

DIRECTORY of CHURCH DISCIPLINE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1		
2		
3	PREFACE TO THE CHURCH	2
4	CHAPTER 1—THE NATURE AND PURPOSES OF DISCIPLINE	5
5	CHAPTER 2—DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURE AND THE ELEMENTS OF MATTHEW 18	7
6	CHAPTER 3—JURISDICTION.....	12
7	CHAPTER 4—THE CONGREGATIONAL PRESBYTERY'S JURISDICTION	13
8	CHAPTER 5—ORIGINAL JURISDICTION OF PRESBYTERY	15
9	CHAPTER 6—SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES	16
10	CHAPTER 7—JUDICIAL PROCESS—ORDINARY	17
11	CHAPTER 8—STEPS IN THE INSTITUTION OF JUDICIAL PROCESS—EXTRAORDINARY	20
12	CHAPTER 9—GENERAL PROVISIONS OF THE TRIAL.....	26
13	CHAPTER 10—TRIAL PROCEEDINGS.....	29
14	CHAPTER 11—EVIDENCE WITH RESPECT TO “INTENT”	32
15	CHAPTER 12—DIRECT AND CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE.....	34
16	CHAPTER 13—DEFAMATION OF CHARACTER.....	39
17	CHAPTER 14—CENSURE AND RESTORATION OF DISCIPLINED INDIVIDUALS	41
18	CHAPTER 15—CASES WITHOUT FULL PROCESS	45
19	CHAPTER 16—PROCEDURES CONCERNING EVENTS PRIOR TO INCLUSION IN PRESBYTERY.....	47
20	CHAPTER 17—DIVESTING FROM OFFICE	49
21	CHAPTER 18—COMPLAINTS.....	51
22	CHAPTER 19—DISSENTS AND PROTESTS	52
23	CHAPTER 20—APPEALS	53
24	CHAPTER 21—DISPUTES BETWEEN AND DISFELLOWSHIPING OF CHURCHES	55

THE DIRECTORY OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE

PREFACE TO THE CHURCH

On June 17, 1932, Dr. J. Gresham Machen made the following statement in London concerning the great cultural conflict which was engulfing the church of Christ in general and the cause of Presbyterianism in particular. He said:

It is no easy thing to defend the Christian faith against the mighty attack that is being brought against it at the present day. Knowledge of the truth is necessary, and also clear acquaintance with the forces hostile to the truth in modern thought.

At that point, a final objection may arise. Does it not involve a terrible peril to men's souls to ask them—for example, in their preparation for the ministry- to acquaint themselves with things that are being said against the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ? Would it not be safer to learn only of the truth, without acquainting ourselves with error? We answer, "Of course it would be safer." It would be far safer, no doubt, to live in a fool's paradise and close one's eyes to what is going on in the world today, just as it is safer to remain in secure dugouts rather than to go over the top in some great attack. We save our souls, perhaps, by such tactics, but the Lord's enemies remain in possession of the field. It is a great battle indeed, this intellectual battle of today; deadly perils await every man who engages in that conflict; but it is the Lord's battle, and He is a great Captain in the fight.¹

A presbytery should be the place in which the Lord's officer-bearers are encouraged and strengthened for the kind of battles which the demands of His ministry place upon them. "Curse ye Meroz... Curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof because they would not come to the help of the Lord..."² is the testimony of Sacred Writ when God's people at Meroz refused to help the rest of Israel in the time of trial.

Regrettably, this call of the presbytery, to strengthen the hands of God's officer-bearers and churches, all too often has run afoul of its sacred trust and has been an hindrance to ministry, ensnaring good men who must expend time and effort in order to disentangle the coils wrapped about their reputations and callings. Wounds, bitterness, disenchantment, and division have been the unhappy results for the church of Christ...leaving some of the finest men to stand crippled in ministry for loss of credibility or discouraged out of ministry for their inability to sustain further damage to themselves or their families. God has raised up faithful bodies of churches in the past and holds and preserves some today in the palm of His almighty hand, so it is our conviction that this presbytery must self-consciously seek to "shepherd" its men and churches so that they will find a refuge among brethren who are not ashamed of them.³

Why are so many good men finding themselves enmeshed and ensnared among the brethren of the household of faith? Doubtless, some have placed themselves there by indiscretion and offense. But, all too often, it has been the courage of being steadfast for the truth, taking seriously that Great Commission which compels them to testify of their Lord's glory before the world...and the church. Luther once testified that the mark of the faithful man was not only that he stands in the fight for righteousness, but that he stands at the hottest place in the fight and refuses to concede the contest there to Christ's enemies...and his. But once such a stand is taken, that individual becomes a dividing line between those convicted to follow and those who know they will not. Like the people of Meroz, the latter will find excuse to abandon such duty and then to condemn it- and those who espouse it -as if it were truly iniquitous. Fear and guilt become key motivations for undermining the reputation and resolve of those who wish to "fight the good fight of the faith".

