

Dear Pastor

I am honored that you would want me to recognize your call to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ in an ordination. Ordination is not, however something I could do for you off the cuff while you are in the states for a while. Consider that:

1) Ordination is not done by a preacher, it is done by a Church body. It is normally done by the individual's sending Church where they have held membership for an extended period amongst people who know them and have witnessed God's hand upon them. Consider, for example, the cases of ordination in the Bible.

2) Ordination involves a group of 'God Called, Doctrinally Straight Baptist Preachers' examining the call and doctrine of a man and ergo recognizing it to be of God and he to be a peer. The group should always be more than two, and always be in unanimous agreement on the individuals 'Call from God'. Recognize that three or more Baptist Preachers would never be in unanimous agreement on every point of doctrine.

3) The group of Baptist Preachers in unanimous agreement about the 'Call of God' on the individual would thereby recognize him as a peer and provide a recommendation to the Ordaining Church body for their action. It would then be up to that Church body to ordain and send out the individual as a recognized, doctrinally sound, authorized by God, Baptist Preacher of the Gospel.

If you do not have such a Church body that would know you, recognize your call and be your sending Church we at Good Samaritan Baptist Church have all the authority of God, all the resources of God, and all the wisdom of God assessable for that purpose. However, we, with a membership of only 16 souls, only have all these resources in faith and not necessarily in a readily assessable and tangible form. I am sure that you have access to a Church body that knows you better and has more tangible resources and influences than GSBC. If you would have me pursue your ordination further I surely would do that for you, but understand that it will take considerable time for us at GSBC to know you, examine you sufficiently, and watch your testimony in action before we could agree on being your sending Church.

Pastor Ed Rice

Pastor Rice,

I'm not older and wiser, but I think what you have written is spot on.

Jim K

Pastor Rice

Overall I believe that your advice to that gentleman is fine. After pastoring 33 years I have my own opinion also on this matter. For instance -

1. I can't say that your initial statement is correct. I seriously question your statement "Ordination is not done by a preacher it is done by a church body". I realize that a church body is and should be involved but where in scripture do you find a local church body without a Pastor ordaining anyone? I think it is "a preacher - a ordained man - several several ordained men" that actually do the ordaining within the spere of "like faith and order". Many a church body, sad to say, would select the wrong man for the job and often do. To me it seems most scriptural for the experienced pastor of a local church to, with the aid of other local Baptist pastors, to lead the way in ordaining a man they have a history with. Jesus ordained the apostles, gave them the commission (and the church represented in them), then they ordained other men (Paul and Timoty etc).

2. My only concern with your second statement is where do you get "it should always be more than two". Can we prove that scripturally?

3. Isn't it actually the "hands of those ordaining" that are laid upon the one being ordained and not that of a local church? It seems more correct to say that a man is sent by God, recognized by brethren, supported by churches.

Also, decades have convinced me that it is more scriptural for pastors to actually have a successor trained and in place. All these pastoral elections may be a necessary thing but I seriously question whether it is pleasing to God. It seems to me to be mostly a source of division and splitting in our local churches. But, we are all entitled to our opinion.

Pastor Bill Rains

I agree, it is the sending church that ordains, or lays hands upon them. In Scripture, this is merely a recognizing by the local church that the Lord has called this man for a specific work or ministry.

I would express great caution in receiving a man "called of God" outside of his local church, for this is NOT the way the Lord works.

Pastor Burke

Dear Pastor Rice,

First, I would like to tell you how much I appreciate all your emails and Bible studies that you have sent in the past. I feel guilty in taking so long to express my appreciation for you sending those this way. I find them always to be a blessing. As for this latest email, my personal view of the matter is that I am not sure that anyone should ever ask anyone else to ordain them. Ever. As you so clearly stated in your response, it is always left with the man's authority (church, pastor, deacons, etc.) who would approach an individual after being persuaded that God's hand and God's calling are on him first. I believe it ought to be the authority that approaches the man called of God, not the so-called man of God approaching "an" authority. I believe it is usually a sign of either rebellion, laziness, apathy, or other reasons that a man is not willing to surrender himself and follow his church's leadership (as long as it is, as you stated, a good solid KJV believing separated church). Where has he been the last two or more years? Five years. Ten years. Anyone can make a show or a fair appearance and go along with a plan or follow someone for a short period of time. Why wasn't anyone else willing to see that God's hand was on this man before? Why hasn't his old church or churches seen that? Was he in the wrong kind of church all that time? That in itself is a sign that he lacks the wisdom to know which church he should belong to and work in and support. Now that he wants to do some work of his own, he seeks a church's approval so that he can run in that church's circles and financially or monetarily gain from such exposure being ordained by the right kind of church? All these are questions that come to my mind. And more. But I believe this suffices enough. Again, I personally don't think I would ordain someone that came to me. But we have ordained a fellow in our church who was called of God and I was the one that approached him and told him he needed to start a church like ours. And he did. God only uses humble people that don't step out of bounds because of their pride. Be careful.

