

Ordination of Pastors in the Church

A resource developed by the
Georgia Baptist Administration Committee
and edited by John L. Yeats of the Missouri Baptist Convention
for general use and information

March 7, 2022

Ordination of Pastors in the Church

Background

At the December 3, 2019, Georgia Baptists Administration Committee meeting, the Administration Committee received and considered questions and concerns regarding the issue of ordination among Georgia Baptist churches. In an effort to address these concerns, and to assist Georgia Baptist churches in examining the doctrine of ordination through a biblical lens, the Administration Committee formed a task force to write a resource regarding ordination to share with the Executive Committee as a matter of information.

Georgia Baptists recognize the value of this position paper to all state convention networks in the Southern Baptist Convention. This free resource has been edited to accommodate general usage. The Missouri Baptist Convention is grateful for the good work of our brothers and sisters in Georgia who provided this resource. The MBC has edited the document for grammar and clarity. It should be noted that this document focuses on the ordination of pastors; it does not address the ordination of deacons in any detail.

Introduction

This resource is written to provide a biblical and theological response to two ultimate questions: First, what is ordination? Second, who are the proper candidates for ordination? The thesis for this resource is that, based upon the clear teaching of God's Word, and in keeping with sound biblical, theological, and ecclesiological practices, ordination is limited to biblically qualified men serving in pastoral roles.

The teaching of Scripture and the theological reflections on Scripture that have emerged over the years as expressed in Baptist confessional documents make clear the pastoral office with its pastoral functions is reserved for men. The distinction between "office" and "function" is explored more thoroughly throughout this study. In some Baptist churches, a man could be "functioning" as a student pastor or worship pastor (not holding the office of senior or lead pastor) and still meet the requirements for ordination.

This study shows that ordination is restricted to men who serve functionally in pastoral roles as they are defined biblically and theologically. What the Bible teaches is of fundamental and foundational importance. The teaching of the Old Testament establishes the context for the teaching of the New Testament. Theological reflection is based solely on biblical teaching.¹ Ordination is a good and right practice for the church. Men, who are called to gospel ministry in and through a local church, need to be set apart by the local church. That is the local church where they serve, in which they are members and through which they are serving. Southern Baptists have historically reserved ordination for men called into gospel ministry and for men called to serve in the office of deacon.

¹ This paper is not intended to be an article for the academy. It is written for the pastors and leaders engaged together in the work of the Georgia Baptist Mission Board. The topic is worthy of a full treatment that would include a thorough examination of how Baptists, particularly Southern and Georgia Baptists, have addressed this issue. It would also need to give more complete attention to how cultural concerns operate in the context of clear biblical teaching on this issue. Any treatment of cultural context, however, should be done on the basis of biblical content. Footnotes are kept to a minimum due to the nature and character of the writing.

Hershel Hobbs, who served Southern Baptists as such a significant voice for so many years, said, “That there are two ordained offices does not mean that a church may not have other workers, such as teachers and leaders, in various places of the work. Such may be chosen as the need demands. But the ordained offices are pastors and deacons.”²

So, what does the Bible say about the ordination of pastors?

Biblical Foundations

The Bible is the inerrant, infallible, and fully sufficient Word of God. To say that the Bible is “inerrant” is to affirm that it has no errors. To say the Bible is “infallible” is to affirm that it cannot err. Infallibility is based on God being the supreme author of Scripture, calling out and using men as His instruments for giving us His Word. To say that the Bible is “fully sufficient” is to say that the Bible is the ultimate authority and all that believers need to live as the people of God in the church and before the world.³ The assessment of both the Old and New Testaments flows from a full commitment to the absolute inerrancy, the non-negotiable infallibility, and the fully sufficient character of the Bible.

The Bible is one book consisting of two testaments. The Bible unfolds as one story in two temporal contexts. The Old Testament is the book of promise; the New Testament is the book of fulfillment. What is seen as shadow in the Old Testament is seen in full light in the New Testament.

² Hershel Hobbs, *The Baptist Faith and Messag*, (Nashville: Convention Press, 1971), 86.

³ We give thanks to God for the conservative resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention. The book that served as a source for so many to see more clearly the problems we were facing was L. Russ Bush and Tom Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible*, Seminary Hill Press, 1980. The issues of inerrancy and infallibility have to be faced, it seems, at least in every generation because the issue of sufficiency is challenged. The question of ordination is ultimately about the sufficiency of Scripture, which always compels us to revisit the question of inerrancy and infallibility. For a good popular treatment of the issues of inerrancy, infallibility and sufficiency, see Erwin Lutzer, *Seven Reasons Why You Can Trust the Bibl*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1998).

The “Son” shines in and through both. Both testaments are all about Him and focus on Him. But He, in all that He is and does, points us to the absolute truth, integrity, and reliability of the Bible (John 5:39-40; 10:34-35; Luke 24:25-27). Jesus confirms the absolute truth of Scripture; Scripture points us to Jesus on every page.⁴ It is right to conclude that whatever Scripture teaches about ordination is exactly what Jesus would teach, and Scripture would confirm what Jesus would teach about ordination.

One way to approach the issue of ordination in the Old Testament is to look at three functions and offices that are found in three persons in the Old Testament that come to fullness and fulfillment in Jesus. These three functions and offices are prophet, priest, and king. The three primary persons who function in these offices who point us to Jesus are Moses, Aaron, and David. Each person is called to serve God in different functions that express the offices which each person holds. Moreover, each of them is a shadow of what comes to full light in the life and ministry of Jesus. But even the shadow sheds light on the question of ordination.

