

What is Ordination?

Written by Calvin Fox

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In my Study, on a wall, is a framed "Certificate of Ordination" given to me on November 26th, 1961. It is signed by the Moderator of the Ordaining Council, Clerk of that Council and Clerk of the sponsoring local church. There were 18 Messengers from 6 local churches in the Council, including their Pastors. They listened to three papers I wrote: Statement of Christian Experience (Conversion), Call to the Ministry and my Statement of Faith (Theology). My own Pastor had prepared me for the occasion. The Messengers, all Fundamentalists, "grilled" me on these matters thoroughly and then voted to recommend me for Ordination, which took place later in the day at Bethel Baptist Church in Hartford, Connecticut. All of this was "according to the usage within the Baptist General Conference".

I remember the Day well, especially the moment I kneeled on the platform in front of the congregation gathered for the Service (there were two of us being ordained) I remember the charged moment when those Messengers encircled me, laid their hands upon me, prayed for me and pronounced the words of Ordination. I had been doing the work of an Evangelist for 7 years. I had earlier been the Youth Pastor and a Deacon of the Bethel church I had already been the interim Pastor of another Baptist church and was the Pastor of a Congregational Church at the time of my ordination. So what was the Ordination for?

It was the public recognition and confirmation of my Call and Gifts for ordained Ministry as a pastor with this Denomination. They were officially declaring me fit for the work and setting me apart, consecrating me, for more of this Ministry. My Ministry prior to this was unofficial and unrecognized or approved by any Denomination or Association of churches.

I would next go on to be the founding Pastor of a BGC church in a nearby town. I never served another BGC church. The church I pastored next was a member of the Conservative Baptist Association of America. The point is that Bible churches are normally autonomous, but they recognize the Ordinations done in other like-minded churches. They do not hire anyone on that basis alone, of course; they have their own local requirements and expectations for their next Pastor, but they do normally want someone who has been publicly, officially recognized and confirmed as qualified in the basics for Ministry by a Denomination or Association whose authority they approve. When I became an Episcopalian much later in life, the Episcopal Church flatly rejected my Baptist ordination and I'm sure vice versa would also be true. I agree that the Clergy of a Denomination should meet the requirements of that Denomination for the Office and should be appropriately qualified and authorized by it to preach and to administer the Sacraments according to its standards. Absolutely.

Baptist Ordination did not make me a Pastor. The call of the local church does that. I am now a "layperson" and not a Pastor of any kind in any church. My last day at my last church was my last day as a Pastor. Although ordained, I have no official authority in any church or Denomination. (The occasional use of the title, "Reverend" with my name now is simply honorific).

Actually, these days, I find that being "ordained" does not mean anything to many evangelicals (I also find that 45 years of ordained ministry does not command any respect either among young evangelicals) There are non-ordained laypeople who consider themselves to be as qualified as any ordained person to be the Pastor or Leader of any local church. This goes hand in glove with the mushrooming of many non-denominational churches, the rejection of the

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institutional church model and all round general anti clericalism and the increasingly popular concept that a "church" is supposed to be an egalitarian fellowship. This is a very unscriptural, sad and dangerous development.