

MESSIAH THE PRINCE,
Or, The Mediatorial Dominion of Jesus Christ.
By William Symington.
Sabbath Afternoon Studies: Part 18.

CHAPTER 7.
THE KINGLY OFFICE OF CHRIST IN
RELATION TO THE CHURCH.
(Continued.)

VII. Christ, in virtue of his mediatorial dominion, appoints, qualifies, and invests with power, the office-bearers in the church. [Section Continued]

Church power has usually been distributed into three kinds. (1) The first is called *dogmatic power* (potestas δογματική), and refers to dogmas or articles of faith. This may be viewed as comprehending whatever is connected with instruction. It concerns what men are to believe; and consists in the right, not, as is claimed by the church of Rome, of determining what man is to believe, but of explaining and enforcing the truths of religion, either by circulating the Scriptures, or preaching the Gospel, or exhibiting summaries of Christian truth; the ultimate appeal being in every case to the word of God. (2) The second is called *ordaining power* (potestas διατακτική), and refers to the government of the church. This comprehends, again, whatever is connected with rule; and consists, not in the power to institute a form of church government, or to make laws for regulating the conduct of men, or to appoint rites and ceremonies, but in the power to take such steps, and devise such measures, as may be requisite for administering the laws and ordinances which Christ has instituted. It is not legislative, but ministerial; it supposes an authority, not to make laws, but to administer them, and of course to pass such enactments or regulations, on points of external order, as may be necessary to give full effect to the institutions of Christ. (3) The third is called the *power of discipline* (potestas διακριτική), and refers to admission to, or exclusion from, the communion of the church. The existence of such a power has been formerly proved. Its nature is entirely spiritual; extending to the souls of men, and not to their bodies, property, or lives. The highest censures which the office-bearers of the church, in virtue of this power, are entitled to inflict, are addressed to the conscience, and have for their object 'the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.' Civil pains, whether fines, confiscation, imprisonment, exile, or death, belong not to ecclesiastical office-bearers; and the church which has recourse to these, in whatever degree, so far identifies itself with the Romish usurpation, which claims dominion alike over the bodies and the souls of men.

Such is the power possessed by the ministers of religion; with which they are invested, not by the people over whom it is exercised, nor by the civil magistrate, but solely by the Lord Jesus Christ himself; and which is conveyed in the manner formerly described.

The exercise of such varied and solemn powers, presupposes certain necessary *qualifications*, for which also the office-bearers in the church are indebted to him from whom the powers themselves are derived. The extraordinary endowments possessed in the primitive age, have long since been suspended; and their place must now be made up by a competent share of natural talents, educational acquirements, and spiritual gifts. Without a portion of such qualifications, there can be no regular call to ministerial office. The Head of the church sends none a warfare on their own charges. He fits his servants for the work he requires of them. Where he has not given the qualification, he does not require the work. And if the functions of office are of so arduous and responsible a nature as to make all who have right feelings, to exclaim, in the prospect of undertaking them, ‘Who is sufficient for these things?’ [2 Cor. 2.16.] the promised assistance is also such as to permit them to add, ‘Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God, who also hath made us able ministers of the New Testament.’ [2 Cor. 3.5-6.] ► To qualify for public instruction, there must be not only an extensive knowledge of the Scriptures, but an acquaintance with literature in general, and particularly with sacred literature. To fit for government and discipline, much knowledge of human nature, a large share of natural sagacity, and no small degree of gravity, patience, and prudence, are requisite. These and similar qualifications are derived from Christ himself, with whom is the residue of the Spirit, and whose it is so to clothe his ministers with salvation that his people may, through their successful labours, have reason to shout for joy. ‘To every one is given grace, according to the measure of the gift of Christ.’ [Eph. 4.7.] Nor are those entrusted with the transmission of official power at liberty to confer it on any who are found, on proper trial, to be deficient in gifts and attainments. ‘The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.’ No greater injury can be done to the church, and we may add to the persons themselves, than to admit to office men who are not qualified to discharge its functions with ability. The office is in this way exposed to contempt; the members of the church who happen to be placed under the care of such persons are not edified; and the persons themselves become a laughing-stock to the profane. Most mistaken policy it is, therefore, in every point of view, from motives of commiseration and pity, to make a farce of preparatory trials, and to

‘Lay careless hands
On skulls that cannot teach and will not learn.’¹

VIII. Christ’s power over the church is, farther, apparent in rendering the administration of ordinances, by her proper office-bearers, effectual to the salvation of her members.