God chose Moses to lead His people out of Egypt (Exod. 3). He would lead them across the Red Sea and into the wilderness (Exod. 14ff.). He would lead them only with Aaron alongside him to help him. He needed more help; so, following the advice of his father-in-law, he chose men to join him in the work of leading the people (Exod. 18:13-27). Moses was the primary leader of the people. He was called by God and set apart for the service God called him to do. He was, according to Exodus 18, to teach them the truth of God by which they were to live and to represent them to God as their intercessor. Moses functioned in many ways in the office of “pastor.” He refers to himself as a prophet, and he points beyond himself to the prophet who is to come (Deut. 18:15-22). Moses is a prophet who fulfills the prophetic role that will come in time to be fulfilled perfectly in Jesus.

⁴ David Murray, *Jesus on Every Page* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2013).

The opening chapter and verses of Deuteronomy confirm what is communicated in Exodus 18. Moses asks each of the tribes to choose “wise, understanding, and experienced men,” (Deut. 1:13) to be leaders. These chosen men were set apart as leaders of the tribes. They served God and His people under the old covenant in a way that is very similar to how a new covenant pastor functions.

Scripture highlights the character of these men. Scripture speaks to the kind of men they are to be. Scripture specifies they are set apart from the people as those anointed and appointed to be spiritual leaders. Moses is a prophet during the time of the old covenant. He anticipates the new covenant prophet or preacher. God calls Moses to Himself. He appoints him and anoints him as the spiritual leader of His people. He brings to Moses other men who, with him, would lead the people of God.

All that Moses was is fulfilled fully in the coming of Jesus who in His coming announces the arrival of His church. The church is born at Pentecost, and the first action after the arrival of the Holy Spirit was for Peter, apostle and new covenant prophet, to stand and preach the Word of God.

Moses led the people of God to the foot of Sinai (Exod. 19), where they received from God through Moses the law of God (Exod. 20). The book of Exodus unfolds from Exodus 20 and establishes how the people are to live out the law of God in practical ways (Exod. 20-23), how the Tabernacle is to be constructed and furnished (Exod. 24-27), and how the priesthood is to function (Exod. 28-31). Aaron serves with his sons as the priests who lead the worship of the people of God and intercede for them. What is seen here in the priesthood is what is also seen in the spiritual leaders set apart by Moses: they are to hold an office in which and through which specific God-given functions are to be fulfilled. The

consecration/ordination of the priests is laid out in Exodus 29 and its companion text in Leviticus 8-9. The word used in Exodus 29:1 that is often translated “ordain” means to “to set apart as holy,” or “to consecrate.”

These men are appointed by God and anointed of God to represent the people to God and God to the people. They belong to God and are called to do what God commands. Their work is to be done in compliance with and conformity to His Word.

Douglas Stuart writes that the priests are “servants of Yahweh. Since the Tabernacle was his house, those who worked there on his behalf were his servants. They helped the guests, but they clearly worked for Yahweh, not the people who came to visit Yahweh.”⁵ They do not get to decide (as Nadab and Abihu found out) how best to do what they were called of God to do (Lev. 10:1-2). Their ministry as ordained priests is to be done in obedience to the Word of God, to bring the way of God to the people, and to bring the concerns and cares of the people to God. They stand between God and the people. They are mediators of the holy presence of God to a sinful people.

What is learned from the ordained priests of the Old Testament is the sacred nature and character of the office. The office they hold and the function they serve are simple reminders to those who live and work under the new covenant of the sacred character of the special call and commission that is given to each man who has the privilege to serve in the ministry of the gospel.

⁵ Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus: The New American Commentary*, (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2006), p. 620. Stuart adds that the actual ordination process involves three unique steps of “clothing the priests, anointing them, and specially offering an ordination ram as a sacrifice,” p. 620. For a good treatment in sermon form of this ordination process in Exodus 29 and how it all connects with the New Testament, see Philip Graham Ryken, *Exodus: Preaching the Word Series* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2005), 901-910.

They do not provide, however, any kind of prescriptive pattern for ministry since all that they were and did is not fulfilled in the pastoral or priestly office but in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ (Heb. 3:1-5:10). Jesus is far greater than Moses or Aaron. He is the one to whom the entire priestly system points, and he is in his majestic priesthood the perfect manifestation of all that was reflected in the mysterious Melchizedek. Jesus is our priest. He is the great high priest so that the priestly system of Israel points to Jesus, who fulfills for believers in every way what is required for someone to bring God to mankind and mankind to God. He is the exclusive mediator between God and people (2 Tim. 2:1-7).

The prophetic function and office find their focus, fullness, and fulfillment in Jesus. The priestly function and office find their focus, fullness, and fulfillment in Jesus. The office of king, embodied most fully during the days of the old covenant in David, also finds its focus, fullness, and fulfillment in Jesus. David was the king who ruled over the kingdom that God gave him, but he did so in the light of a particular promise given to him by God, “your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever,” (2 Sam. 7:16).

God fulfilled this particular promise to David in the coming of the Son of David, born from the lineage of the house of David as the full fruit of the root of David. Jesus is the King who fulfills fully, faithfully, and forever the promise given to David. He holds that office from eternity past and forever, and functions as the true King of Israel. He is the sovereign ruler over all the earth and the true King over His Kingdom. The church which He announced and then brought to birth during the festival of Pentecost (Acts 1-2) is not His Kingdom but consists of the people and place in and through which His Kingdom is revealed.

