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CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Introduction

Accordingly, as the saving doctrine of Christ is the soul of the church, so does discipline serve as its sinews, through which the members of the body hold together, each in its own place. Therefore, all who desire to remove discipline or to hinder its restoration -wether they do this deliberately or out of ignorance- are surely contributing to the ultimate dissolution of the church. ... Therefore, discipline is like a bridle to restrain and tame those who rage against the doctrine of Christ; or like a spur to arouse those of little inclination; and also sometimes like a father's rod to chastise mildly and with the gentleness of Christ's Spirit those who have seriously lapsed.

Calvin, Institutes, IV-xii-1

1. Scripture

The church of the Lord is holy because the holy God dwells in her midst.

Ex. 19 : 6

... you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'

Lev. 11 : 44

I am the LORD your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy.

Lev. 20 : 26

You are to be holy to me; for I, the LORD, am holy and have set you apart from the nations to be my own.

Isa. 6 : 3

And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty;

Luke 1 : 49

for the Mighty One has done great things for me -- holy is his name.

Eph. 5 : 25, 26

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word,

Rev. 15 : 4

For you alone are holy.

The LORD is holy. This means that He is far removed from sin, hates all sin and has nothing to do with it. For this reason He will not tolerate anything unclean in His presence. At the same time He shows His holiness in that He overcomes and breaks down the power of sin by His grace. In the Old Testament we see both elements of holiness in connection with the tabernacle or temple. On the one hand people were forbidden to come close to the ark. This emphasizes that God's holiness means He has nothing to do with sin. On the other hand the LORD made it possible for the Israelites to come in His presence through the shedding of blood. This was symbolized to the people e.g. by what took place on the Day of Atonement (Lev.16). In the New Testament we learn that Christ's death sanctifies the church. The holiness of the congregation is seen in that she is set apart by the mercy of God to serve Him. The congregation can live as a holy nation when she lives from the grace of the LORD. As a result discipline has as goal to remove from the church what is unholy. This sinner has to be called to repentance. If he refuses he is to be excommunicated. He will be excommunicated on account of his unwillingness to repent. Discipline is always aimed at repentance. What needs to be punished is the unwillingness to break with sin and live from the grace of God. The justice of church discipline is therefore not vindictive but aimed at the justice of God (See Deut. 17). God's own dealings with His people show how much patience He has.

The church is duty bound to defend and protect this holiness. The LORD calls His people to remove all evil from their midst. Because this evil can be in the form of sinful deeds as well as sinful words, discipline has to punish sins against both "the purity of doctrine and the piety of conduct."

Numb. 25 : 10 - 13

The LORD said to Moses, "Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, has turned my anger away from the Israelites; for he was as zealous as I am for my honor among them, so that in my zeal I did not put an end to them. Therefore tell him I am making my covenant of peace with him. He and his descendants will have a covenant of a lasting priesthood, because he was zealous for the honor of his God and made atonement for the Israelites.

Deut. 17 : 7

The hands of the witnesses must be the first in putting him to death, and then the hands of all the people. You must purge the evil from among you.

Joshua 7

Then Joshua, together with all Israel, took Achan son of Zerah, the silver, the robe, the gold wedge, his sons and daughters, his cattle, donkeys and sheep, his tent and all that he had, to the Valley of Achor. Joshua said, "Why have you brought this trouble on us? The LORD will bring trouble on you today." Then all Israel stoned him, and after they had stoned the rest, they burned them. Over Achan they heaped up a large pile of rocks, which remains to this day. Then the LORD turned from his fierce anger. Therefore that place has been called the Valley of Achor ever since.

Rom 16:17

I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them.

1 Cor 5:2

And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this?

1 Cor 5:5

Hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.

1 Cor 5:13

God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked man from among you."

1 Cor 6:9-10

Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

Gal 5:19-21

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

2 Thes 3:6

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us.

2 Thes 3:14

If any one does not obey our instructions in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed.

Titus 3:10

Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him.

2 John 1:10

If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him.

Rev. 2:20

Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols.

Rev.22:14-15

"Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

The Word of God calls us to admonish each other.

Prov. 17:10

A rebuke impresses a man of discernment more than a hundred lashes a fool.

Prov. 27:5 - 6

Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses

Prov. 27:17

As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.

Prov.28:23

He who rebukes a man will in the end gain more favor than he who has a flattering tongue.

Luke 17:3-4

So watch yourselves. "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him."

Gal.6:1-2

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

At the same time the elders have the task to supervise the congregation

Ezekiel 33:1-7

The word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, speak to your countrymen and say to them: 'When I bring the sword against a land, and the people of the land choose one of their men and make him their watchman, and he sees the sword coming against the land and blows the trumpet to warn the people, then if anyone hears

the trumpet but does not take warning and the sword comes and takes his life, his blood will be on his own head. Since he heard the sound of the trumpet but did not take warning, his blood will be on his own head. If he had taken warning, he would have saved himself. But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet to warn the people and the sword comes and takes the life of one of them, that man will be taken away because of his sin, but I will hold the watchman accountable for his blood.' "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me

Matt 16:19

I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

Matt 18:18

Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Luke 15:4

What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost, until he finds it.

John 20:23

If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

Acts 20:28-31

Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard!

When the overseers do not fulfil this task the people will suffer the consequences.

Jer. 5 : 5 - 6

So I will go to the leaders and speak to them; surely they know the way of the LORD, the requirements of their God." But with one accord they too had broken off the yoke and torn off the bonds.

Therefore a lion from the forest will attack them, a wolf from the desert will ravage them, a leopard will lie in wait near their towns to tear to pieces any who venture out, for their rebellion is great and their backslidings many.

The aim of all discipline is repentance.

Ezek 33 : 10-11

"Son of man, say to the house of Israel, 'This is what you are saying: "Our offenses and sins weigh us down, and we are wasting away because of them. How then can we live?" ' Say to them, "As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?"

Hosea 2 : 13 - 16

I will punish her for the days she burned incense to the Baals; she decked herself with rings and jewelry, and went after her lovers, but me she forgot," declares the LORD. "Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her. There I will give her back her vineyards, and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. There she will sing as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt. "In that day," declares the LORD, "you will call me 'my husband'; you will no longer call me 'my master.'

Luke 15:7, 10

I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent. In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Heb.12:11

No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

James 5:19-20

My brethren, if any one among you wanders from the truth and some one brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

2. Confessions/Church Order/Forms

2.1. Belgic Confession

The Belgic Confession deals with church discipline within the context of the doctrine of the church. It is one of the marks of the church (Art. 29). In Article 32 the discipline is combined with the order of the church. Another way in which discipline comes to the surface in the Belgic Confession is the rejection of heresies, e.g. in Art. 9, 12 and 13.

- Art. 9 The doctrine of the Holy Trinity has always been maintained and preserved in the true Church since the time of the apostles to this very day, over against Jews, Muslims, and against false Christians and heretics such as Marcion, Mani, Praxeas, Sabellius, Paul of Samosata, Arius, and such like, who have been justly condemned by the orthodox fathers. In this doctrine, therefore, we willingly receive the three creeds, of the Apostles, of Nicea, and of Athanasius; likewise that which in accordance with them is agreed upon by the early fathers.
- Art. 12 Therefore we detest and reject the error of the Sadducees, who deny that there are any spirits and angels; and also the error of the Manichees, who say that the devils were not created, but have their origin of themselves, and that without having become corrupted, they are wicked by their own nature.
- Art. 13 We therefore reject the damnable error of the Epicureans, who say that God does not concern Himself with anything but leaves all things to chance.
- Art. 29 The true Church is to be recognized by the following marks: It practises the pure preaching of the gospel. It maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as Christ instituted them. It exercises Church discipline for correcting and punishing sins. In short, it governs itself according to the pure Word of God, rejecting all things contrary to it and regarding Jesus Christ as the only Head. Hereby the true Church can certainly be known and no one has the right to separate from it.
Those who are of the Church may be recognized by the marks of Christians. They believe in Jesus Christ the only Saviour, flee from sin and pursue righteousness, love the true God and their neighbour without turning to the right or left, and crucify their flesh and its works. Although great weakness remains in them, they fight against it by the Spirit all the days of their life. They appeal constantly to the blood, suffering, death, and obedience of Jesus Christ, in whom they have forgiveness of their sins through faith in Him.
The false church assigns more authority to itself and its ordinances than to the Word of God. It does not want to submit itself to the yoke of Christ. It does not administer the sacraments as Christ commanded in His Word, but adds to them and subtracts from them as it pleases. It bases itself more on men than on Jesus Christ. It persecutes those who live holy lives according to the Word of God and who rebuke the false church for its sins, greed, and idolatries.
- Art. 32 We believe that, although it is useful and good for those who govern the Church to establish a certain order to maintain the body of the Church, they must at all times watch that they do not deviate from what Christ, our only Master, has commanded. Therefore we reject all human inventions and laws introduced into the worship of God which bind and compel the consciences in any way. We accept only what is proper to preserve and promote harmony and unity and to keep all in obedience to God. To that end, discipline and excommunication ought to be exercised in agreement with the Word of God.

