

Concerning Ordinations.

Moved by J. D. Freeman and seconded by J. B. Champion, that this Association recommend the churches within its bounds to present their candidates for ordination at the annual meeting of the Association, and request that body to act as the council in the case. After being spoken to by J. D. Freeman, Prof. Wortman, W. J. Blakney, J. B. Champion, J. H. Cahill and A. Freeman, it was carried by a large majority. Extract from minutes of N. B. Western Association for 1898.

As mover of that disturbing and now historic resolution it may be expected that I should have something to say in defence of my action.

In the first place, then, I wish to express my satisfaction in the knowledge that one very important part of the purpose of that resolution has already been achieved. It was intended to stimulate thought and provoke discussion upon the subject throughout the body. That this has been accomplished the pages of the Year Book and the files of the MESSENGER AND VISITOR bear ample witness.

The immediate occasion of the above resolution was the reading of a report by the associational committee on ordinations, to the effect that, though ordinations had taken place during the year, the committee, as usual, had been ignored. In the discussion which followed the report, quite general dissatisfaction was expressed concerning the conduct of ordinations in this part of the country, and the resolution was adopted in the belief that it would not only arouse enquiry and quicken conscience in this matter, but indicate to the churches a more excellent method of procedure.

Having turned the matter over in my mind a good many times during the last nine months, and having read with interest the different articles in the MESSENGER AND VISITOR upon the subject, I am more profoundly convinced than ever that our action at Florenceville last June was a step in the right direction.

To get down to the bottom of this matter let me raise again the question—What does ordination signify? What does it mean and what does it not mean? To the Law and to the Testimony! The entire teaching of the New Testament upon this subject may be given in small compass, and since the Scripture has been called for let us have it clearly before us.

Note, then, the word "ordain" as found in the New Testament always denotes an election to office by the person or persons competent to make the election. The word occurs six times in connection with a sacred office, and in each case it is the translation of a different Greek word. Here are the passages: Mark 3:14, "Jesus ordained (epoiese) twelve to be with him." Acts 1:22, "Must be one ordained (genesthai) to be a witness with us of his resurrection." Acts 17:31, "By that man whom he hath ordained (horise). 1 Tim. 2:7, "Whereunto I am ordained a preacher" (etelthen). Acts 14:23, "When they had ordained (cheiroloncasantes) them elders in every church." Titus 1:5, "That thou shouldst ordain (katasestēs) elders in every city." Any person with an ordinary working knowledge of Greek will see at a glance that the fact set forth in each instance is that of choice, election, appointment. In the last two instances there may be a hint of some public ceremony, but the emphasis is strongly on the fact of the choice.

The question now arises—Who is competent to make the election to offices in the church? Unquestionably the church itself. The church elects its deacons and the church elects its pastors. That is the inalienable right of the individual, local church, and any interference from outside, other than that of friendly counsel or suggestion, is a manifest impertinence. The church has the right to elect to its offices. In this sense of the word the church, and the church alone, has the right to "ordain," and it needs no council, small or great, to assist in the work.

It may appear as though this admission surrenders the point at issue to those who condemn the resolution under discussion. But just here I call attention to a fact which seems to have been left out of consideration and which constitutes the pivot of the whole question in dispute. The fact is this, that while "ordination" in the strict, Scriptural sense of the term is as above stated, "ordination," as it has been commonly understood and practised among us, is quite a different thing. We have all along been using the term to designate the formal, public setting apart to church office by "the laying on of the hands of the presbytery." Now this ceremony is clearly Scriptural and beautifully significant, yet in naming it "ordination" we have slipped into a verbal inaccuracy, and in many cases fallen into confusion of thought. It is probably too late in the day to hope to reform our terminology, but it is not too late to correct and clarify our ideas. We may continue, if we will, to speak of this ceremony as "ordination." No doubt we shall continue to do so, as I do in this letter, but we should recognize the fact that in doing this we are putting the word to a secondary use. Ordination in the primary, Scriptural signification, means election to office, and the responsibility of it devolves upon the individual church. Ordination as it is popularly understood among us, ordination as we have been discussing it in this journal, ordination as it falls within the purview of the above resolution,

signifies the public ceremony in which a candidate is set apart for sacred service by the laying on of hands, and the responsibility of this devolves not upon the church, but upon the ministry. This position can be established by reference to the Scripture bearing upon the matter.