It is no strange irony that the gospel, most set on making sure people know Jesus is the Son of David, is the same gospel that records for us the announcement of Jesus concerning the

coming of the church over which He is King and Lord (Matt. 16:13-20). In his coming, Jesus fulfills what was promised to David as He embodies and expresses the essence of whom He is as King ruling over His Kingdom, which is found in the world among all those who hear His call and answer it by following Him.

This church that was announced by Jesus would come to birth in the most real sense and in the most real way following the ascension of Jesus (Acts 1:1-11). This first church would be gathered by the Spirit of God through the preaching of the Word of God. Thousands would respond to the gospel in repentance and faith (Acts 2:37-41). The church was born. She would gather for worship to be taught the truth of God. She would care for her own as a community that was committed in love to each other. She would go into the world to preach the gospel. She was led by those men whom God raised up to anoint and to appoint as leaders of the church (Acts 2:42-47; Acts 3ff.).

These men, led by Peter, James, and John, faced intense resistance from the Jewish religious leaders. They had to deal with conflict that came (Acts 5-6) and persecution that would begin to scatter the church from Jerusalem through Samaria and into Gentile regions. The church at Antioch was at first predominantly a Jewish congregation, but it became a multi-ethnic gathering of saints (Acts 11:19ff.). From this church would come the first missionaries/church planters who were used of God to advance the gospel from the Jewish world into the Gentile world (Acts 13ff.). Paul and Barnabas would be sent out from this church in Antioch to proclaim the gospel and to plant churches all over the Gentile world. God was doing his work in saving sinners and in forming churches. Those anointed and appointed for leadership would lead these churches.

What we observe at the end of the first missionary journey becomes a pattern for the church throughout the world (Acts 14:19-23). Luke explains that Paul and Barnabas, having

reached as far as Derbe, began a reverse trip, stopping in each place they had previously evangelized and made disciples as they made their way back to Antioch. Luke is very clear in communicating to us what they did in each place (Acts 14:22-23). In each town, they followed the pattern of making disciples and encouraging the church since the church had discovered that living in the world as a disciple is difficult and demanding. And they appointed (literally they laid their hands on) elders in each church (Acts 14:23).

Acts 14:23 is a pivotal verse. The word translated “appointed” (ESV) means literally to “lay on the hands.” It is used here and in 2 Corinthians 8:19, where it refers to Titus and an unnamed travelling companion upon whom hands were laid to set them apart for ministry. The unnamed brother sent alongside Titus is known to be “famous among the churches for his preaching of the gospel” (2 Cor. 8:18).

The word translated “elders” is the term used from this point forward for the spiritual leaders of the church. It is a term that has to do more with office than function. It is a title. Those who are to give spiritual oversight to the church are called “elders.”

Other terms are used in the New Testament for the function of the office. The two terms used most frequently for the function of the office are “pastor” and “overseer.” The one who holds the office of “elder” serves in that office under the lordship of Jesus and the authority of Scripture as one who cares for the church like a shepherd cares for his sheep, or as one who looks after or gives oversight to those in the church who have been given to him.

This office/function conjunction is clear in Acts 14:23: “with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed,” with the force of the Greek text focused on their living and leading under the lordship of Jesus. This practice of appointing elders (office) who serve as pastors and overseers (function) becomes a paradigm for what happens in terms of leadership in the church throughout the time recorded for us in the New

Testament.

Consider these five texts: Acts 20:17-38; Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 Timothy 3:1-7,14-16; 1 Peter 5:1-4; and 1 Timothy 2:1-15. The first four speak to the character and conduct of the men who were called to be spiritual leaders of the church. The fifth text, although not specifically about elders/pastors, makes clear the primacy of male leadership in the Christian home and in the church as found elsewhere in the New Testament.

Acts 20:17-38. Paul is on his way to Jerusalem and from there to Rome. He has come to Miletus. He sends for the elders of Ephesus. These are the men who are appointed to be the spiritual leaders of this church. The word for elders (Greek: *presbuteros*) is plural while the word for church (Greek: *ekklesia*) is singular. The church in Ephesus is led by men who serve the church as elders (Acts 20:17). This term is used consistently in the New Testament for their office. They are elders.

The term takes a disciple back to the Old Testament and the function of elders in the spiritual leadership of the people of God. Paul speaks to them about who he had been among them (his character and conduct) and what he taught them (Acts 20:18-21). He then tells them where he is going and what he is facing as the context for telling them what they most need for their leadership in the church (20:22-27). He speaks to them simply and strategically about whom they are to be and what they are to do (20:28).

He calls them first to “pay attention.” It is a word that means “to give heed” or to “listen up” or “look closely.”⁶ We would do well to listen and to look. Leaders, first and foremost, should pay attention to personal behavior, to their spiritual condition, to the nurture of our own lives. This “soul nurture” is the source for oversight of the flock, which Jesus bought with his blood, and for which the pastor is called to care. As he speaks to these elders, Paul uses the two terms that have to do with the function of these men. The first term is translated “overseer”

(Greek: *episkopos*) and means to “give oversight to the church” (Acts 20:28). The second term is translated “care for” (Greek: *poimenas*) (20:28), which employs shepherd imagery for the one who is a pastor. The pastor/elder gives oversight to the church by caring for the people in the way that a shepherd cares for his sheep.⁶

The elder or pastor (office) fulfills his office by leading the church in a way that makes clear to the church that he cares for those who are in the church (function). Paul tells the elders from the church in Ephesus how he did this among them (20:29-35). He protected the church through faithful preaching and teaching in the Word of God. Paul did not covet anything from them but worked hard to provide for them everything they needed to be faithful in following Jesus. Paul gave particular attention to those who were weak and struggling, so as to help them mature as followers of Jesus.