Our era, the end of the twentieth century, has witnessed incredible changes in all aspects of culture globally. The complexity of medical ethics, the phenomenal development of technology, the expansive networking capabilities of information systems, the global reach of major events, all coupled with an epistemologically, self-conscious enmity toward the church has left the church frightened and confused, seeking her consolation

¹ J. Gresham Machen speaking to the Bible League Meetings in Westminster, London, June 17, 1932

² Judges 5:23.

³ Gal. 6:2, 10.

1 in being huddled in near seclusion which, though comfortable, fails to take hold of the culture “at
2 large”...refusing to disciple it for lack of ability. Though it is often the case that good Christian people do not
3 lack truth in their personal knowledge of faith, yet they remain confused, unable to cope with the cultural
4 revolution around them. Often, it is not the truths that they hold which fail them. What fails them is “the
5 missing”. Dr. Cornelius Van Til once remarked:

6 The Bible is thought of as authoritative on everything of which it speaks. And it speaks of
7 everything. We do not mean that it speaks of football games, of atoms, etc., directly, but we do mean
8 that it speaks of everything either directly or indirectly. It tells us not only of the Christ and His work
9 but it also tells us who God is and whence the universe has come. It gives us a philosophy of history
10 as well as history. Moreover, the information on these subjects is woven into an inextricable whole. It
11 is only if you reject the Bible as the Word of God that you can separate its so-called religious and
12 moral instruction from what it says, e.g., about the physical universe ... It is therefore the system of
13 truth as contained in Scripture which we must present to the world. The various theological
14 disciplines contribute to the setting forth of this system.⁴

15 The truth of the Scriptures is a system, the neglect of any single portion of which leaves the Church
16 compromised and confused. James makes this point explicit when he says, “For whosoever shall keep the
17 whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.”⁵ To break the law in one point is to violate the
18 entire system. But the Church at large, for the most part, refuses to even acknowledge the validity, much less
19 the usefulness, of the law of the Lord, the only system of ethics given by God to mankind...and the Church.
20 Again, Dr. Machen’s comments are to the point, especially as he identifies “the missing”:

21 When we say “sin”, we have said “law”... At the present time, the existence of law is being
22 denied. Men no longer believe that there is such a thing as a law of God; and naturally they do not
23 believe that there is such a thing as sin. Thoughtful men, who are not Christians, are aware of the
24 problem that this stupendous change in human thinking presents to the modern world. Now that men
25 no longer believe in obligatory morality, now that the moral law has been abandoned, what is to be put
26 in its place, in order that an ordinarily decent human life may be preserved upon the earth? It cannot
27 be said that the answers proposed for that question are as satisfactory as the way in which the question
28 itself is put. It is impossible to keep back the raging seas of human passion with the flimsy mud
29 embankments of an appeal...to self interest. Those raging seas can only be checked by the solid
30 masonry of the law of God...Men are wondering today what is wrong with the world. They are
31 conscious of the fact that they are standing over some terrible abyss. Awful ebullitions rise from that
32 abyss. We have lost altogether the sense of the security of our Western civilization. Men are
33 wondering what is wrong...It is perfectly clear what is wrong. The law of God has been torn up, as
34 though it were a scrap of paper, and the inevitable result is appearing with ever greater clearness.
35 When will the law be rediscovered? When it is rediscovered, that will be a day of terror for mankind:
36 but it will also be a day of joy; for the law will be a schoolmaster unto Christ. Its terrors will drive
37 men back to the little wicket gate, and to the way that leads to that place somewhat ascending where
38 they will see the Cross.⁶

39 Dr. Machen was the man whom God called to oppose the liberalism which captured the Presbyterian Church
40 government in his generation. As he testified, the loss of the law of God in the church has begotten a terrible
41 crisis in society. Two generations have now passed since these fateful words were uttered by one of the most
42 brilliant scholars and theologians with which God has been pleased to gift His church. But the loss is one
43 which has left the church insensitive to her confused estate. She admits to a crisis in the science of
44 hermeneutics and senses the inability of her people (and pastors) to recognize “truth” in areas political,
45 economic, doctrinal and ethical. What’s more, even the “reformed” see their people moving into other, weaker
46 confessional expressions of faith and practice for failure to know how to defend and prove, to their own
47 comfort, such foundational doctrines as a six day creation, infant baptism, Lord’s Day worship (as opposed to
48 seventh day sabbath observance), a limited atonement, predestination and even the Trinity.

