

## **Belgic Confession 32 – Details of Discipline**

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: Through the preaching of the Gospel the kingdom of heaven is opened. Through the enforcing of discipline the kingdom is closed. Both are essential for the preservation 保存 of the church. Let me illustrate. If you tell your child to do something and there is no sanction 制裁...or if there were no sanction in the past that he could recollect, there is good chance he wouldn't do what you tell him. But you know the need for discipline in the family. Similarly, today you will learn from God about the need and nature of discipline in the church.

Our headings are:

**Why is it necessary to Discipline**

**How can one avoid being Disciplined**

**What is the proper method of Discipline**

Our goals are: **That you might gain the courage to give or to take God's discipline so the church of Jesus Christ would be stronger, that it would spread, and that Christ would be honored.**

### **Why is it Necessary to Discipline**

In the meantime we believe, though it is useful and beneficial that those who are **rulers** of the Church institute and **establish certain ordinances** 条例 among themselves for maintaining the body of the Church, yet that they ought studiously 故意 to **take care that they do not depart from those things which Christ, our only Master, has instituted.**

#### **1. There are people in the church who call themselves Christian but are indeed hypocrites 伪君子.**

**a. Some show hypocrisy in their talk.** They say they believe, but their mouths are filled with gossip 闲话, insults 侮辱 or unkind words, or they are ashamed to speak of Christ's goodness.

**b. Some show hypocrisy in their walk.** They say they believe, but are willfully 故意 absent from worship, they are not honest in business, or they show a lack of love for their spouses and children. God demands that belief, talk, and life unquestionably 毫无疑问 match.

**c. Some are hypocrites because they take comfort in the fact that they were baptized** and become complacent 自满 in their lives.

#### **2. So why bother with those who are delinquent 违法的 in doctrine and life? Why meddle in 染指 other people's lives?**

**a. God demands discipline by leaders in order to restore the wanderer – the one who has strayed 游荡 from the true path.** This means that discipline must not be exercised for personal vendettas 仇杀– to get even. In the past, RC's punished people because they preached the truth. This is how Luther was pushed out of the church. But the Lord taught that discipline was for restoration 恢复- that the soul to be saved from hell. Force applied changes the person's direction. Discipline may be painful, but it saves!

Matthew 18:8 "If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed 跛脚或致残, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire.

God loves you too much to let you stray. If it is a sign of hate, the wise man said, not to discipline a child. Also...

Hebrews 12:6 For whom the LORD loves He chastens 惩戒...

**b. God demands discipline in order to keep the church pure.** He wants you to be pure because you are precious 珍贵 to him. He said: "Be holy, for **I am holy.**" Children must reflect parents. God keeps you pure through discipline.

1Peter 1:18 knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish 缺陷 and without spot.

**Remember the warning God gave Ezekiel in Chapter 33. Sound the trumpet 喇叭 lest the people be destroyed!**

**c. God demands discipline in order to bring honor to himself.** Unruly 不羁 children are a shame. When God disciplines you, you will thank him for your discipline – maybe later, **but you will thank** him for his discipline. And when others see how God disciplines the son he loves they will praise him as well.

### **How Can One Avoid Being Disciplined**

And therefore we **reject all human inventions**, and all laws which man would introduce into the worship of God, **thereby to bind and compel the conscience 良心** in any manner whatever.

Therefore we **admit only of that which tends to nourish** 滋养 and preserve concord and unity, and to keep all men in obedience to God.

1. No one enjoys disciplining others or receiving discipline, so in order to avoid having to discipline, the elders of the church must ensure that the faith of people is strong...faith that comes through the faithful proclamation 表明 of truth. To ignore faithful preaching is to sentence the believer to certain discipline. Praise God you have a regular minister to bring you God's Word. Many churches don't have regular preaching, and are therefore prone to wandering!

2. In order to avoiding having to discipline, the elders of the church must ensure they do not make human inventions as law. What are possible some such human inventions? A church that forbids divorce in all cases or requires that the innocent person takes back and an adulterous 通奸 spouse...or a church that requires members to attend non-required worship services...or a church that forbids taking an oath in a legal situation as in court...or a church that sets an age for Profession of Faith...

## What is the Proper Method of Discipline

For this purpose, **excommunication 绝罚 or church discipline is requisite**, with all that pertains to it, according to the Word of God.

1. The church, which is run by the elders who have possession of the keys of the kingdom, enforces discipline on the wanderer to restore him, period. So elders must always watch their motives! In the hierarchical 分级 system, discipline is carried out by the bishops, archbishops, etc. In the congregational system discipline is carried out primarily by the congregation (**this is why congregational churches like "shunning 回避" those under discipline.** Shunning is abnormal cruelty. But they have nothing else. In Reformed churches discipline is carried out by the elders – **a plurality 复数 of elders.** Even when cases get too difficult, elders seek the advice of other elders from other congregations.

