

NAME _____
DATE _____

Transmitting God’s Power

This is the fourth of the foundation doctrines listed in **Hebrews 6:1–2**, the laying on of hands, which I have rendered “Transmitting God’s Power.”

Hebrews 6:1-2 *“**Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, ²Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.**”*

Many of us would probably be a little surprised to find that laying on of hands is among the foundation doctrines, because very little is said about it currently in most congregations. If we pause and consider, it is extremely logical that it is there—because laying on of hands (or transmitting God’s power and authority) is that which brings continuity to the body of Christ. Continuity is established between a senior minister and a junior minister and between one generation and the next. The essential function of this ministry of laying on of hands is to provide continuity in the body of Christ.

Some traditions claim to have preserved this continuity from the days of the apostle Peter until now. I am not considering that claim, but I will point out that the reasoning behind it is logical. We need a way to continue from generation to generation, from ministry to ministry. The way has been provided in the Scripture by this ordinance of laying on of hands. We find the laying on of hands in the first book of the Bible and we can see it extends from then on through the whole history of God’s people. It is an essential element in the history of God’s people.

There are certain spiritual purposes it embraces. First, let’s recognize the fact that to put your hand on somebody is a natural, human reaction. A mother who has a sick baby with a fever, almost without reasoning will put her hand on the forehead of the child. Or two men may meet who have not seen one another for a while and in one way or another they will make contact with their hands—they will lay their hands on each other’s shoulders or shake hands. We see that the hand is one of the main ways for human beings to make contact with one another.

To Transmit

In the spiritual context, I suggest that there are certain purposes that are accomplished.

First of all, in the Bible we find the laying on of hands is used to transmit blessings, authority, wisdom, the Holy Spirit, a spiritual gift, or a ministry.

To Commission

Second, it is the biblical way to commission a person for a place of service in the body of Christ.

As such:

First of all, *it recognizes God's appointment*. We need to understand that appointments in the church are not settled by voting. God is not subject to votes. A lot of churches vote for deacons or pastors or for some other function, but that really is not scriptural. It is God who makes the appointments. Jesus said to His apostles, ***"You did not choose Me, but I chose you"*** (John 15:16).

That is true of every valid function, ministry, and appointment in the church. It is not man who made the choice, but God—because Jesus Christ is head over all things to the church which is His body. Appointments that are not made on the authority of Jesus really have no validity. But the appointment is not to make a person a certain thing, but *to recognize what God has decided that person should be*. If there is a meeting in church to discuss the appointment of deacons, our purpose should not be to decide who we would like to have as a deacon. Our purpose should be to decide whom God has chosen as a deacon. It is a very different attitude. We are somewhat corrupted by democracy, which has very little place in the Bible or in the church. This is a rather controversial issue.

Second, apart from recognizing God's choice, laying on of hands is used to set apart for a certain task or ministry.

Third, it is used to endorse or to give authority.

Fourth, it is used to equip; that is, to transmit the spiritual gift or authority needed to carry out God's appointed task.

To recap, the function of laying on of hands in commissioning people is used to recognize but not appoint, the persons of God's choice. It is used to set apart a person to a certain task or ministry. It is used to endorse a person with authority. And it is used to equip a person with all the spiritual authority or gifts that person will need.

Examples from the Old Testament

Our first example comes from **Genesis 48**, which is a very interesting passage. Joseph has brought his two sons to his father Jacob (who is also called Israel) for him to bless his grandsons. Let me say, that second to the blessing of God Himself, the most desired blessing is one given by a father or grandfather. I would say to everyone, especially younger people, if by any means possible, that you obtain your father's blessing on whatever you do. In the Bible, great importance was attached to a father's blessing. **Genesis 48:8-11**

“Then Israel [or Jacob] saw Joseph’s sons, and said, “Who are these?” And Joseph said to his father, “They are my sons, whom God has given me in this place [Egypt].” And he [Jacob] said, “Please bring them to me, and I will bless them.” Now the eyes of Israel were dim with age, so that he could not see. Then Joseph brought them near him, and he kissed them and embraced them. And Israel said to Joseph, “I had not thought to see your face; but in fact, God has also shown me your offspring!”