2.2. Heidelberg Catechism

In the Heidelberg Catechism church discipline is one of the keys of the Kingdom of heaven. It is to be used to close and open the kingdom. Q/a 85 closes the second part of the Catechism, the one that deals with our redemption (Lord's Days 5 - 31). This shows that discipline is a means to keep someone in the grace of God. The Catechism also pays attention to the steps which must be followed in the process of discipline.

85. Q. How is the kingdom of heaven closed and opened by church discipline?
A. According to the command of Christ, people who call themselves Christians but show themselves to be un-christian in doctrine or life are first repeatedly admonished in a brotherly manner. If they do not give up their errors or wickedness, they are reported to the church, that is, to the elders. If they do not heed also their admonitions, they are forbidden the use of the sacraments, and they are excluded by the elders from the Christian congregation, and by God Himself from the kingdom of Christ. They are again received as members of Christ and of the church when they promise and show real amendment.

The Catechism connects discipline to the celebration of the Lord's Supper. The church has to guard the holiness table and this implies discipline.

81. Q. Who are to come to the table of the Lord?
A. Those who are truly displeased with themselves because of their sins and yet trust that these are forgiven them and that their remaining weakness is covered by the suffering and death of Christ, and who also desire more and more to strengthen their faith and amend their life. But hypocrites and those who do not repent eat and drink judgment upon themselves.

The Catechism stresses the responsibility we have as congregation when it comes to discipline. If the church knowingly allows sin the whole communion is affected.

82. Q. Are those also to be admitted to the Lord's supper who by their confession and life show that they are unbelieving and ungodly?

- A. No, for then the covenant of God would be profaned and His wrath kindled against the whole congregation. Therefore, according to the command of Christ and His apostles, the Christian church is duty-bound to exclude such persons by the keys of the kingdom of heaven, until they amend their lives.

2.3. Canons of Dort.

The Canons of Dort mention discipline in the context of our regeneration and preservation.

Chapter 3/4, Article 17

The almighty working of God whereby He brings forth and sustains this our natural life does not exclude but requires the use of means, by which He according to His infinite wisdom and goodness has willed to exercise His power. So also the aforementioned supernatural working of God whereby He regenerates us, in no way excludes or overthrows the use of the gospel, which the most wise God has ordained to be the seed of regeneration and the food of the soul. For this reason the apostles and the teachers who succeeded them, in the fear of the Lord instructed the people concerning this grace of God, to His glory and to the abasement of all pride. In the meantime, however, they did not neglect to keep them, by the holy admonitions of the gospel, under the administration of the Word, the sacraments, and discipline. So today those who give or receive instruction in the Church should not dare to tempt God by separating what He in His good pleasure has willed to be kept very close together. For grace is conferred through admonitions, and the more readily we do our duty, the more this favour of God, who works in us, usually manifests itself in its lustre and the more directly His works proceed. To God alone all glory, both for the means and for their saving fruit and efficacy, is due throughout eternity. Amen.

Chapter 5, Article 14

As it has pleased God to begin this work of grace in us by the preaching of the gospel, so He maintains, continues, and perfects it by the hearing and reading of His Word, by meditation upon it, by its exhortations, threatenings, and promises, and by the use of the sacraments.

2.4. Church Order

From the beginning the Reformed Churches have realized the importance of discipline. The Church Order of Dort deals with it in a separate section, the Articles 66 through 73. These articles contain the Biblical principles for church discipline and deal with the process of discipline. It must be kept in mind that these articles were not written in order to cover every possible case. We need to apply these articles in each case in a spiritual manner.

Art. 16 - The Office of the Minister of the Word

... and further, with the elders, to keep the church of God in good order, to exercise discipline, and to govern it in such a manner as the Lord has ordained.

Art. 22 - The Office of Elder

They shall exercise Christian discipline according to the command of Christ against those who show themselves unbelieving and ungodly and refuse to repent and shall watch that the sacraments are not profaned.

Art. 66 - Nature and Purpose

Art. 67 - Consistory Involvement

Art. 68 - Excommunication

Art. 69 - Repentance

Art. 70 - Readmission

Art. 71 - Suspension and Deposition of Office-bearers

Art. 72 - Serious and Gross Sins on the Part of Office-bearers

Art. 73 - Christian Censure

2.5. Liturgical Forms and Prayers

The churches have adopted forms for excommunication, one when it concerns a communicant and the other when it concerns a non-communicant member. These forms also spell out the announcements to be made to the congregation. A striking feature of these forms is their urgent appeal to all the members of the congregation to break with sin and live a holy life. Added to these forms of excommunication is the Form for Readmission. This highlights the fact that discipline, including excommunication, is meant to bring about repentance.

Besides these Forms, we also find references to Church Discipline in the Form for Public Profession of Faith, Form for Lord's Supper and Form for the Ordination of Ministers, as well as the Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons.

Form for the Public Profession of Faith

"Do you promise to submit willingly to the admonition and discipline of the Church, if it should happen, and may God graciously prevent it, that you become delinquent either in doctrine or in conduct?"

Form for the Celebration of the Lord's Supper - Invitation and Admonition

... all who either in word or conduct show themselves to be unbelieving by leading an offensive life. While they persist in their sins, they shall not take of this food, which Christ has ordained only for his believers; otherwise their judgement and condemnation will be the heavier.

Form for the Excommunication of Non-Communicant Members

Form for the Excommunication of Communicant Members

Form for Readmission into the Church of Christ

Form for the Ordination of Ministers of the Word

Fourth it is the duty of the minister of the Word, with the elders as stewards of the house of God, to see to it that in the congregation all things are done in peace and good order. Together they shall supervise the doctrine and life of the membership and *tend the flock of God, not as domineering over those in their charge but being examples to the flock*. In doing so they are to shut and open the kingdom of God by Christian discipline, according to the charge given by Christ.

Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons - Mandate of the Elders

They shall exercise Christian discipline, according to the command of Christ, against those who show themselves unbelieving and ungodly and refuse to repent. They shall watch that the sacraments are not profaned.

Prayer 3 - A Public Confession of sins and Prayer before the Sermon

We also beseech Thee, gracious God, to bring back to Thyself in true repentance all who depart from Thy truth, that we all with one accord may serve Thee through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

3. Purpose and Goal

The Belgic Confession speaks about discipline in the context of maintaining the body of the Church (Art. 32). The Heidelberg Catechism connects discipline to the closing and opening the Kingdom of Heaven, and the guarding of the Lord's Table. The Church Order has a more detailed description of the purpose and goal of church discipline:

... to punish sins against both the purity of doctrine and the piety of conduct, in order to reconcile the sinner with the Church and with his neighbour, and to remove all offence out of the Church of Christ.

According to the Form for Excommunication the purpose is as follows:

This excommunication is intended to make this brother (sister) ashamed of his (her) sins, and also to ensure that this corrupt member does not affect the whole body which is Christ's Church. Moreover, in this way the blaspheming of God's Name is prevented.

J.Kamphuis gives this definition of church discipline: "It is the judicial maintenance of the holiness of God's congregation over against the destructive power in the lives of those in the congregation who are dominated by sin." (See Diakonia vol. II, No.4, page 71)

We may conclude that the goal of church discipline is:

- to serve the honour of God,
- to keep the church pure, and
- to bring sinners to repentance.

4. Self Discipline

Church discipline involves mutual discipline, as the Lord Jesus taught in Matthew 18. Mutual discipline, in turn, involves self discipline. How can I admonish others if I do not fight sin in my own life. How can I speak about the joy of a reconciled God, if I do not experience this in my own life. The Lord Jesus taught this need for self discipline in Matthew 5:29-30. Scripture as a whole speaks about the need for self-discipline.

Prov 25:28

Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control.

Matt 5:29-30

If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

John 12:24-25

I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

2 Tim 1:7

For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.

Titus 2:12-13

It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope-- the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ,

The Word of God shows that this call to self discipline applies to all.

Titus 2:2

Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance.

Titus 2:4-6

Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God. Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled.

The Lord Jesus Himself speaks about this self discipline.

Matt 10:37-39

"Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

Luke 9:23-24

Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.

Self discipline is anchored in the death and resurrection of Christ, and thus also a fruit of the Spirit.

Rom 6:6

For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin--

Gal 5:22-24

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.

