

BC Article 31 -Election, Equality, Esteem of Church Leaders

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: Christ owns the church. He purchased her with his own blood, and he, and only he, determines how she is to be run. He has all authority over her. Today you will hear from God how he wants his church run!

Our headings are:

Election of Leaders

Equality of Leaders

Esteeming敬重 of Leaders

Our goals are: That you **learn how the church is to be run**, and **that you consistently fulfill your part in supporting the leaders of the church so that it run for the glory of Christ and for the good of its members**.

We believe that the ministers of God's Word, the elders, and the deacons ought to be **chosen to their respective offices by a lawful election** by the Church, with calling upon the name of the Lord, and in that order which the Word of God teaches. Therefore everyone must take heed **not to intrude himself by improper means**, but is bound to wait **till it shall please God to call him**; that he may have testimony of his calling, and be certain and assured that it is of the Lord.我们相信牧师、长老与执事应当求告主的名，按着圣经的吩咐，由教会合法的选举来选出担任各职。因此，各人必须注意，不可以用不正的方法私自侵入教会圣职，但须忍耐等候神的呼召；以致他有蒙召的见证，并确知他的服事是出于主。

Election of Leaders

1. There were some sinful ways of getting leaders in the church.

a. In the past, Roman Catholics appointed church positions to the sons of those who paid the most to the Church. These young men would then use their many offices to gain more wealth for themselves. Sometimes **RC Bishops would appoint priests to parishes教区 in return for money** – with no care for the real needs of the people there. We call this simony. “Simony” from Simon in Acts 8:9-25, who tried to buy a position in the church. **There was no input from the local congregation**. Many of abuse problems were covered up because of the hierarchy等级制度. RC’s and Pentecostal type churches still appoint leaders today based on personal choices of more powerful leaders and little or no input from the local congregation. Ministers were hired and fired at the whims反复无常 of the leaders.

b. Old Anabaptist重洗派 (re-baptizers) claimed that they were directly called by God (by dreams or direct revelation) to be leaders in the church and others were required to honor them. **John of Leyden**, for instance, claimed he was told by the Holy Spirit to take over a city and then he put to death those who did not agree with him. He also entered into anyone’s house and stores and helped himself to what he wanted. **Jim Jones who killed 918 in Guyana 35 years ago. David Koresh a self-appointed Divine ruler in the cult in Texas** demanded total obedience. In these types of church you often find divisions based on personality and personal claims.

2. But God chooses leaders through an inward call and an outward call. The inward call is when God puts a deep desire in a man heart to serve him as a leader. (1Tim 3:1...if a man desires...) The outward call (our focus today) is when the church as a whole, not one single individual, recognizes that he is called by God to be a leader. Eg:

Acts 6:3 "Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business;

Nominations提名 of elders or deacons **may come from the congregation**, but the **appointment comes from the rulers of the church**. Don’t be confused into thinking that the church in Belgic 31 means every single person in the congregation participates in the election. Less than 20% Canadians voted for the Liberals in the last election and we have a Liberal government. (Some were too young to vote, some were not permitted to vote, many did not vote at all, others voted for other parties.) So “church” may refer to a portion of the church or the leaders of the church. Our elders were chosen by the other elders of the church. **No elder is elected by one man**.

3. What are the guidelines for the churches in electing officers to serve?

a. You do not elect based on who would “side with you” in your disputes争议.

b. You do not elect people simply because they are your friends or your relatives. Remember what happened to the Israelites who followed Absalom because of his good looks and false promises!

c. You do elect with this thought: Who will best represent the interest of Christ? Remember Eli and the troubles caused by bad family members who were appointed to serve in the priesthood!

d. You do elect with prayer. In Acts 1:26, you also see the 120 choosing, with prayer, the Apostle to replace Judas

Iscariot. Prayer is mandatory in electing to office. **You have to submit to this person, so you'd better pray.**

Acts 1: 24 And they prayed and said, "You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen 25 "to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place." 26 And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

e. You do your homework before you elect. You have to know the men and know that they are qualified according to Paul's instruction to Timothy and Titus. Ask questions. See Acts 6:3 above.

4. What guidelines does God give to those who desire to be elders?

a. You must not treat election to office as a popularity 人气 contest. No person is to "run" for office as politicians do. Look for qualification...not pontification 教皇...

b. You are not to elect or appoint yourself or try to force yourself into offices. You may not supererogate that authority.

Hebrews 5:4 - And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was.

Even the Apostle Paul and Barnabas, before they went on their first missionary journey, were chosen by the elders and had prayers offered for them. Acts 13:3...Acts 14:23.

c. You must feel the internal call, which is a prompting to serve that the Holy Spirit puts in your heart. You must be confident of this call.

d. You must wait for an external call – that comes from the church through the elders. This external call from the church confirms the inner call in the heart.

e. You must not seek prestige 威望 and power from these offices. Seek Christ's honor only.

1Peter 5:2 Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, **not for dishonest gain** but eagerly;

Equality of Leaders

As for the ministers of God's Word, **they have equally the same power and authority** wherever they are, as **they are all ministers of Christ**, the only universal Bishop and the only Head of the Church.

