

Gospel Truth

Biblical Instruction and Encouragement
for the Mission Field Worldwide

MINISTERIAL ORDINATION

Ordaining ministers was a practice of the early morning church and it is scriptural and right to follow the example and precepts set down in the New Testament. Ordination throughout history has been political at times—misused and abused; however, this does not mean the church should forgo the true doctrine and practice of ordination.

What is Ordination?

Ministers, workers of the Lord, must be chosen by the Lord and anointed with divine power and authority. Ordination is the biblical, doctrinal act of publicly recognizing, by the laying on of hands of other ordained ministers, what the Holy Spirit has already chosen and qualified. According to *Thayer's Greek Definitions*, to ordain is “to set, place; to set one over a thing, to appoint one to administer an office, to set down as, constitute, to declare.”

In the ecclesiastical sense, to ordain signifies or declares the appointment and call of a person to the ministry in the church by the imposition or laying on of the hands of other ordained church leaders. It is an official, scripturally sanctioned recognition of a minister’s call and qualifications.

Paul wrote to Titus, “For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee” (Titus 1:5). Titus stayed in Crete to follow up on Paul’s work and

to finish those things which were “left undone.” The ordaining of elders was not a novel concept for the Jews, for elders in the Jewish synagogues were ordained.

Paul told Timothy to “stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands” (2 Tim. 1:6). There are other scriptural examples that demonstrate ordination as the divine appointment of ministers being acknowledged by the church in separating or consecrating ministers to their call by the Holy Spirit.

While not necessarily a formal ordination, consider Acts 13:2-4: “As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost...” It is the Holy Spirit that gifts, calls, qualifies, and sends ministers, but there is clearly an act of consecration and sealing that is an aspect of ordination.

Ordination is more than a piece of paper given by church leadership. There is significance to ordination, just as baptism is more meaningful than a one-time event of being plunged into the water.



Ministers, workers of the Lord, must be chosen by the Lord and anointed with divine power and authority.

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WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES ABOUT...

Word of God

2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21; Matt. 24:35

Relationship of Love

Matt. 22:37-40; John 14:21-23; 1 John 4:7-11

Repentance

Acts 3:19; Acts 17:30; 2 Cor. 7:10

New Birth

John 3:3-7; 2 Cor. 5:17; Rom. 6:1-4;
Eph. 2:1, 5-6

Freedom From Sin

1 John 5:18; Matt. 1:21; John 8:11

Infilling of the Holy Spirit

Acts 19:2; Acts 15:8-9; Acts 1:8

Holiness

Luke 1:73-75; Heb. 12:14; 1 Peter 1:15-16;
Titus 2:11-12; Rom. 6:22

Kingdom of God

Luke 17:20-21; Romans 14:17; John 18:36

The Church

Acts 2:47; Eph. 4:4-6; 1 Cor. 12:12-13; Col 1:18

Unity

John 17:20-23; Gal 3:28; Rev. 18:2-4

Ordinances

Matt. 28:19-20; Matt. 26:26-30;
1 Cor. 11:23-27; John 13:14-17

Divine Healing

Luke 4:18; Isaiah 53:4-5; James 5:13-16

Sanctity of Marriage

Matt. 19:5-6; Luke 16:18; Rom. 7:2-3;
1 Cor. 7:10-11

Outward Appearance

1 Tim. 2:9-10; 1 Cor. 11:14-15; Deut. 22:5

End of Time

2 Peter 3:7-12; John 5:28-29; 2 Cor. 5:10;
Matt 25:31-46

Pacifism

Luke 6:27-29; Luke 18:20

Worship

John 4:23-24; Eph. 5:19; 2 Cor. 3:17

Great Commission

Mark 16:15

ONE ORDER OF MINISTRY

In the Scripture, there is an ordination for elders and an ordination for deacons. When a minister is ordained, he is ordained as an elder. In the early morning church, while there were different gifts and offices and there were local ministers and general ministers laboring in the larger field, there was one order of ministers. The word elder is an umbrella term for bishop, presbyter, overseer, etc., and is sometimes used interchangeably in the scripture. Titus 1:5 uses the word elder (*presbuteros*=presbyters) and then proceeds to give the qualifications using the word bishop (*episkopos*=overseer) in verse seven. It is one and the same office and was only polluted by the apostasy that would come at a later date. On this subject, commentator Adam Clarke stated: "It appears that those who are called elders in this place are the same as those termed bishops in Titus 1:7. We have many proofs that bishops and elders were of the same order in the apostolic church, though afterward they became distinct."

