

Faith Pulpit

The Ordination of Men to the Ministry

Faith Baptist Theological Seminary is committed to preparing men to serve in the pastoral ministry. Each year churches call FBTS graduates to serve as pastors and assistant pastors. An important step after a man is called to a church is his ordination. In this article, Don Anderson, an ordained minister and adjunct professor at Faith Baptist Theological Seminary, examines the Biblical teaching concerning ordination of men to the gospel ministry. In the accompanying article, Professor Anderson's son, James, also an ordained minister, gives practical suggestions for planning the ordination service.

Ordination to the gospel ministry is a significant and solemn event in a man's life.^{[1](#)} Churches should understand the Biblical teaching about ordination so they can conduct the procedure in a proper manner.

The General Pattern

Ordinations today generally follow the same pattern. The church, after observing its pastor or assistant pastor for a period of time, decides to call a council to consider the advisability of ordaining him. In addition to some of its own members,^{[2](#)} the church usually seeks the input of men from area churches.^{[3](#)} On the designated day the church and the council members convene to hear the candidate give his salvation testimony, state his call to the ministry, and express his doctrinal positions. In most cases, the individual prepares a written statement of each doctrine. During the session the candidate summarizes his views on each doctrine, followed by questions from the council members.

After the examination, the candidate is dismissed and the council members share their thoughts on the man. If the council is satisfied that he evidences a call to the ministry and is orthodox in his theology, it recommends to the church that it proceed with the ordination. The church then votes to ordain their pastor or assistant pastor at an upcoming service.

At the end of the ordination service, the deacons and ordained men in the congregation lay their hands on the man, formally setting him aside for the ministry.

What Does the New Testament Say?

How does this general pattern fit with what the New Testament says about ordination? Let's look first at the Scripture passages where the English word "ordained" is used.

The King James Version uses the word "ordained" 20 times.⁴ However, only two of the occurrences refer to pastors—Acts 14:23 and Titus 1:5. The other major translations use the word "ordained" sparingly⁵ and do not use it in Acts 14:23 or Titus 1:5. In those passages they uniformly use the word "appointed." So apparently these two Scriptures are not referring to a pastor's ordination but rather to the beginning of his service at a church, what we commonly call his installation.

Appointing Pastors?

As a side note, how do we understand the concept that the apostles "appointed" pastors in churches as we read in Acts 14:23? Did the apostles simply use their apostolic authority and appoint pastors? Or did Paul lead the churches in a congregational election of their pastors? Homer Kent comments that

although there is no question but that the term is capable of either meaning, the following factors favor the interpretation of an election: (1) The choice of the verb *cheirontoneo* rather than one of the many general words for "appoint" suggests that the special characteristics of this word [i.e., to elect by a vote of raised hands] should be understood. (2) The only other NT use of this exact verb is clearly with the sense of a congregational election (2 Cor. 8:19). (3) Congregational selection was the apostolic practice in the choice of the Seven (Acts 6:3).⁶

In view of the meaning of Acts 14:23, Paul's command to Titus in Titus 1:5 was to lead the churches on the island of Crete in congregational votes to select their pastors.

But What about Ordination?

An examination of the word "ordained" does not give us any clear Biblical direction for the practice of ordination. However, we do find help in three passages that refer to laying on of hands (1 Tim. 4:14, 1 Tim. 5:22, and Acts 13:1–3), a common practice at ordinations.

1 Timothy 4:14 "Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership."

This verse refers to a time in Timothy's life that comes the closest to what we call an ordination service today. Consider three questions from this text.

Who ordained? A body of elders ordained Timothy.^{[7](#)} These men may have been from the church at Ephesus where Timothy pastored, but the text is not clear.^{[8](#)} At least they were a Biblically recognized group of church leaders who had the authority to ordain men.

What did they do? The elders laid their hands on Timothy at that special service. Laying on of hands was associated with the bestowal of blessing (Gen. 48:14, 20) and a continuity of leadership (Num. 27:18–23; Deut. 34:9; Acts 6:6; 13:3). So by their laying on of hands, the elders, who were already in church leadership, showed they recognized that Timothy was also qualified and equipped for ministry, and they bestowed their blessing on him. They were symbolizing the continuity of leadership to him.

What was the purpose? This text seems to indicate three purposes for ordaining Timothy.

1. To recognize and set Timothy apart as one who was called of God and qualified for ministry. The event of ordination marked a point of officially recognizing the work of God in his life.
2. To safeguard the ministry. The practice of laying on of hands was a way for the men who had already been approved for leadership to safeguard the ministry by allowing only called and qualified men to enter it. Richard Mayhue comments that “ordination is to church leadership what the bar exam is to the legal profession, the C.P.A. exam to accounting, or state board examinations to medical practice. All these examinations serve to verify genuine qualifications for service in the respective fields.”^{[9](#)}
3. To encourage Timothy. Paul urged Timothy to remember his ordination and the gift that had come at that time as a means of encouraging him when he became discouraged.^{[10](#)}

1 Timothy 5:22 “Do not lay hands on anyone hastily.”

The context involves pastors—how to compensate them (vv. 17, 18) and how to handle a sinning pastor (vv. 19–21). The injunction is to be careful when selecting pastors. Consider the same three questions.

