

BELGIC CONFESSION - ARTICLE 30

The Government of and Offices in the Church

We believe that this true Church must be governed by the spiritual policy which our Lord has taught us in His Word—namely, that there must be ministers or pastors to preach the Word of God, and to administer the sacraments;¹ also elders and deacons, who, together with the pastors, form the council of the Church; that by these means the true religion may be preserved, and the true doctrine everywhere propagated, likewise transgressors punished and restrained by spiritual means; also that the poor and distressed may be relieved and comforted, according to their necessities. By these means everything will be carried on in the Church with good order and decency, when faithful men are chosen according to the rule prescribed by St. Paul in his epistle to Timothy.²

Article 31

The Ministers, Elders, and Deacons

We believe that the ministers of God's Word, and the elders and deacons, ought to be chosen to their respective offices by a lawful election of the Church, with calling upon the name of the Lord, and in the order which the Word of God teaches. Therefore every one must take heed not to intrude himself by indecent 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.³

As for the ministers of God's Word, they have equally the same power and authority wheresoever they are, as they are all ministers of Christ,⁴ the only universal Bishop and the only Head of the Church. Moreover, so 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.⁵

Article 32

The Order and Discipline of the Church

In the meantime we believe, though it is useful and beneficial, that those who are rulers of the Church institute and establish certain ordinances among themselves for maintaining the body of the Church; yet they ought studiously to take care that they do not depart from those things which Christ, our only Master, has instituted. And therefore, we reject all human inventions, and all laws which man would introduce into the worship of God, which bind and force our consciences in any way.⁶

Therefore we accept only what is proper to maintain harmony and unity, and to keep all men in obedience to God. For this reason excommunication or church discipline, with all it involves, is required according to the Word of God.⁷

Verses for Consideration

1. Ephesians 4:11–12
2. 1 Timothy 3
3. Jeremiah 23:21–22
4. 1 Corinthians 4:1
5. 1 Thessalonians 5:12–13
6. Matthew 15:8–9
7. Matthew 18:17; 1 Corinthians 5:4–5

Questions for Consideration

1. What are the three offices of church government listed in this article? What are the obligations of these collective offices?
2. What are some important considerations when selecting people to these offices?
3. Do church rulers have carte blanche to create whatever church ordinances they want?