(If there is one thing that moves me to tears, it is the faithfulness of God. Every time I contemplate the faithfulness of God, I am overcome with tears.)

Genesis 48:12-14

“So Joseph brought them from beside his knees, and he bowed down with his face to the earth. [Notice the respect that people in the Bible showed for parents and for the elderly.] And Joseph took them both, Ephraim with his right hand toward Israel’s left hand, and Manasseh with his left hand toward Israel’s right hand and brought them near him. Then Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on Ephraim’s head, who was the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh’s head, guiding his hands knowingly, for Manasseh was the firstborn.”

Normally, the firstborn would receive the greater blessing, which would be transmitted by the right hand. Joseph specially arranged that Manasseh, who was the elder, was to come opposite Jacob's right hand. But Jacob, prompted by the Holy Spirit, crossed his hands, and laid his right hand on Ephraim and his left hand on Manasseh. He blessed Joseph, and said: verses **15-16**:

“God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has fed me all my life long to this day, the angel who has redeemed me from all evil [this happened when Jacob met the angel at Peniel in Genesis 32:22–32.] Bless the lads; let my name be named upon them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.”

We can see how important it is to transmit a name. So many biblical practices are going out of fashion today, but they have never gone out of fashion with God.

Verses 17–20 *“Now when Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him; so, he took hold of his father’s hand to remove it from Ephraim’s head to Manasseh’s head. And Joseph said to his father, “Not so, my father, for this one is the firstborn; put your right hand on his head.” But his father refused and said, “I know, my son, I know. He also shall become a people, and he also shall be great; but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations.” So, he blessed them that day, saying, “By you Israel will bless, saying, ‘May God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh!’” And thus, he set Ephraim before Manasseh.”*

That is a very vivid scene, and it is very precise. It was understood that the greater blessing would come from the father’s ***right hand***. And it was so real that there was a real transmission of blessing; it was not just a formality or ceremony. It was a vital transaction in the lives of two young men, Ephraim, and Manasseh. It determined their destiny from then onward. Let us never underestimate the significance and the importance of laying on of hands when it is done by the Holy Spirit.

The next example is in **Numbers 27**, where we find that Moses was telling the Lord that it was time to appoint the leader who was to follow him. Moses knew that he would not enter the Promised Land, but he was very concerned about Israel, the people of God. So, Moses said to the Lord:

Numbers 27:15-16 *“Then Moses spoke to the Lord, saying: “Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation.”*

It is significant that God is ***“the God of the spirits of all flesh”***—He knows the spirit of every person. He sees into the innermost depth of human character.

Numbers 27:16–17 *“Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, who may go out before them and go in before them, who may lead*

them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the Lord may not be like sheep which have no shepherd.”

The whole Bible tells us from beginning to end that sheep without a shepherd will be scattered and will become a prey. It is a message that runs consistently throughout the Bible. Let me suggest that unless circumstances are very unusual, each person should have a human shepherd who will watch over your soul and care for you—it is very important. How did the Lord respond? The Lord said to Moses:

Numbers 27:18–20 ***“Take Joshua the son of Nun with you, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him; set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation, and inaugurate [commission] him in their sight. And you shall give some of your authority to him.”***

I like that: not ***“all of your authority,”*** because Moses had unique authority. But give him a good portion of your authority because he is going to need it.

verses 20–23 ***“You shall give some of your authority to him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient. He shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire before the Lord for him by the judgment of the Urim. At his word [Joshua’s word] they shall go out, and at his word they shall come in, he and all the children of Israel with him—all the congregation.” So, Moses did as the Lord commanded him. He took Joshua and set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation. And he laid his hands on him and inaugurated [commissioned] him, just as the Lord had commanded by the hand of Moses.”***

You see, the whole congregation had to witness this transmission of authority from Moses—the one whom they followed for forty years—to his successor. It was a vital transaction for the wellbeing of all of God’s people. Furthermore, it was not just a ceremony, something really happened to Joshua. In **Deuteronomy 34**, we have this interesting comment.

Deuteronomy 34:9 ***“Now Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him.”***

We see that through the laying on of hands Joshua received the spirit of wisdom. It was not just a formality or ceremony. It was a genuine transaction.