Ordination is ordaining one as an elder, NOT to a specific function of ministry in the church, such as a pastor, missionary, or evangelist. An ordained elder in the prophetic ministry is one who has been "designated, officially by the church as morally, mentally, and spiritually qualified to fill the place of a preacher in the church" (*The Apostolic Church*, Charles E. Brown, 1947, p151).

When apostasy set in and eventually developed into Roman Catholicism, the power of the ministry grew very quickly and man assumed the role that the Holy Spirit wanted to fill in people's lives. As the centuries progressed, a hierarchy developed with different levels of official leadership in the ministry that did not exist in the early morning church.

The Scripture teaches that the government of the church is on Christ's shoulders, but it also teaches that there is human leadership by the Holy Spirit through the bestowal of spiritual gifts. It is incumbent upon every minister that claims to operate with the gifting of the Holy Spirit to have that claim subject to the judgment of other Holy Ghost filled ministers as it relates to the exercise of his gifts. "And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets" (1 Corinthians 14:32). This is not accomplished by a hierarchy of ordained ministers but through the humble, working together of Holy Spirit led men of God.

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Editorial



How shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!—Romans 10:14-15

I appreciate so much those who have been called of God and have faithfully preached the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the Holy Spirit that divinely calls people to the ministry. The topic this quarter is ministerial ordination.

Lord willing the ordination of deacons will be addressed in the next issue. Unfortunately, the word 'ordination' puts a sour taste in the mouths of some because of mishandling, lack of understanding, hurts, and abuses by church governing authorities. My prayer is that as people gain understanding, ordination will be seen for the beautiful operation it is in the church.

Ordination is much more than just receiving a piece of paper for legal purposes. It is a witness and confirmation of the Holy Spirit's call and anointing on the life of a minister to the body of Christ. Its precedence and teaching is in the Word of God and hence rises above personal perspectives and opinions. Ordination is a spiritual act of consecration, commitment, and a time of receiving a special blessing and favor from the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands of other ordained ministers.

As with other biblical teaching and practices, it is important to maintain a spiritually balanced understanding. Ordination should never become a status symbol, nor should a hierarchy develop in the church, as it has in many religious movements. All ministers are equal and should all be anointed in their ministries, old and young, ordained and unordained. On the other hand, ordination does mean something, hence there are times that ordained ministers have an authority of God and man that an unordained minister does not have. An ordained minister SHOULD without reservation be qualified and anointed of the Lord, holding the confidence of the people.

It is imperative that ordination be approached carefully in accordance with the biblical qualifications. Ordination can lose its spiritual value in the body of Christ if unqualified people are ordained in an effort to appease a minister or a congregation that may be coming to the truth. This is an issue in many countries. Ordination is not a political tool to curry favor. May the Lord help the Church of God to maintain the purity of the doctrine of ministerial ordination.

As a side note, there are some scriptures in the New Testament which use the word 'ordain' (see Acts 1:22, 1 Timothy 2:7, Acts 14:23) that are not referring to the formal ordination of which other scriptures refer. I have primarily addressed scriptures that address formal ordination. May we each one live to glorify and please God. In the words of Bro. Ostis Wilson, "If we please God, we will please everyone that deserves to be pleased."

Michael W. Smith

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Challenge

[Bro. Ostis Wilson, in referencing Acts 13:1-4 when Barnabas and Saul were separated for the work.]

"This was a sacred, solemn charge to them and they fasted and prayed before they did it, even after the Holy Ghost had spoken to them. They wanted to be certain they were not mistaken. Ah, brethren, could we be a little admonished at this point and consider our ordination services as a more serious and solemn responsibility than we sometimes do. I feel deeply that I myself can."

PURPOSE AND VALUE OF ORDINATION

There are multiple, important purposes for the ordination of ministers in the Church of God which should be valued accordingly and never undermined because of personal agendas, philosophies, or prejudices.



Ordination is one way among others of validating someone's ministry with the people to whom he ministers.

Confirmation of Something Spiritual

According to scriptural teaching, there is something spiritual conveyed in the act of ministerial ordination. Paul referred to ordination when he instructed Timothy: "Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery" (1 Timothy 4:14). The study of this verse conveys much truth about the practice of ordination.

Neglect not the gift that is in thee. "Gift" here is translated from the Greek word, *char'-is-mah*—divine gratuity, spiritual endowment, religious qualification, favor. The totality of Timothy's ministry—the call, the qualifications, the office that he was to fill, the gift of God, and the ordination itself were all part of the favor of God Timothy was not to neglect. Paul spoke of this gift again in 2 Timothy 1:6. "Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands." Paul was speaking personally as a father to his son. "Be faithful to the gift and to the charge that has been committed to your trust." Timothy's ministry, call, and qualifications in their entirety were the gift from God. The brethren who recognized his call and qualifications sanctioned that gift and acknowledged it by the laying on of hands in ordination. Hence, the ordination was a 'part' of the gift or benefit that had been given to Timothy.

