

# Christ's Authority and Wisdom in Building His Church

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[ 0 : 00 ] Please turn to Matthew 16. I'll be reading verses 15 through 19. He asked his disciples, saying, Who do men say that I am?

The Son of Man, that I, the Son of Man, am. So they said, Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, others Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.

He said to them, But who do you say that I am? Simon Peter answered and said, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Jesus answered and said to him, Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.

And also I say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

[ 1 : 21 ] And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God. Please be seated. The grass withers, the flower fades, the word of the Lord stands forever, and no word from God shall be void of power.

Let's pray. Lord, we ask that your Holy Spirit will please give us the faith to behold Jesus.

We pray, Lord, that through the scripture that you've revealed and preserved, applied to us, that your Spirit will help us to be there, and to see our Lord Jesus walking with his disciples in this part of the world, in that point in history.

We pray that your Spirit will help us to marvel at the mystery of what he is declaring to them. We pray also, Lord, that you will give me clarity. I pray that your Spirit will minister your truth with power.

[ 2 : 32 ] I pray that you will help us to discern and to weigh out what's preached today. And I praise you, Lord, for those who have gone before us over the centuries of the church. Thank you for your faithfulness and how you've always been with your church, and you've always preserved your church in truth and in peace, one way or the other.

We trust you'll continue to do that, Lord. We know you will do it even despite us. We praise you, Lord, that by your grace you bring us under your word, and we pray that you will even do that through us and with us, your church right here as you planted us.

For your glory we ask. Amen. Well, different ones of us have had to work with a construction project over the years. And maybe it's been like a residential project to have a house built or remodeled or a school that got built.

What you learn with a construction project nowadays is it's become very complex, and it almost always ends with lawsuits. With a construction project, there's one official builder that receives a contract.

The builder is signing this contract to build something, and they're saying, I'm going to take on all the risk, all the responsibility, and the obligation to deliver what I've promised in this contract as the builder.

[ 3 : 52 ] The builder will then pull in all kinds of others underneath their ultimate authority to get the job done. Others will contribute, but there is one builder.

This builder has all of the authority needed to execute everything that must happen until the project is completed. I want to focus today the theme of the sermon on the authority of Christ as the chief builder of his church.

The authority. The word authority, according to Noah Webster's Dictionary of 1828, it's a legal power, a right to command, to act.

It's a rule or a sway. The examples he gives are the authority of a prince or a civil magistrate over subjects of a kingdom or the authority of parents over children.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, in this flesh, on this earth, he worked a job like you and me. He was an apprentice. He had to learn a skill.

[ 5 : 00 ] And the word for carpenter, which was the trade he learned from his dad, a better description of that would be a builder. If we were to picture our Lord Jesus in the flesh in our time today, it would be like when you go to a food truck like El Poblano and the guys walk up with their safety vests, you know, yellow vests on, blue collar builders working all these different sites.

And our Lord Jesus could have had a lot of other jobs on this earth. In God's providence, isn't that a beautiful thing? The skill he learned was that of being a builder.

So the title of today's sermon is Christ's authority and wisdom in building his church. Christ's authority and wisdom in building his church.

I want to walk through three observations from this passage. And I also want you to know on the third one, I'm going to do my best to pull in what I've been gleaning from a tradition of interpretation following reformed congregationalism in the vein of John Cotton from the 1600s.

So the first observation is this. There is one who holds all divine authority. There is one, one builder who holds all divine authority.

[ 6 : 22 ] Let's marvel at this one first. Matthew 16, 15. Jesus tells his disciples to answer this question.

Who do you say that I am? Simon Peter answered and said, you are the anointed one. You are the Messiah. You are the Christ, the son of the living God.

I mean, you think of what a statement that is. Here's Peter, another blue collar fisherman. These are ordinary guys and they've been living with this ordinary man, a builder. Who now they begin to call rabbi.

And he says, you are the anointed one, the Messiah, son of the living God. And Jesus said to him, blessed are you, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my father who is in heaven.

This statement that Peter made is true. But it's given as a gift of faith, as a revelation that the father in heaven has to give to people.

