

## 24. Church discipline and church government

### **WCF chapter 30** *Modern Language version – 1993 – OPC*

#### **Church discipline**

30.1. The Lord Jesus, as King and Head of his church, has appointed a government in it, to be administered by church officers, distinct from the civil authorities.

2. To these church officers he has committed the keys of the kingdom of heaven. For this reason they have authority to retain and to remit sins, to shut the kingdom against the unrepentant both by the Word and by censures, and to open it to repentant sinners by the ministry of the gospel and by releasing from censures, as the occasion requires.

3. Church discipline is necessary for reclaiming and gaining fellow Christians who are guilty of offenses, for deterring others from committing similar offenses, for purging the leaven which might infect the whole lump, for vindicating the honor of Christ and the holy profession of the gospel, and for averting the wrath of God which might justly fall on the church if it should allow his covenant and its seals to be profaned by notorious and obstinate offenders.

4. For the better attaining of these purposes, the officers of the church are to proceed by admonition, by suspension from the sacrament of the Lord's Supper for a time, and by excommunication from the church, according to the nature of the offense and the degree of the person's guilt.

#### **= Being shaped to be more like Jesus**

- Through instruction (formative discipline)
- Through corrective (corrective discipline)
- \*\* All disciples need both all the time \*\*

#### **Our duty to each other...**

Hebrews 10:24-25, "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."

Colossians 1:28, "Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ."

Basic Christian care = caring for a church member... usually speaking Bible truth with them... with the goal of their growth in godliness.

1 Thessalonians 5:4, "And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all."

#### **Sometimes you DON'T confront sin**

1 Peter 4:8, "Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins."

#### **Sometimes we MUST confront sin**

Matthew 18:15-20,  
Galatians 6:1, 2 Thessalonians 3:13, 2 John 9-11,  
1 Corinthians 5:1-13.

#### **The church's authority and responsibility (see WCF 30:1-4)...**

The "keys": preaching and discipline

The problem of characteristic and ongoing NON-repentance

Pastoral sensitivity

Process...

Assumptions...

**Church government: synods and councils**

31.1. For the better governing and further edifying of the church, there ought to be such assemblies as are commonly called synods or councils.

2. [As magistrates may lawfully call a synod of ministers, and other fit persons, to consult and advise with, about matters of religion; so, if magistrates be open enemies to the Church], the ministers of Christ of themselves, by virtue of their office, or they, with other fit persons upon delegation from their Churches, may meet together in such assemblies.

3. Synods and councils have authority ministerially to decide controversies of faith and cases of conscience, to set down rules and directions for the better ordering of the public worship of God and the government of his church, and to receive and authoritatively act on complaints of maladministration in the church. If the decrees and decisions of these synods and councils are in accordance with the Word of God, they are to be received with reverence and submission, not only because of their agreement with the Word, but also because of the authority by which they are decided, as being an ordinance that God has appointed in his Word.

4. Since apostolic times, all synods and councils, whether general or particular, may err, and many have erred. Therefore, they are not to be made the rule of faith or practice, but are to be used as a help in regard to both.

5. Synods and councils are to handle or conclude nothing but what pertains to the church. They are not to intermeddle in civil affairs which concern the state, except by way of humble petition in extraordinary cases, or by way of advice, for satisfaction of conscience, if they are required to do so by the civil authority.

**Church government is like your car engine...**

**Some NT passages on church government**

Mark 10:42-45, John 13:14-16,  
Acts 14:23, Acts 20:17-38,  
Ephesians 4:11-12, 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13,  
1 Timothy 3:1-13, 5:17-18,  
2 Timothy 1:13-14, 2:1-2,  
Titus 1:5-9,  
1 Peter 5:1-5,  
Hebrews 13:7, 17

**Church elders...**

The job of the church leader... 1 Peter 5:1-5

Elder = overseer = shepherd, pastor-teacher  
(Acts 20:17-28)

Plural... in every town...and

Gathering together  
(WCF 31:1-2)

Their purpose... the limits of their authority  
(WCF 31:3-5)

**See separate papers on Church Discipline and Church Government**

**Personal response: for what should we give thanks... confess... pray?**

**Next...**

**Next week: Praise and prayer – new songs and old!**

**Death & resurrection... the Last Judgement (WCF chapters 32-33)**

**What is the purpose of a church confession?**