God bless you.

jkoletas

In agreement totally! He must have a good report and first be proved!

Bro. Roscoe

Pastor,

I am honored by your confidence in me to invite me read your succinct yet poignant statement, but I would not change anything you have written or add to it. Brevity is a virtue.

Steve Pettey

Hi Ed,

I think your advice is “spot-on” for the candidate. I would add that a careful selection of the members of the ordaining council is important. I think the ordination is only as valid as the caliber of men on the examining council. I have sat on a number of these through the years and found that many were comprised of too many ministry “friends and buddies” who were reluctant to go deep in their questioning and too accepting of insufficient or incorrect answers (not wanting to embarrass the poor guy). High standards of theology/doctrine must be maintained and the “gate keepers” for this are the ordaining council members.

I also think that credit and background checks should be made on the candidate so that, as much as possible, the council is recommending the man’s integrity and character (testimony) to the church as well as his doctrine.

So you see, most of my concern would be for the board being too “easy” on the guy.

In my opinion any candidate for ordination should be well versed on the major divisions of systematic theology (Theology Proper, Christology, Pneumatology, Bibliology, Soteriology, and etc) and able to state his belief on each of the 7 categories using Scripture to back it up. He should be able to define the major terms of theology (i.e. redemption, atonement, sanctification, justification, and etc.). He should also be able to give the major theme of any Bible book and have a good grip on OT history. He should be asked how he would share the Gospel with an unbeliever.

He should be informed as to current major trends in contemporary theology and where he comes down on some of the most crucial issues of the day (abortion, same-sex marriage, ordination of women, complimentarian or egalitarian view of the marriage roles, divorce, charismatics, cessationism vs. continuationism in Spiritual gifts, and etc), reformed theology, Calvinism, Arminianism, dispensationalism, replacement theology, paedobaptism, and how these agree or differ with his own personal views. He should also be pretty settled on his approach to church polity (deacons or elders, both? , and etc.). He should be prepared to discuss his personal devotional life, his family life, and what books he’s read lately. Who are his ministry “heroes” and why? His view on separation (both ecclesiastical and personal) with Scripture to back it up.

I think it would be helpful for him to write out a detailed doctrinal statement (perhaps with the help of a mentor or friend like yourself) and present it to the council chairman prior to the examination so that he can offer suggestions to the candidate if he feels some of his positions are unclear or need more development.

These are just a few thots. With these (and about \$2) you can buy a cup of coffee at Dunkin Donuts. Let’s do it sometime.

Leo

Dear Pastor Ed,

Your comments seem to be proper and sufficient. Pastor D A Waite

Pastor Rice:

I know that I am not older, nor do I consider myself to be wiser. Having said that, I believe that your advice is sound both ethically and Biblically. In my opinion, a gentlemen seeking ordination while "being in the States for a while" would seem to me to be trying to skirt Biblical practice regarding ordination (and if he is, he would not be the type of person worthy of ordination). Whether he is or not, I do not know, nor is it my business. But, as your e-mail seems to indicate, you and I are of the same opinion in this subject--we don't give out Biblical ordination nor a certificate of such to just any person who says they are a God-called preacher. I hope that pastors of other small churches like GSBC keep this advice handy should they have a similar situation.

Joseph Holley

Dear Dr. Ed Rice,

I will examine each paragraph in light of the scripture and make a comment \* on ordaining a missionary on a foreign fields.

**Mark 3:14**

And he **ordained** twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach, Our Lord chose them, and ordained them to preach. John 15:16.

