

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

Video Lecture Series

by Rev. Walter Harinck

STUDY GUIDE

Module 6:
**ECCLESIOLOGY—
THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH**

Lecture 4:
**THE AUTHORITY
OF THE CHURCH**



The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

John Knox Institute of Higher Education

Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

© 2021 by John Knox Institute of Higher Education

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means for profit, except in brief quotations for the purposes of review, comment, or scholarship, without written permission from the publisher, John Knox Institute, P.O. Box 19398, Kalamazoo, MI 49019-19398, USA.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the Authorized King James Version.

Visit our website: www.johnknoxinstitute.org

Rev. Walter Harinck is minister of the gospel in the Gereformeerde Gemeente (Netherlands Reformed Church) in Utrecht, the Netherlands. He served as board member of the denominational foreign mission committee for over 30 years. throughout these years he travelled to many continents, advising missionaries and overseeing their labors in their remote stations and supporting young churches in their ministry.

www.gergeminfo.nl

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

by Rev. Walter Harinck

STUDY GUIDE

Module 6

Ecclesiology—the Doctrine of the Church

1. Introduction to Ecclesiology
2. What Does the Bible Say About the Church?
3. The Nature of the Church
- 4. The Authority of the Church**
5. The Government of the Church
6. Church Offices
7. Church Discipline
8. The Worship of the Church and the Means of Grace
9. The Sacrament of Christian Baptism
10. The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

by Rev. Walter Harinck

STUDY GUIDE

Module 6:

Ecclesiology—The Doctrine of the Church

Lecture 4:

The Authority of the Church

Introduction

Does the church of God have authority? Is there any power of the church? If we compare powerful governments of the world, and look at businesses and educational organizations that have great influence, and then consider our local churches, or even our church denominations, the church may seem weak and ineffective. When we think of the rapid growth of evil in society, we may wonder if the church has power to make any changes at all. The power or authority of the church is not man-given, but God-given. In this lecture, we want to study the spiritual authority of the church. You might say that the power of the church is its God-given authority to carry on spiritual warfare, proclaim the gospel, and exercise church discipline.

Theme: *The Authority of the Church.*

I. The Power of the Church is a Heavenly and a Spiritual Power

1. All authority is rooted in God—Romans 13:1.
 - a. The model of the power of the church is “koinonia”.
2. Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords, he is King of Zion.
 - a. Christ rules by his Word and Spirit through appointed office-bearers.
 - b. The church receives its power from Christ through the Holy Spirit.
 - c. The authority and power of the church exists only:
 - 1) in service to the kingdom of God;
 - 2) for God’s glory;
 - 3) and for the salvation of sinners.
 - d. The authority of the church belongs to the church as the body of Christ.

3. Principal forms of power in the church may vary.
4. Questions to ask about church power:
 - a. How is power acquired?
 - b. How is power exercised?
 - c. How is power evaluated?
5. Five principles to prevent pitfalls in the authority of the church:
 - 1) God is the only Lawgiver—James 4:12.
 - 2) One may neither add nor subtract from Scripture—Deuteronomy 4:2; Revelation 22:18–19.
 - 3) The Lord Jesus rejects human commandments and institutions—Matthew 15:9.
 - 4) It is the calling of ministers to teach all that the Lord has commanded them in his Word—Matthew 28:19–20.
 - 5) Every member must be watchful against becoming a servant of men, not to be brought under anyone’s dominion—Galatians 5:1; 1 Corinthians 7:23.

Questions:

1. What does it mean when we say that the model of power in the church is “koinonia”?

2. What does it mean that the power of the church is a heavenly and a spiritual power? What implications are there in this for us?

3. What is the goal of church authority and power?

4. By what means does the Lord Jesus Christ rule his church?

5. What main questions should we be asking about church authority?

6. What are five principles which might prevent pitfalls in the authority of the church?

7. Why is the 5th principle so important? How does the Bible prove this principle?

II. The Keys of the Kingdom

“And 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”—Matthew 16, verse 19.

“He that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth”—Revelation 3, verse 7.