Who ordained? Evidently Paul thought the church in Ephesus might ordain some of the men of the congregation for ministry. Otherwise he would not have urged Timothy to be careful in doing so. Clearly the local church did the ordaining.

What did they do? As in 1 Timothy 4:14, the people in the church either had or were contemplating laying their hands on some men to set them apart for ministry.

What was the purpose? The statement, “do not lay hands on anyone hastily” seems to indicate a concern for safeguarding the ministry. Paul told Timothy not to rush to ordain men until the church had fully examined them to determine their fitness for ministry.^{[11](#)}

Acts 13:1–3 “Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.”

This text does not describe an ordination but rather what we call today a commissioning service for missionaries since the church sent out Paul and Barnabas to missionary endeavor. However, we see some similarities to the ordination process, and we can at least find some principles here that apply to ordination.

Who did the work? The Holy Spirit identified Paul and Barnabas for missionary service. However, clearly the church at Antioch did the work of sending out the two men, which is the Biblical pattern for missionary service and ordination.

What did they do? The prophets and teachers there observed Paul and Barnabas since they had been serving there for some time. The church no doubt observed their character, evaluated their ministry, and checked their orthodoxy. When the church was satisfied that the men were called of God, they laid their hands on them to show their blessing and their authorization.

What was the purpose? The purpose of the church’s examination and setting apart was to send Paul and Barnabas into ministry. While the ordaining church does not usually send away its pastor, the ordination ceremony is one way of setting their pastor apart for ministry at the church.

Biblical Principles

From this examination of the Scripture, we see these principles and guidelines for ordinations.

1. The local church ordains men. The Scripture gives no precedent for any group outside the local church ordaining men. The ordination council can make a recommendation, but the local church ordains.
2. Ordination involves a process of evaluating a man, which starts before the church ever calls an ordination council.
3. After evaluating a man, the church leaders lay hands on him to show a bestowal of blessing and continuity of leadership.
4. The purpose of ordination is to recognize men whom God has called, to set them apart for ministry, to safeguard the ministry, and to provide an occasion that will encourage them in years to come.

An Important Event

Ordination is an important event in a man's life. If God has called you to ministry, aspire to ordination. You do not usually ask for it yourself; your church should do so. Still you can aspire to it, desire it, and move toward it in your life. Don't fear ordination. The process is difficult and challenging, but it can be a real blessing as you study the Scriptures and express Biblical truths. Your ordination will be an event you can lean on later as a confirmation of God's call to the ministry.

Works Cited

1. FBTS maintains the position that only men should hold the office of pastor (1 Timothy 3:1—"if a man desires the position of a bishop" and Titus 1:6—"if a man is blameless"). Therefore we hold that only men should be ordained.
2. Usually all members of the man's church are welcome to observe the council, but generally only some of the men are chosen to sit on the council.
3. A church invites other men to join in evaluating a candidate so there is wider approval of the man.
4. Mark 3:14; John 15:16; Acts 1:22; Acts 10:42; 13:48; 14:23; 16:4; 17:31; Romans 13:1; 1 Corinthians 2:7; 7:17; 9:14; Galatians 3:19; Ephesians 2:10; 1 Timothy 2:7; Titus 1:5; Hebrews 5:1; 8:3; 9:6; Jude 4
5. NKJV—Acts 10:42; 17:31; 1 Corinthians 2:7; 7:17; ESV—a variant translation of 1 Peter 2:13; NASB—Acts 7:53; Galatians 3:19; NIV—Matthew 21:16
6. Homer A. Kent Jr., *Jerusalem to Rome* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972), 118, 119.
7. Quite literally these men were the "presbytery." The group probably included Paul based on his comment in 2 Timothy 1:6.
8. Some people think the events of 1 Timothy 4:14 may have taken place when Timothy joined Paul as an assistant (Acts 16:1–3). If this was the case, the words, "he was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium" in verse 2 may refer to his ordination.
9. Richard L. Mayhue, "Ordination to Pastoral Ministry" in *Rediscovering Pastoral Ministry*, ed. John MacArthur, Jr. (Nashville: W Publication Group, a Division of Thomas Nelson Inc., 1995), 138. Appendix 3 in this book gives an extensive list of subjects that could be asked at an ordination council. This section would be an excellent source for a man to work through as he anticipates ordination.
10. Timothy may have needed encouragement at that time in view of Paul's words in 1 Timothy 4:12 ("let no one despise your youth") and 2 Timothy 1:7 ("for God has not given us a spirit of fear").
11. That kind of examination would reduce the possibility of disciplining pastors in the future (vv. 19–21).

Mr. Don Anderson

[Other Articles](#)

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