**Calvin’s *Institutes of Christian Religion***

Lesson 37: Ecclesiastical Power & Its Abuse by the Roman Catholic Church, Part 3 - Jurisdictional (Book 4, Chapter 11)

Calvin distinguishes 3 types of ecclesiastical power:

1. Doctrinal authority – the church may rightly define doctrine and declare its faith against error (Chs. 8-9)
2. Legislative authority – the church may establish polity for its well-ordered governance (Ch. 10)
3. Jurisdictional authority – the church’s authority in matters of church discipline

**Chapter 11: The Jurisdiction of the Church and Its Abuse as Seen in the Papacy**

1. Just as no city can function without a magistrate and governing order, so the Church of God needs a “spiritual polity.” “For this purpose courts of judgment were established in the church from the beginning to deal with the censure of morals, to investigate vices, and to be charged with the exercise of the office of the keys.”
2. The keys in reference here come from Matthew 18:15-18 when Christ gives authority to the Church to exercise church discipline.
3. But Calvin wants to distinguish here between the keys in Matthew 16:19 and Matthew 18 here. Matthew 16, Calvin says, deals with the ministry of the Word of God. “Christ has testified that in the preaching of the gospel the apostles have no part save that of ministry; that it was He Himself who would speak and promise all things through their lips as His instruments.” Accordingly, whatever they preach in accord with the Word of God is as if God were in front of their listeners saying the same thing. When they preach forgiveness of sins, that is the true promise from God who says he forgives the sins of all who believe upon Christ.
4. But Matthew 18:15-18 is keys of authority with respect to church discipline. Now there is some overlap here so that are some similarities and differences between Matt 16 and Matt 18.
5. Similarities:
   1. “Each is a general statement”
   2. Both refer to the same power of binding and loosing (through God’s Word)
   3. They are the same command attached with the same promise
6. “But the church binds him whom it excommunicates— not that it casts him into everlasting ruin and despair [only God does that], but because it condemns his life and morals, and already warns him of his condemnation unless he should repent. It looses him whom it receives into communion, for it makes him a sharer of the unity which it has in Christ Jesus. Therefore, that no one may stubbornly despise the judgment of the church, or think it immaterial that he has been condemned by the vote of the believers, the Lord testifies that such judgment by believers is nothing but the proclamation of his own sentence, and that whatever they have done on earth is ratified in heaven. For they have the Word of God with which to condemn the perverse; they have the Word with which to receive the repentant into grace. They cannot err or disagree with God’s judgment, for they judge solely according to God’s law, which is no uncertain or earthly opinion but God’s holy will and heavenly oracle.”
7. The RCC uses Matthew 16 to establish the papacy. “Thus they know so well how to fit their keys to any locks and doors they please that one would say they had practiced the locksmith’s art all their lives!” So they indiscriminately come up with confession, indulgences, purgatory, etc. – things that are not based upon God’s Word, but because they supposedly have the keys they cannot err and so they impose such un-Biblical practice on pretense of having God’s authority.
8. But there is a difference between this ecclesiastical power to discipline and civil power to discipline. “For the church does not have the right of the sword to punish or compel, not the authority to force [compel]; not imprisonment, nor the other punishments which the magistrate commonly inflicts.
9. The goal of church discipline is the sinner professing his repentance which has been brought about by chastisement of the church.
10. “The church does not assume what is proper to the magistrate; nor can the magistrate execute what is carried out by the church.”
11. Calvin’s example: “Suppose a man is drunk. In a well-ordered city, imprisonment will be the penalty. Suppose he is a fornicator. His punishment will be similar or, rather, greater. So will the laws, the magistrate, and outward justice be satisfied. Yet he may happen to show no sign of repentance, but, rather, murmur or grumble. Shall the church stop there? Such men cannot be received to the Lord’s Supper without doing injury to Christ and his sacred institution. And reason requires that he who offends the church by a bad example remove, by a solemn declaration of repentance, the offense he has caused.”
12. “As the magistrate ought by punishment and physical restraint to cleanse the church of offenses, so the minister of the Word in turn ought to help the magistrate in order that not so many may sin. Their functions ought to be so joined that each serves to help, not hinder, the other.”
