

Week 30, Wednesday, August 10, “Of Church Censures”

It should be noted that the Westminster Assembly *first* completed “The Form of Presbyterial Church-Government” and “The Directory for Public Government”, which are intended to be understood in interpreting what is written in these chapters.⁵⁹³ Also, church discipline is understood by the historic Reformed Church as the third of three marks of a true church (along with the right preaching of the Word and the proper administration of the sacraments). R.C. Sproul voices this classic notion: “One essential characteristic of the true church ... is the presence of a duly established government.”⁵⁹⁴

Chapter 30: Of Church Censures:

WCF 30:1: *The Lord Jesus, as King and Head of His Church, hath therein appointed a government, in the hand of Church officers, distinct from the civil magistrate. (a)*

(a) Isa. 9:6-7; 1 Tim. 5:17; 1 Thess. 5:12; Acts 20:17, 28; Heb. 13:7, 17, 24; 1 Cor. 12:28; Matt. 28:18-20.

a. This section specifically teaches against Erastianism (which views the church as a department of the State)⁵⁹⁵. Van Dixhoorn explains the contextual significance of what is being said here: “Historically, the very fact of the independence of church government was resisted by both King and Parliament, for leaders in the state did not want to be accountable to a leadership in the church ... The church is not the religious arm of the state; it is an institution distinct from the state and has its own unique purpose.”⁵⁹⁶ We must remember that Jesus is Lord of Lords of all the world and “King and Head of His Church”. This is also against prelacy (a hierarchy of bishops): “Presbyterianism has

⁵⁹³ Spear, 160. Especially important to understand regarding the “three office” view of church governors (distinctly, ministers (with an overlapping governing duty with Session), elders, and deacons.

⁵⁹⁴ Sproul, vol. 3, 160. He gives helpful disclaimers and directives in section 4 of this chapter: “... church discipline is not to be carried out haphazardly in the Christian community, nor is it to be done in a vigilante fashion. The officers of the church are responsible to proceed with church discipline ... church discipline is to be reserved for those sins that are gross and heinous, that are public and scandalous, that bring dishonor to Christ and to his church ... the ends ... are better achieved when it proceeds in an orderly and progressive manner ... by degrees ...” (163).

⁵⁹⁵ “The Erastian System, named after Erastus, 1524-1583. Erastians regard the Church as a society which owes its existence and form to regulations enacted by the State. The officers of the Church are merely instructors or preachers of the Word, without any right or power to rule, except that which they derive from the civil magistrates. It is the function of the State to govern the Church, to exercise discipline and to excommunicate ... [Erastianism] conflicts with the fundamental principle of the Headship of Jesus Christ, and does not recognize the fact that Church and State are distinct and independent in their origin, in their primary objects, in the power they exercise, and in the administration of that power.” Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946), 579. Ward shares an example of how this was playing out in Britain: “King James VI held that ‘Presbytery agrees as well with a monarchy as God and the devil.’ The statements expressed to him by Andrew Melville (1545-1622) in 1596 have sounded down the years. ‘Sir, as diverse times before I have told you, so now again I must tell you, -there are two Kings and two Kingdoms in Scotland; there is King James, the head of the commonwealth, and there is Christ Jesus, the head of the church, whose subject King James VI is, and of whose kingdom he is not a King, nor a Lord, not a Head but a member.’” We should understand that Jesus also is King of the State (and the World) as God, but Melville here was dealing with the spheres of sovereignty with the administration of Christ’s mediatorial power. Ward, 184.

⁵⁹⁶ VanDixhoorn, 402.

its archbishop and that archbishop is Christ.”⁵⁹⁷ He rules over His Church that He has purchased, and His Church is also the “Kingdom of Heaven”. While it is not of this world, it is conquering this world. And He has “appointed a government” over it. If that government is appointed, it should be discernible by command and demonstration in Scripture, and followed. So it is as Presbyterianism: “... as far as government is concerned, no church is pure unless it is presbyterian.”⁵⁹⁸ Pastor Bell’s membership class listed the following as the basics of Presbyterian (Biblical) church government: (1) Popular Election (officers chosen by and responsible to the people: please note that only men, in federal headship, vote at PRPC, and only on the election of officers; to review the background of this policy, please ask for the notes of our congregational presentation on Sept. 4, 2011): Acts 1:13-26; 6:1-6, 14:23; (2) Offices of [Minister], Elder and Deacon (men only): 1 Tim. 3; Titus 1:5-7, 2 John 1; 1 Peter 5:1; Acts 20:17-28; Philippians 1:1; James 5:14 (3) Plurality of Elders: Ex. 18; Acts 14:23; 20:17; 20:28; Philippians 1:1, Acts 15⁵⁹⁹; (4) Designation of a Person to Ecclesiastical Office with Laying on of Hands: Acts 6:6; 13:1-3; 1 Tim 4:14; 1 Tim 5:22 (5) Privilege of Appeal (and review)⁶⁰⁰. Charles Hodge describes Presbyterianism negatively and positively as follows:

