

THE LAYING ON OF HANDS

This past week we had a wonderful Homecoming Bible Conference at my alma mater and while there I had the privilege of speaking for the ordination of three fine young men. We can say with assurance that what we did Saturday has been carried out in a similar fashion for almost two thousand years.

In some ways it looks mysterious when we ordain men into the ministry or deaconship. A touch of mystery is okay because in a real sense at an ordination, heaven and earth touch. The Lord knows we could use a little more acceptance of the transcendence in our approach to God. The church has become so “user friendly” she has lost the value of being “God friendly.” Transcendent means extending or lying beyond the limits of ordinary experience or going beyond or above the range of normal or merely physical human experience. God declares, *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts”* (Isaiah 55:8,9). Paul said, *“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?”* (Romans 11:33,34). Transcendence is one of the high and holy attributes of God. When we follow the biblical practice of the laying on of hands we are allowing the transcendent nature of God to permeate our atmosphere with His presence that ties His purpose with His giftings to His people.

1. It is the invocation for the blessing of God.

Before Jacob (Israel) died, Joseph brought his sons to be blessed by their grandfather, “And Israel stretched out his right hand, and laid it upon Ephraim’s head, who was the younger, and his left hand upon Manasseh’s head...” (Genesis 48:14). Joshua was going to step into the place of Moses, so the Lord wanted to have a moment of time when the blessing is transferred. “And the LORD said unto Moses, Take thee Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay thine hand upon him” (Numbers 27:18). This transfer of the blessing that was on Moses to Joshua is acknowledged by Deut. 34:9, “And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom; for Moses had laid his hands upon him: and the children of Israel hearkened unto him, and did as the LORD commanded Moses.” One young man whom I lay my hands upon this past Saturday brought a precious memory to me, for his grandfather laid his hands upon me at my ordination May, 1974. The blessing I received when his grandfather prayed over me in my youth, I now bestow upon his grandson. Although his grandfather has passed away, the blessing continues from one generation to the next.

2. We are acknowledging that God has laid his hands upon a person.

In I Timothy 4:14, Paul says, “Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.” Prophecy was the “speaking forth” that God has called someone to ministry. A good example of this is found in Acts 13:2,3 “As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, 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.” It should be noted that I Timothy 4:14 was saying the gift was declared by prophecy and came with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery, not by the hands of those elders. When we extend our hands to the head of a God-called man we are saying we believe that God has laid His holy hand upon this man and by laying our hands on his person we are saying “Amen” to what God has already done!

3. We are encouraging the messenger to be connected to the message.

The Bible says, “Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men’s sins: keep thyself pure” (I Timothy 5:22). God gives the ordained men the command to not lay hands suddenly or too soon on the head of a man who is immature in faith and practice.

Time and space will not permit me to go into too much detail, but let me share with you the requirements of a person who is to be ordained from I Timothy 3:1-7: “This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop (overseer, pastor), he desireth a good work.” Desire is a prolonged longing, a reaching forth from the heart to minister. “A bishop then must be blameless (unrebukeable), “...the husband of one wife (a one-woman man); “...vigilant (circumspect; keeping careful watch for possible danger or difficulties: observant); “...sober (temperate); “...of good behavior (appropriate and modest in conduct); “...given to hospitality (given to generous reception, congenial, helpful); “...apt to teach (a willingness and a readiness to be instructive); “Not given to wine (not ruled by substances...), “...no striker (pugnacious, quarrelsome, bruiser, ready with a blow); “...not greedy of filthy lucre (having or showing an intense and selfish desire for something, especially wealth or power); “...but patient (longsuffering of ills and wrongs, forbearing, gentle); “...not a brawler (peaceable); “...not covetous (having or showing a great desire to possess something, typically something belonging to someone else); “One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity (venerableness; probity: having strong moral principles and enforcing them to those under his roof). “Not a novice (newly planted, a beginner in ministry). “Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil (a reputation of honesty, even among those who are unbelievers).

These are standards that God wants for all of us, but requires them for the pastors, those who shepherd His flock.

4. It is an expression of prayer showing utter dependence on God.

Luke 13:13 says, “And he laid his hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God. “ Luke 4:40 says, “Now when the sun was setting, all they that had any sick with divers diseases brought them unto him; and he laid his hands on every one of them, and healed them.” Our Lord’s custom was to lay His hands on people whom He was about to heal. Christ was taking those hands that were soon to be pierced and touching a person that was not whole to be made whole. “Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed” (I Peter 2:24). Without God there is no health. With His touch comes wholeness. By the same token, when we lay hands on a man for ordination we are asking God to sanctify and make whole this man for ministry. He cannot help fragmented lives if he is fragmented himself. Ministry is for those who are totally dedicated. Dedication comes from resigning in total dependence upon God for our message and methods of ministry.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in black ink and has a long, horizontal flourish extending to the right.