

PART V.

The Office of the Keys, and Confession.

300. What Is the Office of the Keys?

It is the peculiar church power which Christ has given to His Church on earth to forgive the sins of penitent sinners unto them, but to retain the sins of the impenitent as long as they do not repent.

301. Where Is this written?

Thus writes the holy Evangelist John, chapter twentieth: The Lord Jesus breathed on His disciples, and saith unto them; Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained.

302. Why is the Office of the Keys called a peculiar church power?

Because it is not a temporal, but a spiritual power, which Christ has given to His Church on earth and, more particularly, to every local congregation.

500) Matt. 16, 19. I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

501) John 20, 21. Then said Jesus to them again, peace be unto you. As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you.

502) Matt. 18, 17. 18. 20. If he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them.

503) 1 Pet. 2, 9. Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

303. What does this power comprise?

Being the power of the Word, it comprises the power to preach the Gospel and to administer the Sacraments, especially, the power to remit and to retain sins.

504) Matt. 28, 18-20. And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. And, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.

505) Matt. 16, 19. I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

304. Why, then, is this power called the Office of the Keys?

Because by the remission of sins heaven is opened, and by the retention of sins heaven is closed.

305. Whose sins are to be remitted, and whose are to be retained?

The sins of penitent sinners, that is, of those who repent of their sins and believe in Jesus Christ, are to be remitted; the sins of the impenitent are to be retained as long as they do not repent.

506) Acts 3, 19. Repent ye therefore, and be converted that your sins may be blotted out.

507) Ps. 51, 17. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.

508) Acts 16, 31. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved and thy house.

B. H. David. The penitential Psalms. - Luke 18, 13. The publican. - Luke 15, 11-24. The prodigal son. - Matt. 26, 75. Peter.

306. In what manner are Christian congregations to exercise the public administration of the Office of the Keys?

By choosing and calling ministers of the Word, who are in their name to perform the functions of this office.

509) 1 Cor. 4, 1. Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.

510) 2 Cor. 2, 10. If I forgave anything, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ.

511) Acts 20, 28. Take heed therefore unto yourselves and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers to feed the Church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood.

307. What, then, do you believe according to these words?

I believe that when the called ministers of Christ deal with us by His divine command, especially when they exclude manifest and impenitent sinners from the Christian congregation, and, again, when they absolve those who repent of their sins and are willing to amend, this is as valid and certain, in heaven also, as if Christ, our dear Lord, dealt with us Himself.

308. What do you believe in general according to these words?

I believe that whenever the called ministers of Christ deal with us by His divine command is as valid and certain, in heaven also, as if Christ, our dear Lord, dealt with us Himself.

309. In what particular cases is this of such validity and certainty?

When they exclude manifest and impenitent sinners from the Christian congregation, and, again, when they absolve those who repent of their sins and are willing to amend.

310. In what manner is excommunication from the Christian Church to be performed?

In this manner: When an offender has been duly admonished according to Christ's precept and established order, and nevertheless remains impenitent, such judgment is publicly announced by the minister of Christ, and the congregation declares him a heathen man and a publican.

512) 1 Cor. 5, 13. Put away from among yourselves that wicked person.

513) Matt. 18, 15-17. If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone. If he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. (Grades of admonition.)

311. How is an excommunicated person to be dealt with when he shows himself penitent?

If he confesses his sin to the congregation and promises to amend, the called minister should make public announcement of his absolution, and the congregation is to receive him as a brother. For excommunication is not intended for the perdition, but for the salvation, of the soul.

514) 2 Cor. 2, 6-8. 10. Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many. So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him. To whom ye forgive anything, I forgive also; for if I forgave anything, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ.

How the Unlearned Should be Taught to Confess.

312. What is Confession?

Confession embraces two parts: one is that we confess our sins; the other, that we receive absolution, or forgiveness, from the confessor, as from God Himself, and in no wise doubt, but firmly believe, that by it our sins are forgiven before God in heaven.

515) 1 John 1, 8. 9. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

313. Do hypocrites also, who with the mouth confess their sins, but are impenitent at heart, receive forgiveness of sins?

No; for they do not accept the grace of God offered also to them in absolution.

516) Is. 26, 10. Let favor be showed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness; in the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the Lord.

314. What sins should we confess?

Before God we should plead guilty of all sins, even of those which we do not know, as we do in the Lord's Prayer; but before the confessor we should confess those sins only which we know and feel in our hearts.

315. How should we confess before God!

Before God we should plead guilty of all sins, even of those which we do not know, as we do in the Fifth Petition of the Lord's Prayer and in General Confession.

517) Ps. 19, 12. Who can understand his errors? Cleanse Thou me from secret faults.

518) Prov. 28, 13. He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.

316. Should not a Christian also confess his sin to his neighbor whom he has offended and grieved, and ask his pardon?

Yes; for he who is not willing to do this thereby clearly shows that before God also he is not truly penitent of his sin.

519) James 5, 16. Confess your faults one to another.

520) Matt. 5, 23. 24. If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

317. But how is it with confession before the confessor?

Noone should indeed be forced or urged to private confession; but in it a Christian obtains the comfort that to him especially absolution is pronounced, and on such occasion he may ask remission of such particular sins as may above others weigh upon his heart and burden his conscience.

521) Matt. 9, 2. Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.

522) 2 Sam. 12, 13. And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said unto David, The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die.

523) Matt. 3, 5. 6. Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.