For our last Old Testament example, we will go to **2 Kings 13**, which is the closing scene in the life of Elisha. **2 Kings 13:14**

“Elisha had become sick of the illness of which he would die.”

This is certainly not what one would expect. He died of a sickness, yet his bones were so charged with the power of God that when a dead man contacted his bones, the dead man came alive (see verses 20–21). We cannot explain that. There are some things that are beyond explanation. This would be one of the mysteries of God that aren't told to us.

Let me relate something that happened to a man and his wife that were ministering in an Assembly of God Church in South Africa. The associate pastor, who was a young man, had been playing squash (similar to tennis), and he had fallen and broken his arm in four places. So, he came to them for prayer. The man said, “I know this sounds strange, but I'm going to check your legs because this is what God has shown me to do. If your legs are unequal, the short leg will grow out and you will know that God has touched you.” Then he said, “Be very careful to thank God for it.”

You see, when people have a real need, they will do all sorts of strange things they would never have done at other times. So, he went through this ceremony: The man held his legs and one of them grew out. He knew God had touched him. He went back to the doctor and had an X-ray. This is what the man could not explain: there had been four *breaks in his arm*. Three of them were perfectly healed, the fourth was still broken. The senior pastor said to the man, “Explain that!” The man said, “I can't explain.

We could say, He had seventy-five percent faith, but that would be a very unconvincing explanation. People think they know everything God has done and are able to explain it all. But there are lots of things God does that we cannot explain. I am quite content to leave them with God and you should be too.

As we go on with this story of Elisha: **Verses 14**

“Then Joash the king of Israel came down to [Elisha], and wept over his face, and said, ‘O my father, my father, the chariots of Israel and their horsemen!’”

That was the same thing Elisha had said to Elijah when he was taken up in the chariot (see 2 Kings 2: 12). And it contains a message for all of us, really. A man who really knows God can be the defense of a nation, he can be stronger than an army. Joash, who was not a particularly godly king, recognized what Elisha meant to his people.

II Kings 13:15–17

“And Elisha said to him, “Take a bow and some arrows.” So, he took himself a bow and some arrows. Then he said to the king of Israel, “Put your hand on the bow.” So, he [the king] put his hand on it [the bow] and Elisha put his hands on the king’s hands. And he said, “Open the east window” [which was the direction of Syria, the enemy of Israel]; and he opened it. Then Elisha said, “Shoot”; and he shot. And he said, “The arrow of the Lord’s deliverance and the arrow of deliverance from Syria; for you must strike the Syrians at Aphek till you have destroyed them.”

We read that Joash struck the arrows three times and we find out that three times Joash defeated the Syrians. Elisha was angry with him because he should have struck more times. What I want to bring out here is that what made it effective was Elisha’s putting his hands on the hands of the king when he held the bow. Again, it is in the supernatural realm, but it shows that a real impartation can take place when one person lays hands on another.

Examples from the New Testament

Let’s now consider the purposes indicated in the New Testament for the laying on of hands.

To impart healing

First of all, to impart healing to the sick. Jesus said when He commissioned His disciples to God, (Mark 16:17).

“These signs shall follow those who believe” The fifth sign was, (verse 18). *“They will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.”*

In other words, laying hands on the sick was a way of ministering God’s healing to them.

In James 5:14–15 we find another ordinance:

“Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up.”

The elders are to pray over him. They are to lay hands on him, but they are also to anoint him with oil. As I am sure we know, oil is always a type of the Holy Spirit. The oil does not produce the healing, but it symbolizes the release of the Holy Spirit through that ceremony into the body of the sick person.

What is the difference between just laying on hands or laying on hands and anointing with oil? I suggest to you, and this is just approximate—that the laying on of hands without the anointing of oil was for people who were not members of the church. But for members of the church, the ordinance included anointing with oil. This is just an opinion.

Again, I want to point out that the New Testament indicates that normally every believer should be part of a congregation, for he says,

“Is anyone [Christians] among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil.”

If we go to one church on Sunday morning and another church on Sunday evening, which group of elders will we call for? And if we do not have elders to call for, what will we do when we are sick? In other words, the New Testament assumes, with various exceptions, that a believer shall be a member of a congregation. He should be known to the leadership, recognize their leadership, and have available to him the ministry of the leadership.

