"Lay Hands Hastily On No Man …"

"… neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure" (1 Tim. 5:22). This passage, along with two other passages, are the only instances in Paul's writing where this expression is found. In 1 Timothy 4, Paul spoke of the presbytery who *"laid hands on"* Timothy. In his second letter to Timothy, he reminded him that he had himself laid hands on him (2 Tim. 1:6). The appearance of the phrase in 1 Timothy 4 is of a different purpose than that in 2 Timothy 1:6. In the latter passage the *"presbytery"* laid hands on Timothy to appoint him to a work; but in 2 Timothy 1:6, Paul laid hands on Timothy to give him a spiritual gift. In 1 Timothy 5:16, Timothy was cautioned against laying hands hastily on any man. Thus, three different appearances of the phrase are seen and three different ones are seen as laying hands on someone: the *"presbytery"* (who laid hands on Timothy); Paul (who also laid hands on Timothy) and finally Timothy, who was to lay hands hastily on no one. The charge here given has baffled students of the scriptures. Precisely what was Paul's intent in saying, *"Lay hands hastily on no man"*? Bible students know that the expression *"to lay hands on"* is not confined just to one meaning. There are at least four different possible meanings of the phrase: to heal (Mt. 9:18), to impart spiritual gifts (Acts 8:18), to appoint to a work or office (Acts 13:3), and to arrest or charge with wrong doing (Acts 5:18). Which of these four was Paul's command to Timothy?

Since Timothy was not an apostle, clearly Paul did not command him not to be hasty to impart a spiritual gift -- he had no power to do that. Nor is it likely that Paul meant Timothy was to be careful when he *"laid hands"* on someone to heal them. The two remaining options are that either Timothy was charged that he not be hasty in appointing one to a work or office or else that he was counseled not to be hasty to charge someone with wrong doing. Which is correct?

The almost universal consensus among commentaries is that Paul commanded Timothy not to be hasty to appoint one to a work or office. Timothy had been left in Ephesus to charge certain men not to teach a different doctrine and we might conclude that, since he was given qualification for both elders and deacons that he, as Titus, was to appoint men to their respective offices (1 Tim. 1:3; 3:4-13; Titus 1:5). It was certainly Timothy's and Titus's duty to appoint elders, just as Paul and Barnabas had done before them (Acts 14:23). And it is possible some of those who were appointed *"elders"* in the church by Paul on that first journey were among the *"presbytery"* who laid hands on Timothy. There is strong

support that the instructions, *"Lay hands hastily on no man,"* meant that Timothy was to be careful whom he appointed to the eldership.

Still, strong as that support is to sustain the foregoing position, there is some merit in the view that Timothy was being cautioned in accusing any man. The context has to do with reproving of elders. Timothy was: 1) To receive no accusation against an elder save on the testimony of two or three witnesses; 2) he was to publicly rebuke those who were guilty of sin; and, 3) he was to follow those instructions, doing nothing by prejudice or partiality. Since the charge, *"lay hands hastily on no man,"* follows immediately the former charges, it very well may be a continuation of the charge not to be hasty in entertaining charges and administering appropriate rebuke to elders who sinned. And the command, *"be not a partaker of other men's sins,"* would be appropriate in that same context: Do not join with others who falsely charge elders (or anyone else); keep yourself pure.

There is strong support to sustain either of the aforementioned positions, and as is true in many instances, whether Paul urged Timothy not to be hasty in appointing elders or, on the other hand, not to be hasty in charging men with wrong doing, either action then, as now, needed to be tempered by the command, *"Lay hands hastily on no man."*

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