

5th The means by which elders are appointed

(for discussion 5-9-2010)

Calling by the Holy Spirit is not a burning bush experience. It is realistic just as the qualifications are realistic. The Spirit uses means and the means are the following three things: 1) examination by the church, 2) consent of the church, and 3) official appointment by covenant.

Examination by the church

This includes elder leadership per the qualifications the Spirit has put into the hands of the church and it includes some kind of testing process. Thus, the pastor should lead in the examining and testing of prospective ruling elders and he may nominate for the office, but the final decision rests with the church family.

Basis: the qualification lists are given to the church; therefore the church family must observe and evaluate prospects for leadership in a way parallel with the observation and evaluation of the pastor. The following inferences apply: a) in post-apostolic times, the ministry of the apostles is carried forth by pastors who have the primary charge of preaching the word and prayer. b) The distinction between preaching and ruling elders from 2 Tim 5.17 means that ruling elders share in pastoral care by the word and prayer *mutatis mutandis*. Thus, without formally preaching or teaching, they are to teach the word by life and conversation; and they are to learn from the pastor, interact with him for mutual learning, help him lead and steer a straight path in the ministry of the word. Evaluation by church and pastor has its primary focus on these things.

The consent of the church

In order to maintain good order, the decision of the church in the appointment of ruling elders (as in the appointment of the pastor) must be decided by vote. Obviously, for decent order, the vote must be restricted to members in good standing. That is, the vote, especially on matters such as office holding and budget must be limited to those who have made the explicit covenant of submission to pastoral care.

Basis: the idea of a vote comes by inference from the example of how the “first deacons” were appointed. **Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. 2 And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. 3 Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. 4 But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” ... 6 These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them (Acts 6.1-6).** This is how the apostles “appointed” them, which suggests the same for their appointment of elders in every church.

Official appointment by covenant

This is covenant making that is analogous to the covenants of baptism and membership.

Basis: the church seeks the blessing of the prospective elder, which is the post-apostolic essence of imparting a spiritual gift by the laying on of hands (which Paul did for Timothy: **6 For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands (2 Tim 1.6).** The blessing sought by the church is for the church’s care and therefore this prayer for blessing involves the commitment (the covenant) in the Lord to the elder to receive his eldership care. On the part of the elder, when he willingly accepts this office by such covenantal prayer, he also makes covenant to carry out the duties of the word and prayer for the well-being of the church. His focus is twofold as ruling elder; it is toward the pastor and toward the people. In one thought, his job is to help the pastor care for the flock that Jesus purchased with His blood.

Note: consideration of the CREC underscores *the biblical norm of plurality* for the well being of the church. We ought to move forward in this direction even if we do not join the CREC.