Paul was the apostle who was called of God to plant churches. He, along with others, developed disciples in the churches. Men who were gifted for ministry and called to ministry were set apart and appointed to serve the churches as elders/pastors. Paul’s message to these men when he brought them to Miletus illuminates the work that these “set apart” men were

⁶ Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1656; recently republished in 2001). This little book is Baxter’s “exegesis” of Paul’s words, “pay attention to yourselves to all the flock in which God has made you overseers.” Philip Doddridge in his endorsement says the book “is a most extraordinary performance, and should be read by every young minister, before he takes a people under his stated care; and, I think, the practical part of it reviewed every three or four years; for nothing would have a greater tendency to awaken the spirit of a minister to that zeal in his work, for want of which many good men are but shadows of what (by the blessing of God) they might be if the maxims and measures laid down in that incomparable Treatise (*sic*) were strenuously pursued.”

called and commissioned to do.⁷ They were ordained to oversee the church in a way that a shepherd cares for his own sheep.

Ephesians 4:11-16. Paul follows a pattern in this letter that is common for him in most of his letters. He first lays down a solid doctrinal foundation from which he will build the structures for how people in the church are to live their lives. Right belief must come first. Right behavior then emerges from right belief. This is Paul's pattern here. The first three chapters of this letter lay the solid doctrinal foundation. He then makes a turn toward the practical in 4:1. The focus for the purpose of this position paper is 4:1-16.

At least one goal of the first sixteen verses of chapter four is to show how the glory of God is displayed in and through the church. Paul brings the end of Ephesians 3 to a close with a prayer (3:20-21). The focus of the prayer is that God might be glorified in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations and time. It would seem logical then that Paul would show us how that happens.

Paul records how the display of the glory of God in the church is tied to leadership (4:11). Paul addresses the unity of the church, the diversity of gifts in the church, and the maturity of the church in general terms. Then, Paul speaks with specificity of office and functions when he addresses the issue of ministry. The focal point for the flow of his words in 4:11 is the pastor-

⁷ John Phillips, *Exploring Acts: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1986), 404ff. Phillips writes, "Elders are not chosen by popular vote. Only the Holy Spirit can equip a man for the work and endow him with the character, compassion and compulsion to undertake its arduous and time-consuming tasks . . . it is easier to run a multi-national corporation than it is to shepherd God's 'little flock,' and a far less responsible work as well." John B. Polhill, in *Acts: The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 426, writes, "the Ephesian leaders were not designated as bishops but rather as elders who functioned to 'watch over the flock of God.' This image of the leaders as shepherds of God's flock permeates all of vv. 28-30 and is a common biblical theme."

Teacher.⁸ The pastor is to be a teacher who first equips the saints. Does the pastor equip the saints for the work of ministry, or does the pastor equip the saints by doing the work of ministry? The problem is where to place the comma in the text. At least one way of resolving the “comma dilemma” is to see that the pastor equips the saints for ministry by doing the work of ministry.

He is among them as one who leads the way in doing the work of ministry. He is a servant who leads the saints by serving among them. He speaks the Word of God as a teacher and embodies the Word of God as a servant. The outcome is the building up of the body of Christ through his teaching and his living. The result is he is leading the church toward maturity. The pastor/teacher functions as a leader when he teaches the Word of God to the people of God but then expresses the truth of what he teaches in who he is as a person. His way of living is not disconnected from what he teaches. He gives himself to being what he is declaring. This combination for the leader in the church is explosive. It is what God uses, expressing the truth of God and then embodying by example that truth, to build up the church so that the church can grow toward increasing unity as a body.⁹

1 Timothy 3. Paul identifies here what he knows as the two offices of a local church: the overseer (or pastor/bishop) and the deacon. Although he is dealing here with these two offices, his focus is not at all about what pastors and deacons do, but on whom they are to be. He outlines character qualities for both the pastor and the deacon. And the character qualities seem to address

⁸ Scholars from almost every theological and historical approach to the Bible have weighed in on the meaning of “pastor-teacher” and where to place the comma in this verse. The issues are simply that the pastor-teacher is one office, which is the position I take, or two offices, pastor and teacher; and whether or not there should be a comma placed after the word “saints,” so that the function of the one or two offices of “pastor-teacher” is either to equip the saints and to do the work of ministry or to equip the saints for their doing the work of ministry. Addressing these issues and resolving them is much beyond the scope of this paper. What is within the scope, however, is to see very simply the critical importance of the role of the pastor-teacher in the display of the glory of God in and through the church.

⁹ See James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians: An Expositional Commentary* (GrandRapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1997), 137.

as much function as office. They seem to address the kind of people who are needed in order to do the work that needs to be done.

Many commentators have noted that what is so extraordinary about the character qualities listed here is that there is nothing extraordinary here! What is asked of the pastor in terms of who he is to be is no more and no less than what is asked of any and every follower of Jesus.

What is highlighted here is the connection between leadership in the church and in the home. Importance is also attached to the respect that this person has in the larger community. What is distinctive is that he is equipped with the kind of knowledge of the Word of God that would enable him to teach.¹⁰ What is most important here, however, is not what Paul proclaims about who the pastor is to be, but why (for the sake of the church) the issue is of such immense importance. That issue is focused in 1 Timothy 3:15.

Paul's focus is on how believers are to conduct themselves in the church as a part of the household of faith since the church is the pillar and bulwark of the truth. To take seriously the character and the conduct of those recognized as being called of God to give spiritual oversight (elders/pastors)¹⁰ and practical oversight to the church (deacons) is tied directly to how seriously we take the Bible as the truth of God.

