

## Qualifications of a Leader

### Part 2: The Doctrine of Ordination

The *doctrine of ordination*, contained in the Biblical doctrinal header, “of laying on of hands” (see Hebrews 6:2), is the teaching which regulates how leaders/workers are officially commissioned to engage in given ministerial capacities. Regrettably, there are many unqualified and uncalled persons who, in Koristic pride and Adonijistic rebellion, exalt themselves to positions which are not theirs from the Lord (see **I Kings 1:5; 2:15**; Numbers 16:3; see also Nehemiah 9:17). All such self-appointments are, at bottom, Satanic (see Isaiah 14:13-14), and the blessing of God is not upon those works. A Biblical ordination procedure ought to be in place to set up church leaders who will further God’s kingdom, in God’s way. Levitical priests were ordained (Numbers 3:10; Hebrews 5:1), prophets were ordained (I Kings 19:16), and kings were ordained (e.g., Jeroboam, I Kings 11:30-39; Jehu, II Kings 9:1-10). The conclusion that ordination is necessary for full-time spiritual ministers seems unavoidable.

All legitimate authority derives its power from the chiefest potentate, God most High (see Romans 13:1). When a man is requested to be set “over the congregation,” it is related that this is the duty which belongs to “the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh” (Numbers 27:16). God is explicitly recorded as having himself ordained, as prophets, Isaiah (Isaiah 6:8-12), Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:5), Ezekiel (Ezekiel 2), Amos (Amos 7:15), and Jonah (Jonah 1:1-2) (see also Numbers 12:6). God ordained John the Baptist to baptize and preach (John 1:33). Whenever Paul talks of his ordination, he always credits it as being from God (I Timothy 2:7; II Timothy 1:11)—indeed, he is very emphatic to say, for instance, “Paul, an apostle, (*not of men, neither by man*, but by Jesus Christ...)” (Galatians 1:1). Though a church presumably has the authority to ordain whoever they want to do whatever they want, such an authorization does not come from heaven if it is not in complete accordance with Biblical rules and principles. “They have set up kings,” God says, “but not by me” (Hosea 8:4). A full-time Christian servant is settled (**John 17:14-15**; Proverbs 16:1), set apart (**John 17:16-17**), and set up (**John 17:18**; see also **15:16**) by the Lord. Human ordination, therefore, is simply a recognition of this in the life an individual. What man decrees, especially in spiritual matters, has little to no weight if it be not backed by God (see Exodus 18:23; I Chronicles 13:2; see also Proverbs 20:24; Psalm 127:1).

### The Biblical Model of Ordination

To “ordain” someone throughout scripture means to set them up or appoint them for a particular role/function. For example, ordination to temple offices (e.g., II Kings 11:18; I Chronicles 9:22; II Chronicles 23:18) or to government/national offices (e.g., I Samuel 8:11-12; II Kings 7:17). Jesus himself is described as being ordained by God the Father (e.g., Acts 17:31), and he appointed twelve to be his inner-disciples and to be his evangelists and apostles (Mark 3:4; see also Luke 10:1). It may function as a technical term (especially today), but, Biblically, “ordination” is a ubiquitous event, and most often finds itself in non-ecclesiological contexts. For any office or labor, there are *qualifications* of a candidate—secular (e.g., a king, Deuteronomy 17:142) or spiritual (e.g., a deacon, I Timothy 3:8-13)—and an *appointment* by a proper authority.

