

The Church Order on Discipline (#5) (BG 2023)
“Sufficient Evidence of Repentance”

- * Review: Wk #1: *subjects* of discipline. Wk #2: *objects*. Wk #3: the *act*, acc to Mt 18; Wk #4: from elders'
- ** Tonight: Reconciling a repentant sinner requires the elders to judge the genuineness of repentance.

1. We are tempted to two extremes in judging repentance of sin:

The extreme of being naïve, accepting repentance which is not sincere

Of course, it is understandable that we would incline this direction...

Yet for all involved, this is a great danger...

The extreme of “undue severity” where “discipline slides into butchery” (Calvin’s expressions)

There is a history of undue severity, which we may be inclined to as well...

Paul warns about this in II Corinthians 2:7

2. The CO (75) warns against naivete: There must be “sufficient evidence of repentance”

First, define repentance from Scripture and the confessions

Second, some considerations (in light of Scripture) for judging repentance of serious sins

(see handout)

The Church Order on Discipline

“Sufficient Evidence of Repentance”

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Church Order Art. 78: “whenever anyone... desires to be reconciled... in the way of **repentance**...”

Art 75: “reconciliation...shall take place (upon sufficient evidence of **repentance**)...” Three elements:

***Repentance** is required: no restoration to communion and reconciliation without *repentance*.

***Evidence** of repentance is required: repentance is *seen*, not merely spoken.

***Sufficient** evidence is required: elders must judge whether the evidence is *enough*.

Scripture: Prov 13:28; Psalm 32, 51; II Cor 7:10, **11**. Heid Cat: LD 30:81; 31:84,85; 32:87; 33 (all)

Notes on II Cor 10:11: **A.** “wrought in you” means that godly sorrow *worked* these 7 elements; *lack* of the following is evidence of false sorrow. → 1) “carefulness” is haste, diligence, earnestness; its opposite is sloth, nonchalance; 2) “clearing of self” is not self-justification, blame shifting, but full acceptance of guilt; 3) “indignation” = painful displeasure, pressing hard, as Jesus in Mk 10:14; 4) “fear” = fear of God, of self, of the danger of not doing all, properly; 5) “vehement desire” is intense longing, as a baby longs for mother’s milk (II Pet 2:2); 6) “zeal” is fiery passion; it drives to one’s limits, as Paul knew no limits in persecuting the church (Phil 3:6); 7) “revenge” could mean the ‘justice’ of excommunication, but likely the ‘just’ life of living godly. **B.** The word “what” in “what carefulness...” etc., means: “how much!” or “how great!” Paul exclaims at the *abundance*, not paltriness of these seven fruits; repentance’s fruit borders on *excess* rather than little; *maximum*, not minimum. True repentance ought not be hard to judge, but be plain to all:

In light of the above, here are considerations for judging repentance from all sin, especially gross sin:

- 1 **A God-directed sorrow.** God-oriented. Not self-pity. “Godly sorrow” = “sorrow that looks at God.”
- 2 **An admission of personal guilt.** It does not excuse, explain, minimize, or blame others. David did not blame Bathsheba for bathing in his sight, or... Rather, “I have sinned against thy grace...”
- 3 **A voluntary admission of all wrong.** A sign of *impenitence* is admitting only what one cannot deny. A common dynamic: “Is there more? Not that I can think of.” Only to find more later. And then an admission of this “more,” “but no more than this.” The cycle continues. *Godly sorrow* shines God’s light on *everything*.
- 4 **A desire to reconstruct one’s entire life.** Sinners do not need superficial change. Who friends are; where he goes after work; willingness even to change occupations to avoid the sins; committing to long-term plan for a “new and godly life.” May include long-term *accountability*.
- 5 **A willingness to endure great pain.** True conversion is *dying* to self, mortifying the old. It is not unlike a willingness to have a root canal without anesthesia. True conversion is that painful. Do not be surprised at pain.
- 6 **A proper attitude toward the consistory.** 1) Complete and unquestioned *acceptance* of all the consistory’s *requirements*. In details—requirements of counseling, release of info forms from counselor, supervision of devices, accountability of every hour of day & night; generally—patience with the consistory’s timeline to verify repentance, acknowledging that he gave many reasons to be mistrusted. 2) ‘Allows’ consistories to make mistakes, for they will. Does not take the consistory’s imperfections to justify non-compliance or belligerence.
- 7 **A prompt execution of what the consistory asks.** Does not wait till right before next meeting (“carefulness”)
- 8 **A willingness to right wrongs,** remedy damages, make amends. Restore what was taken... pay for counseling for victims... publicly retract lies to correct the false narrative he/she created.
- 9 **A willingness to initiate remedies** & other acts of repentance. A bad sign when sinners do only what’s required of him. *He* must think of what repentance looks like in his life. Godly sorrow is self-motivating: these things were “wrought *in*” them, not imposed upon them.
- 10 **A proper attitude towards those whom he damaged** (e.g., of humility, patience, grace, etc.) 1) I am willing to *learn* what *damage* my sin did to others, and grow in it... 2) I will not make demands on those whom I damaged; for example, “you must forgive me...” 3) I will recognize that there may be time between being *forgiven*, being *trusted*, and being *reconciled*.