

Church of God

The Biblical Grandview

The Mighty Hand of God | Four-Part Series

PART 1

You can be turning over to Isaiah 48. This week I've spent some time in preparation of this message looking at references in the Bible to the hand of God. They are very numerous, as you might imagine, but in particular when God is referring to His power, to His might.

In Isaiah 48:12–13, first of all we see in verse 12 a powerful statement about what God is. He says:

"Listen to Me, O Jacob, and Israel, My called: I am He, I am the First, and I am also the Last."

This translates into a very powerful statement about God, God's power, and God's might because of verse 13:

"Indeed My hand has laid the foundation of the earth, and My right hand stretched out the heavens; when I call to them, they stand up together."

So the First and the Last, and the fact that this is a characteristic of the nature of God, is expressed here

between the heavens and the earth. God, by His hand, stretched out the heavens, and He also laid the foundations of the earth.

Here in verse 13 I see a connection between the hand of God, the power and the might of God, and the heavens and the earth. We'll discuss that a little today in the sermon—how God's great power and might work here in the realm of humankind today.

Still in the book of Isaiah, look at Isaiah 40. We find a similar line of thinking.

In Isaiah 40:10 it tells us:

"Behold, the Lord GOD shall come with a strong hand, and His arm shall rule for Him; behold, His reward is with Him, and His work before Him."

This is, of course, a reference to Jesus Christ.

Then in Isaiah 40:22:

"It is He who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them out like a tent to dwell in."

These are concepts that we need to spend a little time thinking about privately. They help us understand the nature of the God with whom we are involved. He is powerful. He is mighty. He controls everything.

Verse 26:

"Lift up your eyes on high, and see who has created these things, who brings out their host by number; He calls them all by name by the greatness of His might and the strength of His power. Not one is missing."

If I can follow up with the sermon just a little bit, given the state of the world that we're in today and the obvious distractions that we're faced with every week as we live our lives, I think it's good to be reminded of the

mighty power and the hand of God, and how He translates that power into the human realm, and how it really does affect each one of us.

Verse 28:

"Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable."

We need to think about that from time to time as we deal with real-life situations that we go through every week.

"He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength."

That's reaching into the realm of men with that statement. He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength.

Do we think about God in those terms very often?

You have to look at this through the lens of many difficult circumstances that exist in God's Church that people are going through right at this particular time. We're going to come back to this point: God is powerful, He is mighty, and He is very present for His people.

Now, the hand of God has different meanings with different applications, of course. We'll look at a very positive one in Acts 11.

In Acts 11:20–21, we're into the early stages of the New Testament Church.

"But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord."

This is a positive example of the hand of God. The hand of the Lord was with them. In other words, the hand of God opened the minds of the people

to perceive the message that they were given.

Every one of us sitting here today has had that "hand of God" experience in the opening of our minds. It's a very positive description of the hand of God.

But there are also some negative connotations. When I say "negative," I don't mean in terms of God's power or how He uses that power, but negative in terms of the affairs of men. The hand of God can be positive, and it can also be corrective.

In Acts 13:10–11, we have the instance of a sorcerer who was demonstrating his own power.

Paul said:

"O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord? And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall

be blind, not seeing the sun for a time."

Immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went about seeking someone to lead him by the hand.

The might and power of God were demonstrated here upon an evil individual in a corrective way. Whichever way it is expressed, the hand of God signifies the power and the might of God.

One standout example, at least to me, is Elijah.

Turn to 1 Kings 18.

We're very familiar with this account. Elijah has confronted the prophets of Baal, and there has been a lengthy drought in the land.

We come to 1 Kings 18:45–46:

"Now it happened in the meantime that the sky became black with clouds and wind, and there was a heavy

rain. So, Ahab rode away and went to Jezreel."

My understanding is that "rode away" means he was in a chariot. He didn't walk away. He didn't run away. He was traveling by chariot back to Jezreel because of the gathering storm.

Then verse 46 says:

"Then the hand of the LORD came upon Elijah; and he girded up his loins and ran ahead of Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel."

Elijah was a physical man, but the hand of God—the power and the might of God—was with him to the point that he outran a chariot.

To me, that is a very powerful demonstration of God's power at work.

We'll pivot slightly now and bring Christ into the picture.