1) Ordination is not done by a preacher, it is done by a Church body. It is normally done by the individual's sending Church where they have held membership for an extended period amongst people who know them and have witnessed God's hand upon them. Consider, for example, the cases of ordination in the Bible.

**Titus 1:5**

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:

Defined: : to invest officially (as by the laying on of hands) with ministerial or priestly authority.

\* To perform weddings, funerals in an official capacity in accordance to the establish Government I seek not, I seek the Authority of the anointing of the Spirit of God, as a minister of Christ to preach the Gospel.

\* I see that the Authority of the ministry comes from God, Christ is head of the Pastor, and the Pastor is head of the Church. Many a man that is called of God to Preach the Gospel is definitely not qualified to hold other offices within the church body. A Pastor or a Deacon has very strict guidelines.

The word, blameless says it all, and I fail right there! Yet, God has used whom He will for His purpose, and glory, whose praise is not of men but of God.

2) Ordination involves a group of 'God Called, Doctrinally Straight Baptist Preachers' examining the call and doctrine of a man and ergo recognizing it to be of God and he to be a peer. The group should always be more than two, and always be in unanimous agreement on the individuals 'Call from God'. Recognize that three or more Baptist Preachers would never be in unanimous agreement on every point of doctrine.

**1 Timothy 3:1**

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

**1 Timothy 3:2** A **bishop** then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach;

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**1 Timothy 3:8** Likewise *must* the **deacons** *be* grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre;

**1 Timothy 3:10** And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a **deacon**, being *found* blameless.

\* I seek not the office of a Pastor, nor the Office of a Deacon. \* I am a minister of the Gospel, and seek the office of a Missionary.

3) The group of Baptist Preachers in unanimous agreement about the 'Call of God' on the individual would thereby recognize him as a peer and provide a recommendation to the Ordaining Church body for their action. It would then be up to that Church body to ordain and send out the individual as a recognized, doctrinally sound, authorized by God, Baptist Preacher of the Gospel.

### **Acts 13:2**

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.

\* If there be, that the Lord would use you, to fast and pray and lay hands upon me, I will therefore rejoice and go forth with joy, knowing that I shall bare fruit that shall remain, to His glory.

If you do not have such a Church body that would know you, recognize your call and be your sending Church we at Good Samaritan Baptist Church have all the authority of God, all the resources of God, and all the wisdom of God assessable for that purpose. However, we, with a membership of only 16 souls, only have all these resources in faith and not necessarily in a readily assessable and tangible form. I am sure that you have access to a Church body that knows you better and has more tangible resources and influences than GSBC. If you would have me pursue your ordination further I surely would do that for you, but understand that it will take considerable time for us at GSBC to know you, examine you sufficiently, and watch your testimony in action before we could agree on being your sending Church.

Pastor Ed Rice

\* That is correct, I have no church body at this time. On any matter that requires your official blessing you must take that before the Lord, and to the Church body for prayerful consideration that the ministry not be blamed. If you 16 souls, then praise God for every one of them; would to God that every one of them were ministers of the Gospel, and ordained to preach from the house tops!

In Christ Service,

Brother Art Wilmoth, Evangelist,

President of Gospel Tract Ministry,

CEO, Awing Solar Wind Products, LLC

Missionary to India

Included as an appendix to this article/blog is the excellent paper submitted by Pastor Sargent "ORDINATION, A Protestant Stronghold among Baptist Churches?" By: Robert J. Sargent

Bro. Rice,

I am in agreement with you on this. I understand that probably on his field of service the gov't requires ordination to perform religious activity. They do in Romania. I take it that this missionary either does not have a sending church or his sending church will not ordain him, two red flags. However inconvenient it would be for a missionary to have to seek a new sending Church, I would fully expect it to take time for the new Church to get to know their new missionary before adding their recommendation to his ministry. I believe that ordination must be done by the missionary's sending Church. The only way for your Church to do it would be for him to join your Church and prove himself for a certain amount of time. I would say at least a

year if not longer.

I think about this subject as a missionary who has considered the problem of what I would do and be expected to do if I ever had to seek a new sending church.