“And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder”—Isaiah 22, verse 22.

1. Authority to open the door of the kingdom of heaven and allow people to enter in.

a. Apostles were given this authority of preaching the gospel in a primary sense.

b. Ministers of the Word of God have this key in a secondary sense.

1) Called by God and ordained by the church to proclaim the gospel.

2) Called to use the Word of God to open and shut the door of God’s kingdom.

2. The key of preaching of the gospel.

As stated in *The Heidelberg Catechism*, question and answer #84:

“How is the kingdom of heaven opened and closed by the preaching of the gospel?”

Then the answer: *“According to the command of Christ, the kingdom of heaven is opened when*

it is proclaimed and publicly testified to each and every believer that God has really forgiven all their sins for the sake of Christ's merits, as often as they by true faith accept the promise of the gospel. The kingdom of heaven is closed, when it is proclaimed and testified to all unbelievers and hypocrites that the wrath of God and eternal condemnation rest on them as long as they do not repent. According to this testimony of the gospel, God will judge both in this life, and in the life to come."

3. The key of church discipline.

As stated in *The Heidelberg Catechism*, question and answer #85:

"How is the kingdom of heaven closed and opened by church discipline?"

And the answer: "According to the command of Christ, people who call themselves Christians but show themselves to be unchristian in doctrine or life are first repeatedly admonished in a brotherly manner. If they do not give up their errors or wickedness, they are reported to the church, that is, to the elders. If they do not heed also their admonitions, they are forbidden the use of the sacraments, and they are excluded by the elders from the Christian congregation, and by God himself from the kingdom of Christ. They are again received as members of Christ and of the church when they promise and show real amendment."

Questions

1. Using *The Heidelberg Catechism*, please explain how the preaching of the gospel opens and closes the door to the kingdom of heaven.

2. Using *The Heidelberg Catechism*, please explain how church discipline opens and closes the door to the kingdom of heaven.

III. The Church and the State

1. The church is called by God to fight a spiritual battle with the sword of the Word of God—2 Corinthians 10:4.

a. The church must never carry the physical sword for its purpose in the new covenant

age.

2. God gave civil government the right of the physical sword —Romans 13:1–7.
 - a. Civil authorities are called to govern according to the Ten Commandments.
 - b. They are called to protect the true church and promote the true religion.
 - c. They are called to be nursing fathers and nursing mothers of the church.
3. The power of civil magistrates is explained in the words, “*in sacris*” and “*circa sacra*”.
 - a. *In sacris*—civil magistrates have no power *in the church*.
 - b. *Circa sacra*—civil magistrates do have power *about the church*.
4. The church has the duty to pray for kings and all that are in authority, and to bring positive moral influence on government and society—1 Timothy 2:1–2.

Questions:

1. Does Scripture advise the church to carry the sword to promote the advance of God’s kingdom on earth? How do we know that?

2. What kind of battle is the church called to fight on earth? How does the civil magistrate have the right to carry the sword?

3. Regarding the relations between church and state, what do the Latin words “*in sacris*” and “*circa sacra*” mean? What responsibilities does the civil magistrate have towards the church?

4. What responsibilities does the church have in regard to the civil magistrate?

5. How should the church speak out against civil developments that are inconsistent with biblical standards of morality?

IV. The Church and the World

1. The church is in a spiritual battle against the enemies of God.
 - a. Christians use spiritual weapons—Ephesians 6:11–18.
 - b. The world uses physical weapons against the church.
2. The church seeks the salvation of the world.
3. The church is called to loving service.
4. Careful involvement—in the world, but not of the world.

Questions:

1. What is the general response of the world to the church? How should the church react to that enmity?

2. As the church seeks the salvation of the world, what weapons should she use?

3. What kind of loving service is the church called to give in the world?

4. What care should the church take while giving loving service to the world? What does it mean to be “in the world, but not of the world”?

V. Self-Reflection

Does this lecture help you to better understand the calling of the church in this world? How can the church maintain her own identity while bringing salvation to the world? What are the main threats and hindrances to the authority of the church where you live? How can you protect the authority of the church?