[ 7 : 28 ] So before we speak of Christ's authority in his church, we need to we need to marvel and make sure we grasp the one, the person, Jesus Christ, who holds all authority.

The living God himself must reveal to you and me, to every believer that Jesus is God. He is God, the son.

And it's this confession that Peter makes that is the rock. It's this gospel, this revelation from God, the person of Jesus. That's the foundation of the church.

Our hope as believers is built entirely on whether or not that's true of Jesus Christ. The theme here in this passage is building his church, but he uses another metaphor.

He talks about the keys of the kingdom. And when when Peter says you are the Christ, you are the Messiah, you're the promised anointed one. And this is making those who know the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, think of all the promises bundled around the Messiah, the coming one.

[ 8 : 39 ] One of those promises in Isaiah 22, verse 22. The prophecy says that the key of the house of David, God will lay on the shoulder of the Messiah.

So he shall open and no one shall shut and he shall shut and no one shall open. And Peter is declaring you are this Messiah, the one who will have the key to the house of David.

You will be a king and you will have supreme authority. Jesus Christ is the true holder of this kingdom key. He opens the door of salvation and no mortal man or devil can shut it.

And the time of his grace is right now. Jesus is offering grace to whosoever will come to him. But there's a time at his second coming where this door of grace will be closed.

The offer of grace is now before he returns, because when he comes again, there's no power on hell or on earth that can undo his final decree.

[ 9 : 46 ] And as the ruler of the house of David, as the king of kings, as the Messiah, Jesus is the lawgiver. Isaiah 33, 22 says the Lord is our lawgiver.

The Lord is our king. Once the work of Jesus is completed and the Holy Spirit then breathes out all of the New Testament, bearing witness to who Jesus is.

The same description is confirmed again in Revelation chapter three, verse seven. Jesus is described as the one who is holy. He is true.

He who has the key of David. He who opens and no one shuts and who shuts and no one opens. See, Revelation interprets for us that Isaiah prophecy.

Jesus Christ is the one who holds all divine authority. He's the Messiah. In Luke 4, 36, Jesus is described as one who came with authority and power.

[10:46] And this was put on display as he walked this earth because the unclean spirits would come out of people and flee from his presence. Christ also then holds all legislative authority over his church.

He is the lawgiver. He alone can make laws for his church. James 4, 1 interprets the law giving of Christ that same way. There is one lawgiver who is able to save and to destroy.

You see the weight of all of scripture holding up Christ alone. He is preeminent. He has all divine authority. And so when Jesus says in Matthew 28, 18, He says all authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth.

He's bringing all of divine revelation to bear the weight of his authority. This is the one who holds all divine authority. It's Jesus Christ.

Let's make sure that we know the person of Jesus Christ. To know him is the very rock upon which our salvation is built. Jesus Christ has opened the door to heaven to you who believe, to you who will come to him.

[12:02] And Satan and sin, they cannot keep you out. It's Christ alone who can welcome you into his kingdom. And no pastor, no false teacher can get in the way and try to give you hurdles to jump through and to block you to say to be truly saved.

Here's what you need to do. He is the law giver and he opens up the doors of grace to all who will come to him. Jesus Christ holds all divine authority.

Second observation, the purpose for which King Jesus wields his divine authority. In this passage, not only is he called the Messiah, the anointed one, the Christ, you know, the promised fulfillment of all of God's prophecies, but we're also told what he will do as this mediator and as this all-powerful one.

Look at our passage, Matthew 16, verse 18. Jesus responds, I also say to you that you are Peter and on this rock, I will build my church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

Well, in verse 13, we read where they are, which region are they walking through with his disciples at this time? It's a region of Caesarea Philippi. And by the title, you can tell this is a place where the Roman Empire has established a very big palace.

[13:29] And along with this is a temple and is dedicated to cult worship of the emperor of Rome. And it's also a region where another pagan temple was built for the idol called Pan.

And so here's a place of extreme spiritual darkness and oppression. And this temple and this palace, they're right up against the face of a rock. And both in Greek mythology, like in the Iliad, as well as in this first century Christianity, there were nicknames given to caves that would lead you into a rock face like that.

