

ARE YOU AN ORDINATED MINISTER?

May 7, 2017

While ministering in Louisiana, I was visiting a member of the church at the Our Lady of the Lake Hospital in Baton Rouge. While there I learned of the special privileges and accesses that I could attain by acquiring a clergy badge. I decided to take the time to get one. Upon finding and visiting the appropriate office, I was asked if I was an ordained minister and told that I needed a “certificate of ordination” to prove I was an “ordained minister.” Gratefully, I was eventually able to circumvent this obstacle. This is not the first time that I have been asked to produce such a document and it reminded me why I had not attempted to get the clergy badge three years ago. I had also gone through the same thing in order to get my license to perform marriages. I carry a laminated copy of my Memphis School of Preaching diploma in my wallet for such instances.

This, of course, is always an inconvenience to a gospel preacher. It is because nearly the entire religious world has taken the word “ordination” from the Bible and made it to be something very different than what it was. What the hospital administration desired of me was a certification from my denominational headquarters, to prove I was clergy. You can understand my frustration since I am not a member of a denomination, the church has no earthly headquarters, there is no distinction between clergy and laity in the church of Christ, and no man has been appointed to give the members of the Lord’s Body a certification to do what Christ appointed all men to do. These things stirred my interest to study the topic of ordination deeper. I’d like to share with you my findings.

In the New Testament, men were “ordained” unto church offices, however, what that meant was simply **they were appointed** to those offices (Titus 1:5; Acts 14:23; 1 Tim 2:7; Mark 3:14). Not all appointments or ordinations were religious in nature. For example, the same word found in Titus 1:5 translated “**ordained**” with reference to elders, is found in Acts 7:10 in reference to Joseph being “**made**” governor in Egypt. In Matthew 24:25 the same word is found again in reference to the appointment of a steward over a household. The same word Paul used in reference to his being “**ordained**” a preacher, apostle and teacher of the gospel (1 Tim. 2:7) is found in Luke 12:46 in reference to being “**appointed**” to destruction. To be ordained in the first century was simply to be appointed. They were appointed either because: they met the biblical qualifications, they had the desire to serve, they had been chosen to perform a certain task, or a combination of those things. There were often ceremonious acts in connection with their appointment including: the laying on of hands, prayers, and fasting (Acts 13:1-3, et. al.). None of these acts were ever commanded in connection with appointments to office but they are certainly appropriate and authorized. In New Testament times, there is also evidence that letters of commendation were often sent from one congregation to another in order to attest to one’s character or qualifications (2 Cor. 3:1).

Based on the above, the following practices associated with “ordination” are scriptural. First, one can be appointed to a particular area of Christ’s work by the gospel or by the church. Second, an ordination ceremony may be had in connection with it. Third, one may be provided with a commendation or certification denoting qualifications, quality of service performed, etc.

That being said, let us look now at a brief history of “ordination” and some unscriptural practices that often accompany it.

The word “ordination” historically comes from the Latin word *ordinatio*, which means “a legal incorporation into a civil body or corporation with a hierarchy” i.e. given a rank among an order. It was in use during the Roman Empire with respect to various social orders. Employed in a religious context, the process gives elders, deacons, and preachers a higher rank in the church than “ordinary” members of the church. This is a distinction that was never made by New Testament writers. It establishes two casts within the church that were never intended: clergy and laity.

The process of “ordination” is traceable back to the Roman Catholic Church. Considered by Catholic tradition to be one of seven sacraments also called holy orders. With it is the belief that, all ordained clergy are ordained by bishops who were themselves ordained by bishops; an unbroken chain all the way back to the apostles who were ordained by Christ. This false premise, they call apostolic succession. Those ordained with holy orders are authorized to preach sermons, perform baptisms, celebrate the Eucharist, hear confessions, anoint the sick, and absolve sins.

There are numerous things that are unscriptural about the above. The most obvious are: (1) the giving of ranks and separation of clergy and laity; (2) the false idea that apostolic succession is even a matter of importance (additionally, the attempts at falsification of history in order to establish it); (3) the idea that a man needs to be given permission by other men to preach God’s Word, perform baptisms, etc.; (4) the heresy of suggesting that any man can absolve sins.

Ordination among Protestant churches varies by denomination. In most Protestant churches, ordination to the pastoral office is the rite by which their various churches: (1) recognize and confirm that an individual has been called by God to ministry; (2) acknowledges that the individual has gone through a period of discernment and training related to this call; (3) authorizes that individual to take on the office of ministry.

A number of unscriptural ideas and practices are seen here, as well. First, all of mankind has been called by the Gospel and given the appointment (“ordained”) to preach, teach and evangelize (Rom. 1:1,6,7; 1 Cor. 1:9; 2 The. 2:14; Mat. 28:18-20; Mk. 16:15-16). In what capacity one does this work, is up to the individual. The denominational idea of “being called to preach” varies by denomination from a supernatural call (such as hearing a voice in one’s head, a near death experience, an idea accompanied by an euphoric feeling, etc.) to a “call” that others see in the form of potential for God’s service. Either way, any attempt to individually recognize and confirm “the call” is a misunderstanding of the nature of Gospel call in the New Testament. Second, the period of discernment and training in the case of denominational ordination is really code language for –there must be evidence of indoctrination into the creeds of whatever denomination will provide the certification of ordination. Third, as aforementioned, no one can truly authorize or forbid someone else to preach or perform associated acts when God has already given authorization.

This stands as another example of a Biblical word that has been hijacked and counterfeited, thus causing more confusion in the religious world. So how should a Gospel Preacher answer, “Are you an ordained minister?” My answer is, “Yes!” Jesus Christ Himself has ordained me! His ordination carries much more authority than any board or council of men could ever bestow upon me. Regretfully, in most cases, it is not considered enough.

Anyway, the situation brought about a good study for me. Additionally, now, when in that hospital, I have free parking, free coffee, and unrestricted access at the Lake. Oh yeah... and I can now boast of being part of the LOL clergy.