The three great negations of Presbyterianism—that is, the three great errors which it denies—are: (1.) That all Church power vests in the clergy; (2.) That the apostolic office is perpetual; (3.) That each individual Christian congregation is independent. The affirmative statement of these principles is: (1.) That the people have a right to a substantive part in the government of the Church; (2.) That presbyters, who minister in word and doctrine, are the highest permanent officers of the Church, and all belong to the same order; (3.) That the outward and visible Church is, or should be, one, in the sense that a smaller part is subject to a larger, and a larger to the whole ... The power of the Church relates ... 1. To matters of doctrine ... 2. ... power to set down rules for the ordering of public worship ... 3. ... power to make rules for her own government ... 4. power to receive into fellowship, and to exclude the unworthy from her own communion.⁶⁰¹

In short, Presbyterian church government can be summed up as Christ’s organizational rule over His Visible Church by His Word and Spirit particularly through the plurality of elders (deacons report to the elders) qualified and ordained to do His work. John Murray helps us recognize the balance:

⁵⁹⁷ John Murray, “Government in the Church of Christ”, in *Collected Writings*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Banner of Truth and Trust, 1976), 268. Similarly, he writes elsewhere: “Only in the head of the church is there singularity of rule.” (“The Government of the Church”, in *Collected Writings*, vol. 2, 342).

⁵⁹⁸ Williamson, 233.

⁵⁹⁹ “There is ... one feature of the government of Israel as the people of God that can scarcely have failed to provide a pattern for the government of the church under the New Testament. It is the frequent mention of, and the place occupied by ‘the elders’ in the life of Israel ... it is contrary to all reasonable supposition that the Old Testament eldership did not exercise a profound influence upon the institution which appears in such unmistakable characters in the New Testament church ...” John Murray, “The Government of the Church”, in *Collected Writings*, vol. 2, 336-337. Related to this, he also helpfully points out that “The principle of parity is co-ordinate with that of plurality ... in respect of ruling, the minister of the Word is on parity with all the others who are designated elders.” (“The Form of Government”, vol. 2, 346).

⁶⁰⁰ Pastor Wallace Bell served the saints at PRPC for more than 30 years.

⁶⁰¹ Charles Hodge, “What is Presbyterianism”, in *The Westminster Confession: A Commentary*, A.A. Hodge, 400, 401.

... in respect of rule the person who is called the minister has no more authority or jurisdiction than the ruling elder, and therefore no more responsibility devolves upon him than upon the elder. The minister as a teaching elder has his own distinctive function, and exercise, by preaching and teaching, a peculiar prerogative in the church of God, but in ruling he is on a parity with the ruling elders ... Each elder must be aware of the parity that exists in the rule of the church, and therefore the parity of responsibility and obligation.⁶⁰²

It is important to highlight that “The Church is not a vast democracy, where everything is decided by the popular voice.”⁶⁰³ On this note, it is helpful to highlight James Henley Thornwell overagainst Hodge (contemporaries) on defining Presbyterianism. C.N. Willborn explains, “Like Hodge, Thornwell established Presbyterianism upon three principles as well, albeit more particular. Presbyterianism is ‘the government of the Church by parliamentary assemblies, composed of two classes of Elders, and of Elders only, and so arranged as to realize the visible unity of the whole church’.”⁶⁰⁴ John Murray concurs, “In a word, the church, whether conceived of locally or ecumenically, does not rule itself. In that sense it is not a pure democracy; Dickson writes, “ ... democracy or popular government cannot but bring in great confusion, whence many absurdities will

⁶⁰² John Murray, “Government in the Church of Christ”, in *Collected Writings of John Murray, vol. 1, The Claims of Truth* (Philadelphia: Banner of Truth Trust, 1976) , 261. He seems to be 2-office in context (we reject).