2 Pet 1:5-8

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Self discipline is then also a requirement for office-bearers.

Mark 9:35

Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all."

Acts 20:28

Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

Titus 1:8

Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined.

1 Cor 9:25-27

Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

1 Tim 3:2

Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,

Paul speaks about this self discipline in a very personal manner.

2 Cor 4:7

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

2 Cor 12:7-10

To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Our Confessions address the need for self-discipline too. It is striking that Art. 29 of the Belgic Confession not only mentions discipline as one of the marks of the true church, but also as a mark of the Christian.

Those who are of the Church may be recognized by the marks of Christians. They believe in Jesus Christ the only Saviour, flee from sin and pursue righteousness, love the true God and their neighbour without turning to the right or left, and crucify their flesh and its works. Although great weakness remains in them, they fight against it by the Spirit all the days of their life. They appeal constantly to the blood, suffering, death, and obedience of Jesus Christ, in whom they have forgiveness of their sins through faith in Him.

The Heidelberg Catechism speaks about this self discipline in many questions and answers.

70. Q. What does it mean to be washed with Christ's blood and Spirit?
A. To be washed with Christ's blood means to receive forgiveness of sins from God, through grace, because of Christ's blood, poured out for us in His sacrifice on the cross. To be washed with His Spirit means to be renewed by the Holy Spirit and sanctified to be members of Christ, so that more and more we become dead to sin and lead a holy and blameless life.
88. Q. What is the true repentance or conversion of man?
A. It is the dying of the old nature and the coming to life of the new.
89. Q. What is the dying of the old nature?
A. It is to grieve with heartfelt sorrow that we have offended God by our sin, and more and more to hate it and flee from it.
94. Q. What does the LORD require in the first commandment?
A. That for the sake of my very salvation I avoid and flee all idolatry, witchcraft, superstition, and prayer to saints or to other creatures. ... In short, that I forsake all creatures rather than do the least thing against His will.
109. Q. Does God in this commandment forbid nothing more than adultery and similar shameful sins?
A. Since we, body and soul, are temples of the Holy Spirit, it is God's will that we keep ourselves pure and holy. Therefore He forbids all unchaste acts, gestures, words, thought, desires, and whatever may entice us to unchastity.
113. Q. What does the tenth commandment require of us?
A. That not even the slightest thought or desire contrary to any of God's commandments should ever arise in our heart. Rather, with all our heart we should always hate all sin and delight in all righteousness.
123. Q. What is the second petition?
A. *Thy kingdom come.* That is: So rule us by Thy Word and Spirit that more and more we submit to Thee. ...
124. Q. What is the third petition?
A. *Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.* That is: Grant that we and all men may deny our own will, and without any murmuring obey Thy will, for it alone is good....
127. Q. What is the sixth petition?
A. *And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.* That is: In ourselves we are so weak that we cannot stand even for a moment. Moreover, our sworn enemies -- the devil, the world, and our own flesh -- do not cease to attack us. Wilt Thou, therefore, uphold and strengthen us by the power of Thy Holy Spirit, so that in this spiritual war we may not go down to defeat, but always firmly resist our enemies, until we finally obtain the complete victory.

In the Canons of Dort we meet several references as well

Chapter 1, Article 12 The Assurance Of Election

The elect in due time, though in various stages and in different measure, are made certain of this their eternal and unchangeable election to salvation. They attain this assurance, however, not by inquisitively prying into the hidden and deep things of God, but by observing in themselves, with spiritual joy and holy delight, the unfailing fruits of election pointed out in the Word of God -- such as a true faith in Christ, a childlike fear of God, a godly sorrow for their sins, and a hungering and thirsting after righteousness.

Chapter 5, Article 2 - Daily Sins Of Weakness

Therefore daily sins of weakness spring up and defects cling to even the best works of the saints. These are for them a constant reason to humble themselves before God, to flee to the crucified Christ, to put the flesh to death more and more through the Spirit of prayer and by holy exercises of godliness, and to long for the goal of perfection until at last, delivered from this body of death, they reign with the Lamb of God in heaven.

Chapter 5, Article 4 Saints May Fall Into Serious Sins

The power of God whereby He confirms and preserves true believers in grace is so great that it cannot be conquered by the flesh, yet the converted are not always so led and moved by God that they cannot in certain particular actions turn aside through their own fault from the guidance of grace and be seduced by and yield to the lusts of the flesh. They must therefore constantly watch and pray that they may not be led into temptation. When they do not watch and pray, they not only can be drawn away by the flesh, the world, and Satan into serious and atrocious sins, but with the righteous permission of God are sometimes actually drawn away. The lamentable fall of David, Peter, and other saints, described in Holy Scripture, demonstrates this.

Chapter 5, Article 5 The Effects Of Such Serious Sins

By such gross sins, however, they greatly offend God, incur deadly guilt, grieve the Holy Spirit, suspend the exercise of faith, very grievously wound their consciences, and sometimes for a while lose the sense of God's favour — until they return to the right way through sincere repentance and God's fatherly face again shines upon them.

Chapter 5, Article 12 This Assurance Is An Incentive To Godliness

So far, however, is this certainty of perseverance from making true believers proud and complacent that, on the contrary, it is the true root of humility, childlike reverence, genuine godliness, patience in every conflict, fervent prayers, constancy in the cross and in the confession of the truth, and lasting joy in God. Further, the consideration of this benefit is for them an incentive to the serious and constant practice of gratitude and good works, as is evident from the testimonies of Scripture and the examples of the saints.

The liturgical forms give attention to self-discipline. The Form for Baptism begins with reminding us that baptism signifies the impurity of our souls, "so that we may detest ourselves, humble ourselves before God, and seek our cleansing and salvation outside of ourselves." This comes back in the Form for Lord's Supper in the part that deals with self-examination. In the Form for the Public Profession of Faith we are asked whether it is our heartfelt desire to forsake the world, and to crucify our old nature. The Form for the Excommunication of Communicant Members warns the congregation to resist evil from the very beginning.

5. The Rule of Matthew 18

The expression "the rule of Matthew 18" is well known in church life. You can hear it being said, "You must follow the way of Matthew 18," meaning that the person involved should go to the one who is sinning and call him to repentance. It can also happen that a consistory or a major assembly refuses to deal with a matter because the rule of Matthew 18 has not been followed. When Lord's Day 31 is to be discussed at catechism class, the students will also have to learn about the rule of Matthew 18. At church visitation the question can be asked, what does the consistory do to ensure that the rule of Matthew 18 followed? From all these examples we learn that the expression "the rule of Matthew 18" is known. Yet, I question how well this rule functions among us. How many consistories deal with situations of discipline that come to them in the way of Matthew 18? I would be inclined to say, not that many. One could say, that is because it works so well. Is this so? I am not so sure. Could it also be that this rule is not used enough? This can have all kinds of reasons, we are not sure how to go about it, we look up against it, we have been disappointed by it. This leads me to a next question, How well do we know how to use the rule? It can be easy for an office bearer or a consistory to say, 'go the way of Matthew 18,' but does the member know how to do it? What do we do to help one another in this regard?

5.1. What is the rule of Matthew 18?

In Article 66 of the Church Order we come across the expression "the rule given by the Lord in Matthew 18:15-17." In this article we agree that church discipline is of a spiritual nature, is one of the keys of the kingdom of heaven and is to be used to punish sins against both the purity of doctrine and the piety of conduct. Its purpose is to reconcile the sinner with the church and to remove all offence out of the church

of Christ. From this already it is clear that church discipline is an indispensable part of church life. But then Art. 66 C.O. add that this discipline can only function properly when the rule given by the Lord in Matthew 18:15-17 is followed in obedience. Combining the beginning of this article with its concluding words we may say that the more important discipline is, the more important the rule of Matthew 18 becomes. The church cannot function without proper discipline (Art. 29 B.C.), and discipline can only be proper when the rule of Matthew 18 is followed in obedience. This works the other way as well. If the rule of Matthew 18 is not followed in obedience then this has consequences for the proper functioning the discipline in the church, yes for the character of the church.

The Church Order underlines the necessity to follow this rule when it brings out that the rule of Matthew 18 is not a human rule, but is given by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, the Head of the church. One cannot say, "I don't feel up to it," or, "I am not capable of it." We are under obligation to follow it.

