

**MESSIAH THE PRINCE,**  
Or, The Mediatorial Dominion of Jesus Christ.  
By William Symington.  
Sabbath Afternoon Studies: Part 17.

CHAPTER 7.  
THE KINGLY OFFICE OF CHRIST IN  
RELATION TO THE CHURCH.  
(Continued.)

VII. Christ, in virtue of his mediatorial dominion, appoints, qualifies, and invests with power, the office-bearers in the church.

Laws, institutions, and ordinances, suppose the existence of an order of men by whom they are administered. They cannot administer themselves; nor can it be regarded as any thing short of fanaticism to maintain, as is done by some, that everyone is to be guided in the worship of God merely by the fluctuating impulse of his own feelings, or 'the light' within, as it is called. The Scriptures give no countenance to any such wild idea. On the contrary, they give us good reason to believe that, from the beginning, the heads of families were authorized by God to act both as priests and as prophets. During the Mosaic economy, we know that a regular order of office-bearers existed; for there were laws for regulating their preparatory qualifications, their administration, and their succession. At the New Testament period, also, there existed a regular lawful ministry, some of the offices connected with which were certainly of a permanent nature, while others, of an obviously temporary kind, after serving the purpose for which they were introduced, were suffered to die away. Of this latter description were the offices held by those who were called apostles, prophets, and evangelists, the peculiarities of whose functions we wait not to delineate. ► But there is no reason for supposing that with these the existence of a standing ministry in the church was to cease. The very reverse is the inference we should seem warranted to draw. For if, even in an age which was blessed with extraordinary communications of the divine Spirit, teachers and rulers were deemed requisite, it is not reasonable to expect that, when these extraordinary gifts are withdrawn, the church should be able to do without office-bearers altogether. This view of the subject is confirmed by much that is found in the history and writings of the apostles themselves. To this purpose are these express statements of Paul:—'And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. And God hath set some in the church: first, apostles; secondly, prophets; thirdly, teachers; after that, miracles; then, gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of

tongues' [Eph. 4.11,12; 1 Cor. 12.28.] ► The apostles, accordingly, were careful to 'commit the form of sound words to faithful men, able to teach others also.' They ordained them elders in every city. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, by reminding the persons to whom he wrote of those who had *had* the rule over them, whose faith they were required to follow after their decease, and at the same time exhorting them to obey those that *have* the rule over them, distinctly recognises the existence of not merely one but two sets of teachers after the apostles. When John wrote his Apocalypse there were *angels*, that is to say, office-bearers, to whom the epistles to the Asiatic churches were addressed. Add to these considerations, the circumstance that the promise made by the Head of the church himself to his apostles proceeded on the supposition that there should be a standing ministry to the end of time, and is utterly irreconcilable with the notion that such was to expire with the apostles. *Lo, I am with you ALWAYS, EVEN UNTO THE END OF THE WORLD.*