The Bible nowhere provides definitive, normative church practice concerning ordination, but rather supplies numerous examples that a church would do well to pattern (see Philippians 3:17; I Corinthians 11:1). For someone to be overly dogmatic on a subject as this, which is not so clearly outlined in scripture, would be irrational. As with most theological doctrines, there are those who err in one direction or the other, here either in being too strict or too loose. The truth of the matter is in between these two extremes. Many churches which claim to base what they believe wholly on scripture appear to have vestiges they retain of unbiblical tradition concerning ordination: “after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ” (Colossians 2:8). Ordination does not infuse/confer some special power/authority upon an individual, and it

does not require written tokens (see **II Corinthians 3:1**). Ordination of an individual to a spiritual office/ministry *is a church's formal means of corporately bestowing a public approval and blessing for the work to be done*. There are three essential attributes of an ecclesiological ordination:

1. Ordination is a **formal blessing and approval/consent to God's call on a believers' life**.

Ordination is called the “laying on of hands” because this symbolic act is integrally connected with an ordination ceremony (see I Timothy 4:14). Though laying hands upon another has importance for now-obsolete spiritual healing gifts (e.g., Mark 16:18), there is a broader, more natural meaning behind it. It has connotations in scripture both with *blessing* (Genesis 48:18; Matthew 19:13/Mark 10:16) and with *participation* (**I Timothy 5:22; Exodus 23:1**; Deuteronomy 13:9; 17:7; **Ezra 10:19**; see also **II Kings 13:16**). When hands are laid upon an individual in this ceremonial sense, then, it is a symbolic gesture to bless and agree with the work to be done by the person(s). Double-coronation of kings, like Solomon (first: I Kings 1:33-35; second: I Chronicles 29:22), exhibits that an ordination ceremony is approval by nature; if some power/authority was conferred by the ordination the first time, there should no place have been sought for the second.

God does not call barren trees to full-time service, but rather those which are fruitful—it is the rod of the man that buds who God has chosen (see Numbers 17). Saul and Barnabas were separated to the missional work they performed while “they ministered to the Lord” (Acts 13:1-2), and they already had years of ministry-related experience and results behind them by that time (Acts 9:27-29; 11:22-26; 12:25). The Biblical pattern, then, is that a believer learns (see Titus 1:9, “as he hath been taught”) and humbly serves in their local church, submitting to the leadership (Hebrews 13:17), and being spiritually productive. After years of their faithfulness, and their good report of all the brethren generally there (see Acts 16:2), according to their desire (see I Timothy 3:1), they are formally ordained to begin the work God would have them do. It is not he who has a piece of paper from an institution that is worthy of ordination, nor one who has secular clout and worldly riches, but rather the one God has chosen, and “the LORD will show who are his” (Numbers 16:5) by making their spiritual labor in Christ fruitful—their soul-winning to be effective, their Bible preaching to be edifying, their service to others to be abundant.

II Corinthians 10:18: For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth.

What is important here is an *initial* approval. It cannot be seriously maintained that the ordained minister is perpetually accountable to their ordaining church (see Galatians 1:10; I Thessalonians 2:4). Those who seek to prove this strange idea usually fetch their proof texts from the life of Paul, where it is supposed that his frequent return to the church in Antioch-Syria was a kind of accountability procedure (see Acts 14:26-28; 18:22). But nowhere does Paul take orders from this church; nowhere is he assessed by them authoritatively; nowhere is it expressed that he is under their rule. Antioch-Syria is later described merely as the church from where he “had been recommended to the grace of God for the work.” Paul’s caution to Timothy about “laying hands suddenly” (I Timothy 5:22) only has its proper strength if such a deed is in some sense irrevocable. Saul was anointed as king (I Samuel 10:1), and he remained king until his death (see I Samuel 24:6; 26:16), though divinely rejected from being king (I Samuel 15:23, 26; 16:1). While a minister who disqualifies themselves (by serious sin, damnable heresy, etc.) ought to step down from their position, they still retain the Biblical authority over the congregation/ministry in such a state, though not by right.