⁶⁰³ Ibid, 402.

⁶⁰⁴ C.N. Willborn, “Hodge and Thornwell: ‘Princes in Israel’”, in *The Confessional Presbyterian* (Dallas, vol. 8, 2012) , 48. This designation of two classes of elders relates to a distinction by some of a two- or three-office view; that is, that the minister only is allowed to administer the sacraments and to preach. We agree with the classic three-office view of church government after studying, along with our Standards, *Order in the Office*, ed. Mark R. Brown. Here it is relevant to note that the Scottish Commissioners had to convince the rest of the Assembly that there was an office of ruling elder (distinct from the minister) with authority to govern; it was always the practice of the Church of Scotland, but the debate was never a 2-3 office issue in terms of whether their were divided functions within the office of elder, but whether there was an office of ruling elder at all in addition to that of minister (and deacon). See Wayne R. Spear’s *Covenanted Uniformity in Religion: The Influence of the Scottish Commissioners on the Ecclesiology of the Westminster Assembly* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2013) , 112-116. Here also, in the section commenting on “Of Church Censures” in the *Confession*, Dickson emphasizes the distinct role only of official ministers with worship: “ ... many ... err who maintain that the key of doctrine, or of the public preaching of the Word, is proper to any man furnished with suitable gifts, though not called and sent to that employment ... the Scripture mentioneth that God hath set apart certain peculiar ministers for the preaching of the Word (*Rom. I:I; Eph. 4:II; Titus I:3*) ... no man ought to take upon him the public preaching of the Word, unless he be called thereunto ... he that taketh upon him this office without a call, he usurpeth authority in the church, seeing preaching is an act of authority (*I Thess. 5:12*) ... the titles which are given to the preachers of the gospel are names of office ... there is not one approved example in all the Word of God for a gifted brother to preach without a call ... there are precepts and rules set down in Scripture for all ages of the church to the end of the world, anent [concerning] the calling of men to be ministers of the gospel (*I Tim. 3:2-3, 6-7; 5:21-22*). (243-44) Also relevant, though subtle (for is thought understood), is the distinction of “pastors and presbyters of particular congregations” with presbyters as synonyms from “governors of any one congregation” (250).

follow.”⁶⁰⁵ The elders are to rule ... Elders are members of the body of Christ and are subject to the very same kind of rule of which they are the administrators ... It is the recognition of investiture by the Holy Spirit that warrants and requires subjection by the people ... It is the conviction of this rule by men as the ordinance of God that alone constrains subjection, because it is subjection in the Lord.”⁶⁰⁶

While the people are represented and have a right to appeal, the rule of faith and life is the Word of God, not “we the people”: “Church power has a much higher source than the consent of the governed.”⁶⁰⁷ Presbyterianism is primarily about church polity, and that by a plurality of elders (or bishops, the words overlap in Scripture) who are under-shepherds (1 Pet. 5:1-5), overseers (Acts 20:28), servants of the Church (Philippians 1:1), and who rule and watch over the souls of the Church (Hebrews 13:7, 17). Paul instructs Timothy and Titus to find and ordain elders (plural). Churches are told to submit to their elders (plural). The OT connection with elders are the “judges” first appointed in Exodus 18 to support Moses in helping the people apply God’s Word to their daily lives. Just as the essential aspect of government in the state is to enforce law for public peace, so is the purpose of Church government.⁶⁰⁸ So in the New Testament, “The congregation, for its part, is to acknowledge the God-given authority of its leaders and follow the lead they give (Heb. 13:17).”⁶⁰⁹

b. Jesus gave the civil government its own sphere of ministry (Romans 13). He gives the Church its own government as well, “in the hand of Church officers, distinct from the civil government.” Ward

⁶⁰⁵ Dickson, 245. It is relevant to remember that the U.S.A. is not a democracy, but a republic: hence we pledge allegiance “to the Republic” for which the flag stands; this understanding is greatly lost on Americans, especially those who argue against maintaining our electoral college system (which protects against motley majority rule). His following insight also should help us better understand what Paul is often referring to by “elders” in his epistles, not of governing rulers (the second office carried over from the OT, such as Exodus 18), but the revised office with continuity to the Levitical Priests in worship but now with many differences (thus needing updated qualifications along with that for deacons, a new office, in the NT): “... all these congregations were ruled and governed by one college of pastors all of these particular congregations are called but one church (*Acts* 18:22; 12:5)”: here is Dickson is arguing for Presbyteries and Synods, but what should not be missed is that he understands, as did all the Puritans and Reformers, that Paul is speaking of pastors or “bishops” and not ruling elders in these contexts (See see “elders” and “bishop” in context of Titus 1:5, 7).