And different locations like that were considered like portals into the underworld where the dead would live. And Jesus was pointing to this location in Caesarea Philippi that had that nickname, the gates of Hades, the gate to the underworld.

It's a place of spiritual darkness. And this is the first time that Jesus uses the word ecclesia to refer to his people, the church. He says, on this rock, this statement, this profession of faith, I will build my ecclesia.

I will build my assembly, my church. And the gates of Hades shall not prevail against my church. He's naming his people.

[14:51] Mark Dever had a wonderful comment. Jesus Christ founded his own assembly, his own church. Jesus first names his New Testament people as my church right here in this verse.

As Adam named his bride, so Christ names the church. That's the end of Dever's quote. Well, the church will prevail is what he says.

The church will prevail over against the Roman Empire, over against the forces of darkness and demonic temple worship. The church of Christ will prevail over hell and Satan itself.

Revelation 9, 1 says, I saw a star fallen from heaven to earth, and to him was given the key to the bottomless pit. See, it's that theme of a key again being used.

And it's difficult maybe for us to understand the meaning, but we need to put ourselves under God's word and do our best to wrestle with this. What is this key to the bottomless pit?

[16:00] And who is this fallen star? Stars in the scriptures are often referred to as angels that rebelled against God and became demons. So this fallen star refers to Satan or Apollyon, which means destroyer.

At Adam's fall, the devil who knows God is just, he stands to accuse sinners and to prosecute us all the way to hell for eternity. So Satan appeals to God's justice and has this key or this authority to do so, to be our condemner, our accuser.

And he justly locks up sinners in hell and unleashes the torments of demons as a form of divine judgment in the bottomless abyss in hell.

Jesus says, my church will prevail against hell. Even though Satan has this key to the bottomless pit because of Adam's fall, and he gets to use that authority or that power over everyone who is a sinner, Jesus is bringing a wonderful gospel that says, my church, I'm pulling out of hell, so to speak.

I'm lifting you up and I have all authority. The reason Jesus has all authority is because he satisfied divine justice with his righteousness and he appeased divine wrath with his death.

[17:25] Amen. Our Lord Jesus Christ descended to hell into the deepest, darkest depths, not as a captive, but he went to hell as a conqueror.

So now Satan can no longer accuse anyone that Christ has purchased with his own blood. Romans 118 says, I am he who lives and was dead and behold, I am alive forever.

Revelation 118. And Jesus says, I have the keys of death and Hades. See, Jesus tore those keys out of Satan's hands.

He took that authority from Satan away. You can't condemn my people anymore. Jesus has the authority even over who goes to hell. The devil cannot accuse the soul that Christ has purchased with his blood, for he holds the keys now.

Christ alone. Christ alone rescues people from hell. And he doesn't leave them on this earth. He puts them into his church, the church over which he rules.

[18:33] And he wields his power, his authority to do just that, to build his church with one more soul after another. Jesus said in John 15, 5, apart from me, you can do nothing.

The purpose for which King Jesus wields his divine authority is to build his church. It will be his own power, his own authority through his people accomplishing his purpose.

He loves to share his power and his authority with his followers. That was the pattern of his ministry. In Luke 9, 1, he gave his disciples power and authority over demons.

In Luke 10, 19, he says, The purpose for which King Jesus wields his authority is to rescue sinners from hell and to build them into his church.

He has bought you and me to build you and me up as his church, his body. Our Lord Jesus descended to the very prison house of the grave and he conquered.

[19:53] And he did this in order to establish his church. His every act of authority from commanding demons to leave and putting the ministry of the church in order, it's for the sole purpose of gathering, strengthening, and prevailing with his ransomed bride.

Isn't this wonderful? The power of Christ in the gospel and how central the church is to his very purpose. Well, the third observation is this.

How wisely King Jesus has dispersed divine authority. He's a wise builder. Everything he has set out to do, it's ultimately for his glory.

And it's different than what man would come up with. It takes into account all of our frailty and our weakness. Notice verse 19, Matthew 16, 19. Jesus says, I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

And whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven. Whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. This reminds us of what we read in John 20, verse 22.