2. Ordination **comes from God through man**.

According to the Bible, the ordination ceremony merely makes official what God had already decided about an individual. God says, “*Separate me* Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto *I have called them*” (Acts

13:2). After the church does formally ordain them, interestingly enough, it is stated that they were “sent forth by the Holy Ghost” (Acts 13:4), *not the church*. Of the elders of the Ephesian church, doubtless ordained by men like Paul/Timothy, Paul states that it is “the Holy Ghost” who “hath made you overseers” (Acts 20:28). One’s ministry is received “of the Lord” (Acts 20:24; Colossians 4:17). This makes sense of why when leaders in a church were ordained, the ordaining officials “commended them to the Lord” (Acts 14:23), because though they were publicly approving of God’s call on them, it was the Lord to whom they were accountable for their ministry. God merely uses man as his instrument to very openly recognize someone as set apart for a work he has delegated them to.

Though David was chosen and anointed as the next king of Israel (I Samuel 16:1-13), he did not have the actual dominion over Israel until the people of the nation gave their consent thereto in what was first only a Judean ordination (II Samuel 2:4), and, later, a full-scale Israelite ordination (II Samuel 5:3). Observe that David was already technically king, so these ordinations of the nation were simply an official consent to God’s chosen ruler (see **II Samuel 5:1-2**). There is always a slight delay, then, between one’s *anointing* (by God) and their *appointing* (by man) (I Samuel 25:30). It seems proper to say also though that David’s appointment as king was by God (II Samuel 6:21), just like his anointing, but that God did it through human instruments. It would have been wrong for him to kill king Saul (see I Samuel 26:10-11), because God was to bring about the heart of all people of Israel to him at the right time. The charge of the congregation is not something we “take” by force, but rather something we “receive” by patience (Psalm 75:2). For the minister who is called of God, the opportunity seems almost to materialize before their very eyes, in what way, they knew not how. Christians pursuing Biblical offices/ministries have this solemn duty, therefore, to “wait on the Lord” (Psalm 37:34)

### 3. Ordination is **performed by an entire church body**.

Because ordination is a *corporate* approval, it therefore follows that it is a corporate activity. Those who are appointed for a role/function are so appointed by “the whole church” (see Acts 15:22)—they are “chosen of the churches” (II Corinthians 8:19). Again, this is clearly seen in the ordination ceremony of Paul and Barnabas in Acts 13, where it was the entire church (“they”) who prayed, fasted, and commended them to the work (v. 3). There is an OT parallel, where in the consecration of the Levites for tabernacle-service, the “whole assembly of the children of Israel” put their hands upon the Levites (see **Numbers 8:5-11**).

The reason the leader(s) will take a prime role in ordination is because they themselves, as the rulers of the congregation, have the honor and assent of the people. Their officiation of the ceremony gives the congregation more surety and solidarity in their bestowal of approval. When Moses knew that he would not be allowed to bring the children of Israel into the land of promise, he was instructed concerning Joshua, “set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation,” in order to “put some of thine honor upon him” (Numbers 27:18-20). Joshua had been Moses’ faithful servant for many decades by this time (Exodus 24:13), and it is here where Moses’ hands were laid upon Joshua. The two are correlated (the conferring of the honor, and the ordination) that all the congregation would consent. Even when Moses himself was “ordained” by God to be a judge over Israel (see Exodus 3-4), he took the pains to gain the approval of the people of Israel (especially of the “elders”) (see **Exodus 4:29-31**). The leader is the one given the charge particularly to ordain (see Titus 1:5). However, the role of the congregation in recognizing and even selecting candidates (see Deuteronomy 1:13, 15; **Acts 6:3, 5-6**) cannot be forgotten. He who has not the general consent of the local congregation in his ordination is not properly ordained.

God expects us to walk in the personal calling he places upon our life (see I Corinthians 7:17), determined by our abilities and the grace of God (see Romans 12:6), and to not do so would be disobedience (see Acts 26:19). When we have a charge of God, we must act in good faith and conscience by following on in the steps ordered us by the Lord (see Psalm 37:23). The attitude of the church laity and leadership toward a qualified, called

believer to a ministry ought to be that of Peter's toward the Gentiles when he saw the Spirit's work in them: "what was I, that I could withstand God?" (Acts 11:17).