

Kingdom Congress of Illinois”

Position Paper on Ekklesia Convocation: Legislative Decrees

The church, which Jesus declared he would build, has many responsibilities. It has ecclesiastical duties. It is God’s house or His temple, meaning that each believer is a stone in the formation of the sanctuary in which God will dwell. That is an amazing thought. The Apostle Paul said to the Corinthians, “Know you not that you are the temple and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (I Cor. 3:16). Peter communicated that same thought when he stated, “You, also, as lively stones, are built up into a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (I Peter 2:5). Peter affirmed that Jesus’ church is God’s spiritual house and then added that spiritual sacrifices are to be offered in, by, and through the church, which is a holy priesthood.

The priesthood in the days of the Old Covenant order was mandated to offer sacrifices. Part of their duty was to present offerings of animals. In the New Covenant, the priesthood no longer offers blood sacrifices. “But Christ came as a chief priest of the good things that are now here. Christ went through a better, more perfect tent that was not made by human hands and that is not part of this created world. He used his own blood, not the blood of goats and bulls, for the sacrifice. He went into the most holy place and offered this sacrifice once and for all to free us forever. The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of cows sprinkled on unclean people made their bodies holy and clean. The blood of Christ, who had no defect, does even more. Through the eternal Spirit he offered himself to God and cleansed our consciences from the useless things we had done. Now we can serve the living God.” (Heb. 9:11-14, GW)

Although the ecclesiastical or religious duties of the church does not include offering blood sacrifices, Christ’s church is still mandated to present offerings such as: Praise (“By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.” - Heb. 13:15), Personal service (“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.” - Rom. 12:1), Prayers (“I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty, for this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior.” - 1 Tim 2:1-3).

Christ’s church not only serves an ecclesiastical function, it also serves a representative function, which means that the life style of the believers should reflect the will and purity of Christ. (“As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy” - 1 Peter 1:14-16). Representing Christ also requires the church to be tutorial, which means that is mandated to know and preserve the truth of God (I Tim. 3:15), communicate that truth in all the nations (Mt. 28:19), and make disciples who will practice the truth in all spheres of culture (Mt. 28:20).

Added to the ecclesiastical and representative duties of Christ’s church, or His ekklesia, is a governmental or legislative dimension. In Matthew 16:18-19 when Jesus declared He would build His church, He immediately imparted keys of the kingdom. With these keys of authority, His church would be empowered to bind or declare unlawful and to lose or declare lawful. God’s heavenly will is supposed to be legislated in the earth, and the Church was given authority to occupy that governmental function. As can be observed by looking to earthly governments, declaration of what is lawful is accomplished by the creation of laws. Jesus empowered His ekklesia to legislate the law of heaven into the earth.

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The legislative or governmental function of the ekklesia is not the same type of gathering as Sunday church or even prayer gatherings. Congregations assemble for the ecclesiastical functions of offering prayer and praise and for celebration of communion as well as the representative functions of communicating truth and making disciples. When prayer groups gather, they seek God through supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks – as was referenced earlier from I Tim.2:1-3. The appeals vary from praying for persons to praying for cities and territories to praying for God to move in the earth. Although church services and prayer services may, from time to time, operate in a measure of legislative function, an ekklesia convocation is called for the specific purpose of governing.

To best understand the outworking of the governmental dimension of the church, one can read the account in Acts 15 of a time when the church convened to write a new ordinance concerning what God and His people would declare to be lawful in the earth. The circumstances surrounding the gathering centered on new converts from Gentile nations. From the preaching of Philip to the Samaritans and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8), to the ministry of Peter to Cornelius and the Italian band (Acts 10), to the works of Paul and Barnabas to surrounding nations (Acts 13), non-Jewish people were believing in Christ. Certain men of Judea, because of their knowledge of Hebrew custom, held the persuasion that no one could be saved unless they were circumcised as Moses had required. Scripture states that “Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them” (Acts 15:2). A convocation was called in Jerusalem to settle the issue.

Several key elements must be present for a gathering to have a governmental nature. First, the gathering must consist of those mantled with authority. Ekklesia authority arises from that which Christ delegated to every believer, but also from one’s placement or calling in the body and several other factors. (More about authority can be gleaned from the position paper on *The Nature of Legislative Authority*.) The Council at Jerusalem contained that element. “And when they (Paul and Barnabas) were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles, and elders” Acts 15:4).

Another key ingredient for a governing ekklesia is that of a set agenda. Whether one might look at a board meeting for a corporation or assembling of a governmental body such as the US Senate, an agenda is set for each particular gathering. The agenda defines what will be considered. The agenda forecasts where the discussion will go, thus allowing the delegates to prepare, study, and determine where they stand on the issue. (More about setting an agenda can be gleaned from the position paper on *Convening for a Set Agenda*.) The focus of the Jerusalem gathering was the issue of circumcision.

A third element of ekklesia convocations is the actual law, decree, or findings. Again, referencing a natural governmental body, those who are authorized to assemble must prepare, present, and vote upon laws. In order to prepare the law, research must be done. The problem or issue needs to be thoroughly examined. Law-makers do not just gather and then take their best guess based upon a cursory examination or limited knowledge of the subject. Wisdom is required; and according to dictionary.com, “wisdom is knowledge of what is true or right coupled with just judgment as to action, sagacity, discernment, or insight.” Good laws are based upon truth – truth about the issue and truth about the solution. The council at Jerusalem took the time to gather facts through the testimony of Peter, Paul, and Barnabas (Acts 15: 7-12).