Just let me back that up with another Scripture. This is not on this particular subject, but in the book of **Revelation, chapters 2 and 3**, there are seven messages sent to seven churches—but only to the churches. Anybody who was not in a church did not get the message. I feel God wants me to emphasize this point. Some people are like mountain goats—they are way out ahead of the herd and don’t have a shepherd. That is a dangerous place to be. It is humbling to submit yourself to human authority, but God blesses the humble and He resists the proud. **(1 Peter 5:5.)** We must choose.

There are exceptions and situations where this does not apply. But we should not be an exception if we should be part of the rule.

To impart the Holy Spirit

In **Acts 8** we read about Philip, who went to a city of Samaria and preached Christ, attested by miracles and signs, and all the people in the city who believed were baptized. They were saved because Jesus said,

“He who believes and is baptized will be saved” **(Mark 16:16)**.

But the apostles were not content because they knew there was something missing.

Acts 8:14–16 *“Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.”*

That is a very clear indication that *it is possible to be saved without having received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit*. The Holy Spirit spoken of there as “falling upon them,” is what I call immersion from above—a Niagara Falls immersion.

Verses 17–19 *“Then they [the apostles] laid hands on them, and they [the believers] received the Holy Spirit. And when Simon [the magician] saw that through the laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, “Give me this power also.”*

In the next chapter, after Saul had his encounter with Jesus on the Damascus Road, while he was there in a house in Damascus, unable to see, and fasting for three days, Ananias, a mere disciple—not an apostle or prophet, *just a disciple*—came to him. He had received directions from the Lord to go to the house where Saul was, lay hands on him and pray for him. When Ananias laid hands on Saul, his sight was restored, and he was baptized in the Holy Spirit. We need to understand, that the laying on of hands is not limited merely to people with a special ministry.

In the context of God’s will, any person can be directed to lay hands on someone else. I have a rather unusual story to relate concerning this. A minister and his wife were in Kona, Hawaii, and the man had been very sick. In fact, he was still far from recovered. They were walking down the main street, and a man came up to them and said, “Will you pray for me? I’m sick.” The minister said, “What’s the matter with you?” He said, he had been electrocuted, he had received a full charge (he was an electrician). His shoulders were paralyzed, and he could not raise his arms. The minister was rather reluctant to do it, in a way, but he was persistent. So, they stopped in the middle of the street right outside a restaurant and prayed. His wife laid her hands on his shoulders. The next day in the devotions at Youth With A Mission the injured man put his hands right up above his head. He had experienced a miracle through the laying on of hands!

Later on, he came to see the minister and his wife, when they were ministering in Arizona, and told them that he had been to a doctor for a checkup. The doctor said, “I’ve examined your shoulders. There is no possible way that you could ever get your arms above your head!” Well, that is an example of what the laying on of hands will do.

In **Acts 19** we read that Paul arrived in Ephesus and found certain disciples of the teachings of John the Baptist as taught by Apollos. Paul explained the gospel to them, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, and, when Paul laid his hands on them, they spoke with tongues and prophesied. (**See Acts 19:1–6.**) So, we see that laying on of hands is a very scriptural way to transmit the power of the Holy Spirit.

Actually, there are five main examples of receiving the baptism in the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. In two cases—on the Day of Pentecost (**Acts 2:1–4**) and in the house of Cornelius (**Acts 10:44–48**)—it came sovereignly from God. In the other three cases—in Samaria (**Acts 8:14–20**), with Saul of Tarsus (**Acts 9:17–18**) and in Ephesus (**Acts 19:1–6**)—it was transmitted through the laying on of hands. It is a question of how God leads.

To commission church servants

The next purpose of laying on of hands is to commission servants of the church, sometimes called deacons. I wonder how some churches would change if they realized that the word deacon in Greek means “a servant.” In some churches the Board of Deacons has a lot of authority. How would it be if they were called the Board of Servants? We have gotten some of our terminology mixed up.

It was taken for granted in the New Testament church that they invariably accepted responsibility for their widows. In **Acts 6**, the church had run into a very good problem—they were growing so fast that they could not take care of all the poor and the widows who needed their attention. The problem today is that the government has taken over so many functions that the church does not really realize its responsibilities. I believe the church has a responsibility for the poor, whatever way that responsibility may be carried out.