Jim Morgan Missionary to Romania

I think that advice is sound. I don't know the circumstances as to why a man doesn't have ( or at least sees his need to look elsewhere) a sending church to go back to and would contact you. There are some circumstances that might come up. The sending church will not ordain, or church has closed it's doors, or is doctrinally off track. I think you have given good advice and something to pray about.

Brother Eberly

Not knowing anything about the situation, and assuming that the candidate is an otherwise unknown person to you, I would say that your advice is correct. That is how it worked for me. After I had been an associate pastor at my church for 2 years, my pastor agreed to arrange an Ordination committee and service for me.

If you know him personally and are aware of his gifts and calling, then maybe that can be taken into consideration (like a close personal friend who is a missionary or evangelist or something of that nature....but still, the HOME church should be the one who ordains, and the Pastor of that church should arrange the committee...in my view...with some consideration given to particular requests of the candidate as to whom he would like on the committee.

In Christ, Pastor Schwenke

That sounds like good advice to me.

Keep up the good work. Pastor Walker

Last Tuesday, you wrote to Dr. Robert Sumner about his opinions regarding ordination. He had major back surgery last Monday and is recovering at a rehabilitation facility. When he returns, he will have hundreds of unread emails to answer. So he currently didn't have time to individually review your comments, but he asked me to answer your letter since he hates to leave correspondence unanswered.

Generally speaking, he doesn't have strong opinions about ordination because the Scripture says little about it. He is not against the concept. He said his views would generally fall along the lines of Hiscox in his Directory for Baptist Churches. You are correct in your statement that ordination is a function of a local church. An ordination council merely advises an independent Baptist church, which is free to accept or reject their recommendation.

Here is a link to that chapter in Hiscox's book which is now available online  
<http://www.fbinstitute.com/hiscox/chapter14.html>

Trust this is helpful, and Dr. Sumner asked me to you send his personal greetings!

Randy L. Miller TBE Webmaster

## Appendix

### ORDINATION A Protestant Stronghold among Baptist Churches?

By: Robert J. Sargent

At the risk of creating a straw man, and realizing the diversity of practice that exists among Bible-believing Baptist churches, I want to preface this article with a description of a typical Baptist ordination service — at least in terms of my experience.

A man who is to be ordained has acknowledged his surrender to a divine call and his desire to preach the Gospel. He has passed through a period of Bible training and has gained some practical experience along the way. He is judged by others as now ready to be ordained.

An ordination council, comprising several ordained ministers, is called for. These ministers privately interrogate the candidate by asking him questions relating to his call, his character, his qualifications, and his doctrine. Then, having judged the man to be suitably qualified, the council reports its findings and recommendation to the church. As a matter of formal church business, a vote to proceed with the candidate's ordination is taken.

The ordination service itself is usually a very special meeting. Often conducted in the presence of distinguished guests, the meeting is filled with curiosity, anticipation, and the singing of praises to God. The candidate may undergo some additional (public) questioning, and he and his wife are usually asked to give their testimonies. A charge is preached by one of the pastors (often from II Timothy 4:1-5). Then the candidate is asked to kneel at the front of the meeting while the preachers of the ordination council gather around him, lay hands on him, and pray for him. The candidate arises ... as an ordained minister of the Gospel.

The man thus ordained is considered ordained for life. In fact, at some point in the proceedings he is usually asked the question: "If you ever cease to believe the doctrines that today you said you believe in, will you turn in your ordination papers?" As long as he remains true to the Word of God, his ordination stands. Even if he moves on to another church or another field of evangelism, he is not ordained again. Most Baptists view ordination as a credentialing act or an investiture of sorts, whereby a man is accorded the status of an ordained minister and admitted to the ranks of the ministry.

How does this scenario line up with the Word of God? For Bible-believing Baptists, that is ever the critical question. It is not a matter of tradition — it's a question of truth!

Some Baptists have struggled with the whole concept of ordination — asking, in view of the great Baptist distinctives of "soul competency" and the "priesthood of believers," whether there should even be such a thing. These doubts, however, are answered by two New Testament scriptures:

2

*"And when they had ORDAINED them ELDERS in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed" — Acts 14:23.*

*"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.*

The word "ordain" (or "ordained") occurs in the New Testament 22 times, and is used in a variety of ways. However, these two references clearly teach that elders (pastors, bishops) are to be ordained in ALL the churches.