Laying on of hands. The bestowed gift of ministry was in part given by the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands as demonstrated by Paul and other church elders. There is a rich, scriptural heritage of the imposition of hands. In Genesis 48:14 Israel put his hand on Ephraim and Manasseh's heads and blessed them. In Numbers 27:18-20 the Lord instructed Moses to lay his hand upon Joshua in the sight of the priest and all the congregation. Moses was to give Joshua a charge and put his honor upon Joshua that the children of Israel would be obedient. Deuteronomy 34:9 confirms the value: "And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit

of wisdom; for Moses had laid his hands upon him: and the children of Israel hearkened unto him, and did as the LORD commanded Moses." It is noteworthy that on most occasions, the Holy Spirit was given in the early morning church when hands were laid on the believers and they prayed. The Holy Spirit was given by God, but there was a special blessing and power imparted through unified prayer to the gift giver. There is power in the agreement of prayer and a favor of God which is in part instigated by the laying on of hands. This then would run parallel with the "laying on of hands" to ordain someone in the ministry.

Of the presbytery. The word *presbytery* is translated *elders* in Luke 22:66 and in Acts 22:5. Ordination was not by just one minister but by a body or group of elders.

Public Recognition of a Spiritual Call

Ordination is one way among others of validating someone's ministry with the people to whom he ministers. It is a commendation of what God is doing in someone's life and it is one means of helping establish credibility to the people by the ministry as a body. An ordained minister dealing with people and problems should have the backing and support of the ministry. It is important for the people to know and understand that an ordained individual is representing something bigger than himself—the body of Christ. This is one reason ordination should be approached with much carefulness.

Bro. Ostis Wilson wrote the following concerning this subject: "I am sure that a token of recognition is a big support from the ministers with whom and among whom he is going to be working, but I feel the ordination service goes deeper than that and the laying on of hands by Holy Spirit filled men actually imparts something

to the one on whom their hands are laid....Paul confirms...that there was actually something imparted to them by the laying on of hands by Holy Spirit filled men. I feel we should teach this to our people and especially to the candidates for ordination and prepare them to expect to receive something special [blessing/favor/sealing—*editor*] from God when the hands of Holy Ghost filled ministers are laid on them.”

Church Government

The previously quoted scripture in Titus 1:5 reads: “thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city.” The following verses in Titus then give the necessary qualifications for the elders who were to be ordained. In this passage, ordination takes on a higher degree of signification. One of the reasons for ordination was to establish recognized leadership and spiritual authority in the congregation. There have been and always will be contrary spirits at work, and recognized, Holy Ghost filled ministers can help bring clarity and leadership in troubled times. Ordaining elders was part of the church government that the Holy Spirit put in place. Where there are different voices, it is helpful for people to know there is a spiritually recognized leader that can be trusted to instruct them in the ways of righteousness. Consider the writings of some Church of God ministers from the past:

“The first churches were certainly ‘ruled’ by the apostles in the early days, but this ‘ruling’ had nothing official about it. It simply consisted in the exercise of the godly, moral influence of revered and deeply trusted leaders, exactly the same in kind, if not in degree as that exercised by spiritual men in all ages of the church” (*The Apostolic Church*, Charles E. Brown, 1947, p123).

“Truly there is government in the Church of God, and it is exercised by men—God-gifted men

working together with other God-gifted men under Holy Spirit leadership” (*Church of God Doctrines*, Cecil Carver, 1979, p95).

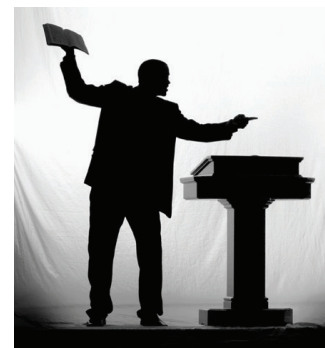
“It is certain that any minister can feel freer in the exercise of his ministry and work more effectually when he knows that he has the recognition, support, backing and approval of the other ministers among whom he works and of the saints. For one to successfully fulfill the office of an ‘Elder’ or ‘Overseer’ in a congregation in all its aspects, he should be ordained by the laying on of hands of other ordained ministers. He may preach just as well and feed the flock just as well without it, but when it comes to exercising authority and dealing with problems which may arise in the congregation, he will be much more effective and respected in his judgment if he has the recognition and backing of the ministry and the people he is dealing with know it” (*Faith and Victory*, Ostis Wilson, December 1979).

