

“Lay Hands Suddenly on No Man” -Harry L. Jackson

In order for us to understand the context of “lay hands suddenly on no man,” we would have to read First Timothy, Chapter 5 in its entirety. Otherwise, it would be very easy to take the passage in isolation and apply it erroneously, as has been done extensively in the modern-day church. This entire chapter can be seen as Paul’s treatise on “Leadership Training,” wherein he begins by teaching Timothy, the “bishop” or overseer (“Episkopos”) at Ephesus, how he was to handle people of different age groups, persuasions and conditions, how to demonstrate care for them, and how they should be instructed to conduct themselves as Christians. He concludes the chapter with verse 17, calling Timothy’s attention to those people in the assembly who are designated as leaders (“elders” -Gr. (Strong’s 4245)“presbuteros”), and gives direction as to how they are to be honored and respected (“counted worthy of double honor”) as those who “rule” (Gr. “proiestemi” (Strong’s 4291)- “stand before, “preside”) well. So again, Paul is giving direction as to how leaders are to be dealt with and raised up in the church, honored and rewarded (vs. 18) when they do well, “rebuked openly” when they sin, and even instructs him to avoid “preferring one before another,” an admonishment that is every bit useful today as it was in Paul’s time. He urges his young protégé to “lay hands on no man suddenly,” a statement to which, if we are to obtain full understanding of Paul’s instructions, we have to attach the next verse, where he is told to also avoid being “a partaker of other men’s sins.” The first verse has to flow into the second, and it is impossible to understand verse 22 in its proper context when it is isolated from verse 21. If Paul understood one thing, it is that repetition is a powerful thing, so he reiterates what he had spoken to Timothy in Chapter 3, verse 6, when he insists that a leader should be “Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.” So when he tells Timothy not to “lay hands” on any man “suddenly,” he is warning him against releasing people into service prematurely. The “laying on of hands” was an important aspect (see Num. 8:10. Acts 13:1-3) of the raising and releasing of leaders in the New Testament church in that it embodied empowerment for service, impartation of gifts (Romans 1:11), as well as validation of the call on a person’s life. It was therefore important that the overseers and general assembly insured that such people were not only prepared to serve, as well as able to do so with a good conscience (i.e., no deliberate, continuous, and unconfessed sin), that Paul reminds Timothy that if he were to knowingly release a person into ministry who was willfully living a sinful lifestyle,



or who was gifted and zealous, yet unbroken, immature and untrained, that God would count the leader(s) and assembly that released that minister as a “partaker” of whatever sin that person might be engaged in. In other words, if we set people in leadership who are “given to wine, a striker, greedy of filthy lucre, a brawler, covetous” (1 Timothy 3:3), then, in God’s sight, we are just as guilty of those sins as the ones who are committing them. Paul informs Timothy, and hence us, that to “lay hands suddenly” (quickly, hastily, and without foresight) on any man (or woman) can be disastrous, both for the individual, as well as for the church, and that alone should be cause to apply the utmost caution and care as we raise up leaders in the Body of Christ.