The purpose of this article is to examine and determine what the Bible teaches concerning ordination — specifically as it relates to Baptist churches and the Baptist ministry. The *thesis* of this article is that some of the ordination traditions commonly practiced among Bible-believing Baptist churches are more Protestant than Bible. The desire of this writer is to present a case from the scriptures in response to those brethren who have expressed their uneasiness with the traditional practices associated with ordination.

#### THE GENERAL MEANING OF ORDINATION:

Our English word "ordain" comes from the Anglo-Norman *ordeiner*, which in turn came from the Latin *ordināre*, meaning to order, to arrange, to set in place. The basic meaning of the word

“ordain” is just that — to appoint, to set in order, to establish ... by selecting or choosing. The Biblical use of the word is no different. To ordain means to choose. A comparison of Mark 3:14 (“*And he ORDAINED twelve*”) with Luke 6:13 (“*of them he CHOSE twelve*”) shows this to be the case. Choosing, appointing, and ordaining are words that are used interchangeably in our English Bible.

In the two passages that actually refer to the ordination of pastors, two Greek words are translated “ordained” and “ordain” respectively. In Acts 14:23 the word is χειροτονήσαντες (cheirotoneō-santes), which means “*to stretch forth the hand for the purpose of giving one’s vote in the assembly,*” “*by show of hands,*” “*appoint,*” “*span with the hand,*” to “*vote.*” (This Greek word is translated “chosen” in II Corinthians 8:19.) In Titus 1:5 the word is καταστήσεις (kata-stēsēs), which means to “*appoint,*” “*set in place,*” “*set in order,*” “*set in array.*” This word is derived from the preposition *kata* (down) + *stēsēs* (from ἵστημι, *istēmi*, meaning to “*make stand,*” to “*stand,*” “*set up,*” “*set,*” “*appoint,*” “*determine,*” or “*bring about*”).

The meaning is clear. Both etymologically and philologically, to “ordain” means to choose or to elect. Ordination is NOT a ceremony, an induction, a consecration, or an investiture — it is the simple act of a church appointing men to an office or ministry.

#### THE GENERAL PRACTICE OF ORDINATION IN CHRISTENDOM:

If scriptural ordination is essentially a vote to appoint or choose a man, where did all the false notions and ceremonial traditions about it come from? To answer this, we turn to history.

As many ancient churches drifted away from the simplicity that is in Christ, the concept of a sacerdotal priesthood began to emerge. It started, first with the division of God’s people into the clergy (*kleros*) and laity (*laos*) classes (in violation of the doctrine of the priesthood of all

3

believers), then with the further division of the clergy class into a hierarchy. Finding no supportive scripture for these changes in the New Testament, men such as Cyprian, bishop of Carthage (200–258 A.D.), turned to the Old Testament where there *was* a mediatorial priesthood. What’s more, the Aaronic priests underwent an elaborate ritual pursuant to undertaking their ministry.

“*And the priest, whom he shall anoint, and whom he shall CONSECRATE to minister in the priest’s office in his father’s stead, shall make the atonement, and shall put on the linen clothes, even the holy garments*” — Leviticus 16:32.

“*For every high priest taken from among men is ORDAINED for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins*” — Hebrews 5:1.

Resorting to the OLD Testament for the faith and order of NEW Testament churches is an unwarranted and dangerous practice. It has introduced many corrupting evils into Christendom: notably the errors of the universal church, sacramentalism, infant baptism and a hierarchy of clergy.

In the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox religions, ordination is known as Holy Orders and is considered a sacrament (a means of grace). The *cheirotonia*, or the laying on of hands by the bishop, is held as the most solemn moment of the ordination ritual and the essential act in the sacrament, because it is at this moment that priestly power is imparted and the apostolic connection is made. From that point, the priest is able to act in the person of Christ and to administer the sacraments. Ordination is seen as an indelible mark conferred upon those who enter an exclusive society of clergy.

The rite of ordination as practiced by most of the Protestant daughters of Rome finds its roots in their Catholic heritage. Protestants may have moved in a “back to the Bible” *direction*, but in most mainline denominations ordination continues to be the ceremonial initiation of someone into the ministry, and ordained ministers are the ones considered qualified to minister the Word of God and the sacraments.