Three instances of the public setting apart of men elected to the church office are found in the New Testament—that of "the seven" (Acts 6:6) "whom they set before the apostles, and when they had prayed they laid their hands on them;" that of Barnabas and Saul, (Acts 13:1-3) respecting whom the Holy Ghost said to the ministry at Antioch, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them they sent them away;" and that of Timothy, to whom Paul wrote (1 Tim. 4:14) "Neglect not the gift that is in thee which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery."

From these scriptures it is clear that ordination in the secondary sense, ordination in the sense of the laying on of hands, is the prerogative not of the individual church, but of the ministers in the community of churches with whom the candidate expects to be associated in his work. So far as I know this special prerogative has never been claimed by any Baptist church.

At this point the justification of our resolution appears. To a church asking for its pastor this formal, ceremonial recognition from his brother ministers, those ministers have the right to say when and where and how it shall be given. It would seem but reasonable and just to all concerned, the candidate, the ministers and the local church, that the ordination be given at such time and place as will assemble the largest representation of those whose right it is to give it. In my judgment the ideal place and time is the convention. But the associational gathering is the next best. This ceremony is not primarily for the benefit of the local church but of the man. He should seek it in the most truly representative gathering available. He will thus but serve not only his own interests, but those of his church, his ministerial brethren and the denomination.

The objections which have been urged against our resolution, are not, in my judgment, of a serious nature. To the objection that the course suggested may necessitate months of waiting, I reply, that since ordination confers no right, power or privilege essential to the full work of the ministry, (even the right to administer ordinances being the gift of the church at its discretion), he can well afford to wait. The objection that the proposition will "tend to weaken the sense of individual responsibility on the part of individual churches," need only to be stated to stand refuted. The author of the objection must admit on sober second thought, that a church is likely to feel far more responsibility and to exercise far more care in presenting a candidate before a large and thoroughly representative body, than in bringing one before a small and perhaps packed council. The insinuation that the underlying purpose in this movement is to debar from ordination all but college trained men, is unwarranted and untrue, and unworthy of those who make it. There is no such thought in our minds. We have continually affirmed to the contrary. Some of the best and most effective of our ministers are doing their work without the help of college training. They will have successors in all the days to come. Let them be held in everlasting honour!

This has been written in the interests of clear thinking and orderly procedure in the matter of ordinations. I have shown, I believe, that our resolution robs the individual church of none of its rights or privileges. Rather will it tend to preserve the church in the enjoyment of its rights and liberties by inducing it to respect the rights of others.

J. D. FREEMAN.

Three Centuries Ago.

D. A. STERLE, D. D.

II.

In our first notice of the Geneva Bible we pointed out that our ancestors made more than we do of the doctrine of election. While Luther was very careful, saying,

"Who hath not known passion, cross, and travail of death, cannot treat of fore-knowledge (election of grace) without injury and inward enmity toward God. Wherefore take heed that thou drink not wine while thou art yet a sacking babe. Each several doctrine hath its own reason and measure and age,"

the men of Geneva launched the bolt straight at the face of the young believer. If it knocked him down,—well, that showed he was none of His; if he bore the shock—why he was a real child of God. Their way of instructing the disciples was heroic; those that did not kill became strong men. The catechism runs in this wise.

"But how shall I know myself to be one of those whom God hath ordained to life eternal?" Answer: "By the motions of spiritual life, which belongeth onely to the children of God," and that these "motions" are brought forward as "remorse of conscience, joyed with the loathing of sinne, and love of righteousness; the hand of faith reaching unto life eternal in Christ, the conscience comforted in distresse, and rayed up to confidence in God by the worke of his Spirit," etc., etc.