The church stands in the world as the repository of the absolute truth of the living God. The church does not have the right or the privilege of bending the truth of God in any way or for any reason. Local church leaders are locked into the authority of Scripture both in terms of the character of those who lead the church and also the conduct of those who lead the church. It is no

¹⁰ For a thorough treatment of the qualifications for men who serve in the pastoral office, see Albert N. Martin, *The Man of God: His Calling and Godly Life* (Montville, New Jersey: Trinity Pulpit Press, 2018), 55-226. Martin has just published his third of three volumes that are very instructive biblically about the calling, the life, and the ministry of the pastor. He reminds us that the Greek word that we translate "able to teach, refers not merely to a disposition and inclination to help others by instruction, but one who is skillful in teaching."

accident that Paul brings the third chapter of 1 Timothy to a close by making clear what is at stake in the character and the conduct of those who fulfill the functions of the offices of pastor/elder and deacon.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones, the gifted expositor at Westminster Chapel, wrote, “We have somehow got hold of the idea that error is only that which is outrageously wrong, and we do not seem to understand that the most dangerous person of all is the one who does not emphasize the right things.”¹¹

1 Peter 5:1-5. This text has clear implications regarding the issue of ordination. Peter is an apostle, and he speaks here as an apostle who also identifies himself as a fellow elder (1 Pet. 5:1). He acknowledges that he is writing in a time of transition. The first leaders of the first churches were the apostles, who then through the ministry and mission of Paul and his companions began to transfer leadership of the church to elders.¹²

Here there is a pattern not of hierarchical power but of biblical fidelity and ecclesiastical simplicity. Leadership in the earliest days was through the apostles, not because of *who* they were but *whose* they were. They were commanded and commissioned by Jesus to carry on His work. His church is to be led by faithful men anointed of the Holy Spirit and appointed by the apostles in the context of the choices of the local church. This is the pattern here—Peter, an apostle, now joining with other elders to pass on his knowledge and experience.

¹¹ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount: Volume Two* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1967), 244.

¹² Herman Bavinck, in *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2008), 338, writes about the office of the apostle, “it is the only office that has been directly instituted by Christ and includes within itself all the powers and activities that are divided over the later offices.” One of the concerns in our time is that in the desire to be “just one among many” in the church, the pastor can lose sight of the pastoral authority given by God. His call to that office should always be received with genuine humility and exercised with grace-filled responsibility, Mark 9:42-45.

Peter speaks in the imperative mood in verse 2, “shepherd the sheep of God among you giving oversight.” The word for “elder” in verse one is the same term that we find in Acts 14. It is the term used for office. These men are not apostles; they are elders. This is their office.

What follows is the term “shepherd,” or literally what is most often translated as “pastor.” The office is “elder.” The function is “pastor.” Peter says the pastor is to take care of his sheep. He is to feed them the right food. He is to bring them to fresh water. He is to provide the proper shelter and to protect them from their enemies. He is to lead them, guide them, guard them, and love them. He is to fulfill the office of the elder (Greek: *presbuteros*) by fulfilling the functions of a shepherd or pastor (Greek: *poimainos*). He is also to “exercise oversight” (Greek: *episkopos*, 5:2). This word describes the function of the elder/pastor, as does the word for shepherd.

Put simply, the pastor is to provide oversight for those assigned to his care in the way that a shepherd cares for his sheep. It is who pastors are. Pastors give oversight to the sheep. Pastors care for the church. Pastors preach. Pastors teach. Pastors love. Pastors listen. Pastors live among the sheep so they know one bleat from another and more blemishes than they care to know.

Then Peter tells how pastors are to go about their oversight that is given to them in their pastoral office. He shows the lure of the world and the flesh and contrasts that with the way of the man of God under the authority of the Word of God (2-4). He concludes this short section by making clear what every man must have and without which no man can be a pastor or function as a pastor: pastors must be covered over and covered up with the clothing of humility (5:5).

Four passages have been assessed to see who was set apart for the pastoral office in the early days of the church and what the functions were of those who were called and commissioned to this office. All four passages are particularly focused on those called of God and set apart by the church for pastoral leadership in the church.

One final text is assessed, not because it addresses directly the issue of ordination, but because it does address the issue of the leadership of men in their own family and in the family of God.

1 Timothy 2:1-15. Paul is writing to his young pastor mentee in a time of doctrinal confusion and compromise. This confusion and compromise have come to the church in Ephesus and created conflict (1:18-20). Paul writes to his son in the faith to issue a “charge” (1:3, 5, 18). Timothy must be clear. Paul gives him what he needs to be clear. What is at stake is the absolute truth of God that is being challenged by concerns in the culture that have caused some to consider compromise (4:1-5). Paul gives first and foundational attention to getting the house of God in order. This is his focus in chapters two and three.

The second chapter can be examined in two halves: 2:1-7 and 2:8-15. The first half calls the church to pray for those in governmental authority that they might fulfill their rightful function so that the church can be and do what she is called to be and do without interference from the government (2:1-2). Paul then makes very plain the primary function of the church: to proclaim to the world the gospel of Jesus Christ because He is the only mediator between God and humans who can redeem us from sin and set us free from the wrath of God.