Ancient Baptists were sometimes called Acephali, which means “headless.” Their enemies called them this because they refused to adopt any form of ecclesiastical hierarchy. Baptists had their pastors, but they were seen Biblically as the shepherds, rulers, and guardians of individual congregations. In the 17TH century, English Baptists avoided the word ordination altogether — preferring words such as “set apart” and “appointed” when referring to their leaders. Over time, however, the influence of Protestant (particularly Calvinistic) thought led many Baptists to adopt more formal ways to credential their ministers.



Protestant thinking has always been the bane of Bible-believing Baptists. The notions of a circumscribed, life-tenured, “ordained ministry” and the necessity of a ceremonial component to ordination are more Protestant than Bible. This is why most Baptist ordination certificates (incorrectly) state that the man is ordained to the GOSPEL MINISTRY rather than to the office of pastor. It is CHRIST Who puts a man into the ministry (I Timothy 1:12); a church puts him in the office.

4

Many years ago I remember being told about George Beauchamp Vick (1901-1975), pastor of Temple Baptist Church in Detroit, Michigan for 40 years, and founding president of Baptist Bible College in Springfield, Missouri. It was quite a marvel to some that he was never ordained! After all, he was such a great preacher and a wonderful pastor — how could this be? What was meant by this was that Vick *never* had a group of ordained preachers lay hands on him. So, was he ordained or not? Let’s see.

THE TRUE MEANING OF ECCLESIASTICAL ORDINATION:

Edward T. Hiscox sets forth the following primary propositions that accurately reflect the New Testament doctrine of ordination as it applies to pastors:

“PROP. I. That the ordination of the New Testament was an *election*, or appointment, to the ministerial office, and not a ceremonial *setting apart*, or consecration to that office.

“PROP. II. That there is no proof in the New Testament that persons chosen to the office of elder, pastor or bishop in the apostolic churches were designated for, or inducted into, that office by any formal service or ceremony whatever.

“PROP. III. That, though the laying on of hands was common on many occasions, as an ancient Oriental Jewish and early Christian form of blessing, especially in the bestowment of the gifts of the Spirit, yet there is neither precept nor precedent in the New Testament to require its use in the ordination of Christian ministers.”

[Hiscox, E. T. *The New Directory for Baptist Churches*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: 1970, Kregel Publications: Pg. 345. (Now published under the title *Principles & Practices for Baptist Churches*)]

Ordination, then, is an election. It is the deliberative vote of a church body to appoint a man to the office of pastor — something that can be done without ceremony in a regular business meeting.

The two scriptures actually relating to the ordination of pastors (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5) are set in the context of *organizing* all the churches planted through the evangelistic efforts of Paul and his fellow laborers.

Question: What was needed to “set in order” these assemblies of baptized believers? The answer is leadership, scriptural leadership — and scriptural leadership is always provided through the pastors of a church (I Thessalonians 5:12; I Timothy 5:17; I Peter 5:2-3).

Question: Were the elders who pastored the churches in Pisidia and Lycaonia, and later on in Crete, first chosen and appointed by Paul and Barnabas (and later by Titus) — then *imposed* upon those respective churches? To answer “yes” would support the notion that clergymen are ordained by bishops (the Catholic way). Baptists, however, hold to the truth that ecclesiastical authority resides in each church (Matthew 18:17-18). Undoubtedly Paul, Barnabas, and Titus *saw to it* that elders were set in the churches they organized, for that is part of the work of an evangelist. But before that could take place, the men who became elders must first have been called of God into the ministry, then trained for the ministry, then chosen by the congregations (no doubt under the guidance of the evangelists) for the office of elder.

5

When a mission is organized into an independent Baptist church, the first two decisions made should be: (1) the vote to organize (often accomplished by the unanimous signing of the charter), and; (2) the vote to ordain (appoint, choose) a pastor.

What about the Laying on of Hands?

As Hiscox correctly observed, there is no hint of any ritual or ceremony being connected with the ordaining of elders in either scripture. The “cheirotonēsantes” was not the laying *ON* of hands, but the *RAISING* of hands (in affirmation).

So exactly what does the “laying on of hands” signify?