Let's have a closer look at this rule. As the expression itself says, this rule is found in Matthew 18. Now when we use a text we must always be aware of its context. Here too. In verse 1 we read that the disciples had been arguing over the question who the greatest is in the kingdom. A question that reveals a typically human attitude, wanting to be the first, the best, the greatest. The Lord Jesus first takes a child and had it stand among them, to teach His disciples humility. The greatest in the kingdom is he who knows his place before God. As a child has to learn this, so do adults. But then the Lord Jesus goes on with telling the parable of the lost sheep. This means that the parable is also part of the answer to the question, "Who is the greatest?" A lost sheep is not the best, the greatest in the flock. On the contrary, it is the one who straggles behind or, goes its own way. Why would the Lord use this parable? To change the mind set of the disciples. They are concerned about being the first and the greatest. Their concern is to be the first one to reach finish. With this parable of the lost sheep the Lord says, "Remember, you don't run alone. You are part of my flock. Rather than be all concerned about being the first, you should be concerned about those who are coming behind. The stragglers have to come in too. You are not going all by yourself, you belong to each other. Do not loose each other."

How easy isn't to lose each other. We go our own way. We are concerned about our own lives. We see each other on Sundays, smile and say a few common places, but that is it. Then we lose each other. It is so easy. It is much harder to hold on to each other, to seek out the other, yes to gain the other. Yet that should be our concern. The rule of Matthew 18 is not an administrative matter. It should never become something you do to make sure you can put in X in the box that asks, "Have followed the way of Matthew 18? If yes move to next line." It has to do with the care and love we have to show to one another. We belong together as members of the congregation through the precious blood of Christ. The Lord uses the term "brother." The rule of Matthew 18 functions within the communion of saints.

The Lord Jesus instructs His church to show care and love when your brother is in danger of being lost. He says: "Go and show him his fault." (vs. 15) The aim is to bring this brother back to the communion of the flock. If he listens, says the Lord, wonderful, you have won over your brother. If he does not listen then brings others and try to convince the sinner to give up his sin. If this still does not work then bring it to the attention of the church. This is the basic rule of Matthew 18. The Church Order has worked this out further.

5.2. Why this rule?

Why does the Lord give this rule? Why do we give it such a prominent place in the Church Order? To answer this question we can use the context of Matthew 18, namely, our aim is to care for each other. No one should be lost. Our human inclination is to leave each other. The Lord Jesus calls us to care for each other and in this way He continues His work. Also here counts what we confess in Canons III/IV, 17 that grace is administered through admonitions. The Lord uses the communion with each other to keep us in communion with Him.

We can also answer the question by referring to Art. 66 C.O.. The purpose of discipline is to reconcile the sinner with the church and his neighbour and to remove all offence out of the church. The rule of Matthew 18 is given for the honour of God, the well-being of the church and the salvation of the sinner. This is in line with Lord's Day 31 of the Heidelberg Catechism. Lord's Day 31 deals with the keys of the kingdom of heaven. This Lord's Day is the last one in the part that deals with our redemption (L.D. 5 - 31). Discipline is a means given by God to keep us in this redemption. Sin can be so deceptive, so destructive. We can so easily underestimate the power of sin and over estimate ourselves. This is why we need each other. Discipline is an instrument of love.

All this is also connected to the confession that the church is holy. The church is set apart by God for Himself. As He is holy so the church must be holy. We also confess that the church is the communion of saints. The Catechism explains this as having communion with Christ and with each other (L.D. 21). These two elements should not be separated. Our relationship with Christ determines our relationship with the brothers and sisters, and the other way around, our relationship to each other is anchored in the relationship with Christ. This communion shows by helping in times of need, it also has to function in a situation when someone falls into sin. Sin breaks down and destroys communion. It breaks down relationships. It leads to the attitude of "Am I my brother's keeper?" Satan know that if he can drive a wedge between brothers, this will lead to distance between the believer and God. He will do his utmost to break down the communion between members of one body. He can use for this purpose things like, lying, gossip, slander, greed, pride, selfishness, jealousy etc. With the rule of Matthew 18 the Lord Jesus mobilizes this very same communion to stop these attacks. He uses the communion of saints to fight the destructive power of sin. Instead of coming to us Himself and confronting us in person, He uses my brothers and sisters.

There is another passage which needs our attention to as well, namely Galatians 6:1-5. In chapter 5 of the letter to the Galatians Paul has spoken about the fruits of the Spirit and the works of the flesh. We are all quite familiar with these words. Paul has also said that these two are opposite to each other. Chapter 5 verse 17: "For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want." The believers fall into sin. This is why Paul says in vs 1 of chapter 6, if someone is overcome by sin, you go and seek to restore the brother. You don't stand by and let things happen, but you go and seek to bring the person back. This must be done in a spirit of gentleness. This approach to your brother shows the fruit of the Spirit in your life. You show your love in pointing out the sin helping the other. This is why he says in vs. 2 "Carry each other's burdens." These burdens are connected to this being caught in sin. Is sin indeed not a burden that can weigh a person's life down? Think of what David says in Ps. 32: 3 and 4: "When I kept silent [i.e. did not confess my sin], my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;" When you see your brother under such a burden, don't keep on walking, but help your brother lift that burden so that together you can walk onward. You may need your brother's help in the future (see vs. 1 and 3).

Paul adds that in carrying each other's burdens you fulfil the law of Christ. Did Christ not come to take the burden of God's wrath off our shoulders, then we must help one another as well. Note the use of the word law in this regard. To carrying each other's burden is a law of Christ. It is not a hobby, to be left to those who in our eyes are good in doing this. It is a law for us all. If we once more keep in mind the context, namely the struggle between the flesh and the Spirit, then we note that although it may seem that the flesh has the upper hand -someone is caught in a sin- the victory belongs to the Spirit of Christ. How does the Spirit show this victory? In that we follow the way of Matthew 18.

The conclusion is clear, the Church Order is correct when it places an strong emphasis on this rule. The Lord Jesus Himself teaches us that belonging to Him also means admonishing one another in a brotherly manner.

5.3. How to use this rule?

In the previous part we looked at why the rule of Matthew 18 is given. We saw that this rule is an expression of the love we have for each other. But does it indeed work that way? Do we indeed use this rule, and do we use it in love? One can hear disappointing reactions. "This is not for me to do." "Who am I to tell someone else?" "I tried but it backfired. The person became angry and holds it against me that I did this." "I spoke in good faith, but my words were twisted." I came with the right motives, but next thing you know you are accused of being a busybody." Such discouraging reactions can have as a result that we stop using this rule. But if we do that, then church discipline cannot function properly either. For this reason we will look at how to use this rule. In this part we will not give the final answer to all possible questions, but rather give some helpful pointers to reflect on.

How should the rule of Matthew be applied? We have already seen that it must be done out of love, in a brotherly manner. This should come out in the way we approach the other. It should come out in our words, as well as in our deeds. Think of what we saw in Galatians 6:1 "But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted." This comes back in verse 3: "If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself." When we know in our own lives how destructive and hurtful sin then we are more inclined to warn the other. When we in our own lives know what it means to live from the grace of God through the confession of sins, we are the more inclined to help our brother or sister experience the same. This is indeed a general answer. To be more specific let's use the words of Matthew 18 :15-17.

"If your brother sins against you, ..."

As already mentioned, it is the brotherhood which is in focus here. This does not deny the fact that we can also call unbelievers to repentance, but the basis on which this is done is different. The brother we may approach as a brother in the Lord. There is a common bond and this bond is threatened by the sin of the other. To a brother we can appeal on the basis of God's work in Jesus Christ. The Lord also uses the word sin. This is important. In order to approach the other in the way of Matthew 18 it must involve a sin. We should be able to show from the Word of God what the other did wrong. This means that we should not come with our own opinions or ideas.

Much has been written about the words "against you." This is not the place to go into detail on this point. Those interested can read up on this in the various commentaries. Certainly this is an important point, but the focus of the text is not so much on the person against whom the sin has been committed as well as on what to do with the one who has committed the sin.

"... go ..."

The Lord Jesus comes with a very simple command: "Go to your brother." Go means exactly that -- go. You have to go to the person involved. It does not suffice to tell others, so they can do something about it. Each situation is different. It can happen that it concerns a person you meet every day. Then it may not be so difficult to speak to him. It can also concern a person whom you do not meet often. Then do not wait till you think there is a good opportunity, for such an opportunity can take a long time. And just when you think it is there, the person is gone again, or someone else joins you. It is better to then make an appointment with the person. It may be necessary to call the person in order to set a place and time. There is nothing wrong in indicating why you want to come, but the matter itself should be discussed face to face. The phone is not meant to admonish someone. Go means indeed go

"... and show him his fault, ..."

The purpose of going to your brother is to show him his fault. You do not go for a nice chat over a cup of coffee. The sin has to be pointed out. How can you show this? With the Word of God. Showing the fault of the other requires honesty. It is not enough to suggest or hint and hope that the other gets the hint. Honestly and love go together. To cover up or excuse is not showing love. The sin has to be pointed out clearly and honestly, in a manner and attitude that shows love for the other.