He then turns to the role of men both in the home and in the church. Men are to lead. They are to lead as servants of God living in submission to Jesus as Lord both in the home and in the church. The context in which Paul is writing here, and the recipients who are reading/hearing what he is writing, must not be missed. He is writing to the church. He is writing to men and women in the church who are devoted to Jesus as Lord and desire to live out that devotion in their homes and in the church. Men must take the lead to gather the family for worship at home and when the family of God gathers for worship in the church (2:8-12).

It is clear that Paul is not addressing our relationship with God or our standing before God

as men and women. Men and women are both born in sin and born in need of a Savior; the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ equally redeems men and women. Men and women stand equally before God in the church as saved sinners called of God to serve in the ways that God has ordered His church. This is the issue in 1 Timothy 2:8-13.

In the church, men are to assume the teaching/preaching office when the church gathers for worship. Women are to serve as women; men are to serve as men. Paul is speaking only to that gathering where men and women are together in the corporate worship of God. He is not addressing the gifting of women for a teaching ministry. Most pastors have in our local churches women who are very gifted teachers. This issue is not his concern here. His concern is the leadership of godly men seeking to live under the lordship of Jesus in the home and in the church. This issue becomes even clearer when we move from chapter two to chapter three.

Augustine reminds us that the Old Testament is in the New Testament revealed while the New Testament is in the Old Testament concealed. It is all of one piece. The two testaments are not disjointed. They are not in conflict but complementary. The latter completes the former as fulfillment to promise.

What is seen in both is clear testimony to the necessity of leadership among the people of God. What is seen is that some are set apart from others as called of God and commissioned by God to lead His people. What makes these persons distinctive is not something about them but everything about God. It is the nature and character of God to call those that are weak to confound the strong. What is seen is that God does not lead His people by any form of dictatorial autocracy or popular democracy. God raises up a plurality of persons to lead His people. There is a position among the people of God that serves a purpose that rises to such a place of prominence that God is very precise and particular about those who serve in this position. It is not for the proud or those who desire prominence. It is not for those who want to

rule or who crave recognition. It is for those who are meek and lowly of heart. It is for the humble. It is the position that is called pastor. It is for men only.

It is ironic that the gender most prone to pride is the gender called out by God to the kind of humility that can produce the kind of person that God sets apart by His anointing and the church sets apart by her appointing to serve for the glory of God among the people of God. Those who are biblically qualified for ordination by the local church are those men who, having been called of God with that call confirmed by the church, are then set apart by the local church to serve the church for the glory of God in the office of elder/pastor. These men are to fulfill the function of pastor or “bishop” as one who through the priority of the preaching and teaching of the Word of God and the practice of the lifestyle of a servant in his home and among the church is able to lead the “church of the living God which is the pillar and bulwark of the truth” (1 Tim. 4:15).

Not all who serve in church “staff” positions should be ordained. To follow the flow of Scripture, churches should recognize that restrictions on the candidates for ordination do not comprise a cultural issue but a biblical issue.¹³ Ultimately, the issue is the authority and the sufficiency of Scripture.

Historical and Theological Reflections

It is absolutely essential that everything that follows flows from the biblical foundation that has been laid. Questions and concerns that come over the issue of ordination arise from a

¹³ James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ: A Treatise on the Nature, Powers, Ordinances, Discipline, and Government of the Christian Church* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1869), 446. Bannerman writes, “The office of pastors and teachers is a standing ordinance of Christ in His Church. The ministry is of Divine appointment, and it is permanent in the office of the Christian Church.” See p. 449 for a beautiful expansion of the duties and responsibilities of the pastor.

misreading, misunderstanding, misinterpretation, and misapplication of the teaching of the Bible, and such concerns deserve and demand attention. Detours and new roads formed historically and created culturally can only be allowed to enter the conversation where they help believers hear more clearly and speak more coherently about what the Bible says. They have no voice to speak into any issue about which the Bible speaks so very clearly. History and culture do not correct what the Bible communicates; they most often simply show that as sinners, even with good intentions, how far off-course people can get.¹⁴

This study offers three theological reflections based on the foundation of what the Bible says about ordination. All three reflections revolve around the nature and character of the church. The first set of reflections is about the nature and character of the church generally. The second set of reflections is about the nature and character of the church from our particular perspective as Southern Baptists. And the third set of reflections is about what changes may need to be made in relationship to ordination in order to protect the nature and character of the church both biblically and theologically.

The Reformation of the sixteenth century struggled to define the church in the light of the massive movement of God during that time that caused the church to recover the gospel of Jesus Christ, and with it the essence of what constitutes a church. What first had to be recognized was that there were and are and always will be true churches and false churches. And then among the

¹⁴ What is laid down for us in the Bible, and particularly in the New Testament, is a very simple and efficient structure for the leadership of the church. Evidence exists that the governing structures got more and more complex over time in order to battle heresies that emerged. Merle d'Aubigne writes, "As we advance through the centuries, light and life begin to decrease in the church. Why? Because the torch of the Scripture begins to grow dim and because the deceitful light of human authorities begins to replace it," cited in Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership* (Littleton, Colorado: Lewis and Roth Publishers, 1995), 11. Strauch quotes Jerome, the fourth century father of the church, who writes, "many build churches nowadays; their walls and pillars of glowing marble, their ceilings glittering with gold, their altars studded with jewels, yet to the choice of Christ's ministers, no heed is paid," 67.

true churches there are those that are simply purer than others. The goal of any Spirit/Word-driven, gospel-preaching, Jesus-exalting and God-glorifying church is to pursue purity through biblical fidelity. It was to this end that the Reformers arrived at a simple definition of a church as that place where the gospel is rightly preached and where the ordinances were rightly administered. Baptists would add in time the practice of church discipline, and some of our Baptist brothers and sisters would even add foot washing!

