

1 Peter 5:1-5a – BC Article 31 – “Shepherds Worthy of Honour”

Introduction: **Because the officers of the church are shepherds under the chief shepherd, we will honour them.**

1) The Fellowship of Elders

- One of the reasons for this article of the Belgic Confession is to distinguish the Reformed church government from the Roman Catholic papacy. Notice how Peter doesn't claim any authority other than that of an elder in the church, and he is a 'fellow elder,' equal in authority. Although the offices of the church have different roles, no office bearer within a given office has more or less authority than another.
- What does give Peter a unique level of insight is that he witnessed Christ's suffering. The suffering that the church is undergoing is imitating Christ's suffering. He suffered so that their sins might be forgiven, and that they might be cleansed, and that is worth suffering for.
- This also recalls a time when, in the middle of Jesus' suffering, Peter denied Christ. Yet, even Peter looks forward to the glory that Jesus' suffering earned for him. This must be the reality for all office bearers, that they are looking forward to glory. They must be aware of their own sin, and know that they are righteous only for Christ's sake.

2) The Temptations of Eldership

- Likely connected with Jesus' speech to Peter in John 21, Peter gives *three temptations* for the office bearer:
 - *Laziness* – there is much work and difficulty associated with eldership, and so elders can be tempted to do the minimum amount of shepherding work. Elders must know that they are serving God in the care of his flock, and must do so zealously.
 - *Greed* – men can use their position of authority to accumulate wealth or favours. In fact, the offices of the church should be characterized by sacrifice, not of receiving gifts.
 - *Lust for Power* – men can also seek office simply to be in control, to get their preferences accomplished over and above those of others. However, the officebearer must be examples of Christ in their office, leading where necessary, and sacrificing their wants and desires where possible for the sake of the flock under their care

3) The Response of the Congregation

- In our text, the 'younger men' likely are singled out because they were the group most likely to rebel against the elders. Today that could be any one of us. Because it is so contrary to our nature, we must all consciously and intentionally submit ourselves to our office bearers.
- Of course, the confession adds "as much as possible," which acknowledges the fact that Scripture may compel us to take our office bearers to task. That said, we must never lose our respect for them for the sake of their work, nor desire that their task be made more difficult by our actions.