When you meet begin with making sure that you have the facts straight and that you are clear about the situation. The meeting should not be started with accusing the other. First ask questions to make sure that the other indeed said this, or did this. Listen well and make sure you understand. It does not hurt to repeat what the other has said in your own words. "Is this what you are saying?" And then say what you have heard. These questions will lead to dealing with the matter itself. For once the facts are established then the question how to square with what we learn from the Bible, is next.

When you go, you have to be prepared to show from the Word that what the other does or says is against the law of God. Show means make it clear. It is more than stating your case. True, whether you can convince the other is another matter. This is why we should not ask too quickly the question "Do you agree?" First we have to ask "Do you understand?" For if I think it is a sin, but in the eyes of the other it is not, then I may have to explain more. This shows that discipline can involve instruction. It can be that the person involves needs to be further instructed in the Word of God. It can also be that the person is unwilling, but then also we have to show what the Bible teaches. As said earlier we do not come to enforce private opinions, we must come with the Word of God. The confessions are a wonderful help in this regard as well. This is especially so when we are dealing with a communicant member, because we can bind this member to these confessions. Hopefully in this way it comes across that it is not a matter of you against me, but how can we together bow before the Word of God.

"... just between the two of you."

This admonishing is to be done "between the two of you." The matter does not have to go further. We are called to protect the reputation of the other. The ninth commandment and the rule of Matthew 18 are connected. Rather than gossip and slander we ought go to each other. Rather than talk to others about, we ought to speak to the person involved. Leave the matter there. Love covers a multitude of sins.

"If he listens to you, you have won your brother over..."

After the facts have been established and the sin is shown the call to repentance is in place. This call flows from what has been discussed already. The question is whether the person involved is willing to admit that what was said or done was indeed wrong before the Lord. Is the person involved also willing to break with what is wrong? We do not have to go on our knees before one another, we must go on our knees before the Lord. It can be good to point out the beauty of repentance. Take for example what we read in Psalm 32. The LORD does forgive the sins of those who in true repentance come to Him.

Discipline may need time. We have to know when to stop. It may take some time for the other to be convinced. In the Heidelberg Catechism we say that those show themselves unchristian in doctrine or life are "repeated admonished in a brotherly manner." (L.D. 31) We should not give up after one visit. We may have to repeat what we have said in previous visits. If you have to come back, make this clear at the end of the visit. It can be helpful to set a certain time, rather than leaving it open. If there is indeed the willingness to acknowledge sin before the Lord and the willingness to fight against sin, then this must be brought before the Lord in prayer. If the repentance is not there it would still be proper to end the visit with prayer. Be careful not to misuse prayer. It does not hurt to say ahead what you will pray for. If prayer is impossible, then pray afterwards by yourself and tell the person that this is what you are doing.

"But if he will not listen, take one of two others along, ..."

If repeated visits do not have the desired result, then others will become involved. Again this is something the person involved should be made aware of. The purpose of involving others (one or two) is to intensify the appeal to the sinner. If necessary, these witnesses therefore become involved in the process of calling to repentance. The elders can only deal with the matter when at least two witnesses indicate that the member involved is unwilling to repent. Also these visits with a witness may have to be repeated before it can be reported to the elders. The Lord Jesus says in verse 17, "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church;".

5.4. Obstacles on the way of Matthew 18

The rule of Matthew 18 does not always function the way it should. This can be because we are hesitant to use it, or we do not know how to go about it. It can also be because the member who admonishes does so in the wrong way, or the members who is being admonished frustrates the process. We all know that good communication requires wisdom and patience. If this is the case when the relationship is relaxed, how much more when the relationship is tense. When it does not function the way it should, it is easy to point to the other. However, we should be willing to look at our own words, actions and motives. We will deal with some of the obstacles that can may the way of Matthew 18 difficult to travel.

Having said that the rule of Matthew 18 does not always function the way it should, we do well to realize that this rule is followed more often than we perhaps notice. If someone tells you something about another member, you may say, "Why don't you go and speak to the other?" Or, when children come home from school with all kinds of stories about others, many a parent will say, "Are you sure? Why don't you talk to the person involved?" You see here again the connection with the ninth commandment. Yet there can be several obstacles in the way of Matthew 18.

Not welcome

You try to arrange a visit, but the visit is cancelled. The best is to try to set up another visit and express the hope that it will be possible to meet. Or, you try to arrange a visit but the other is unwilling. Call display and answering machines don't make it any easier in this regard. If the unwillingness to meet persists it may be necessary to involve the help of others and the church. The sin itself doesn't need to be disclosed, but help may be needed to be able to visit the member involved. If a visit is arranged and comes about, your attitude will do much to help the other get over his apprehension.

Denial

The person involved denies having said or done the things you heard of saw. If there is no proof and no others who have seen or heard it, then the matter ends right there, for it is your word against the others. Then we leave the matter in the hands of the Lord. If we do have proof, or there are witnesses, then it may be necessary to call them in as well.

Anger

It can happen that the member who is approached becomes angry. Since you are the one who visits, keep calm and do what you can not to aggravate the situation. At the same time know your limits too. If the anger does not subside, it may be necessary to stop the discussion because it is impossible to reason with the member involved.

Attack

The person who is admonished can try to turn the tables on you in attacking you and bringing up things that you have done. You can use such attack as evidence that you are no better. We are all sinners, but we have to learn to confess our sins and repent. If these attacks continue make clear that this sidesteps the issue. At times the attacks can become personal. Be careful not to become personal yourself. Try to stand above it. You are not there to defend yourself, but to fulfil the law of Christ, and seek a lost sheep.

Evasion

Sin is deceptive. Sin tries to find excuses and ways out. This can also show in these visits. The discussion can get bogged down into disputes about details, end up in a yes-no controversy, or go off topic. Be aware and prepared for it. Such evasion does not have to be done out of a malicious motive, but it can happen so easily that we loose the main point. During the visit keep the main point in mind. This can mean that you don't answer certain question or reactions. It can mean that you have to stop a confusing discussion and return to the main point.

Breakdown of communication

There are obstacles of another kind as well. We think we understand each other, whereas in fact we talk beside each other. Just because the other is using the same terms or expressions does not mean that you agree. Even when the other says "Yes" does not mean there is agreement. We need to ask simple questions to make sure we have the same things in mind. "What do you mean with?"

Another problem can be that we do not listen carefully. We may latch on to a word and sentence of the other says but we fail to keep in mind the whole context. This easily happens in a normal conversation, certainly also in these visits. It may be good to repeat what you think the other has said, and ask whether you indeed understand him correctly. It can also happen that we use the time the other is speaking to formulate our own thoughts again. This does make for good communication.

A third obstacle can be that we come across too strong, or not strong enough. Both are possible. It is good to be strong, but there is a proper time and setting for it. Not being strong enough may lead the other to think that the sin isn't that bad after all. Let the Word of God speak. His Word is direct and at the same time comforting.

5.5. Attacks on the rule of Matthew 18

Not only can there be obstacles in the way of Matthew 18, there can also be attacks on this way. There can be things in our lives and in the life of the congregation that will harm the proper functioning of this rule.

We have referred to one already, namely, gossip and slander. This can do so much damage to the proper functioning of discipline. Not only does gossip leave the sinner under the burden of sin, we also give the member a bad name in the communion of the saints. It breaks down communion. There is more to this. Gossiping means the end of all confidentiality. If there is not confidentiality, why would the other open up? It can happen that we tell others what we know and in that way sooth our consciences. At least I did something. But that does not help the sinner. This slander can also come from the one who is being admonished. Then the words of the one who came to visit are twisted, or the motives are placed in a suspicious light. It is done to get back at the other or to stop the admonitions.

Another attack is improper closure of the matter. This can mean that we stop too soon. We do not follow up on the visits, and although there was no repentance, we let the matter rest. It can also mean that we come back to a matter after it has been closed. Although both persons involved have concluded that the matter is resolved yet the one who fell into sin continues to hold the visit against the one who visited, or the one who visited keeps on talking about it. When repentance has occurred the matter should be gone.

A third attack is the fear to judge. We live in a world that claims that judging is wrong. This attitude is nice excuse for sin to continue. We should not give in to this nor be afraid to judge if need be. Our judgement ought to deal with the confession or life of the other and must be based on the Word of God.

A four attack is peer pressure. We do not dare to admonish because of what the others will think about us. This applies to all ages. We all like other people to think highly of us, admonishing does not seem to fit in this. We know things of each other but we refuse to deal with it. It starts already at a very young age. Children can lie about things, so as not to expose a fellow student. Connected to this is that blood is often thicker than water. It is much easier to see what is wrong with someone who is not related to you. The closer the blood tie, the more difficult it is to be objective. Exactly for this reason we can be so thankful that the Lord gives us to each other, so that we can help each other in the struggle against sin.