⁴ Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, Presbyterian and Reformed Publ. Co. 1967, p. 8.

⁵ James 2:10.

⁶ J. Gresham Machen, speaking to the Bible League Meetings in Westminster, London, June 17, 1932.

1 Moreover, so many are easily moved by “novelties” in interpretation and are moved by winds of doctrine
2 without knowing which principles to believe. “Clever” has all too often replaced “principled”, under the guise
3 of being “insightful”. Is this due to the loss of the law of God as the foundational body to all hermeneutical
4 considerations? Is the current debate on church government and discipline sparked by failure of her pastors to
5 consider the law of the Lord as foundational to the *principles* of polity? Do the reformed of today really
6 appreciate the hermeneutical principles involved in establishing, for example, circumcision as the ground and
7 warrant for the doctrine of baptism? If so, why do we fragment our theological interpretative principles by
8 “proving” the doctrine of baptism by one method and, say, church government by another? But if not, why
9 then do we see those same principles and precepts at work in Scripture in the establishment of the very
10 government of the church which shall oversee, sanction, and govern by virtue of the “keys” of the Kingdom?

11 Is it not the case that our God, in His Wisdom, so forced His Church to carve out her ethics and
12 governments with the same principles by which She proves the purpose, design and use of the sacramental
13 Keys of the Kingdom? Put bluntly, do such New Testament chapters, which discourse upon church
14 government and discipline in passages contained in Matthew 18, Acts 15, 1 Timothy 3, Titus 1, 1 Peter 5,
15 *stand by themselves as if they were complete or do they rely heavily upon the foundational principles of the*
16 *law*, with its commentaries in the histories, poetry and prophets? Did our Lord Jesus, for example, invent the
17 approach of Matthew 18: 15-18 during His earthly ministry, or was He using the law and the prophets to
18 establish the principles He was expounding? More broadly, if our Lord was “fulfilling the law”, why is it
19 standard practice to expound the Gospel narratives without the expectation (with but few exceptions) that
20 things Christ said or did should be, in themselves, first found as a functional and wise application and
21 understanding of various portions of the law...just as it was the duty of the prophets to perform?⁷

22 No doubt, recourse to the law of the Lord is fast becoming “a terror” for mankind. But the maturities it
23 brings, the assurances it develops and the blessings it promises is well worth the struggle to be borne in
24 learning its intricacies, bearing its offenses, and propounding its judgments so that we must, like the blessed
25 man of Psalm 1, “meditate therein day and night”. Indeed, ought not the law be formative to any proposed
26 *Directory of Church Discipline*? St. Paul himself found the sins of his heart disciplined, chastened by the law
27 which was such a blessing to him as a Christian and as our apostle. So, ought not the church of Christ say
28 “amen” to the inspired words of the apostle Paul when he wrote:

29 And the commandment, *which was ordained to life*, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking
30 occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it, slew me...*Wherefore the law is holy, and just*
31 *and good...For I delight in the law of God after the inward man*. But I see another law in my
32 members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which
33 is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I
34 thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. *So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but*
35 *with the flesh, the law of sin.*⁸

36 Dr. Machen was right. Though the law brings terror to mankind, it will also bring rejoicing to the church of
37 our dear Lord ... for its design is life because its Designer is Life and Light.

⁷ Isa. 8:16-20.

⁸ Romans 7:22-25.

