

ORDAINED FOR \$29.95

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If you have an internet account, you have probably discovered there is as much junk email as there is junk mail that comes through the post office. It is sometimes amusing to note the ridiculous offers made to either take your money or help you make millions. It is less amusing to contemplate that there are people who fall for the schemes. One day I received a particularly egregious email. In part, it read, “*Minister Charles Simpson has the power to make you a LEGALLY ORDAINED MINISTER within 48 hours!!!! BE ORDAINED NOW! As a minister, you will be authorized to perform the rites and ceremonies of the church!!*” (We might question whether any offer is legitimate that uses that many exclamation marks.). The offer goes on to say you can, with the ordination certificate, perform weddings. You can conduct funerals. You can baptize people. You can visit jails, start your own church, and even forgive sins. The cost? Only \$29.95 (Mr. Simpson assures the reader this low figure is not a misprint). For that sum, you get an 8x10 color certificate—complete with gold seal—certifying you as a minister.

Wow. In preparing to preach, I heard a lifetime of sermons and Bible classes, and then studied the Bible in-depth for years in preaching school and college. After reading this email offer, I think I did it the hard way.

Aside from the obvious point that being a “legally ordained” minister is a concept foreign to the New Testament, consider what Mr. Simpson omits from his program. For starters, no Bible knowledge required. No preaching or teaching experience required. No demonstration of godly character required. No faithfulness to any Bible teaching required. One need not love the truth, despise error, be able to tell the difference, or even possess a modicum of good sense. He need not even be a Christian, as long as he has \$29.95 (yes—they take American Express). Just show him the money and, as if by magic, he will zap you into an ordained minister. Can you imagine an apostle taking this route? All of us can see the absurdity of this email offer and recognize it as a shameless effort to separate \$29.95 from people whose Bible knowledge may barely register on any scale.

So what’s the point? After all, we’ve no intention of falling for the scheme. True, but let it serve to remind us how quickly we can slip into the trap of taking the “easy way.” Christianity was costly to establish, and it is costly to implement in our lives. That is its nature. That is why its rewards are so grand. Now if I don’t want to pay what it takes to be a diligent Bible student (2 Tim. 2:15), there will be someone else to tell me what to believe. If I don’t want to invest the time it takes to worship God on a regular basis (Heb. 10:25), the devil will offer distractions galore to keep me occupied. And if I don’t want to defend what the gospel says about a controversial point because it might cost me friends (or worse), or if I’m unwilling to take the heat of persecution (2 Tim. 3:12), the devil will still do all he can to provide me solace in my cowardice.

The onset of Christianity cost God the tears, sweat and blood of his only Son. It is only fitting, then, that God expects our share of Christianity’s cost to be paid in our own tears, sweat, and—if need be—blood. The Lord does not take American Express.

