

The Office of the Keys



Wednesday, 2/21 at 11 & 7

Second Wednesday of Lent – 2018

During Lent: Wednesday Services at 11 & 7; Meals at 12 & 6

Introduction: Dear friends in Christ: We know that keys are important; here are two examples:

1. You are outside of your home, you have a strong need to use the restroom, *and the door to the house is locked!* If you have the key, *you are blessed!* Without the key, *well... not a good situation!*
2. You are outside of the kingdom of God, you have no ability to get in, *and a horrible eternity is fast-approaching!* If, *by God's grace,* you are repentant (contrition and faith), *God's key will open the kingdom,* but if you are not repentant, *the kingdom will remain locked forever!* So keys can be very important!

Going to page 314 in the Explanation of Luther's Small Catechism, we focus on The Office of the Keys!

The Central Thought

“By His death on the cross, Christ accomplished salvation, providing forgiveness of sins for the entire world. Unless His good news is made known to me, it would not benefit me.”

The Office of the Keys is part of the Confession section, so the keys are tied very closely to absolution – *the proclamation of God's forgiveness to all who are repentant!*

Today's section includes 14 questions: **334-347**.

A Closer Reading of the Small Catechism

334. **What special authority has Christ given to His Church on earth?** "...the authority to forgive the sins of repentant sinners, but to withhold forgiveness from the unrepentant as long as they do not repent." Jesus said to His disciples, "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld" (Jn. 20:23 ESV).
335. **Why do we refer to this authority as the power of the Keys?** "Even as keys lock and unlock, so the authority to forgive and retain sins opens and closes heaven." We all have sins, *which can lock heaven*, so we all need God's gift of forgiveness, *which opens heaven!*
336. **Who is to be forgiven?** "All those who repent and ask for forgiveness..." David prayed, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin" (Ps. 32:5 ESV). *Those words should encourage us to confess our sins!*
337. **Who is not to be forgiven?** "Those who do not repent and believe in Jesus Christ." Regarding someone who refuses to acknowledge his sin, Jesus said, "...if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector" (Matt. 18:17 ESV), thus as *an unbeliever*.
338. **Who receives the forgiveness given in absolution?** "All sinners who are sorry for their sins (contrition) and trust in Christ as their Savior (faith)..." One of many good examples is Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10).

339. **How is the Office of the Keys related to the proclamation of the Gospel?** It's "a special, God-given way of applying the Gospel to the individual." The Bible identifies four ways in which God imparts His forgiveness to us: Baptism (Acts 2:38); Word of God (1 Peter 1:23); Absolution / Keys (John 20:22-23); and Lord's Supper (Matthew 26:26-28).

Connections and Applications

340. **What is excommunication?** It "is the exercise of the binding key. In it, the Church announces to impenitent sinners that their sins are not forgiven before God and that they are excluded from the Lord's Supper and every other privilege of fellowship in the Christian Church except hearing God's Word."
341. **What is the purpose of excommunication?** "...to show people who refuse to repent the seriousness of their sin and ultimately to rescue such persons from eternal condemnation and win them back to Christ." Paul gave this instruction to the Church in Corinth about a particular sinner: "...you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord" (1Co. 5:5 ESV).
342. **What is the responsibility of a congregation toward an excommunicated sinner who repents?** "The congregation... joyfully forgives [him] and receives [him] back into the fellowship of Christ's altar." As God forgives us and fully welcomes us back, *so we are to do no less for all others!*
343. **How does the Church publicly exercise the Office of the Keys?** It is done publicly through the called and ordained pastors; *they speak on behalf of Christ!*

344. **May every Christian, without a call, presume to exercise the Office of the Keys publicly?** No, not publicly. “Our churches teach that no one should publicly teach in the Church, or administer the Sacraments, without a rightly ordered call” (AC XIV).
345. **May only pastors, then, forgive sins?** “No. All Christians are given the word of Christ’s forgiveness to proclaim in their daily vocation.” So they proclaim privately rather than publicly.
346. **Who should be considered for the office of pastor?** “...men who are qualified in life and doctrine to serve as pastors.” The Bible explains the qualifications in [1Timothy 3](#) and [Titus 1](#).
347. **May women serve in the pastoral office?** No, not according to God’s Word. The Spirit moved Paul to write these instructions: “As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. ...it is shameful for a woman to speak in church” (1 Cor. 14:33-35 ESV). Women can and should serve in many and various ways, *but not as pastors*.

Conclusion: Let us pray: Father in heaven, though we all deserve a locked door, *we thank You so much for unlocking heaven for us through Jesus!*