

Theology of Ordination
Chris Fluitt

“All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” are to be found in one location. All power (Matthew 26:64), authority (Matthew 28:18), and dominion (Revelation 5:13) abide in one place. Many have told fantastic stories about secret hidden wealth and supernatural empowerment found only in the most hidden, remote, and exotic locations, but for the Christian fortune seeker, our source of all things is Jesus Christ, who has come to all and is lifted up to draw all to Himself. (John 3:14, 12:32)

The Christian Church does not celebrate a large number of treasures, but one treasure: Jesus Christ. For the Christian, there are not many powers or authorities, but One who holds all power and authority, namely Jesus Christ. A casual observer may say the Church had many ministries, but the Church, in fact, has only one ministry; that is the ministry of Christ. “*Christ* is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” (Col 1:17)

If Christ is before all things, then He is before creeds, denominations, seminary degrees, religious offices, man-made traditions and carefully worded philosophies. The centrality and supremacy of Christ must be remembered by those who bear His name.

It is this supreme Jesus who personally calls His disciples and invites them to serve by simply saying, “Follow me.” (Matthew 4:19) How are we to understand the Spiritual work, requirements, and overall purpose of ordination within this singular ministry of Jesus Christ?

The Call

It seemed like an ordinary day to catch fish for two brothers named Simon and Andrew. As they were casting their nets into the Galilean Sea a man walked up and said, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.” (Matthew 4:19) Jesus and his two followers kept walking and soon came upon two more brothers named James and John. As they sat mending their nets, Jesus made His call to them; they promptly left their father’s boat and the family business.

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It is important to remember that it is Jesus who calls us to be His disciples. We know that He loved us first. (1 John 4:19) A disciple is not above their teacher. (Luke 6:40) It is Jesus who came to seek and save the lost. (Luke 19:10) It was not we who sought after Him.

Jesus still calls! He still calls, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” (Matthew 11:28-29) The teachings of a rabbi were referred to as a yoke.¹ The greatest rabbi the world has ever known sought us out and invited us to “come learn.”

Before one can minister the teachings of Christ, they must be ministered to by Christ. It was a Jewish rabbinical tradition for a student to learn “at the feet” of the teacher. (Acts 22:3 KJV) Disciples are students learning at the feet of the teacher, Jesus Christ. Before Peter ever preached on the day of Pentecost and ministered Christ to that crowd, Christ had ministered to him. Before Paul ever ministered Christ in Ephesus, Christ Himself had ministered to him. Every minister MUST first be a disciple.

People often ask about a minister’s calling. “Are you called to pastor, teach, start a church, or be a missionary?” they might ask. While these are Godly calls worthy of double honor (1 Timothy 5:17), let us always remember that most important, initial call from Jesus to become a disciple. Had John never answered his call to be a disciple, he would never have experienced the fulfillment of being John the Revelator. Had Peter or Paul never answered their own call of discipleship, they would have never been the preacher of Pentecost nor the vessel to the Gentiles, respectively

It is at that humble position at the feet of Jesus where a disciple receives his vocation.

¹ “Zygos/Yoke,” accessed April 24, 2023. <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g2218/kjv/tr/0-1/>

The Sending

I remember reading my Bible one particular day. I read Matthew 10:1, “Jesus called his twelve disciples to him...” Verse 2 then reads, “These are the names of the twelve apostles...”

Being a young student of the Word, I remember asking, “Wait... are there 12 disciples and 12 apostles? $12+12=24$?” The word Apostle, ‘apostolos’ in Greek, means “one sent forth.”² In a single verse, these 12 disciples become 12 apostles because Jesus sends them to do His work.

Disciples sit, and apostles are sent.

In the first verse, it says Jesus “gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.” Jesus gifted them with His own authority to do His own work. This work we rightly call ministry.

As we answer that call to sit and learn at the feet of Jesus, we must listen carefully because it is here we may hear him gently call us into His ministry. These brand-new apostles did not set off to start their own ministries but to continue the only true ministry, that of Jesus Christ.

What we call “ministries” may be more Biblically defined as gifts. “When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people.” (Ephesians 4:8 NIV) What are these gifts? Paul tells us a few verses later.

Ephesians 4:11-12 “So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up...”

Christ did not give out different ministries and services. Rather, Christ gave distinct giftings of one singular ministry and service and for one singular purpose: to build up the body

² “apostolos/Apostles,” accessed April 25, 2023. <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g652/kjv/tr/0-1/>

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of Christ - the Church. In the work of ministry, there are many gifts, and it is the Giver's desire that His disciples find and use their gifts.

1 Peter 4:10 (NLT) “God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another.”

Jesus calls His disciples, and then He gifts them; He empowers them, and sends them to do His work. Jesus has enough gifts and power to fully equip every disciple to walk into a work of individual ministry. There is work enough for every disciple to answer the call of the Lord of the Harvest; as Jesus Himself said, “the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.” (Matthew 9:37 NIV)

While there is room for everyone at the feet of Jesus and in the work of His field, there remains distinct and set-apart callings to be recognized and defined.

Ordination

The Scriptures show us a pattern of ordination, where God has gifted someone to minister, and the people of God take part in recognition of that person's call. Here are 8 examples of ordination.