5.6. Conclusion

Carry one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ. It is a wonderful command, it is necessary command. It is a command that goes against my human nature. The Lord has poured out His Spirit on the

congregation to help us fulfil this law. Every one falls short, also when it comes to using the rule of Matthew 18. It can only be followed when we let the Spirit work in us and ask for God's help and wisdom. I mentioned the difficulties involved in going this way not to discourage, but to encourage. Mutual discipline is a gift of our Lord. The love of Christ controls us so that we may speak the truth in love, seek the well being of each other, and serve the glory of our God.

6. The Process of Church Discipline

The Belgic Confession (Art. 30) as well as the Church Order (Art. 66) highlight that church discipline is of a spiritual nature. The elders do not have a physical sword. The Lord has given a spiritual one to the church, the Word of God. Discipline must be exercised on the basis and with the power of His Word. In addition, the aim of all discipline is repentance. In this section the so-called "steps" of discipline will be discussed.

6.1. Brotherly Admonitions

The Church Order distinguishes between private and public sins. In the case of a public sin the matter can come directly to the consistory. When is a sin public? A sin is public when it is committed in public, and/or the sin is known to the public. A sin is also public when the consequences of the sin will become public. In case of a private sin the rule given by the Lord in Matthew 18 must be followed. This rule was discussed in the previous section.

6.2. Secret Censure

This is the stage when the consistory becomes involved. When the consistory is made aware of a sin it has to establish whether this is a private or a public sin. If it is a private sin then it must ascertain whether private admonitions and admonitions in the presence of witnesses have remained fruitless. This means that the consistory has to speak with the sinner, as well as with those who have admonished him. Also when a member of the consistory knows of sin and it is private he has to follow the rule of Matthew 18. He may not put it on the table of the consistory just like that. In the case of a public sin the elders do not have to ascertain whether Matthew 18 has been followed.

Once the consistory deals with a situation, the first things the elders have to do is determine the nature of the sin involved. It is indicative that with each situation of discipline the consistory indicates which commandment is involved, lest we bind one to something that goes over and above Scripture or even against Scripture. Those who are being disciplined have the right to ask for the Biblical basis for the discipline.

The consistory must be careful in the use of the fifth commandment in this regard. If the sin concerns another commandment and the member involved refuses to heed the instructions and admonitions of the consistory we should not be too quick with adding sin against the fifth commandment to the other sins. This is for two reasons. In the first place this unwillingness to heed the admonition flows from the other sin. To be sure, it is wrong to reject these admonitions and in visits this can be pointed out, but it does not form the basis of the discipline. It is better to keep on focussing on the initial sin and the unwillingness to repent from it. The other reason is that as consistory we have authority from the Lord, and must be careful to use this when defending our own position. Members do not have the authority which the overseers have, thus we must be patient.

Would it be correct to discipline a member on the basis of what we confess? The confession is a summary of the Word of God and as such has derived authority. It has authority because it is a summary of God's Word. When members make profession of faith they pledge to maintain this doctrine and to reject what conflicts with it. It is indeed possible to base the discipline of a member on what we confess, but then we must be prepared to give the Biblical foundation for this confession.

The consistory now becomes involved in the admonishing of the sinner. If after several admonitions it is clear that the sinner does not want to repent, he shall be barred from the Lord's Supper. This is what is called "silent censure." The congregation as a whole does not know about it. This silent censure means that the communicant member is not allowed to exercise his rights as a member, i.e. not partake of the sacraments or be involved in the process of election. This withholding is the decision of the whole consistory and not of a particular elder. It is the duty of the consistory to visit a member who is being withheld before each Lord's Supper celebration, to call the member to repentance and if no repentance is forthcoming to inform the member that he is not allowed to partake of the Lord's Supper.

The Reformed Churches also know of a one time abstention which is not disciplinary in character. If, for example, just prior to the Lord's Supper serious allegations are voiced concerning a member and the consistory has no time to deal with the matter, the person involved can be withheld from the Lord's Supper. It can also be that a member has sinned and just before the Lord's Supper repents of the sin. The consistory can also deem it proper, with a view to the congregation, to withhold the member from the Supper of the Lord. This one time abstention is indeed only for one time, and has to either be dropped or lead to proper discipline.

6.3. First Public Announcement

The first public announcement is made after repeated admonitions by the elders have not led to repentance. The member involved must be notified of this. This first public announcement only mentions the sin, not the name of the sinner, and asks the congregation to pray. With this announcement the consistory involves the congregation in requesting its prayers. In the process of discipline the congregation and the consistory are both involved. Each has his own task and place, but at the same time need each other.

6.4. Second Public Announcement

If continued admonitions do not result in repentance the consistory has to move on to the next step, the second public announcement. This announcement goes further than the first. In addition to the sin also the name and address of the person involved are mentioned. This is done so that the members of the congregation now can visit the sinner and call him to repentance. This second announcement can only be made after the consistory has received the concurring advice of classis. The member involved must be notified that classis will be involved. This stipulation is an added safeguard that the discipline is indeed for the right reason and done in the proper manner. If classis gives its concurring advice the second announcement does not have to be made immediately. The consistory can use this concurring advice to increase the pressure on the sinner to repent. If no changes are apparent the second announcement should be made. It is wise to notify the immediate family belonging to the congregation prior to the announcement.

When a case is presented to classis for advice, some personal information about the member involved must be disclosed, such as age, communicant or non-communicant, married or not, but no names must be revealed. Rather, the delegates to classis must be able to prove to classis that the sin is worthy of discipline, that the person obstinately refuses to heed the admonitions and that the consistory has repeatedly admonished the person. The delegates should have a prepared outline of the process of discipline in this case, a list of dates of visits and decisions.

Before a discipline case comes to classis the sinner involved has the right to appeal to classis if the member involved feels that he has been wronged. After several admonitions the consistory could make him aware of this possibility and must be prepared to help the person in presenting the case so that it is indeed fairly represented. The appellant must supply the consistory with a copy of the appeal so that the consistory as a whole can also prepare for classis.

When a sinner indicates that he appeals to classis the process of discipline does not proceed, which means that the admonitions continue but the next step is delayed. The sinner involved must then indeed appeal to classis. If classis judges that the discipline is correct the sinner has the right to appeal to the next major assembly. Again the process of discipline will be delayed by this. After regional synod has judged the matter the consistory need not wait with proceeding with discipline. Much depends on the attitude and behaviour of the sinner, as well as the nature of the sin involved.

6.5. Third Public announcement

The third public announcement is again made after repeated admonitions. At this time not only the sin, the name and address are mentioned, but also the date of excommunication. The congregation is again called to pray for and address the sinner in the hope of repentance.

6.6. Excommunication

Excommunication is the final remedy given to the church to bring a sinner to repentance. As the form shows, excommunication is a very serious matter, for in the name of Christ the church closes the kingdom of heaven (see Heidelberg Catechism, L.D. 31). The seriousness of this matter must also be made clear to the sinner.

Once a sinner has been excommunicated, he is no longer part of the communion of saints. This will have to be felt by the one who has been excommunicated in the hope that repentance may come about as yet. This does not mean that we have to treat the one who is excommunicated as an enemy, but deal with him in such a manner that it can be felt by the one involved that something is broken. In this regard we should avoid two extremes the one is that we do as if the person does not exist, the other is that we do as if nothing is the matter. Because this is not an easy matter the elders may have to talk about and give direction about this on home visits to family and friends of the one who has been excommunicated.

6.7. Repentance

The aim of all discipline is repentance. In fact it is not the sin which is disciplined, but the unwillingness to repent. This leads to the question, what is repentance? The word used in the Bible means to turn around and to return to the Lord and His Word. It is to admit that what has been done or said was wrong, and to amend your life. Repentance is a wonderful event in the lives of all God's children. We should not be ashamed of repentance. When the Lord Jesus says that there is joy in heaven with God and His holy angels when a sinner repents then certainly there should be joy in the congregation when this happens.

The Church Order cautions the consistory to make sure that the repentance is genuine. The sad result of a broken world means that words can be fake. It can be easy to say "I am sorry." Not only must the sinner say that he repents, it also has to show. Since on account of the refusal to repent the trust is broken, this trust can be restored in the deeds which show the genuineness of the words. The consistory has to be careful not to make repentance too difficult in asking too much. This can happen when we bring in more issues than the original sin. At the same time the consistory should not compromise the demand of God's Word either. Repentance has to be complete. If it isn't the process of discipline may slow down, but should not be terminated. There has to be a repentance from the sin that was committed.