CHAPTER 1

THE NATURE AND PURPOSES OF DISCIPLINE

SECTION 1. Ecclesiastical discipline is the exercise of that authority which the Lord Jesus Christ has committed to His visible Church in order to uphold and maintain the purity, peace and well-being of His covenant people.⁹

SECTION 2. Judicial discipline is concerned with the prevention and correction of offenses.¹⁰ Such offenses are defined as anything in the doctrine or practice of a member of the church which is contrary to the Word of God. The purpose of judicial discipline is:

- 1) to vindicate the honor of the Lord;¹¹
- 2) to promote the integrity and purity of His church and to guard other Christians from being tempted, misled, divided, or otherwise harmed;¹²
- 3) to restore fallen Christians to usefulness to God and to fellowship with his church;¹³
- 4) to rightful obedience to Christ along with the resumption of any obligations to his covenant responsibilities;¹⁴ and
- 5) to secure, and make damaged parties whole, to the degree possible.¹⁵

SECTION 3. Administrative discipline is concerned with the maintenance of good order in the government of the church and references the governance, oversight, training, guardianship, and control which the church maintains over its members, officer-bearers and courts. The purpose of such discipline is that all covenant rights may be preserved and all obligations faithfully discharged.¹⁶

SECTION 4. When the presbytery delivers a non-judicial statement (i.e. a decision which is not the result of an ecclesiastical trial), which concerns all the churches especially, in light of their ability to request of presbytery a decision in a matter,¹⁷ all such actions shall be regarded as "advice and counsel" which the churches shall make available to their membership by notification in their respective churches¹⁸ unless such advice is specific to a person¹⁹, persons²⁰, or a particular church²¹. In such cases, presbytery must state its reason(s) for such public exposure, before it may publish publicly unless those implicated give their permission on the floor of presbytery or by written consent.²² Before such publication, any person, persons, or ministry implicated have a right to contest any such public exposure and must be notified to that effect. A person's name remains his property and may not be used by others lightly.²³ The churches are in no wise obligated to implement such advice and counsel.

⁹ Deu. 1:15-17; Mat. 16:19; 18:17-18; John 20:21-23; 2 Cor.13:10-11; Eph.4:3-6; WCF 32.

¹⁰ John 20:23; 1 Cor. 5; 2 Cor.2:?-11.

¹¹ Lev.19: 1; The frequent use of the expression "I am the Lord" and its variations attests to the honor of the Lord in the performance of holy duties. The church is called to maintain such oversight as would keep the brotherhood faithful.

¹² Titus 2:14-15.

¹³ Prov. 27:6; Matt.18:15.

¹⁴ Prov. 27:6; Matt.18:15.

¹⁵ Exod.22:1,9; Job 20:18; 29:7-17; Lk.19:8-9; Gal.6:1-2.

¹⁶ 1 Cor. 11:27-34; 1 Pet. 5:1-6; WCF 32.

¹⁷ DCO 18:8-9

¹⁸ Acts 15.

¹⁹ 1 Tim.1:3-8.

²⁰ 2 Tim.2:17-19; 2 John 1-3.

²¹ 3 John 9-13.

²² Written consent involves posted letter, e-mail, or notice sent by presbyterial messenger.

²³ Pro. 22:1; Ecc. 7:1; Mat. 18:15-20.

SECTION 5. All members of the church, both communicants and those who are members by virtue of baptism alone²⁴, are under the care of the church and are subject to its authoritative disciplines and courts, both judicial and administrative.²⁵

SECTION 6. Fundamental to any disciplinary action is the outline of Matthew 18:1-35. The approach of any judicial procedure must incorporate such elements or show cause why such were not applied.²⁶

SECTION 7. All judgments should be rendered according to the CRPC's understanding of the word of God as interpreted by the constitution.

²⁴ Gen. 7:1; 12:1-2; 17:12-13, 23, 27; 18:19; Acts 11:14; 16:31, 34; 1 Cor. 7:14.

²⁵ Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:5.

²⁶ Our Lord gave the 3 basic steps so that they would be followed. The first two steps are often neglected when mere convenience is not possible and expense is a problem. Yet, the first two steps are not just designed for the sake of the accuser, but are equally designed for the accused. It is an observation of both Scripture and experience that a man's pride can obstruct his repentance. God in His wisdom gave these first two steps so that repentance could be more easily offered by the accused at these points in the process since he would not face the humiliation of public embarrassment in order to admit his guilt. Also, it becomes increasingly difficult for anyone to later claim ignorance or inability when confronted with his guilt in church court if he has been admonished already in the process of a scrupulous adherence to Matt. 18 demands. Perhaps the real issue involved is that man wants a way out of his accountability, so he allow a laxity to develop with respect to a system of reproof instituted by our Lord. The people of the churches should be taught from the pulpits concerning their responsibilities in such matters.