In the Old Testament, the act signified either the imparting of a blessing (Genesis 48:14) or the identification with something. Jewish priests laid hands upon the heads of animals about to be

sacrificed, signifying their identification with that sacrifice (thereby symbolically declaring: “This is what I deserve, but an innocent sacrifice is taking my place”).

In the New Testament, the laying on of hands also signified a benediction (Matthew 19:13-15), and it was also occasionally associated with the sign gift of healing (Acts 28:8) and the [temporary] apostolic communication of the Holy Ghost (Acts 8:17-19; 19:6).

When it comes to the Lord’s churches, the laying on of hands was associated with the choosing of deacons by the church (Acts 6:5-6) and a church’s sending forth two of its pastors (Barnabas and Saul) as evangelists (Acts 13:3). In these instances, the laying on of hands (though not prescribed by scripture) was a demonstrative act — seeking the divine *blessing* upon men who have been set apart for special service and the *identification* of that church with their ministry. In the latter case, both Barnabas and Saul had already been actively engaged in the work of the ministry for many years.

An objection to this explanation is often raised on the basis of I Timothy 4:14 and II Timothy 1:6.

*“Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the LAYING ON OF THE HANDS of the presbytery.”*

*“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.”*

Neither scripture actually mentions ordination. What, then, are they teaching? Two things: first, that Timothy *had* a spiritual gift; secondly, that this spiritual gift was imparted through prophecy (preaching) — *not* by the laying on of hands. Putting both of these passages together it seems Timothy was not only converted to Christ through the ministry of Paul, but was also called to preach through the preaching of Paul. Paul undoubtedly recognized God’s call upon his son in the faith and thus laid his hands on him; subsequently, the pastors of the church at Lystra also noticed this gift and calling (see: Acts 16:2). The laying on of their hands upon Timothy did not impart the gift, but was done in recognition of his gift — and thus was an act of identification and benediction. The Baptist theologian John Gill, commenting on I Timothy 4:14 says: “And since gifts have ceased being conveyed this way, the rite [sic] of laying on of hands in ordination seems useless and of no avail.”

What about I Timothy 5:22? Surely this verse cautions a hasty ordination!

6

*“Lay hands suddenly on no man...”*

Again, ordination is not mentioned here. Hiscox is right on target when he asserts: “It has usually been taken for granted that the primitive ministry was inducted into office by formal services, and that “prayer with the laying on of hands” was the essential part of such ordination. But this has been accepted as scriptural, not because it is found in the Scriptures, but because Prelatical and Presbyterian authorities have interpreted the Scriptures by their own ecclesiastical usages, rather than adjusted their usages to the New Testament teaching. They have seen Episcopal and Presbyterian ordination in the New Testament because they saw it in their Church standards and practices. Their scholars have largely so interpreted the text, and Baptists have accepted their conclusions without even their justification.” [Ibid. pg. 353.] While it is true that its neighboring context (I Timothy 5:17-20) refers to pastors, the immediate context of the verse charges Timothy with the way he is to carry out the instructions contained in the chapter. “Do nothing by partiality” he is told — especially when it comes to the contentious issues of dealing with the widows of the church (young and old) and to accusations brought against pastors. Do not be quick to take sides.

The significance of the laying on of hands as it relates specifically to the Lord’s churches and the work of the Lord is that it has to do with imparting a blessing and/or identifying with a man’s ministry. Nothing more, nothing less!

**THE TRUE PRACTICE OF ECCLESIASTICAL ORDINATION:**

How should the process of ordination work in a Bible-believing Baptist church?

Ordination is the appointing of a qualified man to the office of pastor. The act is effected by a church vote. Whether it is accompanied by a public meeting of the church designed to make it a notable and memorable occasion is of no great matter. A couple may be lawfully married at the courthouse with two witnesses before a judge, or be wed in an elaborate, lavish “church wedding.” Either way, they are married!

Here are some thoughts on how the Lord’s churches ought to go about ordaining their pastors.

To begin with, there are three possible scenarios to consider.

The first is where a new church is being established. In this case, evangelists sent from and by the “mother” church preach the Gospel, baptize the converts, and eventually organize a church. Their labors also include training men who have been called by God into the ministry. Example: During his three-year ministry in Ephesus, Paul and his team not only planted a church in that city, but also trained its pastors (Acts 20:17) and the evangelists that were evidently sent forth to plant other churches in Asia (Acts 19:10).

