

His Mercy and His Men - V

What do you believe about the Office of the Keys?

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities, writes the holy Apostle Paul. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgement.

We do not like to hear that, most of us, and particularly most of us here in Wyoming do not; nevertheless, this is what the Apostle also writes about any servant of the government: *He is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.* In other words, through the authorities instituted by Him, God Himself acts, as Lord of history, and as Lord of your life.

And the Holy Apostle Peter writes: *For the Lord's sake, be subject to every human institution!* In other words, Christians should submit to earthly authorities, not only for the sake of good order, but for *the Lord's sake*, that is: as a matter of faith, in direct obedience to God Himself!

The question arises immediately in our minds, though, does it not: What about *bad government*? Well, we heard the answer tonight, in the answer our Lord Jesus gave to Pilate: *You would have no authority over me at all, had it not been given you from above. Therefore He who gave me over to you has the greater sin.*

Pilate was a bad ruler, a brutal one, and a cowardly one, also. And through his brutality and cowardice was the greatest injustice ever in history brought about, the slaying of the Son of God. And this was all by the design of God. He who is Himself God, who had taken upon Himself the fullness of sin, had given Himself over to Pilate; and through Pilate's brutal and cowardly ruling, the purpose of God was brought to completion, the salvation of sinners.

There is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Through the authorities God institutes and puts in place, He Himself works in the world, and in the life of His Christians. Therefore He commands His Christians, in Holy Scripture: *For the Lord's sake, be subject to every human institution!*

Ever so much more, obviously, would this hold true for *that special authority which Christ has given to His Church on earth to forgive the sins of repentant sinners, but to withhold forgiveness from the unrepentant as long as they do not repent.*

Not only that Christians should *obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account; as the Letter to the Hebrews writes it, nor only that there is no authority except from God in Church, either, and that those that exist have been instituted by God also in Church; or as the holy Apostle Paul is recorded in the Book of Acts as having spoken to the Pastors of Ephesus of the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the Church of God, which He obtained with His own blood. But first and foremost this: that when the called ministers of Christ deal with us by His divine command, in particular when they exclude openly unrepentant sinners from the Christian congregation and absolve those who repent of their sins and want to do better, this is just as valid and certain, even in Heaven, as if Christ our dear Lord dealt with us Himself. As God Himself works His will in the world, and in your life, by means of earthly authorities, good or bad, so He works His will in Church, and in your life with Him, by means of the man He has given to your congregation, and as such also to you, to speak His Word to you.*

Through him He speaks His promise to you of full forgiveness for all your sins and shortcomings. For the promise He has your Pastor speak to you is His own promise, for which He has Himself paid the most terrible price with His sufferings and death. Therefore, the Word of salvation your Pastor speaks to you is *just as valid and certain, even in Heaven, as if Christ our dear Lord dealt with us Himself; because He does that, through the called minister of the Church. And so, you can be confident and rejoice in your salvation, when you have confessed to your Pastor whatever sins might have bothered you and made you to doubt your salvation, and then hear the word of forgiveness as his direct response to your confession; unless you deliberately lied, of course; but why would you? That would defeat the purpose to begin with, would it not? Well, obviously it would.*

And just as valid and certain, even in Heaven, is it when they exclude openly unrepentant sinners from the Christian congregation; when your Pastor tells you that he cannot pronounce the promise of salvation to you, and asks you to refrain from receiving the Sacrament, because you refuse to repent of some specific sin, and to turn away from your ungodly ways, or when he outright refuses to give the Sacrament to you, also in public, because your sin is public, and known to others, and your refusal to repent.

And all this is for your salvation. Yes. It is for your salvation God has His Word of salvation spoken to you with His own authority.

And it is also for your salvation that He has given your Pastor to you to warn you, and sincerely and severely so, against hardening your heart to the Word and will of God, and shut your heart off to His love.

In matters of your salvation, you should not trust in your own judgement. It is the ancient lie of the evil one that we ourselves are like God in knowing and judging good and evil. So often, when we have the choice between the love of God and our own or that of the world, our choice is to set Barrabbas the murderer free in our hearts and minds and let Christ be crucified anew and faith in us to die. And this we might do even without knowing it, because in our judgement, what we are doing is really not all that serious, misled by our own sinful mind, and perhaps persuaded by others, by unbelievers, by the world around us, or by what is taught by false preachers and teachers, and tolerated and accepted in churches that do not honour the Word and will of God.

But declaring ourselves innocent does not make us to be innocent; no more than Pilate became innocent of the blood of Christ by declaring himself to be that; that is one of the greatest ironies of history, is it not? That all over the world ever since, Pilate has been held accountable for what he did; that the Son of God *suffered under Pontius Pilate*.

Ultimately, *we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ*, as the holy Apostle Paul writes it. And ultimately, His judgement is the only one that matters. And this does not bode well for those who will not submit to His judgement and repent; those who would rather take the risk. Like the Jews who defiantly declared: *His blood be upon us, and upon our children*.

Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, writes the holy Apostle John, *for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God.* If we are comfortable to live in disobedience and defiance against God, then it shows that we are *not of the faith*.

God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all, the Apostle also writes, *and if we say we are in communion with Him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not do the Truth*, that is: we are lying, not living the faith, even if we do go to Church, or at least are members, and say that we believe in Him, and perhaps think ourselves that we do.

If we say that we have no sin, the Apostle also writes, we deceive ourselves, and the Truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just so as to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

He is indeed; for His will is your salvation. Therefore is it that He wills to deliver you from deceiving yourself that you have no sin, or that your disobedience is not sin, or that faith in you will not die from your defiance against Him and His Word and His will and His love for you.

Therefore is it that He has set someone to speak to you with His own authority, and set His love before you, what He has suffered for you. *Behold, this is Man!* This is what sin is, what it has done. This is what sin has caused the Son of God to suffer. This is what you would have Him suffer anew, when you choose sin over Him *They are crucifying once again the Son of God,* writes the Letter to the Hebrews of those who turn away from the faith. And you are, when you harden your heart against Him and His Word and will in disobedience and defiance, against His love; when you set your own judgement over His and will not be taught by the man He Himself has set to teach you, for your salvation, and through whom Christ our dear Lord deals with you Himself.

Through the man He has set to teach His Truth to you, Christ our dear Lord deals with You Himself. When He first appeared alive to His Apostles after His sufferings and death, before He told them: *If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld!*, He told them: *As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you!*

In other words, in the ministry of your Pastor, the Good Shepherd continues His shepherdly care for His flock. That is why your Pastor is called *Pastor*, the Latin word for *shepherd*. As the Father sent the Son for the salvation of sinners, so the Son sent and sends His servants with salvation for sinners - for your salvation; to save you from the sickness of sin in your heart and mind, ungodliness and unbelief, and also from the *guilt* of sin.

So submit to the Word with which He has sent His servant to you. Repent of the sin with which he confronts you; if it persists in haunting you, confess it anew, again and again, and take his word of forgiveness to heart. It is *as valid and certain, even in Heaven, as if Christ our dear Lord dealt with us Himself*; for He does, in the manner He has chosen, through the man He has chosen.

O Christ our God, Lamb of God, who have borne, and take away, the sin of the world, have mercy upon us. *Amen.*