We know that Christ sits at the right hand of God.

In Psalm 110:1–2 we read:

"The LORD said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool.'"

"The LORD shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies."

Dropping down to verse 5:

"The Lord is at Your right hand; He shall execute kings in the day of His wrath."

Again, this is a reference to Jesus Christ being at the right hand of the Father in heaven.

That position carries a great deal of importance. It denotes the sharing of God's power.

Turn now to 1 Peter 3:21–22.

In 1 Peter 3:21–22 we read:

"There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him."

Here we see the working of Christ in a human life where the power of God has been extended. The hand of God has been extended to mankind through Jesus Christ.

Christ has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God. Angels, authorities, and powers have been made subject to Him.

If God occupies the position of supreme power and might, and Christ shares that position at the Father's right hand, then Christ now mediates between the Father and mankind.

Christ was the One who actually stretched out the heavens, but He did

so at the command and behest of the Father. He is therefore intimately involved in God's relationship with mankind, where God's power is shared and demonstrated.

This gives a very interesting perspective for the Church. We are dealing with Jesus Christ in the greatness of the power that He has.

Turn now to Ephesians 1:19.

Breaking into Paul's thought:

"...and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power..."

I appreciate that many of us are familiar with these verses, but I think it is worthwhile bringing them to the front of our minds as we deal with life as it is today.

Continuing:

"...which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and

seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come."

This is Jesus Christ.

He has all the power and might of God because He sits at the Father's right hand.

Everything has been placed under His authority.

Verse 22 continues:

"And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be Head over all things to the church."

Here we see the mighty hand of God coming through Jesus Christ into the realm of mankind in the form of His Body, the Church. Verse 23:

"...which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all."

This really brings the position of the Church into a very high level of responsibility.

Christ shares the power that He receives from the Father with converted human beings in the form of His Body.

Paul is addressing the relationship between the Father, Christ, and the Church.

Christ has authority and control far above all principality, power, might, and dominion.

That is quite a statement when you stop and think about it.

All of this empowers His Body—the Church.

It empowers His Body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. This refers specifically to the Church as the Body over which Jesus Christ is Head.

Christ delegates authority through His Body.

Turn to 1 Corinthians 12:27–28.

"Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. And God has appointed these in the church..."

The King James Version says, "God has set some in the church."

God has appointed authority within the Church.

Paul then lists various offices and responsibilities.

We all know that not every part of the body has the same function. A body has hands, feet, fingers, toes, and so on. Each has different responsibilities within the same body.

Likewise, the power and might of God flow through the Body of Christ.

Turn now to Ephesians 4:10–12.

Referring again to Jesus Christ, Paul writes:

"He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things."

That is important—that He might fill all things with the power and the might of God.

Continuing:

"And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers."

Here we see delegated authority from Jesus Christ within His Body. As He interfaces between the Father and mankind, He works through His Body, the Church.

The Church is clearly an organ whereby Christ expresses His fullness and His authority over His work on this earth.

PART 2

Jesus Christ being the Head of the Church is therefore a very important

position—one that we must recognize.

In Ephesians 3:3–10.

Paul writes:

"...how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery, as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ."

He continues:

"...which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets."

Again, signifying the importance of the Body in God's working with mankind.

It does not limit God's expression of power and might to all humans, but is a time-based element here. Right now, the Church plays a very important role in that expression.

Paul explains that:

"...the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel..."

He then adds:

"...of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power."

We'll see in a moment how the hand of God and Paul's conversion come together.

Verse 8 says:

"To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ."

None of us are partakers of the experience of God's power and might because we deserve it or have earned it in any way.

It is an expression of God's grace, mercy, and kindness.

Although I'm making reference to many of the serious situations that exist within the Body at the moment, there is always the positive side.

We do see God's hand.

We do see God's intervention.

My own experience has been that, most often, it is in many of the little things that we see God's hand—just enough to keep reminding us that He is there and that He is involved.

The bigger things often involve another context entirely—the experience of trials, suffering, and testing.

I was thinking about that while driving in this morning. My wife wasn't with me, so I had plenty of time to think as I drove. She's probably listening.

Many of the trials and issues we go through help form a frame of mind

and a reference point that enables us to place God in the proper perspective in our lives.