⁶⁰⁶ Murray, “Government in the Church of Christ”, 261-262, 264.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid, 416.

⁶⁰⁸ We earlier were taught by Packer (238) that government is the lawful use of force to enforce just laws. For civil government, the power of the sword is used. For church government, the sword of the Spirit is used. But the principle remains the same against lawless anarchy. There is an overlap of both within parental family government. So Richard Phillips writes, “... a father’s call [is] to *keep* his children through the loving discipline that preserves them from harm ... Parental authority in mode of keeping, therefore, has the obedience of our children as its immediate and urgent goal.” Richard Phillips, *The Masculine Mandate: God’s Calling to Men* (Orlando: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2010), 109. Further, “To be a father is to be an authority figure who rules his children by commands and enforces his rules through the God-given means of corporal punishment and verbal correction. Your goal in all this is the same as that of God the Father in His fatherly discipline toward us ... Heb. 12:11 ...” Ibid, 111. Note that this is in his chapter on discipline; the previous chapter is on discipleship based on the need to ask for a child’s heart, Prov. 23:26 and a call to teach our children and pray and play with them.

⁶⁰⁹ Packer, 207. This being said, thus, “The pastoral role of elders demands mature and stable Christian character and a well-ordered personal life (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9)” (208).

explains succinctly, “The power of the keys belongs to the church (Matt 16:19), the power of the sword to the state (Rom 13:4).”⁶¹⁰ This might inform our earlier Church-State concerns (chs. 23-24, 31).

WCF 30:2: *To these officers, the keys of the kingdom of heaven are committed: by virtue whereof, they have power respectively to retain, and remit sins; to shut that kingdom against the impenitent, both by the Word and censures; and to open it unto penitent sinners, by the ministry of the gospel, and by absolution from censures, as occasion shall require.*(b)
(b)Matt. 16:19; Matt. 18:17-18; John 20:21-23; 2 Cor. 2:6-8.

Although not inherent but derivative, yet the officers of the Church have not been given simply figurehead leadership. The “keys of the kingdom of heaven ... committed” to them “represent stewardship, and this is government ...”⁶¹¹ They actually have a job to do, and that is namely (in terms of ruling) discipline positively and negatively: “[This power] belongs to them to say what is lawful and what is unlawful in conduct, and what is right and what is wrong in belief. It is their right and duty to impose censures and to absolve from the same, as occasion may require. Is a church officer puffed up with a sense of his power and importance? Let him rather be bowed and burdened with the sense of his responsibility.”⁶¹² Green warns this power must be administered: “Church officers have been remiss in not applying the power of the keys to keep the church pure in its faith and in its morals. As a result the church has suffered much loss of prestige and power.”⁶¹³ Again, this power of the keys is entrusted and not innate. The actual power is in the keys, not in the person holding the keys. Berkhoff explains: “Christ exercises His authority by means of His royal Word ... while it is true that Christ exercises His authority in the Church through the officers, this is not to be understood in the sense that He *transfers* His authority to His servants. He Himself rules the Church through all the ages, but in doing this, He uses the officers of the Church as His organs. They have no absolute or independent, but only a derived and ministerial power.”⁶¹⁴ *This* is against Roman Catholicism, which teaches Peter received Christ’s power and has handed it down through the Popes in what is known as “apostolic succession”. Rather, it is an authority derived and entrusted from Christ and His Church to be administered (like the turning of a key) by His ordained officers in each generation of the Church as they are governed by the Word of God. It is noteworthy that neither Paul nor Peter were leading or deciding in Acts 15 (but they did carry out the orders).

