

BC Article 31 –Old leaders in a modern church

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: **We have established that the church does not need an updated government.** The offices God established 2,000 years ago are perfectly fine, sufficient, and bring many blessings. What we need to know now is how to get these leaders into place and how to respond to them properly. This is important because today many churches look to see **if a person were popular, if he could speak well, if he had good connections, if he ran a successful business, and if he would do what we want** and then use those criteria to elect him to ecclesiastical office. Is God pleased with what he sees? No! Consider what God says.

Our headings are:

Election of Leaders

Equality of Leaders

Esteeming of Leaders

Our goals are: That you will **learn how the church is to be run**, and **that you will 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.

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 offices to gain more wealth for themselves. At other times **bishops would appoint priests to parishes in return for money** – with no care for the 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 abuse problems were covered up because of the **hierarchy**. Pentecostal churches still appoint leaders today based on personal choices of more powerful leaders and little or no input from the local congregation. Ministers are hired and fired at the whims of the leaders.

b. Old Anabaptists (re-baptizers) claimed they were directly called by God (by dreams or direct revelation) to be leaders in the church and others were required to honor them. (Remember **John of Leyden**? He said 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 store and helped himself to what he wanted. **More recently, self-appointed Jim Jones killed 918 in Guyana in the People's Temple cult, and David Koresh, another**

self-appointed Divine ruler in a cult in Texas, demanded total obedience and caused many people to die in that horrible fire in Waco, Texas. No one was allowed to question these leaders!

2. But God chooses leaders in his church today as he always did in the past; no one was ever self-appointed.

Self-appointed leaders like Absalom, Adonijah, and the bad Simon brought only troubles!

3. God chooses leaders through an inward call and an outward call.

The inward call is when God puts a deep desire in a man's heart to serve 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 a man is called by God to be a leader. Look at one example:

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 leaders **may come from the congregation**, but the **appointment comes from the rulers of the church**.

Now don't be confused into thinking that every single person in the congregation participates in the election. **Let me illustrate:** 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.**

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

a. Do not elect based on who would "side with you" in your disputes. The church is not a democracy but a Christocracy!

b. 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. 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. 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 you are electing, 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."

e. Do your homework before you elect. You have to know the men and know they are qualified according to Paul's instruction to Timothy and Titus. Ask questions.

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

a. You must not treat election to office as a popularity contest. No person is to "run" for office as politicians do. Look for qualification...not pontification...Don't try to talk people into voting for you.

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, - a prompting to serve that the Holy Spirit puts in your heart. 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 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.

1. The Bible makes it clear that all elders – those who teach and those who rule – have the same authority.

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. He demands all church leaders then hold all church leaders accountable. It is mutual censorship.

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 and helps to guard the church from heresy.

b. This helps to prevent sins like pedophilia among priests. When power is in one man's hand, like a bishop, he simply moves a perverted priest around from one place to another to cover for sins. This is less likely to happen with a plurality of elders. A recent CNN documentary showed how the Roman Catholic Church moved a child-predator priest from where he committed crimes against children to Central African Republic where he committed worse crimes. Instead of full prosecution, they simply moved him around.

c. This helps to protect the minister from unjust treatment. In hierarchical churches a good man who does not toe the party line may be removed from office. In Reformed Churches you may appeal a local decision to leaders of neighboring churches.

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 equal, 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.

1. Seeing the position of elders and seeing the benefits you receive from them, you must have a proper 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 delinquents, ensuring holiness be maintained, reaching the lost for Christ, and helping the poor. Apostle Paul echoed the same sentiment.

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 your elders**. To not honor your elders is to hinder the kingdom of Christ from coming!

2. You must respect church leaders outwardly as well.

Elders and ministers are not perfect. We have our maggots and worms. But in spite of this, God calls you to respect us. Remember as well the high standards God imposed on bringing charges against an elder! Also:

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 any longer.

3. You must live peacefully with elders.

Living in peace means no murmuring, contention, or strife. It means being 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-vessels of clay-weak- and they struggle with their own sins and their own families.

Conclusion:

The Presbyterian system God 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 is a most valuable way to conduct day to day business. It prevents dictatorship and it avoids anarchy. Yes, the Presbyterian

system could be abused, but it is harder to abuse. **With good governance you can focus on glorifying Jesus rather than on fighting.** This is why proper government is so important.

Brothers and Sisters:

1. The church must select elders wisely and rightly. Don't select someone because he is nice, he is your friend, or thinking he has to "get his turn." Know what the qualifications of leaders ought to be.

2. Ask God for wisdom to choose well.

3. Respect the pastor, elders and deacons God has placed over you - inwardly and outwardly.

4. Pray for your leaders knowing that the Devil wants to destroy the shepherds to destroy the sheep.

5. Encourage your elders so their job will become easier.

6. 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 don't have people to teach you truth, 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 and life as yours, and incorporate you into his kingdom. Above all, you will be able to please God.