That is really what is needed.

If we are the end-time Church of God, then a great deal of responsibility rests upon us to be witnesses of God's power and might in action.

There are many things we need to think about more deeply than perhaps we are.

I sometimes wonder why the Church continues in the condition it does, and why there is so much material appearing on the Internet every week discussing the sickness within the Churches of God.

I wonder whether God is allowing us to become completely weary of politics—of mankind doing things its own way.

Perhaps He is allowing things to continue long enough for us to become thoroughly tired of the

political way of doing things so that we will become more receptive to God's system.

I'm simply thinking out loud.

Paul continues:

"...and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ..."

Christ was intimately involved in stretching out the heavens and laying the foundations of the earth, but always under the authority of the Father.

Verse 10 says:

"...to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places."

Think about what that means.

There are things spirit beings are learning as they observe you and me.

They are witnessing God's power displayed through the Body of Christ.

They are learning aspects of God's purpose by watching what He is accomplishing in His people.

That is a profound responsibility.

Continuing in Ephesians 3:

"...according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him."

Therefore, I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations, which are for your glory.

That's something we all struggle with on a regular basis—not losing heart, and being able to keep the proper perspective on why we're going through what we're dealing with.

"For this reason, I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named..."

All mankind will one day have the opportunity to become part of God's Family.

You carry the name of God.

Now the Body of Christ is the Church of God.

Paul continues:

"...that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man."

That is God's intent, and that strength is available to us according to Scripture.

At this point, another passage comes to mind—Isaiah 59:1.

"Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear."

No matter what physical circumstances you're experiencing or going through, His hand is not shortened.

God is there.

He knows.

He understands.

He has a plan and a purpose that He is working out.

Sometimes that plan involves some negativity in our lives so that we will turn to Him, trust Him, and place our lives completely into His hands.

Returning to Ephesians 3:

"...that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love..."

"...may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height..."

"...to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."

That is the purpose of Christ's Body—to become filled with a relationship with God the Father.

Paul concludes this section:

"Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us..."

"...to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen."

We need to let passages like these roll through our minds and spend time thinking about them.

They are extremely powerful.

They place each one of us, as members of the Body of Christ, into a very important and responsible position.

As the Shepherd, Christ uses human beings to assist Him in shepherding His flock.

The Church is extremely important in what God is working out here on the earth.

Christ is the Shepherd of the flock.

Turn now to 1 Peter 5:1–4.

Peter writes:

"The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed."

Then he gives this instruction:

"Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers..."

This is a designated role given to human beings.

Peter continues:

"...not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock."

And then:

"When the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away."

Notice the role of the shepherd.

This is speaking of a human being placed into a delegated position of authority under Jesus Christ.

They are not to become overlords.

They are to serve as overseers.

Their responsibility is to help bring the Church into a closer relationship with its Head.

I will be the first to admit that there have been far too many examples within God's Church in past days of people who have lorded authority over others.

In my opinion, we have not always fully understood or practiced the role of the shepherd as God intended to be.

Personally, this has been something I have had to learn through experience over many years.

I would admit that we were not trained to be loving shepherds.

Too much emphasis was placed on authority.

That is beside the point.

But there are system and order in God's Church, but Peter clearly understood the true role of the ministry.

He understood the importance of shepherding—namely, protecting the flock.

Continuing in 2 Peter 1:1–4:

"Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ."

This is an expression of the hand of God in the life of the Church.

"Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue..."

Again, that is an incredible statement.

Peter continues:

"...by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust."

Place yourself in this position.

The hand of God has brought you into this relationship with the Father through Jesus Christ.

Now turn to 2 Peter 3:1–2.

Still thinking about the role of a shepherd, Peter writes:

"Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle, in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder..."

"...that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior."

Then he gives a warning:

"Knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts..."
There is a need for shepherds who mirror the Chief Shepherd and the way He conducts Himself.

Christ passes authority on to human beings to continue that role of shepherding.

The last days will contain these kinds of people.

I assume we are living in those last days.

Half the material that comes across my computer I don't even seek out—it simply arrives.

The things taking place within the circles of the Churches of God today are incredible.

The Church needs good shepherds.

It needs shepherds who set the example, establish the tone, and remain watchful for the safety and protection of God's people.