Aaron and his sons

After the exodus from Egypt, God selected a family to serve as priests. Aaron and his sons were anointed, ordained, and consecrated in a special ceremony. God told Moses, “You shall anoint them and **ordain** them and consecrate them, so that they may serve Me as priests. (Exodus 28:41 NASB)

From this moment on, it was known by all that Aaron and his sons possessed a distinct gift of service unto God and His people.

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The tribe of Levi

Because of the loyalty shown to God in a crisis, the entire tribe of Levi was set apart to assist the priests in the services of the sanctuary (Ex 32:26; Num. 8:5-26). They were installed to this service in a ceremony where the “sons of Israel” laid their hands on the Levites. (Num. 8:10)

The 70 elders

Moses again ordains ministers, when he chooses seventy men from among the people to assist him with his leadership responsibilities (Num. 11:16-30). Moses took great care in selecting these elders and commented on the qualifications of these seventy elders. They were “leading men... wise and respected.” (Deut 1:15 NIV)

Spiritual gifting took place during this ordination because the Lord promised to Moses: “I will take some of the power of the Spirit that is on you and put it on them.” (Num. 11:17 NIV) It is noteworthy that God did not directly choose these elders, but Moses did. (Num. 11:16)

Joshua

God appointed Joshua as Moses’ successor.(Num. 27:15-23) God instructed Moses to lay his hands on Joshua’s head in a special ceremony. Scripture says that Joshua received Spiritual gifting and became “full of the spirit of wisdom.” (Dt. 34:9)

The influence and pattern of ordination is not just seen in the old testament, but also in the new testament.

12 apostles

There is only one place in scripture where Jesus prayed the entire night. It is when He selects his apostles for ordination. (Luke 6:12) When morning came, Jesus made a distinction among his larger group of disciples and set apart twelve whom he designated Apostles. He gifted these 12 with his authority and sent them out to do His work of ministry.

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7 servants

In the growing Church, the apostles saw the need to improve the efficiency of ministry. The daily service of providing food had become too great for the disciples to oversee in addition to their ministry of the Word. The 12 called together all the disciples to address the issue.

“Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.” (Acts 6:3-4 NIV)

The 12 apostles set the requirements and gave the congregation the duty of selection. Seen here also is the distinction of giftings in the same ministry of Christ, for the Apostles are dedicated to a daily duty of the Word while these servants (or deacons) are tasked with daily duties of ministry to the physical needs of people. We see the one ministry of Christ with distinct operations.

The congregation of disciples presented these 7 men to the apostles, who laid their hands on them and prayed. God’s favor upon this act is clearly seen in verse seven when it says, “So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.”

Paul & Barnabas

While worshipping, the Holy Spirit spoke to the Church in Antioch, saying, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” (Acts 13:2 NIV) Ordination requires more than God's voice! Ordination requires the agreement of the people with God’s will. The congregation at Antioch had heard God’s voice, but they took time to fast and pray about their decision and for Paul & Barnabus, as well. It is a command of God that we lay the hands of

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ordination on no one suddenly. (1 Timothy 5:22) “So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.” Acts 13:3)

Timothy

A young man (1 Tim 4:12) named Timothy received his gift of ministry with the laying on of the hands of Paul and the “presbytery.” During his ordination, Timothy received a spiritual gift. As Paul wrote, “Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you. (1 Timothy 4:14 NIV) Paul kept reminding Timothy of this gift, and in his last letter, wrote, “Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.” (2 Timothy 1:6 (NKJV) Here again we see a Spiritual gifting that happens to those who are called from the sitting position to the sending vocation.

Requirements of Ordination

Dear disciple, we learned at the feet of Jesus, “To whomsoever much is given, much will be required.” (Luke 12:48) Jesus requires much of disciples and those who answer the call to His ministry.

The apostle Paul wrote of requirements for elders and deacons in his letters to Timothy and Titus. (1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:6-9) These qualifications were adopted by most of the Christian churches throughout the history of Christianity. The ordination of ministry is a “noble task” requiring a life lived “above reproach.” The same apostle Paul told the Church of Ephesus to “take heed.”

“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers [bishop], to shepherd [pastor] the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28).

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Such a responsibility is found in this verse. The Holy Spirit Himself has made you to be a worker in the Church, the same Church God purchased with His own blood. Take heed indeed, to yourselves and the flock.

Anyone can receive the call to sit at the feet of Jesus as a disciple. The distinct gifting and call of the Spirit can only be received by a disciple, and can only be given by God. Because it is at the feet of Jesus where everything begins. Today, every minister should still be found at the feet of the master.

Conclusion

Ordination is not the calling but rather the recognition and acceptance of the people of God that the call has already occurred. The 7 chosen in Acts 6 were already full of the Spirit. The 70 elders were already leading their tribes diligently. Aaron was already a mediator for Moses and the people of Israel. Paul & Barnabas were already teaching the Word. The ordination is not the call, but the recognition of the call. While Spiritual gifting may take place upon the laying of the hands of ordination, that gift is merely a tool to further the gift of your calling.

“Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called.” (1 Corinthians 1:26 NIV)

Do you still remember when Jesus called you to follow? That same call which came to you while you were in darkness, is the same call into a royal priesthood, and the same call that will one day lead you to the very throne of Jesus. One must simply answer the call.

“You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”

1 Peter 2:9 NIV)