

## Blueprints for Belief

### *Laying the Theological Foundations for Constructing Your Faith* **Westminster Confession of Faith 30.1-4 – Church Discipline**

- Jesus, the head of His church, has put in place church officers to govern the church. (*Acts 20:28; 1 Thessalonians 5:12–13; Hebrews 13:7, 17; 1 Peter 5:1–4*)
- Church government should be separate from the civil government. (*Matthew 22:21; John 18:36; Hebrews 13:17*)
- These officers have been given the “keys of the kingdom”, granting them authority to:
  - Forgive sins and hold back forgiveness
  - Shut the kingdom to those who refuse to repent
  - Open the kingdom to those who do repent(*Matthew 16:19; Matthew 18:18; John 20:21–23*)
- Church discipline is necessary to:
  - Bring Christians back into the church (*1 Corinthians 5:5; 2 Corinthians 2:6–8*)
  - Deter others from similar sins (*Acts 5:1–11; 1 Timothy 5:20*)
  - Remove sin that might infect the whole church (*1 Corinthians 5:6–7*)
  - Honor Christ and the work of the Gospel (*Ephesians 5:25–27; Titus 2:5, 8, 10*)
  - Prevent God’s anger, which He has every right to bring upon a church that has broken covenant allowed unrepentant sin to remain (*1 Peter 4:17; Revelation 2:14–16, 20–23*)
- There are three stages of church discipline:
  - Warning (*Matthew 18:15–16; Galatians 6:1; 2 Thessalonians 3:15*)
  - Suspension from the Table (*2 Thessalonians 3:14–15; 1 Corinthians 5:11*)
  - Excommunication (*Matthew 18:17; 1 Corinthians 5:2, 5, 13*)
- Church discipline should be handled carefully, with the goal of restoration. (*Galatians 6:1; 2 Corinthians 2:6–8*)

### Discussion Questions

- 1) When you hear “church discipline,” what emotions or past experiences come to mind, and how do those line up with Scripture’s goal of loving restoration rather than punishment?
- 2) How can we as a congregation support elders and deacons in practicing careful, restorative discipline that both protects the church and seeks to bring wandering believers back?

## **Westminster Confession of Faith – Chapter 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.

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.

3. Church censures are necessary, for the reclaiming and gaining of offending brethren, for deterring of others from the 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.

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.