1 Excerpted from “The Task,” by W.C., c. 1785. Compare 1 Tim. 5.22.—JTK.

The laws, worship, government, and discipline, instituted by the Redeemer, are designed to promote the spiritual welfare of souls. Their efficacy for this purpose, is derived from Christ himself. In one point of view, indeed, this efficacy is to be ascribed to the Spirit. But the Spirit, it should never be forgotten, is the Spirit of Christ; is sent by Christ; and acts in every case under the commission of Christ. Thus it is that the whole honour of man's redemption is secured to the Mediator, as well the renovation of man's nature and character as the removal of his guilt. Agreeably to this, Christ is represented as He with whom is the residue of the Spirit; as sending the Comforter to reprove the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment; and as having, when he ascended on high, received gifts for men, yea, for the rebellious, that the Lord God might dwell among them. The precious oil, which goes down to the skirts of the garments, is first poured on the Head.

The whole world being, by nature, in a state of rebellion against the Lord and his Anointed, the Redeemer can have no friends among men until he makes them such; can have no spiritual subjects until he subdues them to himself; can have no obedient children, until, by the rod of his strength sent forth out of Sion, he has made a willing people in the day of his power. The renewed heart is Satan's seat. To dethrone the tyrant, and lead the rebel captive, is the prerogative of Him who is king in Sion, the Faithful and True, who in righteousness doth judge and make war. The rescue of fallen man from sin and Satan, is effected, not by the strength of the evidence by which the gospel is supported; not by any inherent power in the truth itself; not by the clearness, and faithfulness, and eloquence with which it is propounded; not by mere moral suasion: but by the naked energy of the Saviour himself. Where the word of this king is, there is power; and nowhere else. ► It is by his omnific power, convincing of sin, enlightening the mind in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing the will, that any are persuaded and enabled to embrace the Saviour as he is offered to them in the gospel. This it is alone that can open men's eyes, and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God. The kingdom of God is within men. It cometh not with observation. The arrow which pierces the heart and brings down its enmity, which inflicts the wound that nothing but a Saviour's blood can heal, is selected, is fitted to the string, is propelled with unerring aim, and guided with infallible certainty, by the skill and power of the Redeemer himself. 'Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most Mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty. And in thy majesty ride prosperously, because of truth, and meekness, and righteousness; and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things. Thine arrows are sharp in the hearts of the king's enemies; whereby the people fall under thee.' [Psalm 45.3-5.]

To such as are thus subdued by the power of his grace, he imparts the comforting sense of pardon and the honourable title of children. Their justification and adoption are legal acts for which they are indebted to Christ as a Priest; but the comforting sense of safety derived from the one, and of dignity derived from the other, they owe to his power as a King conveying it to their hearts. If it is true that by his sacerdotal blood they are justified from all things from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses, it is no less true that 'he is exalted a *Prince* and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and *forgiveness of sin.*' Nor is it less

explicitly made known that ‘to as many as receive him, He gives power to become the sons of God;’ sending forth his Spirit into their hearts, enabling them to cry ‘Abba, Father.’ Now, all this is brought about by his giving efficacy to the ordinances.

In the same way it is that He rules and reigns in the hearts of his people. He asserts his authority over the conscience, the will, the life; and prescribes his law as the rule of their obedience. They recognise him as their master; cheerfully acknowledge his supremacy; and delight in the law of the Lord after the inward man. He puts his law into their minds, and writes it in their hearts. They yield themselves up to him as his willing servants; and every principle that is within them, every affection, volition, desire, proclaims him King and Lord.

The members of the church have many enemies. The devil, the world, and the flesh, are in league against them. They wrestle not only against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. They are required to assume the character, equipments, and attitude of soldiers. They must put on the whole armour of God, that they may be able to stand; having their loins girt about with truth; having on the breastplate of righteousness; having their feet shod with the preparation of the gospel; and taking the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Satan, the chief and leader of these enemies, exasperated at his overthrow, makes a desperate effort to regain his lost dominion over them; and, although he cannot succeed, he does much to annoy such as have been rescued from his grasp. ► They are in themselves too feeble and powerless to sustain the shock of this unequal combat. But they have an omnipotent King, whose wisdom and might are exerted to assist and protect them. By the instructions of his Word, by the influence of his example, by the moral power of his ordinances, as well as by the positive strength which he imparts by his Spirit, he teaches their hands to war and their fingers to fight; he girds them with strength unto the battle, subdues under them those that rise up against them, and gives them the necks of their enemies. Sin, indwelling sin, has no longer dominion over them: by faith they overcome the world: and God bruises Satan under their feet. Yes; ye good soldiers of Jesus Christ! your King not only witnesses from his throne in the heavens the contest in which you are engaged, but cheers you on with his presence, encourages you by his example, animates you by his promises, stretches over you the impenetrable shield of his righteousness, and by his grace insures your final conquest. Well, then, may you exclaim with the Jewish prophet, ‘Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy; when I fall I shall arise; when I sit in darkness the Lord shall be a light unto me,’ [Mic. 7.8.]; or break forth into the exulting language of the apostle, ‘Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us.’ [Rom. 8.35,37.]

