

WCF Chapter 30 Of Church Censures
Chapter 31 Of Synods and Councils

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I. 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.

Source of administrative authority is Christ-

Distinct from Civil Magistrate-

II. 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.

Officers Given Power of Keys to Administer; ultimate power resides with Christ

Two Errors:

Displace Keys-

Ignore Keys-

Two Uses:

Word opens and shuts-

Discipline opens and shuts-

III. Church censures are necessary for the reclaiming and gaining of offending brethren; for deterring of others from like offenses; for purging out of that leaven which might infect the whole lump; for vindicating the honor 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.

Purpose of Discipline:

Positively: Reclaim, Purge, Honor Christ-

Negatively: Prevent God's Wrath-

IV. 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.

Levels of Discipline:

Admonition-

Suspension from Lord's Supper-

Excommunication-

Nature: spiritual, progressive, restorative-

CHAPTER 31 *Of Synods and Councils*

1. For the better government, and further edification of the Church, there ought to be such assemblies as are commonly called Synods or Councils; and it belongeth to the overseers and other rulers of the particular churches, by virtue of their office, and the power which Christ hath given them for edification and not for destruction, to appoint such assemblies; and to convene together in them, as often as they shall judge it expedient for the good of the church.

2. It belongeth to synods and councils, ministerially to determine controversies of faith, and cases of conscience; to set down rules and directions for the better ordering of the public worship of God, and government of His Church; to receive complaints in cases of maladministration, and authoritatively to determine the same: which decrees and determinations, if consonant to the Word of God, are to be received with reverence and submission; not only for their agreement with the Word, but also for the power whereby they are made, as being an ordinance of God appointed thereunto in His Word.

3. All synods or councils, since the Apostles' times, whether general or particular, may err; and many have erred. Therefore they are not to be made the rule of faith, or practice; but to be used as a help in both.

4. Synods and councils are to handle, or conclude nothing, but that which is ecclesiastical: and are not to intermeddle with civil affairs which concern the commonwealth, unless by way of humble petition in cases extraordinary; or, by way of advice, for satisfaction of conscience, if they be thereunto required by the civil magistrate.

Three forms of Church Government:

Hierarchical (ex. Catholic)-

Congregational (ex. Baptist)-

Presbyterian-

Principles of Church Government:¹

1. **Christ alone is the head of the church (Eph. 5:23; Col. 1:18)**
2. **Elders are chosen by the people over whom they rule (Acts 1:15-26; 6:1-6)**
3. **All ruling elders are equal in authority (Acts. 20:17,28; Titus 1:5,7)**
4. **Each particular church must have a plurality of elders (Acts 14:23)**
5. **Church officers are ordained by the presbytery (1 Tim. 4:14)**
6. **The right of appeal is made from the smaller to the wider assembly of elders (Acts 15:1-31)**

¹ Taken from G. I. Williamson's Commentary on the WCF, 301