WCF 30:3: *Church censures are necessary, for the reclaiming and gaining of offending brethren, for deterring of others from the like offences, for purging out of that leaven which might infect the whole lump, for vindicating the honour of Christ, and the holy profession of the gospel, and for preventing the wrath of God, which might justly fall upon the Church, if they should suffer His covenant and the seals thereof to be profaned by notorious and obstinate offenders.*(c)
(c)1 Cor. 5; 1 Tim. 5:20; Matt. 7:6; 1 Tim. 1:20; 1 Cor. 11:27-34 with Jude 23.

⁶¹⁰ Ward, 185.

⁶¹¹ Murray, “The Government of the Church”, in *Collected Writings*, vol. 2, 338. He adds, “ ... it is the abiding headship of Christ that gives sanction and validity to human instrumentality.” (340)

⁶¹² Green, 222.

⁶¹³ *Ibid.*

⁶¹⁴ Berkhof, 583.

Church censures (formal disciplinary measures) are necessary. The goal is always repentance and restitution, “reclaiming and gaining”, the sinner to Christ and His Church. Still, censures are not only for the benefit of individual offenders, but for the honor of Jesus⁶¹⁵ and the safety and testimony of the whole of His Body: “When the church tolerates open and obstinate sin, its witness to the saving power of the gospel is gravely compromised.”⁶¹⁶ Censures are to “deter” others from sinning, and “purging” out those who won’t repent and are a cancer among us (sometimes there is spiritual growth by attrition). As we are a covenant people, we affect each other in our covenant relationship with God (consider Achan’s effect on Israel, Joshua 7). Church discipline is Christ’s ordained means of preserving pure unity that witnesses to Him.⁶¹⁷ To neglect “keeping house” is to have a filthy and broken home in danger of being condemned with temporal judgment: “Lack of church discipline is to be seen for what it really is—not a loving concern as is hypocritically claimed, but an indifference to the honor of Christ and the welfare of his flock ... When error and sin are left alone they will spread.”⁶¹⁸ There are plenty of churches that will never deal with your sin. They usually turn into the synagogues of Satan: “When men fail to properly exercise or administer these keys [preaching the Word and disciplining by the Word], Christ gives them to others ...”⁶¹⁹ By God’s grace, this church will not lose the keys for lack of use. Durham writes, “As theologians say, excommunication is added to confirm God’s threatenings, as sacraments seal the promises.”⁶²⁰ Ward soberly comments, “... excommunication is relatively rare in Presbyterian circles particularly in the 20th century. It is too rare.”⁶²¹ He also shares a helpful anecdote by the well-known pastor R.M. McCheyne to demonstrate the importance of church discipline: “When I first entered upon the work of the ministry among you, I was exceedingly ignorant of the vast importance of church discipline. I thought that my great work and almost only work was to pray and preach...But it pleased God, who teaches his servants in another way than man teaches, to bless some of the cases of discipline to the manifest and undeniable conversion of the souls of those under our care; and from that hour a new light broke into my mind, and I saw that if preaching be an ordinance of Christ, so is church discipline.”⁶²² Van Dixhoorn writes, “Discipline is alarming. It focuses the minds of disciples and

⁶¹⁵ “... church discipline flows immediately from Jesus Christ. It reminds people more directly of His authority and the fact that they are answerable to Him.” James Durham, Eds., Matthew Vogan and Catherine Hyde (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2022), 3.

⁶¹⁶ Spear, 157.

⁶¹⁷ “Jesus prays for a visible unity that will bear witness to the world. The mysterious unity of believers with one another must come to visible expression so as to be instrumental in bringing conviction to the world ... If there is unity it follows that this unity must express itself in all the functions which belong to the church. Since government in the church is an institution of Christ (cf. Rom. 12:8; 1 Cor. 12:28; 1 Tim. 5:17 Heb. 13:7 1 Pet. 5:1, 2), this unity must be expressed in government ... A concrete illustration of this principle is the decree of the Jerusalem council (Acts 15:28, 29; 16:4) ... Any infringement upon this sovereignty belonging to Christ is a violation of what is basic and central in the government of the church.” Murray, “The Biblical Basis for Ecclesiastical Union”, in *Collected Writings*, vol. 1, 271.

⁶¹⁸ Williamson, 237.

⁶¹⁹ Ibid, 235.

⁶²⁰ Durham, 13.

⁶²¹ Ward, 186.