The goal though was to be a church that was as faithful to the Word of God in being who we are called to be and doing what we are called to do. Biblical fidelity marked by theological integrity lived out in the world without cultural accommodation is a clear mark of a true church pursuing purity before God.

The problem is that people can too easily and so quickly lose their focus. Attempts to win the culture can cause believers to be increasingly conformed to the culture. But it is not just conformity to the culture that can be a snare. Doctrinal truths that are precious can, over time, be misunderstood and misapplied because adherents do not diligently bring the truths under the light of Scripture. Take the doctrine of the priesthood of the believer as an example. It emerged in the face of the priestly system of the Roman Catholic Church. Precious to Protestants, it simply means that a believer's access to God for salvation and sanctification does not require a priest. Biblicists have access to God through Jesus Christ alone who is the great High Priest. But it would come over time to get connected with everything from the interpretation of the Bible (every man and woman to themselves) to the call of God into ministry. This detour from the Bible about what this doctrine means has led to conclusions such as "the Protestant affirmation of the priesthood of all believers challenges all social and cultural restrictions imposed as a

criterion for ordination.”¹⁵ The point is that if a person is her own priest, then she can determine for herself what the Bible teaches. No other voice really matters. Really? What is the missing point?

The point is vigilance. Biblical fidelity must be revisited and reestablished in at least every generation. To think that believers can reach any period and have settled forever the question of basic biblical inerrancy and sufficiency is to misunderstand both the history of the church and also human depravity.

The commonly held confession of faith as Baptists is the Baptist Faith and Message. Over time, it has been through several revisions. The Baptist Faith and Message 2000 is the current version. The first article is on “The Scriptures.” The last line reads, “All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation.”¹⁶ That is a revision from 1963, which reads, “Jesus Christ is the criterion for the interpretation of Scripture.”¹⁷ The difference is huge.

The 1963 version is a “liberal loophole.” It allows a person to separate, for example, Paul from Jesus. What happens is that a person develops a perspective on Jesus, for example, as one who was welcoming to everyone, regardless of his or her station in life. No one disputes that truth. Jesus invited all to come to Him (Matt. 11:28-30). He did not, however, invite all people into the apostolic band of the twelve that He chose and called to Himself. Until rightly corrected by the BF&M 2000, the BF&M statement of 1963 was used to argue for all kinds of affirmations of acceptance into places of leadership based on the perceived hospitality of Jesus separated from the rest of Holy Writ.

¹⁵ Joseph L. Price, “Ordination in the New Testament,” *Mercer Dictionary of the Bible*, Ed. Watson Mills (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1990), 635.

¹⁶ The Baptist Faith and Message, 2000, adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention, June 14, 2000.

¹⁷ The Baptist Faith and Message, 1963, adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention, May 9, 1963.

What did Baptists do? What is right to do? In 2000, the error was corrected by removal of the loophole. The church/denomination moved more in the direction of purity. Baptists pulled their position back into closer conformity to clear biblical fidelity.

With clarity, the Bible teaches absolute truth that is embodied and expressed in who Jesus is and what Jesus says. There is no division between the Word written and the Word become flesh. What Baptists say about Scripture then in BF&M 2000 is and must be the foundation for what is so about the office and function of pastoral ministry. The scriptural offices of the church are “pastors and deacons. While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture.”¹⁸

Finally, it is very clear biblically and theologically that ordination is not for all who lead in the church, even for all who lead as a part of the staff of a church. Ordination should be reserved for those who serve in a pastoral capacity. This means biblically that their office is as an elder or pastor. The function of that office is primarily the preaching and teaching of the Word of God, the oversight of the church family or a segment of the church family, and the care of souls for whom the pastor has responsibility. It is equally clear both biblically and theologically that this office and its functions has been assigned to men. Thus, ordination should be for men who, having been called of God to gospel ministry, have that call confirmed by the leaders of a local church who thus responsibly commission the man who is called to the ministry of the gospel of Jesus Christ in and through a local church.

¹⁸ The Baptist Faith and Message 2000, adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention, June 14, 2000. The view of Scripture expressed in the BF&M 1963 can and did lead to certain conclusions about women serving as pastors based not on biblical authority but on the perceived perspective from Jesus to women as seen in the Bible. Leon McBeth, for example, in a Review and Expositor article in the fall of 1981, p. 520 would write, “Baptists have always been firmly committed to the authority of the Bible. *But Baptists’ interpretation of the Bible can vary and has varied at different times and places in our history* (emphasis added).” He cites women serving as pastors as an example in which it was justified “in the context and in light of the teachings of Jesus.” McBeth wrote a book, *Women in Baptist Life*, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1979), that is a good overview of the role of women in Baptist life, which shows so clearly just how significantly influential women have been in Baptist life. The BF&M 2000 statement on this issue is in conformity to historic Baptist confessions of faith.

The persons to be ordained are men. The purpose for the ordination is to set a man apart for the pastoral ministry, which at its center is the preaching and teaching of the Word of God.

The biblical foundations which form the bedrock for the theological reflections make clear that the ordination of people to an office whose function is to serve the church in the preaching and teaching of the Word of God in the context of giving pastoral oversight to the church is a biblically faithful and theologically proper practice of the local church.¹⁹ This pastoral office for those who function in the ministry of the Word belongs to men only.