13. Calvin on this relationship between church and magistrate: “When emperors and magistrates began to accept Christ, the spiritual jurisdiction of the church was not at once annulled but was only so ordered that it should not detract from the civil jurisdiction or become confused with it. And rightly! For the magistrate, if he is godly, will not want to exempt himself from the common subjection of God’s children. It is by no means the least significant part of this for him to subject himself to the church, which judges according to God’s Word— so far ought he to be from setting that judgment aside! ‘For what is more honorable,’ says Ambrose, ‘than for the emperor to be called a son of the church? For a good emperor is within the church, not over the church.’”
14. Calvin then transitions to discuss abuses of this ecclesiastical jurisdiction. First, Calvin reminds us of the true aim: “This is the aim of ecclesiastical jurisdiction: that offenses be resisted, and any scandal that has arisen be wiped out. In its use two things ought to be taken into account: that this spiritual power be completely separated from the right of the sword; secondly, that it be administered not by the decision of one man but by a lawful assembly.
15. Slowly, the clergy alone took into their power the ability to exercise church discipline rather than the whole church body. Then they began to tire of this so they delegated this to “officials” – an office they created to carry out that which they didn’t want to carry out. These were like “deputies” who were not ordained in any sense but to whom were delegated the authority to exercise church discipline.
16. Example: “Does some poor man owe money? He is cited. If he appears, he is condemned. If, being condemned, he does not pay up, he is warned; after the second warning, a step is taken toward excommunication; if he does not appear, he is warned to submit himself to judgment; if he delays, he is warned, and soon thereafter excommunicated. I ask you, what is there here that is anything like Christ’s institution, or like ancient custom, or like ecclesiastical procedure?” At the same time, they were neglecting to discipline drunkenness, fornication, etc. not only among the people but the clergy also.
17. Conversely, Calvin doesn’t believe ministers should be found in the world of civilian politics. He quotes the church father Ambrose approvingly: “to the emperor belongs the palaces; to the priest the churches.”
18. Why? Because this is exactly what happened in the RCC. The bishops of the church began to assume to themselves authority and power that rightly belonged to the civil magistrate.
19. “A means was, indeed, devised by which bishops might hold the title, honor, and riches of their office without burden or care. But afterward, not to leave them entirely idle, the right of the sword was given them, or rather, they usurped it for themselves. With what excuse, then, will they defend this shamelessness? Was it the bishops’ duty to involve themselves in judicial proceedings and in the administration of cities and provinces, and to undertake activities far, far removed from their own? For in their own office they have so much work and business that if they devoted themselves wholly and continuously to it, and were not distracted by any interruptions, they would scarcely be adequate to the task.”
20. Calvin says they did this in small, incremental steps and in times of trouble. People preferred to come to the bishops to settle civil matters because they were trustworthy and the people trusted their faithfulness in times of difficulty. Slowly the bishops took something voluntary and made it a sphere over which they exercise authority. At other times, princes granted it to bishops for political purposes.
21. The second error is the rise of papal supremacy so that it becomes the Pope who excommunicates. “At last, the Roman pontiff, not content with modest baronies, first laid his hand on kingdoms, then upon the Empire itself. And that he may retain by some pretext or other the possession obtained by mere robbery, he sometimes boasts that he has it by divine right…”
22. Calvin quotes Bernard approvingly: “Therefore, highly as we think of ourselves, let us remember that a ministry has been laid upon us, not a lordship given. Learn that you need a hoe, not a scepter, to do the prophet’s work.”
23. Added to this jurisdiction is supposed immunity from civil courts. “To jurisdiction is appended the immunity which the Roman clergy assume for themselves. For they count it beneath their dignity to answer in personal cases before a civil judge. And they deem both the liberty and dignity of the church to consist in their exemption from common courts and laws.”
24. Calvin ends with this: “The church does not have the power to coerce [in civil sphere], and ought not to seek it, it is the duty of godly kings and princes to sustain religion by laws, edicts, and judgments.”