone who has been publicly recognized as having the right and responsibility to perform certain functions for the benefit of the whole church.
- Church officers (e.g. elder, pastor) *need public recognition* in order to do their job effectively.
- Other roles within a church (e.g. gift of “helps”, gift of exhorting) do not need public recognition in order to effectively exercise the role.

1. Apostle

- The apostles listed in the NT had a unique kind of authority in the church: speak & write words that were regarded as “words of God” in an absolute sense.
- Three meanings of the word “apostle”:
 - ♦ today' s popular usage - effective church planter or missionary pioneer
 - ♦ Greek definition - “messenger” or “one who is sent” (Phil 2:25, 2 Cor 8:23, John 13:16)
 - ♦ a special church office - “apostle of Jesus Christ”; most of this section is concerned with this narrow definition of the word “apostle”.

a. Qualifications

- Seeing Jesus after the resurrection with one' s own eyes. (Acts 1:22, 1:2-3)
 - ♦ Paul saw Jesus after the resurrection. (1 Cor 9:1, 15:7-9, Acts 26:16)
- Specific appointment by Jesus Christ as an apostle.
 - ♦ Jesus' closest disciples are called “apostles” in the context of Jesus commissioning them to go out preaching. (Matt 10:1-7, Acts 1:2 w/ 1:8)
 - ♦ The 11 apostles asked Christ to appoint an apostle to replace Judas. (Acts 1:24-26)
 - ♦ Christ personally appointed Paul as an apostle. (Acts 26:16-17, Rom 1:1, Gal 1:1)

b. Who Were Apostles?

- The original 12 disciples, minus Judas, plus Matthias, were the “charter members” of the church office of apostleship. (Acts 1:26, Rev 21:14)
- Paul, Barnabas, and James (the brother of Jesus) are also called “apostles”. (Acts 14:14, Gal 1:19, 1 Cor 15:7-9)
- There may have been a few more, but there is insufficient evidence to conclude more than 15.
 - ♦ Rom 16:7 does not conclusively teach that Andronicus & Junias were apostles, since there are many translation problems with this verse; see Grudem page 909 for details.
 - ♦ 1 Thess 2:6 does not conclusively teach that Silas & Timothy were apostles, since Paul uses “we” as a courtesy towards his companions; see Grudem pages 909-910 for details.
- Was Paul the last appointed apostle? (1 Cor 15:5-9)

c. What about Ephesians 4:11?

- The list of “five-fold” ministry offices includes “apostles”.
- The Grandville-Sharp rule of Greek construction suggests that “pastors and teachers” is *one, unified office*. Thus, it may be more accurate to say that Eph 4:11 lists four offices.
- Grudem' s position: The verb tense indicates a one-time event (“He gave ...”).
 - ♦ Other NT verses must be used to establish whether or not Christ gives those gifts today.
 - ♦ We do find other NT verses that indicate the giving of prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers. We find no other verses that indicate appointment of apostles after Paul.
- Classic charismatic position: Christ continues to give apostles today, based on Eph 4:11. This will continue until “we all come to the unity of the faith”. (Eph 4:13)

d. Parting Shots (from Grudem)

- There are no apostles today; instead, we have their writings (the NT) to teach & lead the church.
- No *major leaders* in church history (e.g. Augustine, Calvin) referred to themselves as “apostles”.
- Today' s ministers should avoid the title “apostle” because it is confusing in light of NT usage.

2. Elder

a. Multiple Elders

- Consistent NT pattern of the local church being governed by plural (multiple) elders. (Acts 14:23, 20:17, 15:2, Titus 1:5, 1 Tim 4:14, James 5:14, 1 Peter 5:1-2)
 - ♦ Note that NT books of James and Peter are *general epistles*, written to many churches.
- No NT passage suggests that any church had only one elder.
- No other patterns of local church government seen in the NT.

b. Other Names

- The noun “pastor” (Gk. *poimen*) is used only in Eph 4:11.
- The related verb “to act as a shepherd” (Gk. *poimaino*) is used in Acts 20:28 and 1 Peter 5:2.
 - ♦ These two passages are clearly addressed to church elders.
- “Bishop” or “overseer” (Gk. *episkopos*) is used in Acts 20:28, 1 Tim 3:1-2, Titus 1:5-7, Phil 1:1.
 - ♦ Since the 2nd century AD, some parts of the church use “bishop” to refer to a single person with authority over several churches; however, this is not found in the NT.

c. Functions

- Governing and ruling over the local church (1 Tim 5:17, 3:4-5)
 - ♦ Consistent with the image of a shepherd, elders must not rule harshly. (1 Peter 5:2-5)
- Preaching and teaching (Eph 4:11, 1 Tim 3:2, Titus 1:9)
 - ♦ There may be a subset of elders that focus more (“labor”) on teaching. (1 Tim 5:17)

d. Qualifications

- One list of qualifications for elders is found in 1 Tim 3:2-7.
- A similar list is found in Titus 1:6-9.
- Some of these qualifications require years of faithful Christian living to become evident.
- By these qualifications, elders become living examples to the flock. (1 Tim 4:12, Titus 2:7)

e. Husband of One Wife

- Both lists of qualifications contain the item “the husband of one wife”. (1 Tim 3:2, Titus 1:6)
- Some believe that men who have remarried after divorce cannot be elders.
- Grudem' s position: this is only a prohibition against a polygamist becoming an elder.
 - ♦ The lists of qualifications apply to a man' s present status, not his entire past life.
 - ♦ Polygamy was practiced by some Jews at the time.
- An opposing position:
 - ♦ If God sees marriage as a permanent covenant with limited exceptions (Matt 5:31-32), then a remarried man (after divorce) is in a similar position to the polygamist.

f. Installation

- The selection of elders and deacons must not be rushed. (1 Tim 5:22, 3:10)
- In the NT, selection of church officers was often accompanied by prayer and fasting. (Acts 14:23)

3. Deacon

- The office of deacon (Gk. *diakonos*) is distinct from the office of elder. (Phil 1:1, 1 Tim 3:8)
- The list of qualifications for deacons is found in 1 Tim 3:8-13.
- Grudem: the list of qualifications suggests some functions of deacons.
- The overall function of deacons can be seen most clearly in Acts 6:2.
 - ♦ The apostles wanted additional men “to serve” (Gk. *diakoneo*) in the administrative tasks of the church, so that the apostles could focus on teaching.
- The NT sometimes uses *diakonos* to mean “servant”, not the church office of deacon. (Rom 16:1, 13:4, 15:8, 1 Cor 3:5)
- Deacons do not have ruling authority, nor are they required to be able to teach Scripture.