Good legislative policy must also be based upon some transcendent axiom. If a business is setting a new policy, the new regulation must support and advance the vision and legal

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documents of the corporation. If the Senate gathers to write a new law, the new ruling must adhere to the US Constitution. If the church convenes to answer a current day problem and decide upon an issue’s spiritual legality, there must be a transcendent document to which those findings comply. That transcendent document is the Bible. Paul told Timothy, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

The standard for that which is legal, or holy, or righteous, or allowed must come from God. No believer would argue with that concept. Man, or humanism, may not be the author of what is right and wrong. That truth was firmly established and enforced in the Garden. God told Adam the standard – “Do not eat” – while Adam attempted to alter the standard to one more suited to his own liking. Right and wrong are God-ordained, God-appointed, and God-enforced edicts. Man in Adam could not change it; man in Old Covenant days had to accept it; man in New Covenant days must acknowledge it. God gives the standard for all binding and loosing. So, what are the keys? They are the laws of God.

God redeemed Israel from the satanic bondage of the Egyptians and sent the nation forth to occupy the Promised Land. In their new land, they would build an earthly reflection of God’s kingdom rather than a replica of the Egyptian culture. To build the new thing, they would need to be given a template of that which was God’s will. In route, they were guided to Mt. Sinai. On that holy mount, Moses was given keys. God revealed how the nation should build a religious community – a priestly nation – and how they should build a civil community – a kingly nation. No aspect of their life would be open to private or human standards. The keys of what would be allowed and what would not be allowed were given to Moses and the Israelites when God gave Moses the law. The standard of good and evil, that which is allowed or not allowed, and the law: these are all synonymous concepts. Israel of old, who were God’s stewards of the kingdom, were given keys to the kingdom. They were commissioned to apply the law as the determining factor as to how they built both their religious and their civil societies.

The Apostle Paul, when addressing the need for both Jew and Gentile to have a circumcision of the heart rather than only a circumcision of the flesh (Rom. 2:25-29), seems to be placing the covenantal structures under which the Jews served God into an unimportant or inferior position. A closer examination of the passage reveals, however, that Paul is emphasizing the covenantal truth expressed by circumcision to be of more importance than just the performance of the ritual without understanding and faith to back the ceremony. Paul is not putting down His countrymen for their obedience to the God’s commands during the Old Covenant order but rather exposing where their obedience was incomplete because it lacked true worship and faith. Into the context of discussing the Jews, Paul asks the question, “What advantage then does the Jew have?” He then answers His own inquiry by replying, “Much in every way but the main advantage is that they were given the law of God” (Rom. 3:1-2).

When God gave his standards – His laws – to the Jews, they were given a great advantage. They were given the keys to the kingdom. They were given knowledge of what was good and evil, what was right and wrong, what was allowed and what was not allowed. They would be able to bind or deny admittance and loose or grant admittance in accordance with the will and Word of God. The law – the keys – were advantageous in kingdom building and kingdom management.

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When Jesus announced that His ekklesia would receive the keys of the kingdom, Jesus was stating that His called out nation would follow the pattern of the former ekklesia that was called out under Moses. One could say that the baton of authority was transferred from the old Israel to the new. Not only did Jesus identify His new nation, but He also identified the tools or keys. One could ask the question, “What advantage then does the church have?” and then answer the inquiry by replying, “Much in every way but the main advantage is that they were given the law of God.”

Certainly the law is understood and operated differently in the New Covenant than it was under the Old Covenant. The cross created a dividing point. Some law comes through the cross unchanged. “Thou shall not kill” remains the same in both covenantal structures. The sacrifices of animals and the laws that pertain to the Levitical ceremonies are not the same post-Christ and His cross. Shadows of things promised disappear in the full light of the materialize provision. It has been said that the Old Covenant is the New Covenant concealed while the New is the Old revealed. Accommodating for the changes, the law still remains the standard or the transcendent document for that which God allows and for that which God does not allow. Jesus commissioned His ekklesia and gave the church the keys (the law) by which to bind and loose.

When the convocation occurred in Acts 15, the ruling or the new law was based on the Scriptures of old. James, who seems to be the presiding elder, referenced Amos 9: 11-12. Reading of the text in Acts 15 indicates that James not only had knowledge of the writings of the prophet Amos but that the Holy Spirit was enlightening his understanding on the relevant meaning of the old writing to the current situation. The ekklesia used the keys of the kingdom to declare heaven’s law in the earth. Based upon Amos, the law or decision of the convocation was presented that “we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God.” They would not be required to continue the Old Covenant symbol of circumcision.

The Legislative declaration set a new ordinance into operation. Letters were written and distributed to all the local assemblies of the findings of the convocation. Because of the new rule, the church was re-formed. It would not continue to reflect the former form, but it would be formed anew based upon that which had been legalized during the convocation. Reformation results from new legislation. (More about reformation can be gleaned from the position paper on *The Reformation Power of Legislation.*)

The rulings of the ekklesia serve not only as the legal decree of heaven, but they serve as tutorial because they reveal God’s will for the earth. Depending upon the issue or the set agenda, the proclamation of the ekklesia can reach beyond the sphere of the church into the other aspects of culture. Certainly, the Acts 15 convocation was focused upon a church issue. However, consider a convocation called on an economic crisis within a community or a social injustice against a segment of society. God’s insight, as revealed after a detailed exegesis of the scriptures, would be released in the form of a resolution. Such of resolution decreeing what God allows and does not allow – His laws – would contain wisdom of the area of culture under examination. Civil and business realms could find instruction in an ekklesia resolution. Any and all aspects of culture could potentially of be instructed by the findings of the church.

If the church does not tutor the spheres of culture, the culture will seek another source of wisdom. If God’s wisdom is excluded from the conversation, wisdom must come from man in the form of humanism or from the devil in the form of deception. The legislative function of the ekklesia cannot be under estimated in its tutorial influence. When God’s will and word is

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released and acted upon in the earth, the will and word of the devil is ineffective, inoperative, and bound.

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