[21:05] Jesus breathed on them and said, Receive the Holy Spirit. And if you forgive the sins of any, they will be forgiven them. If you retain the sins of any, they are retained.

And after the Lord finished his work and ascended and poured out his Holy Spirit, this sign act of blowing on them was fulfilled when the Holy Spirit came like a mighty wind and formed these

disciples, these followers of Christ into a church.

So when he says, I give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, whatever you bind will be bound.

Whatever you loose will be loosed. He's speaking to Peter as a representative of the church.

He's giving his authority to his church. And that's what we get to unpack. How has he done that?

Looking at the rest of scripture. And what did these keys mean?

One of our catechisms that we use to teach at our churches, based on the Heidelberg Catechism of 1563, and it's adapted by a Reformed Baptist or particular Baptist named Hercules Collins.

[ 22 : 12 ] And we've read this question as part of our liturgy before. Question 89. What are the keys of the kingdom? And the answer that the church has held to for centuries is given in the catechism.

The keys of the kingdom are the preaching of the Holy Gospel and Christian discipline toward repentance. So both preaching and discipline open the kingdom of heaven to believers and close it to unbelievers.

So preaching and discipline. Those are the keys of the kingdom according to the catechism. To continue using this language of keys and putting ourselves under God's word, these are the words Christ himself used.

Keys would be the authority of Christ delegated. It's delegated or shared or given or dispersed.

First, authority. And Jesus did not give all the power and authority to a bishop or a pope.

He gave it to the church. And he didn't do it in an individualistic or chaotic way. He gave it to the church in an orderly way. Remember, he told his disciples, wait.

[ 23 : 20 ] And as they waited, they prayed. And he poured out his spirit on them, on the church corporately. All of them as one body gathered in his name. The second time that our Lord Jesus uses the word church is also helpful to get at his meaning here.

Would you turn just another page forward to Matthew 18 and look at verse 17. He's giving disciples instructions.

When you are operating as a church by the help of the Holy Spirit. If two or three gather in my name and speak truth and love to another brother or sister, there is a real declarative authority.

Calling them back to Christ. Turn away from sin. Turn to Christ. There's a declarative authority there. And he says in verse 17, if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church.

So every Christian, every disciple of Christ will have a church. They will belong to a church. They will be part of a local body where there's an orderly way to obey Christ in this way.

[ 24 : 26 ] You need to have a church to tell it to in this case. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen. So in Matthew 18, he's using the same term ecclesia.

These are the only two times Jesus uses that term church. And he's saying there's a clear line. You're either in my church or you're a heathen. You're of the world.

The line is not blurry between the church and the world. And so when Jesus says to Peter, I'm giving you the keys of the kingdom.

This is where we need a little bit of help. We need a tradition of interpretation. If we take one tradition of interpretation, we'll end up with the conclusion that Peter now is the pope.

And that's the line that receives all the authority over the church. If we take a different line of interpretation, we'll end up with very different conclusions as well.

[ 25 : 21 ] So what I want to present to you is received by the congregationalists that were in England in the 1600s. It was one of those Puritans who had migrated through the Netherlands, came to the American colonies in the middle of the 1600s named John Cotton.

And his work was so clear, even though it's somewhat concise. When it got back to England, the prince of the Puritans, as he's called, John Owen, read it and was convinced away from Presbyterian toward reformed congregationalism.

And so John Cotton offers, I think, to me, a very helpful tradition of interpretation. Who was Peter representing in this statement?

Cotton says Peter had a unique role representing an apostle, an elder and a believer representing all of those. He's representative of all three.

And the exercise of all the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven is committed not to any single person, but it is distributed among the rest of the church, which is composed.

[ 26 : 27 ] Philippians 1, 1, the whole church from among them, elders and deacons. So you could say officers and the brethren. That's the language of Scripture. According to their respective gifts and places.

That's the end of Cotton's quote. So following this tradition of interpretation, I'd like to pull in other passages from the Scripture and show you six ways in which the keys of the kingdom or the authority of Christ over his church has been dispersed.