The believers (mostly gentile believers) came to the apostles and said, “Things aren’t working out right, our widows are being neglected.” So, the apostles said they would take steps. This was a rather crucial situation. The twelve apostles summoned the congregation and said:

Acts 6:2–4 *“It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”*

The apostolic ministry is prayer and the ministry of the Word, not administration. They said they could get other people to do the administration, but they needed to stick with their responsibility.

So, they said,

“Choose seven men from among you whom you know.”

All of them had to be full of the Holy Spirit. Not even a deacon was appointed in the early church unless he was full of the Holy Spirit.

This was the wisdom of the apostles, you see. The apostles were going to look after the finances, but they let the congregation choose the men. The apostles accepted the men, ordained them, and put them in office. After that, the congregation could never complain about the men because the congregation made the choice. See how wise God is?

So, it says, the congregation brought these men and

(verse 6): *“set [them] before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.”*

They were ordaining them. The apostles were getting so busy they needed helpers.

The position of a helper was very important. It is interesting to see what happened to two of those helpers: Stephen became the first martyr and Philip became the God-acknowledged evangelist. If you start in the position of a servant, bear in mind it can be a steppingstone to something else. In fact, if you don't start as a servant, you really never will be promoted by God because God only promotes people who start down the ladder.

To send out apostles

Some people think there are only twelve apostles in the New Testament. That is not so. I have counted approximately twenty people who were called apostles. There were the twelve foundation apostles, then there were other apostles who were mentioned by name. We will look at some of them.

In **Acts 13** it speaks about the church at Antioch, which was in many ways a model church. In fact, in some ways it got ahead of the church in Jerusalem, which got a little bit stuck in what I would call “internal focus.” That is one of the big problems with our churches today. Most churches are so focused on the internal that they have very little time for the real job, which is preaching the gospel to those who have never heard it. But the people at Antioch had a different vision and this is very important.

Acts 13:1 *“Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers [five of them are named]: Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius, Manaen and Saul [who later became Paul].”*

If we can believe for prophets and teachers, then the way is open for apostles.

Verse 2 says, *“As they ministered to the Lord [worshiped the Lord, NIV] and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, “Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”*

Notice, the Holy Spirit was speaking as God: *“Separate to Me these two men.”* How do you think the Holy Spirit said it? Do you think it was a disembodied voice that came, or do you think He spoke through one of the five men? You can make up your own mind—I believe personally it was probably a prophetic word.

Verse 3 says, *“Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.”*

A lot of happenings in the church will never occur until people learn to fast and pray. This was the second time they had fasted. They were already fasting when they got the message.

Please note, they did not just choose the junior youth director, which is what some churches would do. They chose the two top men; they sent out their best. Promotion to the outreach of the ministry is from the top, not from the bottom. The church of today has a tremendous lesson to learn. The people who are “missionaries” (or whatever you want to call them) are not people with some minor ministry way on down the line; they should be the top people chosen by God. We have an altogether wrong emphasis on our internal structure, and we are so absorbed with ourselves that we really do not have the vision of the Lord.

I hope you will forgive me for saying this, but many people in the current move of the Holy Spirit, at least in some countries, are like the astronomers in the days of Ptolemy. I do not know much about astronomy, but Ptolemy was convinced that the sun revolved around the earth. Along came Copernicus and he said, “That’s not right; it’s the other way around. The earth revolves around the sun.” Typically, enough, the church wanted to put Copernicus to death for saying that. He just escaped with his life. Why was the church so upset? Because Copernicus’ theory was contrary to their traditions.

I say, a lot of Christians are still living in the age of Ptolemy. They still believe that God the Son revolves around us. They have not yet learned it is the other way around. We revolve around the Son.

Jesus is not here for our benefit; we are here for His glory. Some of the songs we sing focus entirely on what Jesus will do for us. That's wonderful, but the emphasis should be on what we will do for Jesus.

The church at Antioch sent out its two best men. When they were sent out, they were prophets and teachers, but if you read on in the next chapter of Acts about the same two men, it says at one point: The multitude of the city was divided: part sided with the Jews, and part with the apostles. . . . **But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard this . . . Acts 14:4, 14**
We see that Barnabas and Paul had become apostles. How had they become apostles? By being sent out from a church through the direction of the Holy Spirit.

