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Presbyterianism 101

ALL TO GOD'S GLORY:
Church Censures
(WCF 30)

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The Christian Life: Communion

- **Presbyterian Gov't:** return to apostolic practice, free from Civil Gov't interference
- **Re-Formed Practice:** Church Government patterned after the testimony of the Scripture
 - Distinct Ends
 - Distinct means
 - Distinct Censures

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Nature of Church Gov't (30.1)

The Lord Jesus, as King and Head of His Church, hath therein appointed a government, in the band of Church officers, distinct from the civil magistrate.

Nature of Church Gov't (30.1)

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- **Various Forms of Church Government**
 - Episcopacy/Prelacy
 - Congregational
 - Presbyterian
- **Christ Alone Establishes Church Government**

Nature of Church Gov't (30.1)

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- **Christ Alone Establishes Church Government**
 - The Church is a Theocratic Kingdom
- **Church Officers bear (some of) Christ's Authority**
 - Christ gives gifts to the Church (Eph 4:8ff)
 - Church power is ministerial and declarative, not legislative and not forceful

Power of the Church, Officers (30.2)

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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.

Power of the Church, Officers (30.2)

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- **Keys to the Kingdom of Heaven:** shocking language, yet used multiple times
 - Matt 16:19-20
 - Matt 18:17-19
 - John 20:21-23: *Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."*

Power of the Church, Officers (30.2)

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- **Keys to the Kingdom of Heaven:** shocking language, yet used multiple times
- **Elders have responsibility to receive, dismiss members**
 - Joining a church is not merely individual decision
 - Elders are not perfect, but are gatekeepers

Power of the Church, Officers (30.2)

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- **Opening and Shutting**
 - OPEN: Preaching of the gospel, release from censure and correction (cf. II Cor. 2:7)
 - SHUT: Preaching the word, administer censures, drive to repentance (cf. I Cor 5)
- **Membership in the Kingdom of Heaven:** insofar as elders are able to determine, a person's soul is safe (or not)

Purpose of Church Discipline (30.3)

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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.

Purpose of Church Discipline (30.3)

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- **Cautions re: Church discipline**
- **Church Discipline is Purposeful**
 - Recovery of Erring Brother
 - Deter Sin by way of Example
 - Vindicate Honour of Christ
 - Prevent the Wrath of God (Purity of Church)

Church Censures Listed (30.4)

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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.

Church Censures Listed (30.4)

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- **Caveat:** not every “crime” is worthy of same punishment, censures proceed progressively
- **Admonition:** warning; may be formal or informal
- **Suspension:** exclusion from the Table to highlight seriousness of sin, compel repentance
- **Excommunication:** declare - insofar as possible to know - the person is outside of Christ and is in need of saving mercies, the new birth, etc.
