

LESSON 6

RECOGNITION, OR RE-ORDINATION.

WHEN a minister, having changed his ecclesiastical views, enters the denomination, from some other communion, he is admitted to the ministry in his new religious connection, either by a *re-ordination* or a *recognition* service. Usage is not uniform, and so far as his ministerial character and standing are concerned, there is no difference which is chosen. Whichever the minister and the church should prefer, may well be adopted, without prejudice to either.

In either case a Council, or Presbytery, should be assembled, and the candidate pass a sufficiently careful examination to give assurance that in matters of faith and practice, he is in harmony with the denomination into which he is admitted. Otherwise, he cannot expect a cordial recognition by them.

The services in *re-ordination* are usually the same as those of ordination; while those of *recognition* differ only in omitting the laying-on of hands. The imposition of hands may safely be left to the candidate, the church, and the Council. The man will be a minister none the more by the use of this ceremony, and none the less by the omission of it.

Sometimes a church will admit to membership, and put into the ministry as its pastor, one received from another denomination, without Council for advice, or public ceremony. This, they have an undoubted right to do, but it is neither wise nor expedient; neither for the church nor for the pastor.

Whether ordination confers an indelible character, and he who is once a minister, is always a minister; or, whether the ecclesiastical acts of one denomination are to be recognized as valid by another, are questions of no great practical moment, and in respect to which opinions widely differ. They can be settled by no authoritative decision, and may safely be left to the disposition of those with whom they may chance to arise. It is, however, better for each denomination to conform to its own polity, and follow its own order. It implies no want of Christian courtesy and suggests no disrespect, that the acts of one are not accepted as valid by another.

RECOGNITION OF CHURCHES.

WHEREVER there may be living near each other a number of Christian disciples, who entertain like views of Scripture doctrine and church order, it is their privilege to organize themselves into a church, by entering into covenant to be a church for the purpose of observing the ordinances of religion, and maintaining public worship. Such a company of believers, if they are members of churches already, would obtain letters from their churches, for this purpose. If not members, they would seek baptism, and make a public profession of their faith, preparatory to entering into the constitution of a church.

And such a company of believers, so becoming a church by uniting in covenant together, are in fact a church, possessing all the rights, privileges and authority of a church of Christ, without the sanction, permission or authority of any man, or body of men whatever, aside from their own number. No person or persons have a right to hinder, or interfere with them in the exercise of these rights.

But since churches of like faith and order, wish to be in fellowship with other churches of similar faith and order, and to exercise the courtesies of Christian fraternity towards each other, it is customary for

one, when it is constituted, as above, to invite a Council, to look into the circumstances, and give their approval—if they do approve—of the step they have taken in their organization. And thus also, to express fellowship for them, as a regular and properly constituted church of Christ.

The Council usually examines their articles of faith, to see if they are in harmony with the denomination, as to doctrine and church order. They also consider whether a church be needed in that locality; whether the members could not be accommodated with religious privileges without the constitution of a new church; and whether they have promise of being able to sustain worship, and meet the expenses to be incurred.

The approval of a Council secures for the new body the confidence and sympathy of other churches, and gives them credit in the denomination. But should the Council refuse their commendation and disapprove the organization, still they would be a church, and possess all the rights of one, did they choose to maintain their position. But in such a case they would not be likely to command the public confidence.

Some public *recognition* services are usually held, to give expression to the approving action of the Council. These generally consist of a sermon and addresses of welcome, encouragement, and counsel to the church, the people, and the pastor—if there be a pastor.

In the opinion of some, the proper time for calling a Council is before the organization of the church

takes place, and not afterwards. The Council can then advise whether it is best that a church should be formed, rather than to express approval or disapproval of the act after it is accomplished.

The action in such cases, as in others, is advisory, and not authoritative.

Ed. Note:

Contrary to what bro. Hiscox has stated in this section, the custom of a group of believers simply deciding to start a church in their area and then doing so is not scriptural.

Yes, they would be a church no matter if anyone else recognized them as such. However, in Scripture, all churches were started by men sent out from an already established church. And those churches out of which those men were sent could all trace their lineage directly to the original Church started by Jesus Christ.

Therefore, the only scriptural way to start a church is for a man to be sent out from an already existing church with a lineage traceable back to the original Church started by Christ. This process is clearly taught in the Scriptures and is the only way a church can have the proper recognition as well as carry the proper authority to baptize with the baptism authorized by Christ which has been passed down from church to church beginning with that original Church. (See the prerequisite course, The Church.)

LAYING A CORNER-STONE.

THE construction of church edifices—and often, of other buildings designed for religious or benevolent purposes, or even for special public use—is signalized by the ceremony of *laying the corner-stone*. The significance of the service is supposed to be, a declaration of trust in God for the success of the work, which is professedly for His praise; and on the enterprise His blessing is invoked.

The corner-stone itself, is a block usually different from the material of the foundation in which it is placed. On the front of it the year in which it is laid is engraved in figures.

A vertical cavity is made in the stone sufficiently large to hold a metallic box, in which may be enclosed various documents—the history of the church, and the building enterprise, copies of current newspapers, and anything else thought desirable—the box to be sealed up before it is deposited.

The place of the stone is in the main corner or angle of the foundation—the right-hand corner to one who stands facing the main entrance of the building—under the sill and water-table of the main floor of the edifice. Of course the foundations must be completed, including whatever of basement there may be, before the corner-stone can be laid.

The ceremony consists in putting the metallic box in its place, then laying the stone lid or cover upon the cavity, and with a trowel covering it with cement or mortar, and thus completely enclose and seal the box within the stone.

There are usually preparatory exercises, consisting of singing, reading the Scriptures, prayer, and one or more addresses appropriate to the occasion, by persons selected for the purpose.

Sometimes preceding the erection of a public building of special importance, the *breaking ground*—the removal of the first earth preparatory to laying the foundations—is made an occasion for some public services; mainly an address declarative of the purpose and importance of the structure to be erected.

DEDICATIONS.

THE dedication of a church edifice, when it is complete and ready for use, is supposed to be the solemnly setting it apart to its designed purpose, the worship of God, with appropriate religious services. The principal feature of the ceremony is usually a sermon by the pastor, or some other one chosen for the purpose.

Unfortunately, the raising of money to pay for the house has come to be an almost inevitable concomitant of dedications, pressed so persistently as well nigh to obliterate the religious character of the occasion.

It is by some contended that a house of worship should never be formally set apart and dedicated to the service of God, until it is entirely paid for; that the presentation to Almighty God of a house to his praise which is encumbered with debt, and on which creditors hold claims, is unbecoming and inconsistent. This view may be extreme, but it is better and safer than to dedicate houses with debts so heavy as to crush the energy and discourage the hope of the church.

END LESSON SIX