

The Church Order on Discipline (#4) (BG 2023)

The Act of Discipline, From the Elders' Bench

* Review: Wk #1: *subjects* of discipline. Wk #2: *objects*. Week #3: the *act*, acc to Mt 18

** Tonight: How discipline is carried out by the consistory.

*** Next week: Reconciling, and judging "sufficient evidence of repentance" (CO 75)

1. Receiving and Investigating reports of sin

Receiving charges. By whom?

Receiving charges at a meeting. How?

Investigating reports.

Necessary!

By unbiased elders

By careful work

2. Carrying out the steps of discipline

(for this, see separate handout: "A Recommended Process of Discipline")

3. Working with the sinner (do not let emphasis on *form* cause us to lose *focus: heart* of discipline is *here*)

Formally (for elders): many things must be considered:

Regularly scheduled meetings

At an appropriate place

With a committee, never by one

Most importantly: the Word of God and prayer must govern all our work.

II **Tim 2:24-26**—a theme text for God's people in discipline work

The situation: a Christian ensnared by Satan

The goal: he is freed from the snare by *repenting*, acknowledging *truth* (vs 25,26)

The method: not fighting, but 1) prayerful, 2) gentle, 3) patient, and 4) meek 5) *teaching*

A Recommended Process of Discipline (for Consistories)

(BG 2023)

A. Silent Censure (CO 76)

1. The meaning: A decision to bar from the Lord's Supper (censure), but known only by the sinner ('silent')
 - a. He is cut off from *all* membership rights: sacraments & the right to vote or protest (except his own discipl.)
 - b. It is a declaration that, unless repentant, he is outside the kingdom.
2. Process: After careful investigation, the consistory:
 - a. Makes *formal charge of sin*, with grounds: "Consistory charges N.N. with sin against 'X' commandment."
Always 2 grounds: 1) censurable sin; 2) impenitence (evidence from written committee reports)
 - b. By a committee, *informs* the impenitent sinner. Visit and admonish frequently.
3. Notes:
 - a) After much labor, if no repentance, consistory proceeds to "B" (announcements).
 - b) Consistory determines how soon to proceed: patience, but not neglect. Each case is judged on its own.
 - c) *In cases of gross or public sins (see art 76), elders may a member from the LS without formal charges of sin. This is not discipline for impenitence. Rather: 1) avoids congregational offence 2) gives consistory time to investigate & test genuine repentance.*

B. Public Announcements (CO 77: "admonitions to the church")

1. First: Name of sinner is not mentioned
 - a. Announcement includes the consistory's explanation of:
 - 1) The sin—which commandment(s)—and impenitence in it.
 - 2) The extended care given by the consistory to the sinner: "reproof, suspension... admonition".
 - 3) The congregation's call to pray (also re proper attitudes and avoidance of gossip)
 - b. Process:
 - 1) A decision to announce, with date fixed. One ground: impenitence. Worded carefully for reading.
 - 2) Inform sinner of decision before the announcement is made.
2. Second: Name of sinner is mentioned
 - a. Announcement includes:
 - 1) Same information as first (*continued* impenitence) but now a name is attached.
 - 2) Congregation is exhorted not only to pray, but to *speak* to the member.
 - b. Process:
 - 1) A formal decision that reads: "A motion to proceed to the second announcement, *pending the approval of classis...*" Grounds: same as before: Impenitence. Nothing new.
 - 2) Inform sinner of decision.
 - c. To prepare for classis, consistory will adopt a report that will inform classis of:
 - 1) Evidence of censurable sin and continued impenitence.
 - 2) # of visits; length of time since silent censure, 1st announcement, & now; CO 76 was followed.
 - 3) (Implication: By this, classis approves excommunication; no second approach of classis needed.)
3. Third: Excommunication is pending
 - a. Announcement includes: 1) Same as first and second; 2) date for excommunication since no penitence
 - b. Process: 1) Formal decision (date included), with ground: Impenitence. 2) Inform sinner
 - c. Instruct congregation: 1) This will be *their* act; 2) Thus, be present; 3) prepare spiritually.
 - d. Note: CO 77 mentions "congregation's tacit approval." But approbation applies to this entire process.

C. Final Excommunication (CO 76,77)

1. Process:
 - a. Decisions have been made; now, only carry out the 'disagreeable necessity' & 'last remedy' (Form for Exc)
 - b. Form for Excommunication is read at the service.
2. The meaning:
 - a. Declared to be cut off from Christ, outside the kingdom. What is bound on earth, is bound in heaven.
 - b. Congregation is: 1) Freed from corporate responsibility; 2) Urged to pray for former member continually

All committee reports ought to be in a form similar to this:

Report of Committee for _____ (date)

I. Information

A. First, explain the **mandate** for the committee. Give the date and article number of the of the consistory meeting where your committee was asked to work. For example, investigate the accusation of sin against N.N., brought by member N.N.

B. Second, explain the **actions** of the committee: meetings, dates, places, what was discussed, etc.

II. Recommendation(s) with grounds:

A. "We recommend that the consistory charge N.N. with impenitence for sin against the X commandment, and place him under silent censure, according to Article..."

B. Grounds: There *must* be grounds given for a recommendation. For example, "Why should the consistory proceed with discipline?" First ground would be: 1. The member has violated the sixth commandment. Second ground could be: 2. The committee has worked repeatedly with the member and finds him/her impenitent. Then, evidence from reports and visits need to be included.

Signed, _____ and _____