

THE THEOLOGY OF ORDINATION

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Ellen White refers to Acts 13:1-3 as an account of the formal ordination of Paul and Barnabas to the gospel ministry. "God had abundantly blessed the labors of Paul and Barnabas during the year they remained with the believers in Antioch (see Acts 11:22-30). But neither of them had as yet been formally ordained to the gospel ministry. They had reached a point in their Christian experience when God was about to entrust them with the carrying forward of a difficult missionary enterprise, in the prosecution of which they would need every advantage that could be obtained through the agency of the church" (AA 160).

Acts 13:2 indicates that the instruction from the Holy Spirit to the church at Antioch to ordain Paul and Barnabas, probably through one of the prophets, came either in the midst of a specific public worship service accompanied by fasting or sometime during the course of their ministering to the Lord punctuated with fasting. Note the identification of those who ordain and those who are to ordain:

1. "He instructed the church by revelation to set them apart publicly to the work of the ministry" (AA 161).

"God communicated with the devout prophets and teachers in the church at Antioch" (SR 303).

2. On page 101 of Early Writings Ellen White speaks of those who should ordain men to the ministry: "Brethren of experience and of sound minds should assemble, and following the Word of God and the sanction of the Holy Spirit, should with fervent prayer, lay hands upon those who have...."

In vol. 1, Testimonies, page 209 she writes, "I saw that God had laid upon His chosen ministers the duty of deciding who was fit for the holy work; and in union with the church and the manifest tokens of the Holy Spirit, they were to decide who should go and who were unfit to go."

Acts 13:3 tells of fasting, prayer, laying on of hands, and official sending which implies blessing, and full authorization by the church. And AA, pages 161-162 adds, "Before being sent forth as missionaries to the heathen world, these apostles were solemnly dedicated to God by fasting and prayer and the laying on of hands....And when the ministers of the church of believers in Antioch (see Acts 13:1) laid their hands upon Paul and Barnabas."

Beyond this it is well to note that in the "circumstances connected with the separation of Paul and Barnabas by the Holy Spirit to a definite line of service," Ellen White sees clear evidence, "that the Lord works through appointed agencies in His organized church" (AA 162).

The Origin of Ordination

Mark 3:14 indicates the first step in the organization of the Christian church. "When Jesus had ended His instruction to the disciples, He gathered the little band close about Him, and kneeling in the midst of them, and laying hands upon their heads, He offered a prayer dedicating them to the sacred work. Thus the Lord's disciples were ordained to the gospel ministry" (DA 296). "It was at the ordination of the twelve that the first step was taken in the organization of the church that after Christ's departure was to carry on His work on earth" (AA 18).

In AA, page 162, Ellen White traces the form of the laying on of hands back to the Old Testament antecedents of a Jewish father blessing his children by laying his hands reverently upon their heads and the one invested with priestly authority laying his hand upon the head of an animal devoted to sacrifice. She sees in these acts of the bestowal of blessing and the setting aside or dedication for a specific purpose an analogy of what occurs in ordination. In AA page 94, Ellen White mentions the ordination of the seventy elders whom Moses selected to share with him the responsibilities of leadership.

What is Conferred in Ordination?

"Full ecclesiastical authority" is conferred in ordination according to AA pages 161-162. Here we also read that "Their ordination was a public recognition of their divine appointment to bear to the Gentiles the glad tidings of the gospel. Both Paul and Barnabas had already received their commission from God Himself, and the ceremony of the laying on of hands added no new grace or virtual qualification. It was an acknowledged form of designation to an appointed office, and a recognition of one's authority in that office. By it the seal of the church was set upon the work of God" Ordination was thus a recognition of a previous divine appointment and added no new grace or virtual qualification."

When the ministers of the church of believers in Antioch laid their hands upon Paul and Barnabas, they, by that action, asked God to bestow His blessing upon the chosen apostles, in their devotion to the specific work to which they had been appointed" (AA 162, emphasis added).

Mrs. White then goes on in this same reference to speak of and to condemn the unwarrantable importance that was attached to ordination at a later date, "as if a power came at once upon those who received such ordination, which immediately qualified them for any and all ministerial work. But in the setting apart of these two apostles, there is no record indicating that any virtue was imparted by the mere act of laying on of hands."

Early Writings, page 101, further amplifies, "Ordination sets men apart to devote themselves entirely to God's work and shows the sanction of the church to their going forth as messengers to carry the most solemn message ever given to men."

What Ordination Authorizes Men to Do

Acts of the Apostles, page 161, lists three things those ordained are authorized to do:

1. To teach the truth.
2. To perform the rite of baptism.
3. To organize churches.

(These three precede the words, "being invested with full ecclesiastical authority.")

Early Writings, pages 101-104, adds:

4. To administer the ordinances of the Lord's house.
5. To secure the peace, harmony and union of the church--to keep the church from being deceived and imposed upon by false teachers.

Who Should Be Ordained?