Now, what is lacking in these instructions? They are objectionable because they point to an advanced stage in the spiritual life rather than to the beginning; and because they lay down a specific set of feelings for every one. The child in belief does not always have the same "motions," he simply feels that he is a sinner, and that Jesus is his Saviour. "Remorse of conscience," I apprehend, comes to some men at the beginning, but to most Christians at a later stage, when they are led to understand, by their constant tendency to sin, what is meant by the "plague of their hearts." But there is here a grave omission, which is at once seen by those who have read modern religious discussions. The filial feeling, the movement of the heart toward the Father of our spirits, does not find a place here; nor does that simplest "motion" which an apostle gives, by which we may know that we are children, find a place; "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by His Spirit which he hath given to us." How much less bewildering to distressed minds is the method of John the beloved: "Hereby we know that we know Him, if we keep his commandments." Neither is that absolute test mentioned as among these "motions" by which we are to judge whether we have eternal life: "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God." Again we say that it seems strange that these simplest directions are not prominent in this old testing instrument. But, then, we must remember that this was not a biblical method, but a dogmatic one. It is the fault of all catechisms and creeds; one-sided views; a part of truth; that which seemed to the men of that age prominent, or essential, must be laid before men.

We feel, as we pore over these old black letter directions to men enquiring the way of eternal life, that they were wanting in another respect. If a man be really joined to Christ he will have a desire to bring forth fruit—the yearning to bear something divine—according to the Great Teacher's familiar illustration of the vine and the branches. But in this list of "motions" or "signs of spiritual life," there is not a word of this; nothing of right living, of honorable dealing, of our bounden duty to promote the Kingdom of God. The fact is, the Reformers were afraid of good works. Because Rome had jerked the doctrine out of its true position, because she had made merit to hang thereby, therefore, for fear that souls might be led astray, they hardly dared to mention them in the same day with justification by faith. These dear old fellows, solemn-visaged, clear-headed, thorough paced, expounders of the divine mysteries of election and reprobation, say in effect, all through this searching catechism, printed in special, and inserted before the entrance to the New Testament, "Ye must beware of good works, ye must not mingle the practical with the doctrinal. They were afraid for the ark; it would topple over unless their hands stayed it. It seems a wonder that they were not smitten, for it is a spiritual crime to present to men but one part of God's gracious revelation. Through his infinite power, rather than through the wisdom of the winners of souls, men were drawn into the kingdom. Within the memory of men still among us, there was the same one-sided way of dealing with men. The influence of Geneva dominated theologians for three hundred years. But the last century has witnessed a gradual change, until at the present we find ourselves far out of position with our ancestors. The pendulum has oscillated well towards the other end of the arc. We rarely—I had almost said never—hear the words "foreknowledge," "election," "distinguishing grace," mentioned. Everything is laid upon the human will. I heard a prominent Baptist minister declare in public discourse that if God had willed a certain thing, and that if man had not willed it, it would not be done. I had always understood that God's will was supreme, and that the human will was not an infinite factor, and yet I gave a good deal of credit to human stubbornness. Who has not felt, during the agony of an evangelists campaign, that after all the fat would be found to stand: "It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy." The apostle makes short work of man's boasted power—when he formally sets himself against God, and so does the whole Bible. If ever a sinner is saved, while he uses his own faculties, thinks, prays, repents, believes, and confesses Christ, God Almighty is back of it all. A man cannot be his own father. Hence the need of regeneration by the Holy Ghost. "Except a man be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God." While we have not lost sight of this part of the gospel, and while Baptists must proclaim it, or cease to be Baptists, we are losing sight of what is involved in it. God re-creates the sinner, and in doing so is omnipotent at every part of the process. Strange to say that while the discussion in the Geneva Bible emphasizes the election of grace, puts it in the foreground, as I have shown; it does not make mention of this cardinal doctrine of the total renewal of the man. The great stress is laid upon being ordained to eternal life, and plump and plain it assures the poor enquiring soul that "some are vessels of wrath fitted to destruction." Instead of the plain and gentle directions of Jesus and His apostles to the heavy laden, we have this cold, formal answer to the question, "By what means useth God to ordain men to himself that they may be saved?" Answer: "By the preaching of His Word, and the ministering of his sacraments therunto annexed." "The preaching of His Word" meant to them hard, narrow dogma. The children cried for milk, and they gave them bones.

Rupert Street, Amherst, March, 1899.

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