And the reason this is important is because every believer has an active role and a responsibility as a member of the church of Christ. So the first way in which Christ has dispersed his power, he's given it to the individual believer.

To you and me as individual stand-alone Christians. Cotton called this the key of faith or to use Christ's own words, the key of knowledge. In Luke chapter 11, verse 54, Jesus himself says, Woe to you lawyers, you have taken away the key of knowledge.

You did not enter yourselves and those who were entering you hindered. So Jesus says, you who are now holding the law against my people, you have taken away from my people the key of knowledge.

[ 27 : 45 ] That's the word Christ himself uses. This means that every true believer can know a saving faith in Jesus Christ. And it gives you confidence to know the Holy Spirit will convict me what is true.

And if again, if I hear another person telling me that you need to do this and this and this in order to save yourself, You have the key of knowledge, the key of faith to know that is not the true gospel. And some families have been drawn to this church by God's grace because they were at another church telling them, Unless you keep the covenant for yourself and satisfy the law, you can't know that you're saved.

It was a gospel of works, not a gospel of grace. So that's the first one, the key of faith or knowledge. The second authority that God disperses is to the entire congregation.

John Cotton calls this the key of order for a body together. It's given to a visible local church for participation in church life. Second Thessalonians 3, 6 tells a church as an orderly body to withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly.

[ 28 : 57 ] So the nature, the structure, the visible makeup of a local church ought to be directed by the word of King Jesus, not from a civil government, as was happening in England in the 1600s.

It's not also up to a group that's going to go off and make decisions on behalf of the whole body. This is to be under the word of God. It should be the scripture itself that regulates the practices of a church.

This has been called over time the regulative principle, a church that's doing its best to be more and more and more regulated by the word of God. So how a church goes about doing that ought to be putting ourselves more and more again, time and time again, under the word of God.

And it was John Owen, late 1600s in England. And he was even appointed as chancellor over Oxford University when Oliver Cromwell took over, you know, running the empire, the monarchy. And John Owen observed observed this about church order at the time. He said the Moldovian Greek Orthodox churches, they didn't have local ministers, but rather only regional bishops.

[ 30 : 08 ] And he saw this as being an imitation of Alexander the Great's governors. He noticed how the Roman Catholics patterned after the Roman Empire, even Anglicanism and Episcopalianism.

And Owen thought were patterned off the British Empire. He even went as far and said that Presbyterianism was patterned off of Scottish clans rejecting magisterial rule of a king appointed priest and said it would be the lords of the clans coming together.

Where their decisions now as clan lords would then bind those they went back. And that's the Presbyterian model of elders going off and as a Presbyterian making decisions that then come back and bind all the congregations.

Now think about today. That's the end of Owen's observations. But today, most Baptist Christians or churches are patterned off of majority rules.

It's very similar to an American democracy or as Thomas Jefferson cautioned, a mobocracy. Most megachurches are patterned off of corporate empires where a CEO hires an HR department and they become financially dependent on the market and they have a staffing plan to service consumers.

[ 31 : 26 ] You see how we need to be just as careful today as in the 1600s. We need to be regulated as best we can under God's word and God's word alone for the order of a church.

To be very clear, the 1689 confession of faith is first reformed. It's not out of the Armenian or general Baptist tradition, which was it was a little bit more free for all, a little bit more in that Anabaptist vein.

This was more patterned off of the Puritan trying to reform from within the more Presbyterian model. And so that's the confession of faith of a reformed Baptist church today.

Yes, Baptist. Yes, Congregationalist in the sense that there's not a higher national church or something like that. But first and foremost, under doing our best to be under God's word in the reformed Puritan tradition.

So that's the key of order, the power given to churches as a whole to order themselves. The third one is specifically for members of local churches.

[ 32 : 34 ] And Cotton called this the key of liberty or the key of privilege. If you're a member of a local church, as every Christian ought to be, you have the key or the authority to weigh a matter, to peacefully discuss a question, to uphold truth, to check the scriptures.

And that's an important responsibility that every Christian has. Galatians 5.13 says, For you, brethren, addressing all the Christians, the members of this local church, you have been called to liberty.