Dropping to verse 17:

"You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked."

Someone sent me a statement this week from the writings of one of the Churches of God.

Disbelief is about the only way I can describe my reaction.

The statement claimed that Jesus Christ did not exist until He was born of Mary as a physical human being—that only then did He become Jesus Christ.

Think that through.

No preexistence of Jesus Christ.

Yet that has been taught in one of the Churches of God—not in the world, but in the Church.

You have to stay alert.

You have to be very watchful for the things that are circulating.

Peter concludes:

"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

That is exactly what shepherds are assigned to help us accomplish.

Turn now to Acts 20:28.

Paul writes:

"Therefore, take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."

Is the Church important?

Christ bought it with His blood when He was crucified.

The Holy Spirit has made certain men overseers to shepherd the Church of God.

That is a tremendously important responsibility.

PART 3

So, we ask the question:

We see that authority is delegated—but how does Christ delegate authority within the Body?

Let's look at the structure that God established for Israel.

Turn to Numbers 27:12–23.

The LORD said to Moses:

"Go up into this Mount Abarim, and see the land which I have given to the children of Israel."

He tells Moses to go up and look at the land that God has promised to Israel.

Then He says:

"When you have seen it, you also shall be gathered to your people, as Aaron your brother was gathered."

In other words:

"Go up, look over the land—and then you are going to die."

Not much encouragement for climbing the mountain.

But Moses clearly understood what God was saying because of what had happened when he struck the rock. So, Moses responds, not by thinking

about himself, but by thinking about Israel.

He says:

"Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation..."

Moses had been their leader up to this point.

He continues:

"...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."

That is a remarkable statement.

God's people were never intended to be sheep without a shepherd.

The LORD answered Moses:

"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 him in their sight."

Then God said:

"And you shall give some of your authority to him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient."

This is a transfer of authority at the human level.

Joshua:

"...shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire before the LORD for him by the judgment of the Urim. At his 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 exactly as the LORD commanded him.

He took Joshua, set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation,

"...and he laid his hands on him and inaugurated him, just as the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses."

The authority was with Moses to lay hands upon another individual and transfer that authority.

Moses was about to die.

His authority was being transferred to another human being. It was accomplished through the laying on of hands.

It is a very clear line of authority.

It was not established by man.

It came by God's instruction, and God Himself was involved in the transfer of leadership.

This was a transfer of authority through the laying on of hands.

That practice became part of the system of government for Israel.

We also see it exercised within the priesthood.

Turn to Leviticus 8.

We will not go through every detail, but simply note the pattern.

The LORD spoke to Moses:

"Take Aaron and his sons with him, and the garments, the anointing oil, a bull as the sin offering, two rams, and a basket of unleavened bread; and gather all the congregation together at the door of the tabernacle of meeting."

Everything was to be done publicly so that all Israel would witness the setting apart of the priesthood.

Dropping down to verse 10:

Moses took the anointing oil and anointed the tabernacle and everything that was in it, consecrating them. He sprinkled the altar seven times and consecrated the altar, all its utensils, the laver, and its base.

Then:

"He poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron's head and anointed him, to consecrate him."

After that Moses clothed Aaron's sons with their priestly garments.

Then he brought the bull for the sin offering.

Notice what happened next.

"Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the bull for the sin offering."

This symbolized the transfer of their sins to the sacrificial animal. It was a visible act. All Israel witnessed it.

Later, in verse 18, they did the same thing with the ram.

"Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the ram."

The consecration of the priesthood involved an elaborate ceremony

setting Aaron and his sons apart to serve God as priests.

The laying on of hands symbolized cleansing and purification through the transfer of sin to the sacrifice.

As we noted earlier, the hand has a special significance whenever God is involved with mankind.

The hand of God enters into human affairs through the laying on of hands.

Similarly, the Levites were separated by God for a particular purpose.

Turn to Numbers 8.

Again, we are simply noting the occurrence rather than examining every detail.

Verse 6 says:

"Take the Levites from among the children of Israel and cleanse them ceremonially."

Then in verse 9:

"You shall bring the Levites before the tabernacle of meeting, and you shall gather together the whole congregation of the children of Israel."

Then:

"The children of Israel shall lay their hands on the Levites."