The permanent and ordinary office-bearers in the church are presbyters and deacons. Presbyters are of two kinds, namely, such as teach as well as rule, and such as rule only. The former are commonly known by the names of pastors, teachers, or ministers, and the latter by that of ruling elders. Presbyters of the former class appear to be the only description of bishops authorized by the Scriptures or by the practice of the primitive churches. The word commonly translated *bishop* signifies an *overseer*, and is so rendered in several instances in the common version. By a comparison of texts, we are led to conclude, that, in the early Christian church, the bishop and the presbyter were synonymous terms, denoting the very same office. In the twentieth chapter of the Acts, those called in the seventeenth verse 'elders,' πρεσβυτέρους, are called 'overseers,' or bishops, ἐπισκόπους, in the twenty-eighth. In the Epistle to Titus, first chapter, the qualifications of 'elders,' πρεσβυτέρους, and of a 'bishop,' ἐπίσκοπος, are the same. In the first Epistle of Peter, the verb from which the word translated *bishop* is derived, is employed in describing the duties of elders:—'The elders, πρεσβυτέρους, which are among you I exhort.—Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the over-sight thereof,' ἐπισκοποῦντες. ► It is not, then, from any thing in the Scripture usage of the terms, that the inference can be drawn, that the one term describes a different and a higher office than that which is pointed out by the other. Neither is there any thing in the original signification of the terms themselves to warrant this conclusion; but rather the contrary. *Overseer* and *presbyter*, while they are used indiscriminately to designate persons holding the same office, differ from one another in their primitive meaning so as to point out, indeed, the one the activity of service, the other the dignity of rule: but it so happens that the former idea is suggested by the term which Episcopalians understand to designate the office which is superior, and the latter idea attaches to the term which they regard as expressive of the office that is inferior. So far, indeed, from *presbyter* being, either in its primitive import or its current use in Scripture, expressive of inferiority, presbyters are described as exercising the very highest official acts—acts which, according to Episcopalians, belong only to bishops. ► Presbyters are described as *ruling*. The *elders* of Ephesus are required to '*take heed* to the flock.' We read of 'the *elders* that *rule* well.' Presbyters are spoken of as ordaining: 'Neglect not the gift which is in thee, which was given

thee by prophecy, with the *laying on of the hands of the presbytery.*' When to these considerations it is added that there is but one ministerial commission, and that the preaching of the Word is spoken of in Scripture as a more dignified function than that of ruling, and as entitling to more abundant honour, [1 Tim. 5.17,] the evidence adduced appears sufficient to warrant the opinion that overseer and presbyter describe the same office, and that the one supposes no sort of superiority over the other, but on the contrary a clear and perfect equality.

As to the presbyters of the second class—those who rule only—their existence is plainly enough intimated in the plurality of elders which existed in the primitive churches, it being highly improbable that there should be more than one teacher who required to be supported by the members; in the distinction made betwixt 'him that exhorteth' and 'him that ruleth,' and betwixt 'teachers' and 'helps and governments;' and in the very clear line of demarcation drawn betwixt the elders that merely rule, and those who also labour in the word and doctrine.<sup>1</sup>

But it is not so much our object, to shew what offices Christ has appointed in his church, as to speak of the exercise of his mediatorial authority in appointing, qualifying, and investing with power, the men by whom these offices are held.

*Appointment* to office in the church is essential to the regular discharge of the functions belonging to office. 'I sent them not, nor commanded them: therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the Lord.' 'How shall they preach except they be sent?' 'No man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God as was Aaron. So also Christ glorified not himself to be made a High Priest; but He that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to-day have I begotten thee.'<sup>2</sup> It must surely be presumptuous, in any mere servant of Christ to dispense with what was requisite to give validity to the office of his Master. But what constitutes a sufficient and valid appointment? An *inward impulse* of the divine Spirit, inclining an individual to serve the church in a public capacity, is not enough, as it can be of use only to the person himself. An *immediate* commission requires to be substantiated by miracles, and is not now to be expected. The only appointment, then, that can now be looked for, would seem to be that which consists in solemn and regular investiture with office by persons previously qualified and authorized; in other words, presbyterian ordination, or ecclesiastical designation.

Now, ordination derives its authority and validity from the institution of Christ as King and Head of his church. The custom of ordination existed in the primitive church. The apostles could not have practised it, nor could the inspired writers have given directions with regard to the performance of it, unless they had been authorized so to do; and by whom could they be so authorized but by Christ himself? The 'laying on of hands,' we are taught to consider as a part of Christianity as much as 'repentance from dead works, or faith toward God, or the resurrection of the dead, or eternal judgment.' [Heb. 6.1,2.]

Ordination consists in the transmission of ecclesiastical power, by the solemn and appropriate form of the laying on of the hands of presbyters. The laying on of hands in

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1 Acts 14.23; Rom. 12.8; 1 Cor. 12.28; 1 Tim. 5.17.