Legal Aspects

The official, legal designation of ordination acknowledges that someone is a qualified, accepted minister of a church fellowship. This is required by some governments and organizations for ministers to carry out certain ministerial duties (i.e. perform marriages, prison ministry, hospice, etc.).

Personal Acceptance

Ministry is a lonely place, ordained or not. However, there is a strength and comfort that can come from knowing your fellow ministers are behind you and acknowledge the leadings and anointing of God in your life. This is not a reason to ordain, but there is value here as it can help mitigate questions, internal and external, if all else is in order in the life and ministry.



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Biblical Qualifications for a Bishop

1 Timothy 3:1-7

This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.

A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach;

Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous;

One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity;

(For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)

Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.

Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

The Candidate

Conditions for ordination



“The minister should be representative of the body of Christ and an example of holiness, sound in doctrine, and Christlike in spirit.”

Qualifications. A minister who is a candidate for ordination should clearly have the anointing and call of God on his ministry and meet the scriptural qualifications for a bishop as outlined in 1 Timothy 3:1-7. These scriptural qualifications should be incumbent upon all who minister; however, they should be without question in a minister’s life before ordination takes place. The minister should be representative of the body of Christ and an example of holiness, sound in doctrine, and Christlike in spirit. The anointing of the Lord should be evident to the general body, not to just a few. Candidates for ordination should be effective in their labors and an asset rather than a liability to the ministry. Their integrity in business, temporal and spiritual, should be without reproach and they should have the confidence of the people. While it is a high calling, ordination should never be confused with requiring human perfection, for everyone makes mistakes, has weaknesses, and personality attributes on which God is still working.

Hindrances. In addition to the aforementioned qualifications, the following is a partial list of things that should give pause to the ordination of a minister: home life not in order, pattern and trail of problems, lack of confidence from the people, unfaithful in service, unwise preaching and presentation, not in unity with the body of Christ, etc.

Timing. A new minister, regardless of age and knowledge, should not be ordained quickly and should be given time to prove his ministry in the Lord, for there are spiritual traps that the enemy has laid. Bro. Cecil Carver stated, “The Word teaches that a minister should not be ordained until he has shown his worthiness. ‘Not a novice’ shows that care should be exercised before ordination. On the other hand, ministers should not delay ordination too long” (*Church of God Doctrines*, 1979).

Ordination is a serious thing and is to be addressed with godly care. Paul gave instruction in 1 Timothy 5:22 to “Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men’s sins...” If an elder knowingly ordains an unworthy

minister, he is a partaker of such unworthiness by sanctioning that ministry. A minister never need bow to pressure to ordain someone if there is not a clearness and affirmation from the Holy Spirit. To ordain someone solely for the purpose of government requirements (to perform a marriage, etc.) is not in keeping with the importance of ordination unless all other qualifications are in order.

This caution also applies when a minister comes in from another belief system or church. Although the anointing of God seems to be present and there is a general acceptance of truth, time will help prove a ministry.

1 Thessalonians 5:12 reads, “And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you.” It takes time to know someone’s doctrine and manner of life, so it is unwise to quickly ordain a minister that comes seeking recognition in the Church of God.

For consideration. The scripture does not set a specific length of time someone should minister before being ordained, hence, there will be differences from ministry to ministry. Bro. Ed Wilson, an elder in the Church of God, shared an insight for consideration on that subject. If someone has had an active pulpit ministry for five to seven years, in most cases, it could be time for the subject of ordination to be discussed. It might be time to either ordain or give a reason why not. Hence, if someone has been ministering for many years and not been ordained, it might be in order for him to humbly inquire if there is a hindrance.

If a minister has a lack in his life, he should keep praying, seeking God, and laboring in the Spirit. He should work with the ministry to gain that confidence and be willing to fix by word and by deed that which might be hindering. It is a hard thing for people to step back from ministry, but if the anointing and the call of God is not there or not recognized by other Holy Ghost filled ministers, there are times that a ministry should be laid down for the benefit of the gospel and for the sake of the people. Ordination is never something for which to strive and is not an “end” or measure of success. A minister should not push for ordination for “A man’s gift maketh room for him...” (Proverbs 18:16).

Protocol and Practicalities

OF THE ORDINATION PROCESS

The scripture does not lay out a blueprint for the ordination process. It gives the qualifications and leaves some things in the hands of Holy Spirit led men of God. The protocols shared below are not biblical rules incumbent upon every minister; rather, they are things to consider in the ordination process for edification. As the apostle Paul, I write these things by permission, not by commandment.