The meaning of the word apostle is “one who is sent out.” If we have not been sent out, we are not an apostle. Here are two men who were not in the original twelve, who are now called apostles. They become apostles by the appointment of the Holy Spirit. They heard the voice of the Holy Spirit when they were praying, fasting, and worshiping God. When church leadership follows that sequence, then we will see apostles emerging.

To appoint elders

The next use of laying on of hands in the New Testament is to appoint elders. In the same chapter of Acts that we have been looking at, we read:

Acts 14:23 *They [the two apostles, Barnabas, and Paul] . . . appointed elders in every church . . .”*

The appointment of elders initially was from the apostles. Writing to Timothy, who was his representative in the city of Ephesus, Paul is instructing Timothy about the kind of person who should be an elder.

1 Timothy 5:17 *“Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine [teaching].”*

If you analyze the phrase “double honor,” in the New Testament, it means some kind of financial remuneration. The word honor is not just an empty title, it means you show respect by the way you handle people’s needs. Here we have laid out for us a standard of remuneration; those who give their time fully to the Word of God have to be remunerated by the people whom they serve, according to the amount of time they give. Paul goes on about how to treat elders,

(1 Timothy 5:19) “Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses.”

That is very important. We should not entertain an accusation against a man who is in the position of an elder unless it is supported by at least two witnesses. Many times, men of God have been slandered and people have taken up the slander without ever demanding witnesses. Never do that, because one of Satan’s main ways of attacking people in the ministry is to raise false charges against them. Here is the protection: Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is supported by at least two and preferably three eyewitnesses. A great many things in the church would change if we stuck to that rule.

Paul goes on in the same chapter:

Verses 21–22 “I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality [which has no place in the kingdom of God]. Do not lay hands on anyone hastily [or suddenly] nor share in other people’s sins; keep yourself pure.”

This is in the context of appointing elders, so when Paul says, **“Do not lay hands on anyone hastily,”** it means we should not hastily appoint an elder. We must be very careful that we have God’s mind and that the man has the qualifications required. It is much easier to lay hands on than to lay hands off. Once we have appointed an elder it is an awful problem if we have made the wrong appointment. Paul is telling Timothy to be very careful and not lay hands to appoint eldership of anybody until he is absolutely sure that it is God’s choice.

Then Paul says, **“Nor share in other men’s sins,”** because if we appoint an elder who is not worthy—who may exploit the congregation and the people of God—we have a share in his sins. We must be very careful. We see how many lessons come out of all this about laying on of hands, it is not just a little thing. The purpose of laying on of hands in all these cases—whether servants or apostles or elders—**is to transmit authority, to set apart, to endorse and to equip a person for service.**

To impart a spiritual gift (charisma)

Paul wrote to the Roman Christians, and he said,

(See Romans 1:11.) “I would love to come to you and impart some spiritual gift to you.” But he didn’t go at that time, he went later on. In that same context, in writing to Timothy, Paul says: **2 Timothy 1:6 “I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.”**

A gift was transmitted to Timothy through the laying on of Paul's hands. The Greek word used there is charisma, from which we get the word "charismatic." My personal opinion is that the charisma that was imparted to Timothy was apostleship. I will show you out of the Bible. The first letter to the Thessalonians was written by three men—which was quite normal in the New Testament: Paul, Silvanus (which is another way of saying Silas) and Timothy.

They were the writers of the letter. In chapter 2 of that letter, these same men—Paul, Silas, and Timothy—said:

1 Thessalonians 2:6 *"Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ."*

So, all three of those men—Paul, Silas, and Timothy—were apostles. The ministry of apostles has not gone out of date because in **Ephesians 4** God says He has put apostles in the church.

"till we all come to the unity of the faith" (**verse 13**).

Anybody with a candid mind would have to acknowledge we have not yet come to the unity of the faith. Is that right?

So, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers are all needed until the job is complete. We now have four men who are called apostles besides the original Twelve: Paul, Barnabas, Silas, and Timothy. They were all appointed after the Day of Pentecost. And there are many others.