In certain situations the repentance of the person is announced to the congregation. This is done to let the congregation know that the relationship with the Lord is restored. For restoration with the Lord, also means the relationship with the members of the congregation is restored. The announcement of repentance builds the communion of saints. No one is allowed to hold this sin against the person any longer.

When should the repentance be announced to the congregation? The consistory has to judge whether it will serve the benefit of the congregation. If the process of discipline has reached the second announcement or past it, the name will be known to the congregation and it is clear that mentioning the

repentance, including the name of the one involved will benefit the congregation. If the sin is of a private nature and the discipline has not reached the second announcement, then there is little benefit in letting the congregation know. If the sin is of a public nature and the discipline has not reached the second public announcement, the consistory must determine whether the repentance and the name of the one involved should be mentioned. Mentioning the repentance but not the name does not really benefit the congregation and could promote gossip and slander rather than stop it. Besides mentioning the repentance and the person involved the announcement could also contain the following elements: instruction concerning the importance of repentance, the call to fight against sin and temptations, the warning not to sin against the ninth commandment, and the call to accept the person involved.

The confession of sin also be done in a public worship service. We should not too quickly dismiss this possibility. Sin is a powerful force and all members have to struggle with it in their lives. What is more wonderful than to hear from someone that the grace of the Lord is more powerful than sin. To make this confession in public will help the acceptance of the person within the communion of saints. Such a public confession should focus of the power of God's grace in the life of this brother or sister, so that the congregation can give thanks to God for His mercy.

6.8. Readmission

Excommunication is not the last step. There is always the hope and prayer for repentance and thus for readmission. This has to be done properly and therefore the church has adopted a Form for this purpose.

7. Non-communicant members and Discipline

The Church Order distinguishes between communicant and non-communicant members when it comes to discipline. We also have two forms for excommunication. This is a recent development. In 1983 General Synod Cloverdale adopted this distinction in the Church Order and these forms. In the history of the Reformed churches the matter of discipline of non-communicant members has been much discussed. There were those who maintained that because children belong to God's covenant and congregation as well as adults, the discipline applies to them as well. They maintained that since the Lord calls them to follow Him they must be disciplined if they refuse to obey the Lord. There were others who maintained that because non-communicant members have not made a promise you cannot discipline them. You can take note of the fact that they have withdrawn, but you cannot discipline them in the way the church disciplines communicant members. This discussion has come to a conclusion in the decisions of Cloverdale 1983. The churches have agreed to treat non-communicant members as members who by baptism are called to a life of faith and obedience and thus ought to be disciplined when they refuse to repent. At the same time the churches realize that there is a difference when compared to communicant members and this has been kept in mind as well.

Already in the 1930ies the churches in The Netherlands dealt with this matter. We can learn a lot from the Reports and Guidelines drawn up by the General Synod of Sneek 1940, and amended by Synod Utrecht 1943. The following is gleaned from these Guidelines.

When we speak about non-communicant members we must distinguish between children and teen-agers who have not yet made profession of faith on the one hand and adults who are disobedient to the call of the covenant and have not made profession of faith on the other hand.

With regard to the children and teenagers the consistories must see to it that by the preaching and home visits the parents are urged and helped to bring up their children in the fear of the Lord, according to the vow given at baptism. The consistory shall also see to it that by means of sound and applicable catechism instruction, the heirs of God's kingdom and of His covenant are taught the principles of a godly life and thus are led to a conscious acceptance of their baptism. If children before adulthood reveal an unchristian lifestyle the consistories shall, as much as

possible with the help of the parents, oppose the violation of God's covenant by admonitions in order to bring about a commitment to new obedience.

With regard to adult non-communicant members the consistories shall give relentless pastoral care to those members who in their lives show that they have no desire to know the ways of the Lord. The Synod mentioned the following sins in this regard: ungodly words and/or deeds, open rejection of the doctrine of the church and/or offensive behaviour and willfully neglecting the public worship services and the catechism instruction. In such situations the help of the parents must also be sought. The oral admonitions by the office bearers must take place several times per year. When there is no response to oral admonitions several written admonitions shall be given. If this does not help then the consistory shall proceed with public announcements.

In cases of exceptional offensive ungodliness the consistory may terminate the membership of a non-communicant member at the age of twenty one. As a rule the consistory shall not proceed to the final disciplinary steps before the non-communicant member who stubbornly turns away reaches the age of twenty five. When a non-communicant member gives oral or written notice of withdrawal from the church the consistory shall seriously try to dissuade him from this additional sin of disobedience at least once. If the non-communicant member persists in his decision further discipline may not be exercised and the consistory will confine itself to the sorrowful announcement in the public gathering of the congregation that the person involved has withdrawn from the church of which he was a member by baptism. Under no circumstance is the consistory allowed to encourage withdrawal from the church. The evangelization work by the church must also specifically be directed towards former non-communicant members.

Those who continue to be negligent with regard to publicly professing their faith and proclaiming the death of Christ and yet partake in church life and whose lifestyle for the rest gives no offense shall be continually be admonished by the consistory in an upbuilding manner. If these urgent admonitions do not show results and those negligent continue in their actual refusal to love the Lord, to accept for themselves the promises of the covenant and to live, by grace, in new obedience according to the demands of the covenant, then the consistory shall proceed to a public announcement. This disobedience to the clear commands of the King of the church is too serious to only be dealt with by admonitions which are kept confidential. The consistory may not yet proceed to the extreme remedy in regard to the negligent unless it is clear that not extreme shyness, lack of insight or conscientious scruples, but definite unbelief is the cause of not coming to the public acceptance of Holy Baptism, and to the celebration of the Holy Supper.

We conclude:

- non-communicant members are also members of the congregation and thus are under our supervision;
- by their baptism they have been set apart by the Lord and thus are called to serve Him;
- discipline must be exercised when it becomes clear that they by word and/or deed reject the promises and demands of the covenant;
- this discipline proceeds slower than in the case of a communicant member because the person involved has not made a public commitment.
- as much as possible this discipline should involve the parents.

8. The discipline visit

The discipline visit is usually not an easy visit. It is important to realize that we come because we are sent by the LORD. If we do not warn the sin comes on our heads (see Ezekiel 3). It is equally important to keep in mind that the LORD has no delight in the death of sinners, but in that they repent and be saved. What applies to all visits, certainly applies to the discipline visit: we need the help and guidance of the Lord.

8.1. The character of this visit

Discipline visits have been made in many different situations and circumstances. They have been made in homes, in coffee shops, in an atmosphere of willingness to listen or in a hostile atmosphere. In that sense each situation is unique. No matter the situation or the circumstance the visit is meant to bring about repentance through brotherly admonitions. This is therefore not a visit with a social character, with time for small talk. For this reason the overseers should come as quickly as possible to the matter, and not stay a long time after the visit has been conducted. Socializing after such a visit can blur the focus and character of such a visit. We must stay focussed. This has to be kept in mind as well during the visit. Avoid side issues, detours and road blocks, remind yourself of the character and purpose during the discussion. At the same time the elders must keep in mind that they are instructed to make this visit. The instruction comes from the Lord, through the consistory. It is important that the consistory give the brothers clear instructions and that the elders make clear that what they say is the judgement of the consistory.

8.2 Arranging the visit

In arranging the visit we must be open and direct. The person involved should know who is coming and why. If it is impossible to arrange a visit because the person cannot be reached, the elders can try to go unannounced. If the reason for not being available is unwillingness it may be necessary to mail a letter. If upon arranging a visit, the person involved requests that a witness be present, then this request should be granted, provided the other person does not interfere with the discipline.

8.3. Conducting the visit

Elders must be aware that they come in the Name of the LORD. This can become clear in directing the person to the Word of God in order to point out the sin, the need for discipline and the urgency of repentance. Ahead of time the elders should discuss how to approach the visit. It is true that the discussion can take unexpected turns, but the main goal should be clear in the minds of those who visit. They should also discuss whether to open and close with prayer and Bible reading. To open with prayer and Bible reading is good, but not always necessary. To end with prayer is important. With regard to this prayer it must be made clear to the person involved what the contents of the prayer will be. We should not bring up matters in prayer that have not been addressed in the visit. Be careful not to use the prayer as a way to attack the person, or to get even. If the person refuses to pray or if prayer is impossible due to circumstances it is important that the elders pray together after the visit.

During the visit the elders must make clear to the sinner what the sin is. If there is ignorance then further instruction is necessary. Such instruction can take time. The elders have to judge whether the willingness is genuine or a tactic to stall the process of discipline. If there is unwillingness to repent the demand of the Word of God must be repeated. As overseers we must make sure that what we say is clear. Ask the sinner whether he/she understands what you say. We cannot make a person agree, but we must do our best to make it as clear as possible. If the person involved understands what the elders say then our task has been fulfilled.