Only do not use your liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love, serve one another. So each one has been liberated from our own bent towards self, our own fleshly desires.

We're liberated to serve a local body, to use the wisdom, the insights, the discernment that God has given us. As a member of a local church, you also need to use this authority to help confirm to the best of our ability together what is the mind of Christ.

Acts 6.3-6 tells the congregation, Choose from among you men of good repute, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom the elders may appoint over this business.

[ 33 : 48 ] And it well pleased the whole multitude, and they chose these men. And these were the proto-deacons. But you see how they had a responsibility. They had this authority or this power to choose from among them, and then to affirm and confirm who it is that we believe God is raising up.

Notice the language. It would be the elders then who would appoint these men over this matter. So Christ will raise up servants from within the church. He'll raise up officers. The congregation has a responsibility to seek out from among you, to be a member that takes that responsibility very seriously and eagerly.

Then the elders entrust to faithful men and equip them. The congregation has the role of testing and eventually confirming. We believe this is a man that God has raised up.

It's Jesus Christ who ultimately delegates his authority, but he does it through a congregation, through the members having their part, the officers having their part.

And so the authority is not given by those who are asked to vote. The authority is given by Christ himself. And it's recognized that way. Then there are two powers or two authorities given to the office of elder in John Cotton's tradition of interpretation.

[ 35 : 09 ] The first he called the key of rule. And Peter is a representative of an elder. He served as an elder of a local church. Elders have the authority to call the whole assembly together, to leave the assembly in worship, to propose a decision for for consideration, for a decision making process and to ordain those who the church has confirmed.

They also have the authority to dismiss God's people and to bless them on their way out. You see, this authority to rule, you know, the Bible says there's a double, you know, those who rule well are worthy of that honor.

But this doesn't mean that elders know know what's best. The Bible assumes a plurality of elders. There will be times where the elders don't know what's wise. The elders do have a responsibility to bring before the congregation opportunities or decisions for the congregation to help weigh out.

And, you know, to do that and to peacefully question this together and wrestle through decisions is actually the I believe the sanctifying process God has given the church to arrive at a decision.

In other words, let's say at some point elders and deacons do their best to go through a process, perhaps about, you know, acquiring an old building. If God were to make that available, do your due process, present all the information.

[ 36 : 34 ] But the whole congregation needs to weigh that out. There might be differences of opinion. And even if it's brought to a vote, members of the congregation might not all vote the same way. There might not be consensus on every matter.

But we take the final decision as direction from God. And it's not divisive to, you know, each member does need to do their part and vote their conscience. And so know that that's the expectation within a body like this.

It's that everyone will be actively involved and have a part with the elders ultimately giving account to God for ruling. Well, the second authority given to elders, this is the fifth one.

It's the key of declarative ministerial authority to declare the word of God, the truth and to minister Christ. And when you do so, you do it with Christ's own authority.

First Timothy 5:17 says elders are to labor in the word and doctrine. Hebrews 13 says they are to speak the word of God to the people of God.

[ 37 : 34 ] In the faith of the elders, you are to follow considering the outcome of their conduct. They are ones who keep watch over your souls as ones who will give account to Christ. Titus 2:15 says elders are to speak these things, to exhort, to rebuke even with all authority, a declarative authority.

Let no one despise you. There's an authority that elders are expected of, of Christ, to declare. And let no one despise you in declaring Christ to the best of your ability.

Now, excuse me, there's so much authority here placed in the hands of these officers. And we've all seen or experienced that authority be misused.

And this was nothing new in any century. In the mid 1600s, John Cotton and his in his writing address this objection. He raised the objection.

If elders have all this power to exercise all these acts of rule and declarative authority over both private members of the church and over the church as a whole, how are they then also called servants of the church?

[ 38 : 43 ] And the citation is 2 Corinthians 4:5. For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus, the Lord, and ourselves as your bond servants for Jesus' sake.

See, it's biblical for elders to describe themselves as slaves of the church for Christ's sake. And here's how Cotton answered that objection. The role of elder as both servant and ruler within the church are entirely consistent.