2 Jer. 23.32; Rom. 10.15; Heb. 5.4,5.

ordination, is not a mere unauthorized ceremony. It is distinctly recognised both by apostolical example and precept. ‘The gift that is in thee, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery’ (1 Tim. 4.14.) ‘Lay hands suddenly on no man’ (1 Tim. 5.22). Not that any thing is actually conveyed, by the mere imposition of hands, from the persons engaged in the act to the person who is the object of it. It is properly the *sign* rather than the *medium* of conveyance; just as sprinkling with water is significant of the application of the blood of Christ and the regenerating influence of the Spirit to the soul of the person baptized. Sprinkling with water does not convey these spiritual benefits; yet it is not an empty unmeaning ceremony, but an appropriately significant act. In like manner, the imposition of hands in ordination is not a useless form, but the appropriate mode by which it has pleased the Head of the church to express the communication of official power, to those by whom it is to be exercised. It were well that this view of the subject were more attended to than it is.

The act of ordination belongs to persons previously ordained. If it is significant of the conveyance of office-power, it can only be performed by those who possess such power. The power, it is true, is not *derived from* men but from Christ, the fountain-head of all authority. But it is *transmitted through* men; and there is an obvious propriety, if not necessity, that the medium of transmission should be such as to bring to view the thing transmitted. It follows, that the act of ordination belongs not to the people. It is of great importance to observe that the existence of the ministerial office is in no way dependent on the members of the church. Some have identified ordination and the call of the people. Others have considered the call of the people to be an indispensable prerequisite to ordination, an essential preparatory step to investiture with power and authority in the church. It does not appear to us that either of these opinions is correct. ► Not that we are indifferent to the right of the Christian people to call such as shall be placed over them in the Lord. The call of the people, we hold to be essential to the formation of the *pastoral relation*; and every attempt to deprive them of this right, or to cripple them in the exercise of it, we regard as a scandalous interference with the prerogative of Christ the church’s Head, and a daring invasion of the privileges of the church’s members. We hold that, in the formation of the interesting, and solemn, and important relation in question, the people should have a *choice*; it is mockery to put them off with a *veto*. But, then, there is a distinction betwixt *the pastoral relation* and *the ministerial office*—a distinction which is not sufficiently understood, but one, the correct understanding of which would go far to prevent many mistakes, and to remove many prejudices, on subjects connected with the office-bearers of the church.

The *ministerial office* is necessary to the full exercise of the functions arising out of the *pastoral relation*. Accordingly, the former is usually conferred at the time when the latter is formed; and hence may have arisen the misconception by which they are identified or confounded. But, although the pastoral relation supposes the existence of the ministerial office, the ministerial office may, and often does, exist without the pastoral relation.<sup>3</sup> This being the

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3 The church is now happily familiar with this in the case of missionaries to the heathen. It is to be remembered that this was written in 1837, the middle of the Ten Years’ Conflict.—AMS. For

case, the choice of the people may be essential to the latter, and yet in no way necessary to the former. On the one hand, the pastoral relation, springing from the choice of the people, and supposing the mutual consent of the parties betwixt whom it exists, is necessarily restricted and exclusive. On the other hand, the ministerial office, derived from the church's office-bearers, is wide as the wide world itself in the sphere over which it extends, and is altogether independent of the will of the people. ► The pastor, as such, cannot properly discharge the functions of the pastoral relation, without the consent of the people; and even this he can do only within the limited bounds of his own parish or congregation: but the minister of Christ as such, is, in virtue of his office, entitled to traverse the bounds of the habitable globe, and to proclaim the message of salvation in the ears of all those with whom he meets, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear. No magic circle circumscribes the bounds of his ministrations. The laying on of the hands of the presbytery has given him a relation to the church universal, has invested him with authority to exercise his ministry, wherever God in his providence may call him, or may give him an opportunity. Wherever his voice can reach, wherever his feet can carry him, wherever, by land or by water, he can have his person transported, there has he a full and unquestionable right to unfold the message with which he is entrusted as a minister, and to beseech sinners of every clime, in Christ's stead, to be reconciled to God. In this he needs not to wait for the call of the people. The exercise of his office is not suspended on the invitation of men. The people can neither impart nor remove the right to exercise it. It descends from Christ the fountain of all authority, through a regular and divinely-appointed ordination.