It was to be unmistakably clear in the minds of the people that this tribe had been set apart by God for a special purpose.

The priests had already been established.

Now the Levites were being set apart to assist in the service of the tabernacle.

When hands are laid upon another person, it signifies God's authority setting that individual apart for a special purpose.

This also means that the one laying on hands must himself have first

been set apart through the laying on of hands.

Only someone who has received that delegated authority can properly pass it on to another.

That principle was driven home to me several years ago.

An individual came to us claiming to be an elder. At first we had no reason to doubt him.

Another person on the council knew him, so he began working with us as an elder. As time went on, however, it became apparent that he was trying to establish a congregation of his own.

One day he explained how he had been ordained. He had belonged to a small independent group of about twenty people. They decided they needed a minister.

So, the entire group gathered together and all laid their hands on him. He said that was his ordination.

But there was not one person in that group who possessed the authority to ordain him. It may have been a sincere and emotional occasion for them, but it did not follow God's established line of authority. It did not constitute a biblical ordination.

God—not man—gives authority and sets individuals apart for His work. That is the hand of God operating in the government of His people.

Before we spend time in the New Testament, let's note another example where the laying on of hands set the course of history.

Turn to Genesis 48.

This account is very familiar to us, but it is important because we can still see its ramifications today.

Beginning in Genesis 48:11:

Israel said to Joseph, "I had not thought to see your face; but in fact, God has also shown me your offspring."

Joseph brought his two sons near to Israel.

He bowed himself with his face to the earth.

Joseph positioned them according to custom. He placed Ephraim toward Israel's left hand and Manasseh toward Israel's right hand so that the firstborn would receive the right hand of blessing.

But then Israel deliberately crossed his hands.

"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."

Then he blessed Joseph, saying:

"God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has fed me all my life long to this day..."

This was not simply Jacob making a personal choice. It was God's authority being exercised through the laying on of hands. When Joseph saw what had happened, he was displeased. He took hold of his father's hand, intending to move it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's.

Joseph said,

"Not so, my father, for this one is the firstborn; put your right hand on his head."

But Israel refused.

He answered,

"I know, my son, I know."
This was not Jacob's will.

It was God's will.

He continued:

"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."

Here we see the course of history being established through God's delegated authority exercised in the laying on of hands.

The Church of God continues to recognize this as a core doctrine today.

Turn to Hebrews 6:1–2.

Why do I call it a core doctrine?

Because it is specifically listed among the foundational teachings of the Church.

Paul writes:

"Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection..."

Then he lists those elementary doctrines:

"...not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God..."

Notice the order.

God calls a person.

That produces repentance.

Repentance develops faith in Christ's sacrifice.

Then comes:

"...the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment."

These doctrines outline God's plan of salvation.

Included among those foundational doctrines is the laying on of hands. It is that important.

It represents God's delegated authority operating through the Body of Jesus Christ.

Now let's follow several examples in the history of the New Testament Church.

Turn to Acts 6.

Beginning in verse 3, we find a genuine need within the rapidly growing Church.

There had arisen a complaint because certain widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.

The apostles responded:

"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." Here we see the introduction of deacons into the structure of the New Testament Church.

Notice carefully what qualified these men. This was not a popularity contest. It was not a political solution. They were to be men of good reputation. A reputation is not built in

a day. It is established over time through consistent conduct and proven character. The fruit of a person's life demonstrates the direction in which that life is headed.

These men were to be known as individuals who were full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. The apostles explained:

"But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

The whole congregation approved. They selected Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, along with the others.

Then:

"Whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them."

Here again delegated authority was conferred through the laying on of hands so that these men could fulfill

the responsibility God had given them.

Once more, notice that this was not a political process.

It was not a popularity contest.

It was the orderly exercise of God's authority within His Church.

Turn now to Acts 8, beginning in verse 4.

"Therefore, those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word."

Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them.

The multitudes listened with one accord to the things Philip spoke, hearing and seeing the miracles that he performed.

"For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed."

There was great joy in that city.

But there was also a problem.

There was a certain man named Simon who had previously practiced sorcery. He had amazed the people of Samaria and claimed to be someone great.

PART 4

The people listened to him, from the least to the greatest, saying:

"This man is the great power of God."

They followed him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time.

But when Philip preached the things concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women believed and were baptized.