2. What kind of discipline are elders instructed to use? Elders discipline by admonishing 诫勉, restraining, and excluding (excommunication) those who act as if they were non-Christians. The church does not have, neither should it be seeking to acquire, corporal 肉体的 discipline.

3. If elders do not discipline, they show their lack of care for the brethren and lack of love for the Lord.

1 Corinthians 5:1 It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father's wife! 2 And you are puffed up 张狂, and have not rather mourned...

Can you imagine what the young people thought who were looking at the elders condoning 纵容 of sin in Corinth? Imagine how harmful that was to them! What were outsiders saying about this new religion? Would they want to enter into a kingdom that did not appear to be different from the one in which they were? What striking similarities to us today! **How elders show hate to their congregations when they refuse to discipline!** OTOH, **you must not resist your pastor and elders when they ask you about your life.** You must be accountable to your elders for what you believe, how you live, how you worship, and how you raise your family. We want to make sure you are walking in God's ways. That is God's charge to us. God will severely punish us if we fail to oversee 监察 your lives.

4. The Lord gave a clear outline to follow-starting with you-to restore your erring 犯错 brother. He taught this doctrine more clearly than most doctrines.

Matthew 18:15 "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. 16 "But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' 17 "And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen 异教徒 and a tax collector.

Talk to the erring brother...take witnesses if he would not repent...turn discipline over to the elders if he still does not repent. If the person still refuses to repent, he is excommunicated **until he repents.** **But discipline starts with you!** **Do not to go to the elders when you discover someone's sin...and do not to ignore sin and say: "I don't want to be involved."** God puts that obligation on every Christian. **You are part of one family!** Who sees his sister trying to put her hand on the hot stove and pretends he doesn't see? That would be cruel.

5. While Mt 18 is a sufficient, the Lord was pleased to give more details about the method for discipline.

1 Corinthians 5:4 In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are **gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ,** 5 deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. 11 But now I

have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral 不道德, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler 辱骂, or a drunkard, or an extortioner 赃官—not even to eat with such a person. 13 ...Therefore "put away from yourselves the evil person."

The elders who exercise discipline must do so with unity and with prayer for guidance from the Holy Spirit. Now look at the follow up situation of that man that the Corinthians had to discipline:

2Corinthians 2:6 This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man, 7 so that, on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. 8 Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him.

What joy this restoration brought to the church! What a testimony 见证 to the world!

**7. Elders must not exercise discipline with a heavy hand. While there are bad sheep there are also bad shepherds.** But God wants elders to know that there are some members who are weak and are easily drawn away by sin. Their sins may not be sins of mature deliberation 老谋深算. So not every sin puts one under discipline. Further, some may sin in ignorance and the elders must show love and teach rather than discipline. Sometimes a mild rebuke is useful. Remember the parable 寓言 of the Lord going to search for his 1 lost sheep of 100. What wondrous love the Savior has for his children! (These principles apply to your home as well.)

2Thessalonians 3:14 And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle 书信, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. 15 Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

**7. Elders and the church must always be ready to forgive the repentant.** Jesus told a parable of a man who was forgiven great debts by a king and the forgiven man then threw a man into prison who owed him very little. That man did not understand forgiveness. Elders are called to remember their own great forgiveness through Jesus Christ as they exercise discipline over others. The Prodigal Son's father accepted his repentant son and the father's family experienced great joy.

Luke 15:20 "And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. 21 "And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22 "But the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. 23 'And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry;

### **Conclusion:**

The elders of the church are called to carefully, patiently, and fully carry out discipline. They must do this to correct the erring brother, they must do this in order to keep the church pure, and they must do this because proper discipline honors the Lord. They must not impose undue requirement that crushes the brother. The Lord loves his church and wants her to be kept pure. If the rebellious one does not submit to Christ's discipline he must be excommunicated from Christ's church until he repents.

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ:

**1. Thank the Lord that he cares enough for you to punish you.** He saved you and now he keeps you through discipline.

**2. Pray that your elders will have the wisdom and courage to carry out proper discipline.**

**3. Be a part of the process of discipline.** If you see someone erring, show him his faults and win him back.

**4. And remember that by participating in discipline you are helping to advance the cause of Christ's kingdom throughout the world.** You are his through blood and baptism; work for him.

Finally, if you are not a Christian you have something much greater to worry about than not having someone to care for you: you have to worry about eternity in the fiery 火热 pit of hell. Yet, if you call on God and ask him to make you his child because Christ took your punishment, he will hear you!