Responsibility. The responsibility to ordain a minister lies with the pastor and spiritual mentors that know well the candidate's life. Whoever is taking the lead to ordain a minister should confer with a few elders who have labored with that minister and see if there is a similar burden and/or support for the ordination. On occasion, a minister has not been ordained because no one took responsibility due to geographical limitations etc. This should not be construed as a poor reflection on an unordained minister.

Ministers should never feel pushed to ordain someone where there is a lack of "spiritual comfort" with the person under consideration. It is much easier to deal with a specific issue than it is when there is general unease. Time has proven for many ministers in the past to be cautious when there is unease. Ordination is of a spiritual nature and should never be politically motivated or to curry favor. In addition, there is tacitly some responsibility that ordaining ministers have regarding those whom they ordain.

Vetting. It is wisdom to vet a minister before ordination. The ordaining minister should speak with the candidate minister extensively about doctrine to establish that all is clear. It is good to visit with the spouse to confirm the spiritual stability of and verify the confidence in the minister by the family. The ordaining ministers should communicate with the congregation where the minister labors. On occasion there are hidden problems that can be revealed if these steps are taken. It is better to deal with problems before ordination rather than to make an unretractable mistake.

Ordination is a two-way street. Not only is the ministry backing and supporting that minister, the ordainee is accepting who and what the Church of God is as a body. An ordination from a sect group has no value or recognition among the Church of God.

The ordination process is not intended to be invasive and yet it should be thorough. It should not be viewed as a judgment but as a confidence. Candidates for ordination should not fear or resist this process. It is intended to be a blessing from God and the body of Christ.

Transparency. It is courteous to communicate with fellow ministers in the body. While two or three ordained elders may have the biblical right to ordain someone, the very nature of ordination implies a confidence and backing of the general ministry and of the church. Usually, a secret or private ordination defeats one of the primary purposes of ordination. The process should be conducted in a way that lends itself to the credibility of ordination.

Location. It is a blessing to God's people and a testament of the Holy Spirit's working to conduct an ordination service in the presence of the body of believers. Furthermore, it is good to ordain a minister among those with whom he is laboring. Ordination is a sober recognition and also a celebration of what God is doing in and with the life of a minister.

Ordination is a Bible doctrine that is still important to the operation of God's church today. It is to be valued and respected. Ordained elders are to be esteemed for their works' sake and for their authority in the Holy Spirit.

Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 2:7, "Whereunto I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle...." Some of the commentators have understood the word 'ordained' here not as the formal recognition of a ministry by the laying on of hands but of the divine call of God on Paul's life. While the ordination of man in the church has its place, the most important is that we all seek that true ordination of Jesus Christ through the anointing of the Holy Spirit.



Ordination is a two-way street. Not only is the ministry backing and supporting that minister, the ordainee is accepting who and what the Church of God is as a body.



DID YOU KNOW?

Among the Jews, “At the ordination of the president of the synagogue there were always three presbyters present to lay on hands, so the early Church canons required three bishops to be present at the consecration of a bishop” [Jamieson-Fausset-Brown on 1 Timothy 4:14].

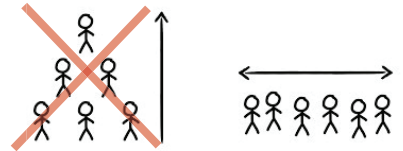


A Word
in Season

EQUALITY OF THE MINISTRY

“But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted. — Matthew 23:8-12

Even though there are differing gifts, calls, and administrations, there is an equality among the ministers. Jesus said, “All ye are brethren.” He was clearly speaking against titles and a hierarchical ministry. While recognizing the value of ordination and giving room for the exercise of the scriptural authority that comes with it, there is an equality among the ministers which is unique among the Church of God.



Jesus called His disciples to him and said: “Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all” (Mark 10:42-44).

“While the greater gifts and qualifications of some of the apostles made them more useful than others and placed greater responsibilities upon them, still this humble standard of equality was maintained until the apostasy began to develop” (*What the Bible Teaches*, F. G. Smith, 1914, p252).

The teaching and practice of ordination in no way negates this truth as godly ministers seek to have the mind of Christ and make themselves of no reputation (Philippians 2:5-7) after the example of the Lord.

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HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD

For How Long Does Ordination Last?

The ordination and spiritual authority of a minister lasts only as long as his teaching and behavior is in accordance with the scripture. That recognition is only good and effective as there is continual operation under the anointing of the Holy Spirit and clear confidence of the brethren is maintained.