至于传神话语的牧师，不拘他们在哪里，他们都是教会唯一元首基督的使者，因为他们都有同等的权威。

1. Ministers and elders do not control other ministers and elders. Jesus made it clear to his disciples that **hierarchy was not his system of government.**

Question: Why then was there a High Priest? The reason the Jews had a High Priest was because the High Priest represented Jesus (he was not a picture of earthly leaders), and after Jesus came, there was no need for a human High Priest any more. Since Christ has all authority, all other authority is derivative 衍生物. He demands that all church leaders then hold all church leaders accountable. It is mutual censorship 互相监督.

Matthew 28:18 - And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "**All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.**"

2. Because elders and ministers are equal in authority

a. This helps to eliminate dictatorships 独裁 and helps to guard the church from heresy 异端.

b. This helps to prevent sins like pedophilia of Roman Catholic priests. When power was in one man's hand, like a bishop, he simply moved a perverted priest around from one place to another to cover for sins. This is less likely to happen with a plurality of elders.

c. This helps to protect the minister from unjust treatment. In hierarchical churches **sometimes a good man who does not tow the party line is removed from office.** (In Reformed Churches you have the possibility of appeal to leaders of neighboring church leaders.) What good could come out of a situation where power is in the hands of one man? Ego 自我 kills.

James 3:16 - For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.

d. One elder or the minister cannot strong-arm the other leaders. Elders learn to unite and remove an elder or minister from office when he does not properly represent the cause of Christ.

3. Because elders and ministers are equals, don't be afraid to call your elders to pray with you. Your pastor is not

greater than elders. Your pastor's prayers are not more effective than an elder's prayer. A pastor might have different gifts but he is not superior – neither spiritually nor authoritatively. The Lord uses any shepherd to raise his flock. This is why Reformed elders are active in visiting members of the congregation regularly and see that they you are living well. **Elder are not accountants...or businessmen.** It is sinful and shameful to see them that way. They

are shepherds for Christ.

Esteeming of Leaders

Moreover, in order that this holy ordinance of God may not be violated or slighted, we say that every one ought to esteem the ministers of God's Word and the elders of the Church very highly for their work's sake, and be at peace with them without murmuring, strife, or contention, as much as possible. 此圣职不可侵犯或轻视，所以我们说每个人都当尊重传神话语的牧师，并教会中的长老，为他们工作的缘故高看他们，尽量与他们和平相处，不可有口角、分争。

1. Seeing the position of elders...and seeing the benefits you receive from them, you must have a proper inward respect of church leaders. Today pastors are viewed with little respect – just above politicians and telemarketers. But this was not what God intended.

Hebrews 13:7 Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.

They have been given the task of administering the sacraments, teaching the whole counsel of God, disciplining the delinquents 青少年, ensuring that holiness be maintained, reaching the lost for Christ, and helping the poor. The Apostle Paul also echoed (said) the same sentiment (idea).

1Thessalonians 5:12 - Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. 13 Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other.

To not honor leaders of the church in your heart is to violate God's principles for the proper functioning of the church. To not honor the elders will cause you to disregard God's instruction that come through them.

2. You must respect church leaders outwardly as well. And remember: Elders and ministers are not perfect. We have our maggots and worms. And in spite of this, God calls you to respect us. Remember as well the high standards God imposed on bringing charges against an elder...

Hebrews 13:17 Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

1Timothy 5:17 - The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.

As part of your honoring of the minister, it is your duty to provide well for your preacher. But sometimes honoring him might mean you have to remove him from office –like if he were losing his mind, or if he were not advancing the cause of Christ.

3. You must live peacefully with elders. Peace means no murmuring 怨言, contention, or strife. Be patient. Remember the Israelites who murmured against Moses. Don't wear out your elders by excessive demands. Your elders are mere humans with a hard job and are still vessels of clay...weak...and struggle with their own sins and their own families.

Conclusion:

The Presbyterian system that God has put in place avoids the pitfalls of the Roman Catholic hierarchy and the Anabaptists congregationalism. The Presbyterian system, as we have in our Reformed churches, is an excellent “check and balance” system for sin and it a most valuable way to conduct day to day business. It prevents dictatorship and it avoids anarchy 无政府主义. Yes, the Presbyterian system could be abused, but it is harder to abuse. With good governance you can focus on glorifying Jesus Christ rather than on fighting.

Brothers and Sisters:

1. You also have responsibilities when it comes to leaders in the churches. What are some of those duties?

a. The church must select elders wisely – rightly. Don't select someone because they are nice, they are your friends, or they have to get their turn. Know what their qualifications ought to be.

b. Ask God for wisdom to choose well.

c. Then respect the pastor, elders and deacons God has placed over you - inwardly and outwardly.

d. Pray for your leaders know that the Devil wants to destroy the shepherds to destroy the sheep.

e. Make the elder's job easier by your encouragement.

2. Remember, elders represent Christ to whom you belong. He owns you- body and soul. Love him by obeying his leaders.

Finally, if you are not a Christian, you are on your own. You don't have people to teach you, correct you, or discipline you, which is most sad. But you can have these blessings if you ask God to make you his child. If you do, he will count Christ's death as yours, and his life as yours, and incorporate you into his kingdom.