Keep the purpose in mind during the visit. It is easy to get on side roads. This can be done on purpose, or without realizing it. Also keep in mind that you are dealing with this sinner. The person involved can point to other situations or things in our lives. That does not take away from the point of calling to repentance. After all the point is not perfection, but willingness to repent. Do not be too easily offended either. It is important to stay calm. In a way it is better to deal with someone who becomes emotional, than one who remains totally indifferent. If a discussion becomes emotional things can be said that are not correct. Do not jump on every thing, but stick to the main issue.

8.4. Reporting the visit

The visit must be reported on at the consistory meeting. At least two elders who were participated in the visit must be present in order to do this. In the Minutes the date of the visit must be recorded as well as the conclusion of the elders and the decision of the consistory how to proceed. The reporting is

confidential. It would be wrong if information about the visit is known in the congregation because of a leak in the consistory. The member involved is allowed to speak about the discipline, but not the consistory members. This can lead to awkward situations, especially when what is said is not true. Consistory members may feel the need to defend the Consistory. Confidentiality is more important and should determine what we say or not say.

In reporting it can be helpful to formulate the summary of the visit with the person involved, especially when it involves a difference of opinion. The member involved is not at the meeting to defend himself, thus we have to be very careful that we give a proper report.

9. Withdrawal of Church Membership

It can happen that during the process of discipline a members indicates that he wants to withdraw as member of the church. The consistory can only deal with such a request when it is made before at least two elders or is submitted in written form to the consistory. The elders shall do their utmost to persuade the member involved that withdrawing is not pleasing in the eyes of the Lord. As we confess in Article 28 of the Belgic Confession, it is contrary to the ordinance of God. It is self-willed service and thus sin against the second commandment. At no point should elders encourage withdrawal. If the person persists the consistory has no other option but to deal with this request. This request prevents the elders from further using the keys of the kingdom of heaven. It shortchanges the process of discipline and is completely contrary to its purpose.

How are the elders to deal with this request? It is within the lines of Reformed church polity to maintain that no one can of his own volition terminate his membership in the church of Christ. Christ has given the authority over the congregation into the hands of the elders. Just like the decision to be part of the congregation is not within the power of the individual, but is a decision of the elders, so also termination of membership is a decision of the elders. To be sure, the decision of the elders for admission or withdrawal is based on the request or stated intent of the person involved. No one can be admitted to the church against his will, and no one can remain a member against his will. But the decision that a person has lost all the right connected to members is made by the consistory. The fact that the final decision lies within the power of the elders, gives the elders the opportunity to involve the congregation. In acquiescing to a withdrawal, the elders are to involve the congregation. Rather than placing the congregation for an accomplished fact, the consistory can encourage the congregation to call the member to repentance. Here are two announcements that could be used.

1st Announcement

Brothers and sisters,

On _____ the Consistory received a notice of withdrawal from brother (sister) _____ which we now make known to you. This request is contrary to the ordinance of God. The Consistory has urgently appealed to the brother (sister) to repent of this sin. Despite these appeals he (she) still maintains his (her) decision to withdraw. We hereby call upon you, the congregation, to speak with this brother (sister) and to appeal to him (her) to reconsider his (her) decision. The Consistory encourages you to admonish this brother (sister) in a brotherly manner, that he (she) may realize the importance of maintaining his (her) place in the communion of the saints. May the Lord bless our combined effort and work in his (her) heart that our brother (sister) may realize his (her) sin and repent.

If our brother (sister) does not indicate a change of heart on this matter, the final announcement of withdrawal will be made in _____ weeks.

2nd Announcement

Brothers and sisters,

The Consistory has previously made known to you that brother (sister) _____ no longer wants to be part of the communion of the church of the Lord. After final appeals by you and the Consistory to repent of this sin, brother (sister) _____ has not indicated a change of heart in this matter. The Consistory now with sadness makes known that brother (sister) _____, contrary to the ordinance of God, has withdrawn from the communion of the church of the Lord. The Consistory further declares that by this act of withdrawal all his (her) entitlements to the privileges and promises bound up with church membership, have ended.

10. Discipline over Office-bearers

The Church Order also deals with discipline of Office-bearers. See the Art. 71 and 72. In the suspension and deposition of office-bearers the neighbouring church and the federation of churches (Classis and Deputies of Regional Synod) are involved. This is done to protect the congregations against office-bearers who misuse their office. It is also done to defend the honour of Christ's name. Office bearers must be above reproach. The involvement of other churches is needed to protect the office-bearers lest they for the wrong reasons would be suspended by the council.

Art. 73 speaks of mutual Christian censure exercised by the minister, elders and deacons. This censure is with regard to the execution of their office. If there is a personal matter between office-bearers they must follow the rule of Matthew 18. Art. 73 deals with a situation in which the office-bearer needs to be admonished with regard to the execution of his office so that we can work together fruitfully for the glory of the Head of the Church and the well-being of the congregation. Four times per year Art. 73 C.O. is placed on the Agenda, usually the last Council meeting before the Lord's Supper. The use of Art. 73 is not restricted to this. Any office-bearer can at any time request that this be placed on the Agenda.

11. Discipline and Attestations

What happen when a member who is under discipline moves away? As a rule the person will receive an attestation which will inform the church he or she is going to of the sin and the process of discipline. The information may not be more than the member involved has been told. If the person moves without asking for an attestation the elders will urge the person to ask for one. If that gives no solution the consistory in that area will be notified by letter that one of our members is residing there and it will be asked to take up contact if possible. If that does not have any result, the congregation will be informed that this person is no longer a member of the congregation. If the person moves to an area where there is no church, attempts will be made to contact the person, if this is impossible or there is no answer then the congregation will be informed that the person involved is no longer a member of the congregation.

What happens when a person who is under discipline comes to another consistory? (see also 2 - 4) The new consistory must honour the attestations issued by a sister church. If someone comes who is under discipline we must honour this. At the same time, because the person submits to the oversight of the new consistory, it has the right to investigate the matter. If it agrees with the discipline, the new consistory will continue with the discipline where the previous consistory left off. If repentance comes about, it would be helpful to let the previous consistory know.

12. Evaluation

1. What does it mean that the church is holy and how is this related to church discipline? How can we bring this across to the congregation?
2. What is the connection with the Lord's Supper? How does this function in this congregation? How do we as office-bearers bring out this connection?
3. How does discipline function as a key of God's kingdom? What is the connection between church discipline and preaching in this regard?
4. What is the importance of self discipline? How can we help the members (families) of the congregation in self discipline? See also the marks of the Christian in Art. 29 of the Belgic Confession.
5. Mutual discipline is connected to the rule given by the Lord in Matthew 18:15-17. How does this rule function? How often do matters come to the consistory in the way of Matthew 18? What can we do to improve this?
6. Discipline has as goal repentance. What is true repentance? What is forgiveness? Do we confess our sins? How can we as office bearers help the members in this?
7. Is there a danger that we rank sins regarding piety of conduct "higher" than sins against the purity of doctrine? How much do we as office bearers warn against false doctrine? To turn it around, what about the accusation which can be heard at times, that our churches are strict when it comes to doctrine, but easy going when it comes to "piety of conduct"?
8. With regard to the piety of conduct, is one sin greater than another? Are we consistent in dealing with sin?
9. How many communicant members are under discipline? How often are these members contacted? How is the congregation involved?
10. How many non-communicant members are under discipline? How often are they contacted? Are the parents involved in the discipline? How is the congregation involved?
11. In Art. 27 of the CO we agree that in order to ward off false doctrines and errors, the office-bearers "shall use the means of instruction, of refutation, of warning, and of admonition, as well in the ministry of the Word as in Christian teaching and family visiting." How does this function? Are there dominant sins against which the consistory must particularly take action?
12. Does Art. 73 function as it should?
13. Does the church have a task with regard to those who in the past have withdrawn themselves or have been excommunicated?
14. Are there things in connection with this chapter which should have our attention? How will we deal with them?

13. Literature

J.Kamphuis, Concerning the Holiness of the Congregation in Diakonia, Vol. II, no. 3, 4 Vol.III no 1, 2.
 A.N.Hendriks, A Few Remarks about Church Discipline, in Diakonia Vol. II, 2
 A.N.Hendriks, The Elder and the Administration of Discipline in Diakonia Vol.IV, no.1
 J.J.Arnold, The Living Church , chapter 4 "Some Notes on Mutual Discipline".
 R.D. Anderson, "Reformed Church Polity Concerning Withdrawal of Church Membership" see <http://www.spindleworks.com>

See also Commentaries on Church Order.