⁶²² R.M. McCheyne, *Life of Robert Murray McCheyne*, Andrew Bonar (reprint London 1960) ; 87-88, in Ward, 187.

often discourages them from following the pattern of an offender ... Censures help us avoid following the wrong people down the wrong path. God has a preventative purpose to discipline ... We are to keep what is holy from those who act like dogs and pigs in the church (*Matt. 7:6*) ... God is displeased with churches that tolerate sin.”⁶²³ Further, Packer rightly highlights that “The New Testament clearly shows ... that ... judicial correctives have a significant place in the maturing of churches and individuals.”⁶²⁴ Strong preaching without strong ruling amounts to emptiness: “Failure to discipline guts the preaching.”⁶²⁵ On that note, Christ threatens to gut our churches if we fail to exercise church discipline. See Revelation 2:14-16 (the theme verse of James Durham’s work, “The Scandal of Undisciplined Disciples” per the Suggested readings below).⁶²⁶ Durham states, “Ministers and elders need to be faithful in this if they want to receive Christ’s commendation on the one hand and avoid His sharp reproof on the other ... It is therefore no wonder that the devil is so busy trying to oppose church discipline or undermine it ... failure to exercise scriptural church government and discipline is very advanta-geous to Satan’s kingdom and very detrimental to Christ’s.”⁶²⁷

WCF 30:4: *For the better attaining of these ends, the officers of the Church are to proceed by admonition; suspension from the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper for a season; and by excommunication from the Church; according to the nature of the crime, and demerit of the person.*
(d)

(d)1 Thess. 5:12; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14-15; 1 Cor. 5:4-5,13; Matt. 18:17; Tit. 3:10.

Here is the order of discipline for offences⁶²⁸; it is more drawn out in our OPC *Book of Discipline* (in the *Book of Order*, pp 112-113), VI, “Censure and Restoration, B. Degrees of Censure”: 1. Admonition, 2. Rebuke, 3. Suspension, 4. Deposition, 5. Excommunication. We have copies of the OPC *Book of Order* available in our library for your reference, and they are also in digital form free online at <http://www.opc.org/order.html> (note also that there can be found formal directives and forms for complaints and appeals by the laity about and unto Session, and to higher courts, pp.

⁶²³ Van Dixhoorn, 406.

⁶²⁴ Packer, 221. He provides these Scriptures: 1 Cor. 5:1-13; 2 Cor. 2:5-11; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14-15; Titus 1:10-14; 3:9-11. He also qualifies this statement saying more is in view than judicial process solely: “Only where the personal disciplines of learning and devotion, worship and fellowship, righteousness and service are being steadily taught in a context of care and accountability ... is there a meaningful place for judicial correctives (220-221).

⁶²⁵ Engelsma, *Bound to Join*, 115.

⁶²⁶ “The topic of church discipline is very prominent in the letters to the seven churches (Rev. 2–3). When a church is commended or rebuked, it is often largely down to whether they are faithful or defective in administering church discipline ... Ministers and elders need to be faithful in this if they want to receive Christ’s commendation on the one hand and avoid His sharp reproof on the other.” Durham, 1.

⁶²⁷ *Ibid*, 1-2.

⁶²⁸ Durham has some very helpful guidance laid out about determining when an offense needs to be privately dealt with only, and if public, how to go about the steps with a careful gauge for the elders not only of the offender but of themselves. See chapter 2 of the book already mentioned. It is interesting he lists among “gross and infectious evils” requiring public discipline to include “Sabbath breaking” (11).