1. Missionary physicians whose work is largely spiritual--"The work of the true medical missionary is largely a spiritual work. It includes prayer and the laying on of hands (a reference to prayer for the sick as outlined in James 5:14, 15?); he therefore should be as sacredly set apart for his work as is the minister of the gospel. Those who are selected to act the part of missionary physicians, are to be set apart as such. This will strengthen them against the temptation to withdraw from the sanitarium work to engage in private practice. No selfish motive should be allowed to draw the worker from his post of duty" (Ev. 546).
2. Deacons--qualified to instruct in the truth but largely to transact the business of the church. "The seven chosen men were solemnly set apart for their duties by prayer and the laying on of hands. Those who were thus ordained were not thereby excluded from teaching the faith. On the contrary, it is recorded that 'Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.' They were fully qualified to instruct in the truth. They were also men of calm judgment and discretion, well calculated to deal with difficult cases of trial, of murmuring or jealousy.

"This choosing of men to transact the business of the church, so that the apostles could be left free for their special work of teaching the truth, was greatly blessed of God. The church advanced in numbers and strength. 'And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.' It is necessary that the same order and system should be maintained in the church now as in the days of the apostles. The prosperity of the cause

depends largely upon its various departments being conducted by men of ability, who are qualified for their positions (SR 260-261).

3. Another order--those whom God has called to minister in word and doctrine. "Those who are chosen of God to be leaders in the cause of God, having the general over-sight of the spiritual interest of the church, should be relieved, as far as possible, from cares and perplexities of a temporal nature. Those whom God has called to minister in word and doctrine should have time for meditation, prayer, and study of the Scriptures. Their clear spiritual perception is dimmed by entering into the lesser details of business and dealing with the various temperaments of those who meet to gather in church capacity. It is proper for all matters of a temporal nature to come before the proper officers and be by them adjusted. But if they are of so difficult a character as to baffle their wisdom, they should be carried into the council of those who have the over-sight of the entire church" (SR 260,261). (Compare AA 89.)
4. Elders in every church--Acts 14:23.

Qualifications for Ordination

Acts 11:22-24,26 and 13:1-3 lists these qualifications:

1. Called by the church.
2. One who understands, experiences, and preaches the gospel of God's grace.
3. A good man, full of the Holy Ghost and faith.
4. One to whom God gives fruitage for his labors.

Early Writings, pages 100-102, adds several more:

5. Men who have given good evidence that they are capable of ruling well their own house and preserving order in their own families.
6. Men who have given good evidence that they can enlighten those who are in darkness.
7. Men who have given full proof that they have received their commission of God.
8. Holy men--God will not accept men or "entrust the care of His precious flock to men whose mind and judgment have been weakened by former errors that they have cherished, such as so-called perfectionism and Spiritualism, and who, by their course while in these errors, have disgraced themselves and brought reproach upon the cause of truth, (even though) they may now feel free from error and competent to go forth and to teach this last message" because "their judgment was perverted while in error, and is now weakened....The holy law spoken by God from Sinai is a part of Himself, and holy men who are its strict observers will alone honor Him by teaching it to others."

9. The approval of the Holy Spirit--After men who have entered upon the sacred work of teaching Bible truth to the world, having been carefully examined by faithful, experienced, persons* have had some experience, they "should be presented before the Lord in earnest prayer that He would indicate by His Holy Spirit that they are acceptable to Him. The apostle says: 'Lay hands on no man.' In the days of the apostles the ministers of God did not dare to rely upon their own judgment in selecting or accepting men to take the solemn and sacred position of mouthpiece for God. They selected the men whom their judgment would accept, and then they placed them before the Lord to see if He would accept them to go forth as His representatives. No less than this should be done now." (Cf 1T 208, 209.)

Testimonies vol. 4, page 607 adds three more:

10. Proper self-government.
11. Good influence.
12. Men "of good repute, capable of discreetly managing an interest after they have aroused it."
13. Men who will dare to reprove sin in the spirit of meekness. (1T 209)
14. Must see "the infinite sacrifice made by the Son of God to save fallen men, and his own soul must be imbued with the spirit of undying love: (4T 442). Cf DA 815--Must have the love of Jesus in the heart.
15. Be able to teach the people how to seek and save the lost. Be an educator of the church in gospel work. (DA 825)

*On the kind of examination mentioned in the paragraph above Ellen White has written much. Notice the following statements:

"...examined especially to see if they have an intelligent understanding of the truth for this time, so that they can give a connected discourse upon the prophecies or upon practical subjects" (4T 407).

"Hands are laid upon men to ordain them for the ministry before they are thoroughly examined as to their qualifications for the sacred work; but how much better would it be to make thorough work before accepting them, as ministers..." (4T 407).

Ellen White has character qualifications in mind.

More on examination of candidates for the ministry: "Those upon whom this responsibility rests, should acquaint themselves with his history since he professed to believe the truth. His Christian experience and his knowledge of the Scriptures the way he holds present truth should all be understood. No one should be accepted as a laborer in the cause of God until he makes it manifest that he has a real, living experience in the things of God" (GW 438).

Note how Paul examined Timothy--GW 439.

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16. Men who like Timothy seek the advice and instruction of older successful ministers and who do not move from impulse, but exercise consideration and calm thought, inquiring at every step, is this the way of the Lord? (GW 440)
17. Men who are willing to receive their reward not in money but in souls (Ms 74, 1903)
18. "No man should be set apart as a teacher of the people while his own teaching or example contradicts the testimony God has given His servants to bear in regard to diet, for this will bring confusion. His disregard of health reform unfits him to stand as the Lord's messenger" (6T 378).