The second scenario is that of an established church being led by a group of pastors who are in turn training God-called men for the ministry.

The third case is when an established church is bereft of any pastor due to death, disablement, departure, discipline, or congregational decline.

7

Most things said below will apply to all three situations, but some unusual circumstances may require special treatment.

1. God calls men into the ministry (Acts 9:15). It is neither a chosen nor an inherited vocation. Men thus called *are* preachers. Of course they must be trained and prepared — that is why we often refer to them as “preachers-in-training.” See: II Timothy 2:2; 3:10-11; Titus 2:9.

2. Pastors and evangelists are *gifted* by the Lord Jesus Christ to His churches (Ephesians 4:11). It therefore becomes a church’s responsibility to discern those whom Christ is placing over the body as its shepherds. Ideally, these are men who have been raised up in the church, trained by the pastors of the church, and brought into the office as the LORD directs and leads — thus assuring the church of a continuity of scriptural leadership. The practice of a pastor “hiring” associates from outside sources is not found in scripture.

3. Having had sufficient opportunity to judge a man’s calling, desire, gifts, qualifications, and commitment to Christ, a church can properly vote to elect him as a pastor. By this action he is duly “ordained” and no further steps by the church are required.

When a man has been brought up and trained in his church, he should be well-known and “well reported of by the brethren” by the time he is ready for the pastorate. Any interrogation of the man should be unnecessary (though the church certainly has liberty to publicly question him if it be considered instructive to the congregation).

In the case of a mission work, the training of men and the guidance provided by the churchplanting team will be key factors in helping the new church elect its pastor(s).

In the instance of a church having no pastor (and being a spiritually immature body), receiving assistance from pastors of other like faith and order churches can be beneficial and even necessary. These men can examine a candidate and advise the church as to his suitability — acting in an advisory capacity only, and openly conducting their work in the presence of the membership. This should be the *only* time an “ordination council” (not a good term) is called for. It has absolutely no authority over the church that called for it.

4. In keeping with the exact meaning of the word, a church sets apart a man by the simple gesture of its members (or men) lifting up their right hands.

It is a separate matter when men are called away to engage in evangelistic ministry (as in Acts 13:1-3). It is appropriate for the church to publicly identify with them and seek God’s blessing upon their labors by the laying on of hands if it so desires. This can properly be done on behalf of the church by its presbytery (not pastors from other churches) and/or its men.

5. Should a pastor of a church move to another church of like faith and order for the purpose of becoming its pastor (or one of its pastors), the process of scriptural ordination should be repeated. He carries with him no invested right or authority to simply assume the pastorate of that church. He brings only his calling and his reputation, experience, faith, and God-given abilities. What he yet needs is a vote! I was ordained a pastor by Bethel Baptist Church in Springvale, Victoria on November 26, 1971 (the traditional way); I was ordained as pastor of Willetton Bible Baptist Church in Willetton, Western Australia on March 3, 1985

8

(by vote); and I was ordained (in absentia) a pastor of Bible Baptist Church in Oak Harbor, Washington on November 16, 1988 (by vote).

6. Since the majority of Baptist preachers have been ordained in the traditional way described

at the beginning, what of the validity of their ordination? Thankfully, undergoing the private inquisition of an ordination council and the public laying on of hands (and everything in between) does not invalidate an ordination IF, in the midst of all the pageantry, there was a church vote.

Ordination is a wonderful thing, and it should never be minimized or scorned. It represents the tenderest care of Bible-believing Baptist churches by their risen Head, Who continually calls and endows faithful shepherds to feed, lead, and give heed to His flocks.

The issue of this article is not about the man so much as it is about the misleading nature of traditional ordination and its tendency to promote denominationalism and a clergy class.

Scriptural ordination magnifies the sacred *office* rather than the man — Romans 11:13.

Let us who are called Baptists, who claim to be the people of the Book, examine all our traditions and phraseologies in the full light of divine revelation — lest we, too, slowly drift off into a darkening apostasy that has afflicted so many Baptist churches from the days of the apostles to the present.