116-120, 172-175).⁶²⁹ Berkhof gives a helpful summary of the purpose and process of discipline: “With reference to diseased members of the Church, discipline is first of all medical in that it seeks to effect a cure, but it may become surgical, when the well-being of the Church requires the excision of the diseased member. It is impossible to tell when a process of discipline begins, whether a cure will be effected, or whether the diseased member will finally have to be removed.”⁶³⁰ The process of discipline really begins earlier: the elders first disciplining themselves in godliness to be the example to follow.⁶³¹ As well, “... a spirit of love and tenderness is essential to the efficacy of discipline.”⁶³² And good discipline involves proactive effort, working closely with people on little things so that they do not become big things. Notice there are degrees of discipline from less to more severe, with the goal of repentance and restoration before the worst happens. It also takes wisdom to navigate “according to the nature of the crime, and demerit of the person”. Keep in mind that when you yoke yourself to the Church in membership, you are submitting to Jesus Christ and His authority over you, and He exercises that loving leadership over you through His appointed elders. This is why it is good that He ordains the plurality of elders: you are not at the whim of one bishop. While you should be careful not to speak against an elder (1 Tim. 5:19), you may appeal to the Session if one might lord his office over you (1 Pet. 5:3). Durham has some other comments worth nothing in closing: “It is the duty of ministers and elders to discipline those who have caused others to stumble. Since this is so, it is also the duty of those who are disciplined to submit and the duty of the church to acknowledge these decisions. Hebrews 13:17 ...”⁶³³ “Who fumes most at church authority? It is those who are inclined to looseness in practice or error in doctrine and can-not abide any such restraints. Those who are bitterly opposed to discipline are also against preaching that rebukes and spiritual authority in general. It is often the most faithful and zealous ministers and elders of whom people are most suspicious.”⁶³⁴ “Suspensions about church authority tend to arise mostly when ministers and elders are serving Christ, and people tend to entertain such suspicions mostly when they are least spiritual ... if censures are administered in a way that only lets people laugh at their sin, without reaching their consciences to convict them, how does that benefit anyone?”⁶³⁵

Some concluding thoughts by Thomas Watson:

From *A Body of Divinity*, “Of Christ’s Kingly Office”: “In what sense is Christ king? ... In reference to his people ... To govern them” (187). Many would admit Christ to be their advocate to plead for them, but not their king to rule over them” (188). “Many would have Christ their saviour, but not

⁶²⁹ We also have begun often to defer to the RPCGA’s Book of Church Order (as we turn to our Presbytery which we are in Affiliate Relations with while pursuing Fraternal Relations): <https://www.rpcga.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/RPCGA-BCO-2016.pdf>

⁶³⁰ Berkhof, 599.

⁶³¹ So Paul calls the elders in Ephesus to first take heed unto themselves (along with the flock) in Acts 20:28. So it was emphasized in pastor’s Care and Administration of the Church class that church discipline begins with the elders’ own self-discipline (Dr. Dennis Prutow, Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Pittsburgh, PA).

⁶³² Section 5 of “Discipline”, in *The Practice of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland*, 74. Still, notice there is such a thing as “tough love” per Christ’s letters to the seven churches of Asia in Revelation chs. 2-3, as summarized by our Lord in 3:19: *As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.*

⁶³³ Durham, 4.

⁶³⁴ Ibid, 5.

⁶³⁵ Ibid, 6.

their prince; such as will not have Christ to be their king to rule over them, shall never have his blood to save them” (191). From *The Ten Commandments*, on the Fifth Commandment: “There are spiritual fathers, as pastors and ministers ... The spiritual fathers are to be honoured in respect of their office Whatever their persons are, their office is honorable ... They represent no less than God himself” (123). “The spiritual fathers are to be honoured ‘for their work’s sake [1 Thess. 5:13].’ ... this honour is to be shown three ways:— (1) By giving them respect ... I Thess v I2, I3 ... Surely, were it not for the ministry, you would not be a vineyard, but a desert. Were it not for the ministry, you would be destitute of the two seals of the covenant, baptism and the Lord’s Supper; you would be infidels; ‘for faith comes by hearing; and how shall they hear without a preacher?’ Rom x I4. (2) Honour these spiritual fathers, by becoming advocates for them, and wiping off those slanders and calumnies which are unjustly cast upon them. I Tim v I9. Constantine was a great honorer of the ministry; he vindicated them; he would not read the envious accusations brought against them, but burnt them. Do the ministers open their mouths to God for you in prayer, and will not you open your mouths in their behalf? ... if they labour to save your souls, you ought to save their credit” (124-125).” “(3) Honour them by conforming to their doctrine. The greatest honour you can put upon your spiritual fathers, is to believe and obey their doctrine ... A thriving people are a minister’s crown ... You cannot honour your spiritual fathers more, than by thriving under their ministry, and living upon the sermons which they preach (126).”

