

THE IMPORTANCE OF ORDINATION

Throughout the history of Christian religion there has been the custom of setting apart by formal recognition the official leadership for the churches. This is called ordination.

The purpose of ordination is twofold: First, to signify that the individual has decided to devote his life to the church's ministry; and second, to indicate that the church is approving and authorizing them to serve the church in ministry. Ordination is a recognition of God's call and the church's approval.

The Christian church inherited this practice of ordination from its historical forerunner, the Jewish synagogue. The rabbis were given a rather definite form of ordination. But, there is, I believe, a clear scriptural basis for the practice in the New Testament.

It seems rather certain that the definite procedure of ordination began with the installation of the seven as assistants to the apostles in the Jerusalem church (Acts 6:6).

The several Greek words translated *ordain* in the New Testament mean "to set apart to an office or special service."

Three of those times it signifies formal induction into office (Titus 1:5; Hebrews 5:1; 8:3). And in one instance (Titus 1:5) it has reference to a Christian office.

Where the word ordained is used for induction into office, it throws no light on the details of procedure. They do not describe for us the ceremony of ordination. However, we can derive vivid and valuable suggestions from the record of the ordination of the seven in Acts 6:3-6.

In these verses the apostles assured the Jerusalem disciples that they will ordain the men selected to the task proposed. In verse 6 we are told they laid their hands on them.

The laying on of hands was a frequent and respected religious ceremony of the times, among both Jews and Christians. Thus we have sufficient evidence that this was the most solemn and significant part of the ordination procedure in New Testament times (Acts 6:6; 13:3; 1 Timothy 4:14; 5:22; 2 Timothy 1:6).

These passages also indicate that ordination was a public and formal act.

The New Testament also furnishes grounds for the conclusion that ordination of ministers is more than an interest of the local church. Paul and Barnabas supervised the election of elders in the Galatian churches (Acts 14:23). Paul sent Titus to Crete to ordain elders in every city (Titus 1:5). And, we can infer that Paul and Silas supervised the ordination of Timothy (1 Timothy 4:14, 2 Timothy 1:6). Thus, we must conclude that while the elders were ordained for service in the local church, they were not ordained as a function of the local church alone.

So, ordination of ministers is a function of the local church performed for the kingdom as a whole and the general interest of all churches should be faithfully considered in this important service. That's the basis for ordination of ministers including representatives from other churches.

Thus, we conclude about ordination:

- it was an open and public ceremony;
- it consisted of laying on of hands;
- both deacons and ministers were ordained;
- the ordination of elders was not a function of the local church alone.

From these scriptures we may be perfectly sure that ordination was a ceremony of installation that originated in apostolic times. But, beyond the public, formal laying on of hands, we must develop our own order of service.

The Necessity of Ordination

Ordination, of course, is not essential. Charles H. Spurgeon was never ordained. Neither was D. L. Moody. Spurgeon once said of ordination, "It's a matter of laying empty hands on empty heads." But we need some method of recognition and approval of those called into Christian leadership, and ordination has a strong scriptural basis.