



# 19 Minutes with Luther

## The Keys and Confession

- The Knowledge of God
- Law and Gospel
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- The Gospel & the Nature of God
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- 3rd Article (The Holy Spirit)
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- Baptism (Part 1)
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- **Keys & Confession (Part 1)**
- Keys & Confession (Part 2)
- Keys & Confession (Part 3)
- Introduction to the Lord's Prayer
- The Address
- 1st Petition
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### The Keys

*First: What is the use of the keys?*

The use of the keys is that special power and right which Christ gave to his church on earth: to forgive the sins of penitent sinners but refuse forgiveness to the impenitent as long as they do not repent.

*Where is this written?*

The holy evangelist John writes in chapter 20, “[Jesus] breathed on [his disciples] and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.’”

1. Jesus spoke of the keys when he said, *“I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven”* (Matthew 16:19). He also spoke of the keys in John 20:23 (see above). To whom did Jesus give the keys? What did he mean by the words *bind* and *loose*? What did Jesus say about the validity of the use of the keys on earth?
  
2. *Jesus said: “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault. . . . If he refuses to listen . . . treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector”* (Matthew 18:15,17). According to Jesus’ words, with whom are we to use the binding key? Why are we to use the binding key in this situation (in other words, what is the desired outcome)? What may be the result of not using the binding key in this situation?
  
3. Saint Paul wrote, *“You ought to forgive and comfort [the penitent sinner], so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow”* (2 Corinthians 2:7). According to Paul’s words, with whom are we to use the loosing key? Why are we to use the loosing key in this situation (in other words, what is the desired outcome)? What may be the result of not using the loosing key in this situation?
  
4. Why are Christians sometimes reluctant to use the keys?

5. What do the following passages tell us about the use of the keys?

*“Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently” (Galatians 6:1).*

*“In the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you” (Matthew 7:2).*

6. Agree or disagree:

It is unloving to tell someone that he or she is going to hell.

Since people may lie about their repentance, the use of the keys is not always valid.

*“The power of forgiving and retaining sins was communicated to the apostles and their lawful successors,” that is, the pope, priests, and such (The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent).*

It is judgmental to tell someone that he or she is going to hell.

#### **Luther said:**

*“[Christ] says: ‘Receive ye the Holy Ghost.’ This power is given to him who has the Holy Ghost, that is, to him who is a Christian. But who is a Christian? He who believes. He who believes has the Holy Ghost. Therefore every Christian has the power . . . to retain or to remit sins. (Plass, Vol. 1, page. 5.)*

#### **Closing Prayer**

Lord Jesus, you have placed into our hands the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Empower us, by your Spirit, to use them courageously and responsibly for the sake of immortal souls and to the glory of your name. Amen.

#### **At home**

Memorize the Keys.

#### **Helps**

(1) Jesus gave the keys to all believers—to all who have received the Holy Spirit. When Jesus used the word *bind*, he meant the refusal to forgive sins. When he used the word *loose*, he meant pronouncing that a person's sins are forgiven. When believers use the keys, their use is as valid in heaven as if Christ were dealing with us himself. (2) We are to use the binding key with the impenitent in an attempt to have them see God's terrible judgment and repent. Allowing the impenitent to continue in their sin may lead them to a false security and to damnation. (3) We are to use the loosing key with penitent sinners in order to comfort them and lead them to see God's forgiveness and salvation in Christ. Neglecting or refusing to use the loosing key may lead the penitent to despair. (4) Answers may vary. Some reasons may be fear of rejection, a sense of inadequacy, or apathy. (5) As we use the keys, and in particular the binding key, we must deal gently, humbly, and lovingly with others. We must also be careful not to judge one's motives or heart. (6) The most loving thing that we can do for people in danger is to alert them to that danger. This is especially true if they are in danger of eternal damnation because of impenitence. This does not mean that we are judging people's hearts or motives; we are simply sharing the truth of God's Word. The truth that there is forgiveness for the penitent (loosing key) is objective, and therefore true for all: a person may, by his hypocrisy, reject this forgiveness. Jesus did not reserve the use of the keys for the clergy but gave it to all believers, that is, to all who have received the Holy Spirit.