Apostleship of Timothy

I have pointed out that Timothy is called an apostle. But how did he become an apostle? This is a very important question since we need apostles desperately in the church. Mind you, in the book of Revelation, I must point out that Jesus commended the church of Ephesus because they tested those who said they were apostles and were not and found them to be liars (see **Revelation 2:2**). We should not accept everybody's claim to be an apostle — they have to be tested. We know that liars end up in the lake of fire (**Revelation 21:8**). This is a very serious issue. If somebody claims to be an apostle and is not, he is headed for the lake of fire. Let's look at this situation in **Acts 16**. Paul has started out on his second missionary journey with Silas:

Acts 16:1–2 *"He came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father was Greek. He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium."*

One thing that normally is required for anybody who is going to hold a significant position in the church is that they have a good report from their own congregation. If their own people cannot say well of them, then what other people say about them matters very little.

Years ago, a lady was sent to a man's ministry as a coworker when they were in Jerusalem. The man's wife, who was very sharp, read through all the recommendations, which were many. She said, "There's just one thing missing—there's no recommendation from her own church." They took her on but regretted it bitterly as she was a source of many problems.

When choosing a person, the most important recommendation is from the people that lived with them, worked with them, and knew them. If those people do not recommend them, no other recommendation is worth much.

Timothy had a good report from the elders of the churches in which he had been ministering or living. So, Paul took him along and said, "You come with me." We have to follow this rather carefully, but later on we read that Paul said to Timothy:

1 Timothy 4:14, "Do not neglect [forget] the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership."

My conclusion is that a prophetic word was given saying that Timothy was to go out with Paul and Silas. On the basis of that prophetic word and because of their knowledge of his character, the local elders laid hands on Timothy and sent him out. He received the gift (or charisma) of apostleship. That is the way I understand it.

We must balance that with what we already read in **2 Timothy 1:6** where Paul says to Timothy,

"Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands."

There could be many ways of understanding that. The most probable way is, in this situation in Lystra when the prophecy was given and duly tested (the prophecy that said Timothy was to go out with Paul and Silas), the elders said, "We endorse him." Paul said, "I receive him." Then Paul and the elders laid hands on him and imparted to him the charisma (gift) of apostleship.

It is very important to notice that the prophecy was very significant. Paul, writing to Timothy, says:

1 Timothy 1:18 "This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare."

That is the real purpose of prophecy: to encourage a person who is going to face opposition and that they will know that God has really chosen them. A quite well-known Christian leader in New Zealand had a prophecy over him when he was in the United States that revealed he was to do a certain task. He got very discouraged, and he was about to give up. Then he read this verse in Timothy and he said, "I'm going to go by the prophecies." It turned out to be one of the things that got him into his ministry, which has now affected New Zealand and many other nations.

Prophecy can be very significant if given in the Holy Spirit. Much of prophecy today is what I call "Charismatic fortune-telling." People come in, lay hands on you, and say, "You will do this, and you will do that." Maybe— But in most cases, it just does not happen. There is a very thin line between prophecy and fortune-telling. We know that fortune-tellers can tell the truth. In **Acts 16** there was a fortune-telling woman who first recognized who Paul and Silas were. Before anybody else in the city of Philippi, she knew they were "*the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation.*" And yet, she was a servant of Satan. (See **Acts 16:16–19.**)

Dangers and Safeguards

Let's look at the two dangers that are mentioned.

First, endorsing someone who is unworthy—because when we do that and it does not work out, we are partly responsible for the mess they make.

The second is what I call spiritual contamination. We may lay hands on somebody to pray for deliverance from an evil spirit, but we have to know how to protect ourselves. It can be a two-way transaction. Either we can impart the Spirit of God, or that evil spirit can affect us.

On one occasion a group of men laid hands on a man who was suffering from severe depression. They did not really have the leading of the Lord; they just did it. Do you know what happened? They all got attacked by depression because they had not protected themselves.

When we lay hands on somebody, we need protection. We get this by prayer and humility. We must be directed by the Holy Spirit: "*As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God*" (**Romans 8:14**).

We must be protected by the blood of Jesus and know how to keep ourselves under the blood of Jesus. Bear in mind that Jesus said to His disciples, "*I give you authority ... over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you*" (**Luke 10:19**).