Nor will their glorious Captain and Leader rest satisfied, until he has rendered the administration of Gospel ordinances effectual, in conducting forward the work of grace in the souls of his people to its final consummation in eternal glory. The honour of having brought the struggle with their enemies to a successful issue, shall be followed by the enjoyment of an

everlasting reward. And the Saviour himself, as King of saints and King of glory, shall adorn them with their white robes, put the palms of victory into their hands, place upon their heads their crowns of gold, invite them to sit with him on his great high throne, and fill their mouths with unceasing Alleluias.

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Supplement from George Gillespie's Assertion of the Government of the Church of Scotland.

The power of jurisdiction whereof I speak, is threefold, δογματική, διατακτική, and κριτική. So it is distinguished by our writers, and all these three do in manner foresaid belong unto synods. In respect of articles of faith or worship, a synod is *index* or *testis*; in respect of external order and policy in circumstances, a contriver of a canon or διατύπωσις; in respect of heresy, schism, obstinacy, contempt, and scandal, *vindex*; not by any external coercive power (which is peculiar to the magistrate) but by spiritual censures.

The *dogmatic* power of a synod is not a power to make new articles of faith, nor new duties and parts of divine worship, but a power to apply and interpret those articles of faith and duties of worship which God hath set before us in his written Word, and to declare the same to be inconsistent with emergent heresies and errors. To this purpose it is that the Apostle calleth the church "the pillar and ground of the truth," 1 Tim. 3.15, στῦλος καὶ ἐδραίωμα, not θεμέλιον, which may be expounded either *in sensu forensi*, the church is the public witness, notifier, and keeper of truth, even as in courts and places of judgment there are pillars to which the edicts of magistrates are affixed, that people may have notice thereof; or *in sensu architectonico*, as the church by her faith is built upon Christ, or (which is all one) upon the doctrine and truth of Christ, contained in the writings of the prophets and apostles, and leaneth thereto; so by her ministry she upholdeth, under-proppeth, and conserveth this same truth, lest, as the prophet speaketh, "Truth fall in the streets, and perish among men." Truth standeth fast in the church, and is kept firm, while it is professed, preached, propugned [*vindicated*], and maintained against all contrary error and heresy. In the same sense, saith the Apostle, Rom. 3.2, that unto the Jewish church were committed the oracles of God, by them to be kept, interpreted, propagated, &c.

By the *diatactic* power a synod may institute, restore, or change, according to the condition and exigence of the church, the external circumstances in the worship of God, and ecclesiastical discipline; I mean those circumstances which are common both to civil and sacred societies, the conveniency whereof is determinable by the light of nature, always observing the general rules of the word, which commandeth that all be done to the glory of God, that all be done to edifying, that all be done in order and decency, that we give none offence, that we support the weak, that we give no place to the enemies of the truth, nor symbolise with idolaters, &c. Now, for avoiding disorder and disconformity in a nation professing one religion, it is fit that national synods give certain directions and rules even concerning these rites and circumstances, not having therein an arbitrary or autocratic power, but being always tied to follow the rules foresaid.

The *critic* power of a synod is not a lordly imperious domineering over the flock of Christ, which is not to be ruled with force and cruelty, but it is the power of spiritual censures, as excommunication, deposition, and the like, most necessary for the repressing of heresy, error, obstinacy in wickedness, and scandals, otherwise incorrigible. Without this power, schisms and offences could not be cured, but should the more increase; whileas liberty is left to heretics, schismatics, and obstinate persons, without any censure to pester and disturb a whole nation, without any regard to the constitutions of a national synod.

Discussion Questions:

1. What are the three types of power or authority which are warrantably exercised in the Church of Jesus Christ?
A. They may be described as *dogmatic* power, concerning instruction in the faith; *ordaining power*, concerning government; and the *power of discipline*.
2. Does the power of discipline include the power of imposing fines or imprisoning offenders?
A. No. This is a Romish usurpation.
3. Who invests the ministers of the Gospel with these legitimate powers? The people? The Magistrate?
A. No, they are invested with the power by the Lord Jesus Christ, and it is conveyed to them as previously described, through the existing ministry of the Church.
4. Why are qualifications accounted to be necessary for those who will be installed in the ministry?
A. Because the work is great, and has such responsibilities as will make even those truly gifted to say, "Who is sufficient for these things?" But if there is no evidence a man has been gifted or equipped by Christ for the work, then this implies Christ has not called him to the work.
5. Besides appointing and qualifying men for the work of the ministry, what else does Christ do by his power so that men are saved from sin?
A. He renders the administration of his ordinances effectual to the salvation of the members of the Church.
6. What does Christ do for those who are subdued by the power of his grace?
A. He imparts to them the comforting sense of pardon and the honorable title of children. They not only possess but also enjoy the blessings of justification and adoption.
7. What character are believers required to assume in light of the opposition of their enemies?
A. They are required to assume the character, equipments, and attitude of soldiers.