This means, of course, following the flow of Scripture and the theological understanding that flows from Scripture, that only men can be ordained.²⁰ Alexander Strauch argues that the cultural winds of equality for all, even in the ordained ministries of the church, is so strong that excluding women from the role of the ordained pastorate causes the greatest offense in the modern church.²¹ What is seen, however, as the denial to women of a proper position by the modern culture, is clearly seen in Scripture as simply what God has ordained for His church in order for her to function under His sovereign rule and to flourish in the world as His people. God's Word must always have the last word.

¹⁹ Bannerman, 452-453; Bavinck, volume 4, 328, "ordination presupposes a confirmed call through careful examination. Ordination does not constitute the office, it is rather the solemn and public declaration before God and the congregation that the person is indeed call of God and ought to be received, recognized and honored . . . "

²⁰ Strauch, 51.

²¹ Ibid., 51.

Practical Implications

The focus of this study has been ordination. The primary questions have been, “What does the Bible say about ordination?” and “Who are the subjects for ordination?” The historical and theological reflections have emerged from the conclusions about what the Bible teaches concerning ordination. The research along the way for this resource has brought to light numerous practical implications in connection with the practice of ordination biblically, historically, and currently. Seven of these implications are:

- 1. Scriptural Sufficiency.** Here is where the argument begins and also where it ends. It is the most important issue of all. Are Baptists really Bible people? Is the Bible sufficient to answer every question it is intended to answer? If so, the written Word of God is sufficient to answer questions on the subject of ordination.
- 2. Priesthood of the Believer.** Christ followers must be clear about what this precious doctrine means. Historically, it means that each and every child of God is responsible before God for the integrity and validity of their own salvation and that believers are responsible to each other as priests. Scriptures are clear, believers do not need a priest or a preacher to gain access to God. What it does not mean is that the Bible is subject to personal individualistic interpretation so that we are the final and ultimate authority to determine what Scripture says (2 Pet. 1:19-20).
- 3. Subjects of Ordination.** Those who are the subjects of ordination should only be those who meet the basic biblical requirements for ordination. That a person seeks ordination should not in any way be the first or final word on whom is ordained. One study found that many larger churches do a better job of screening subjects for ordination than smaller

churches because smaller churches are often more directed by knowing the person, his or her parents and grandparents, etc., than what the Bible teaches about who must be the subjects for ordination.²²

4. Calling out the Called. This is related to number 3 but is more basic. The Reformation would give birth to the principle of the “internal call” and the “external call.” The first is simply someone who believes that God is calling them to ministry. He shares that with his pastor. And his pastor with some other leaders in the church begin to work with this young man either to confirm or not confirm this call, to develop over time the legitimacy or not of that man’s call to gospel ministry.

5. Process or Procedure. This is also related to 3 and 4 but more specific and precise. One SBC leader says that Southern Baptists have become “lackadaisical in the ordination practices.”²³ For example, an ordination council and an ordination service on the same day is not the best approach. We need to give some attention to the very clear distinctions between licensure in Baptist life and ordination.

For example, a man who is licensed is under the care and concern of the pastor and leaders of the local church where he is a member. Ordination is different. It is a request made by another church of the local church where the prospective pastor is a member. The church making the request has seen gifts and abilities in this man that cause them to want to “employ” him in pastoral ministry. Quite frankly, we simply need to slow down

²² Jason A. Lowe, “Above Reproach: A Study of the Ordination Practices of SBC Churches,” as reported in Baptist Press, May 10, 2019 (www.bpnews.net/52899/church-ordination-study-room-for-improvement). This study was done following the origin and rise of reports of sexual abuse among SBC clergy. Lowe discovered among other things that very little is being done by way of background checks and conversations about sexual purity.

²³ Strauch, 51.

and give much more serious attention to the steps from “I am sensing God calling me to ministry” to “I am now the official pastor or youth pastor of _____ Baptist Church.”

- 6 **Pastoral Responsibility.** This one stings. Pastors who lead churches must do more to teach churches about ordination and to be on the lookout for young men who may be among the called out and don’t know it yet. Church pastors must lead more effectively and more biblically in the process from the point of calling to commissioning. It is also essential for pastors to “push” those who are sensing God’s call toward good sound and biblically faithful theological training.
5. **Local Church Autonomy.** This principle is precious to Baptists. There is no hierarchy beyond the local church. It is true that the headquarters for the state convention and the SBC is the local church. Local church autonomy has its blessings and burdens; the burdens are particularly difficult to bear in an individualistically-oriented and freedom-loving culture like North America. This is why it is so imperative that policies and procedures be driven by the Bible. We must return over and over to make sure that church processes are in keeping with what the Bible teaches directly or by reasonable inference.

Reasonable inference is not needed for what the Bible teaches about ordination. It is for men who have been called of God and confirmed by the church into pastoral ministry. The essence of the pastoral ministry is the preaching and teaching of the Word of God either to the entirety of the gathered local church or to a group in that local church, e.g.; students, and providing oversight/care for that local church.

Southern Baptists are unequivocally a people of the Book. Where the Bible speaks clearly and coherently on an issue, the issue is settled and requires full and faithful submission and obedience. This issue is one of those places. Believers must make our yes, “yes.” The Bible has the last word.

Conclusion

Based on the clear teaching of God’s Word, and in keeping with sound biblical, theological, and historic ecclesiological practices, the leaders of this state convention (Ga. Baptist Mission Board) believe that ordination should be limited to biblically qualified men serving in pastoral roles. Consequently, the leadership of this state convention urges its committees and entities to follow these recommendations when filling leadership roles. The Credentials Committee and Executive Board also urge churches affiliated with this state convention to use this document as a framework to assist them in examining the doctrine of ordination.