Suggested Readings (related to this week and next week, Synods and Councils):

- *The Scandal of Undisciplined Disciples: Making Church Discipline Edifying*, by James Durham (forthcoming with Reformation Heritage Books, which has asked Pastor to do a back cover endorsement). This is part 2 of a four-part division of an updated/edited series of his original one volume, 1658 work, *A Treatise concerning Scandal: The Dying Man’s Testament to the Church of Scotland*. This volume mentioned here springs off of his exposition of Revelation 2:14-16 to the Church of Pergamos. See Pastor’s lecture on this text, “Only Jesus is Lord”, at <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=1018121445383> (part of the lecture’s highlight notes are: “[Jesus] reminds them He is Lord over the Church and will Personally discipline their church if they don’t repent of a lack of church discipline for sin within.”)
- “The Form of Presbyterial Church Government” (in the WCF)
- “Individual Liberty and Church Authority”, John Lafayette Girardeau: <http://www.thisday.pcahistory.org/2015/04/april-11-2/>
- *The Book of Church Order of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, (this is what PRPC presently uses; copies are available in our library and free digitally online at <http://opc.org/order.html>).
- The RPCGA’s Book of Church Order (the denomination we are Affiliate Relations with pushing fraternal relations): <https://www.rpcga.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/RPCGA-BCO-2016.pdf>
- *The Practice of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland*. This lengthy but excellent document has been read in full by PRPC’s Session during communications with the EPC Australia which they provided while we sought out Fraternal Relations (and possibly denominational) with them.
- *The Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America*. Its *Testimony* follows alongside an unedited, original WCF. It can be accessed online for free digital reading at <http://reformedpresbyterian.org/downloads/old/constitution2010.pdf>
- “What is Presbyterianism”, Charles Hodge: <http://www.pcahistory.org/documents/wip.html>
- “The Nature of Presbyterianism”: <http://www.pcahistory.org/findingaids/rpces/history/01.pdf>
- *What Presbyterians Believe*, Gordon H. Clark
- *Scottish Covenanters*, J.G. Vos.
- *Order in the Offices: Essays Defining the Roles of Church Officers*, Mark R. Brown, Editor
- *Systematic Theology*, Louis Berkhof (“The Church”, pp 555-595)
- *The Scottish Covenanters*, video in library

- *Aaron's Rod Blossoming*, George Gillespie
- "Church Discipline", collected essays in a booklet by Free Grace Broadcaster, Issue 222 (Winter 2012)
- *Lex Rex*, Samuel Rutherford
- *The Apostolic Church, Which is It?*, Thomas Witherow
- *Should I Join a Church?*, Douglas G. Millar
- *Why Join a Church?*, Kenneth Kantzer: <http://biblicalspirituality.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/Why-Join-a-Church.pdf>
- *Covenanted Uniformity in Religion: The Influence of the Scottish Commissioners on the Ecclesiology of the Westminster Assembly*, Wayne R. Spear
- Pastor Grant's writings for Place for Truth:
 - <https://www.placefortruth.org/blog/word-sacrament-and-discipline-discipline-means-sign-true-body-life>
 - <https://www.placefortruth.org/blog/church-discipline-wisely-and-lovingly-receive-righteous-rebukes>
 - <https://www.placefortruth.org/blog/church-discipline-what-does-suspension-mean>
 - <https://www.placefortruth.org/blog/church-discipline-what-is-rebuke>
- PRPC sermons:
 - "Undeterred, Divisive Church Members Must be Dejected": <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=6721343147191>
 - "Seek to Restore Sinful Brethren and Order to the Church": <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=1110192345237273>
 - "Be Holy Because of Your Holy God (God Commands the Unclean to Be Put Out of the Camp)": <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=3617018223>
 - "You Need Strong Leaders (Moses Compared to Aaron re: the Golden Calf)": <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=29151221152>
- *Collected Writings of John Murray*, vol. 1: *The Claims of Truth*:
 - "Government in the Church of Christ" (ch. 35, pp 260-268)
 - "The Biblical Basis for Ecclesiastical Union" (ch. 36, pp 269-272)
 - "Corporate Responsibility" (ch. 37, pp 273-279)
 - "The Creedal Basis of Union in the Church" (ch. 38, pp 280-287)
- *Collected Writings of John Murray*, vol. 2: *Systematic Theology*:
 - "The Nature and Unity of the Church" (ch. 26, pp 321-335)
 - "The Government of the Church" (ch. 27, pp 336-344)
 - "The Form of Government" (ch. 28, pp 345-350)
 - "Office in the Church" (ch. 30, pp 357-365)

Assigned Readings for Wednesday, August 24:

WCF 31, "Of Church Synods and Councils" with respective Scripture references.