It is scarcely necessary to add, after this, that the power of ordination does not lie with a bishop,—a diocesan bishop. Paul and Barnabas, indeed, ordained elders in every city; but they did so, not as bishops, but as apostles—an extraordinary office, whose functions included those of the ordinary. Timothy and Titus ordained; but it will require stronger proof than we have yet seen, to convince us that they were diocesan bishops. Timothy himself was ordained by the laying on of *the hands of the presbytery*. *Supernatural gifts* he appears to have received by the putting on of Paul's hands; but the *ministerial gift* was conferred on him by the laying on of the hands of the *presbytery*.

By means of ordination, provision is made for the regular and orderly transmission of official power in the church, throughout all ages. We do not contend for an uninterrupted succession from the apostles as essential to the validity of official ministrations. The value of the Christian ministry is suspended on no such contingency. Extraordinary circumstances, we fully admit, may warrant extraordinary measures; and there is no form or rite in being in the church which may not lawfully be dispensed with on particular occasions. [2 Chron. 30.18-20,23.] The letter must ever be held to be subordinate to the spirit; and when both cannot be had, the former must yield to the latter. So it is in the case of ordination. The importance and propriety of installing men into office, in all ordinary cases, by the imposition of the hands of

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Covenanters, this principle also had significance, for a time, in the ordination of ministers for the United Societies, who bore a relation to the Societies in general, and labored among them in circuit.  
—JTK.

presbyters, may be maintained, in perfect consistency with the admission that cases may occur in which, at the call of the people, persons may warrantably and validly exercise the functions of the ministry, without having undergone the solemnity in question. Still, in all common cases, the regular and orderly way is that of which we have been speaking. It thus appears that ordination, while it confers authority of boundless extent as regards the sphere within which it may be exercised, provides for the perpetuation of it to the end of time. It possesses the property of indefinite and endless reproduction, and is in this way adapted to the conveyance of powers for which the necessity is both universal and perpetual.

And what, it is time now to ask, are these *powers* with which the Head of the church invests her office-bearers? In general, the authority with which ministers are invested, is authority to dispense all the laws and ordinances of the church; and by adverting to what we have previously said regarding these, we may come to form a tolerably correct idea of the nature and extent of office-power in the church of Christ. This power, let it be distinctly marked, is, in no shape or degree whatever, absolute and unlimited. As it is derived from the Lord Jesus Christ, it is to be exercised within such limitations as he, in the exercise of his sovereignty, has seen fit to appoint. In short, it is not sovereign but delegated power; and this necessarily supposes restriction and accountability.

[Three types of ministerial power next to be considered as part of section VII.]

#### Discussion Questions:

1. When the Lord ceased to send extraordinary officers, such as apostles, prophets, and evangelists, among his people, were they left without a divinely instituted system of rule and instruction?  
A.
2. What about the Lord's commission makes it evident that this ordinary system of government was intended to continue with his authority and blessing, even after he ceased to send apostles, etc.  
A.
3. What two categories can be named to summarize all of the kinds of bible-instituted office-bearers in general, in ordinary times?  
A.
4. Why do Reformed Christians, and some Lutherans, decline to recognize a distinct office or order for bishops, though the title is used for church rulers in the New Testament?  
A.
5. What is the Biblical ordinance by which a man is appointed for the ministry by other church rulers?  
A.
6. What kind of calling must a man have, if he is to serve as a church officer, without this appointment?  
A.
7. What distinction is essential to understanding the work of ministers who labor out of a congregation?  
A.