Their authority is not self-serving or lordly as if they ruled by their own will. Rather, their rule is stewardly and ministerial. They govern the church on behalf of Christ based on his command and call.

And they rule for the church's benefit, ensuring its spiritual and eternal good. Then he gives this wonderful illustration that just puts you in 1600s England.

Consider a queen's mariners entrusted with authority to pilot the king's ship to a desired harbor. Can you get that scene?

[ 39 : 50 ] Now, he's saying the ship belongs to the king. And the king is Jesus. And who is the bride of Jesus? It's the church. So he's calling the church the queen.

And the mariners are the pilots. The ones who have been hired by the king to get this ship to its desired harbor. Though they are servants, once called to that office, even she, the queen, must submit to their guidance in steering the course until they safely reach the port.

This illustrates the relationship between the church and its elders. And that's the fifth of the keys that Cotton pointed out. And there's a sixth one that we won't have time for today.

I'll tell you what it is, but it will be a separate sermon in the months ahead, Lord willing. And it's the key of partnering with other churches. So the principle in Acts 15 is that individual churches, while they are fully operating as churches on their own, they're independent in that sense.

They also ought to have a level of interdependency with other churches. And that's the pattern we see in Acts 15. So one individual church has the liberty to consult other churches, and that would include both the officers and the brethren, the members of those churches.

[ 41 : 13 ] And as churches and as a church, both officers and members, our church also has the responsibility and the authority to declare truth to other churches if they ever consult with us or ask.

Well, those are the ways in which Jesus has wisely dispersed the keys. See, there's remaining sin in every saved sinner, everyone who he has built into his church.

And there's so many ways in which we need the checks and balances, even if we're all underneath his word. But in his wisdom, King Jesus will build his church and he'll do it in all of these marvelous ways.

He's not led his church to figure out its way on its own. He's also not just turned us over to the flimsy patterns of this world or earthly empires.

He's ordained a divine order rooted in his word. So let us trust Christ's wisdom and how he's dispersed his authority to his church in these ways.

[ 42 : 12 ] I believe each of these is vital as a safeguard. Let us joyfully seek the mind of Christ together on whatever matters come before our church, trusting that with each decision, he is sovereign and he is the one ultimately through this process, steering our souls safely through the tempestuous seas until he brings us to our final destination, our eternal rest.

There's one last scene I want to leave you with as Christ walked this earth and the dust on his sandals. In the context of first century Judea and Galilee, there were failed building projects everywhere you turned.

They were a common sight. The region was undergoing massive construction under the ambitions of Herod the Great and his sons. But this caused a lot of price inflation.

And projects were often abandoned for lack of funds and resources, leaving many people without work, including builders. So the economy was depressed in many places. And in Luke 14 verses 28 and 29, Jesus most likely pointing to one of these abandoned buildings.

He says, for which of you intending to build a tower does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it, lest after he has laid the foundation and is not able to finish, all who will see it will begin to mock him.

[ 43 : 38 ] And in the Mediterranean honor shame culture of the time, public figures would have been ridiculed for such a failure. An unfinished tower, it would be a constant public spectacle.

It would be like a byword and a folly. It would bring immense shame on the builder and his entire family. Remember, our Lord Jesus Christ is the builder of his church.

And he will not be put to shame. Our Lord Jesus Christ will not fail. He was mocked and he was shamed on the cross. But he did that in order to become the cornerstone, the one that the world rejected.

And upon his own life, he will build his church. He's the builder. He assumed all the risk of building a church, even like this one.

He has all authority to do it. He is most wise. He will not be put to shame. He will receive all the glory that's due his name by building his church.

[ 44 : 45 ] You and me. It is he who began the good work in us, Reformed Heritage Church. And he will see it through to completion for his glory. Let's pray.

Lord, we thank you for your power. We thank you for your faithfulness. We thank you for how you counted the full cost. And you didn't start something you would not finish.

Lord, help us to trust you. Thank you for your wisdom. Thank you for your power. We are earthen vessels, Lord, but you entrust the glorious gospel to your church.

Help us to be faithful stewards of this, to minister Christ faithfully to one another, only by your help. Amen.