Even Simon himself believed and was baptized.

He continued with Philip and was amazed as he witnessed the miracles and signs that were taking place.

Now notice what happened next.

When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the Word of God, they sent Peter and John.

When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers that they might receive the Holy Spirit.

The reason was explained:

"...for as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus."

Then:

"Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit."

Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given. He immediately offered them money. He wanted to purchase

that authority. He wanted the power he had witnessed in God's true servants. Simon was not the genuine article. He was masquerading. He had political ambitions. This account shows that receiving God's Spirit involves being set apart through the laying on of hands.

Now turn to Acts 19:1–6.

Paul came to Ephesus and found certain disciples.

He asked them,

"Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"

They answered,

"We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit."

Paul asked,

"Into what then were you baptized?"

They replied,

"Into John's baptism."

Paul explained:

"John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus."

When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Then:

"And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied."

Again, it was through the laying on of hands that God's Spirit was given.

This is the same practice we follow today at baptism.

A person is immersed completely in water as a symbol of death and burial. When the individual comes up

out of the water, hands are laid upon him or her, and prayer is offered that God would grant the gift of His Holy Spirit.

It is through that act that the person receives the Holy Spirit, which then continues to grow and work within that individual.

The laying on of hands signifies being set apart for a special purpose.

We use it in several different circumstances within the Church.

We follow Christ's example in the blessing of little children.

He laid His hands on children, and we continue that practice today.

The laying on of hands also forms part of the wedding ceremony as we ask God to unite a husband and wife and set them apart for that special relationship.

And, of course, we use it when anointing the sick.

Turn to Mark 10:13–16.

"Then they brought little children to Him, that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked those who brought them."

When Jesus saw this, He was greatly displeased.

He said:

"Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God."

Then He added:

"Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it."

Finally:

"And He took them up in His arms, laid His hands on them, and blessed them."

That is the example we continue to follow within the Church of God today. Now turn to Mark 6:1–6.

This is another example involving Jesus Christ.

Here He was dealing with people who knew Him simply as the carpenter's son rather than recognizing Him as the Son of God.

In Mark 6:4, Jesus said:

"A prophet is not without honor except in his own country, among his own relatives, and in his own house."

Then we are told:

"Now He could do no mighty work there, except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them."

Although this was not a particularly positive situation because of their unbelief, it still demonstrates the hand as the channel through which God's power was exercised in healing.

The mighty hand of God was at work in the affairs of mankind.

Earlier I mentioned the calling of Saul. We need to look at that account. Turn to Acts 9, beginning in verse 9. Saul's calling was a miraculous event. While traveling on the road to Damascus he encountered the brilliant light and heard the voice speaking to him.

Afterward,

"He was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank."

Then there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias.

The Lord spoke to him in a vision:

"Ananias."

He answered,

"Here I am, Lord."

Notice that Ananias was not presented as some outstanding public figure. He was simply a faithful disciple whom Christ chose to use.

The Lord instructed him:

"Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying."

The Lord also explained that Saul had seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming to lay his hands on him so that he might receive his sight.

Ananias hesitated. Saul's reputation was well known. He knew why Saul had come to Damascus.

But the Lord answered:

"Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel."

Then He added:

"For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."

So, Ananias obeyed. He entered the house. Laying his hands on Saul, he said:

"Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

Immediately something like scales fell from Saul's eyes. He received his sight. He arose and was baptized.

Ananias laid hands upon Saul. Saul received his sight.

Then the mighty hand of God opened his mind to understand the truth of God, the way of God, and the purpose of Christ's sacrifice. This marked the beginning of Paul's ministry to the Gentiles. Notice something important.

The focus is not upon the individual laying on hands. The focus is upon the mighty hand of God. It is never about the human instrument. Christ's position represents the authority that He received from the Father. Turn now to Hebrews 12:2.

"Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith..."

He is the One who fills all in all. The passage continues:

"...who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

Whenever hands are laid upon someone and prayer is offered in Christ's name, the authority of the Father, exercised through Jesus Christ, is being applied to a human life.

It is a line of authority that proceeds from the Father, through Christ, and into the Body of Christ.

Christ is the Author and Finisher of our faith.

Our lives are completely in His hands—or at least they should be.

When we ask for anointing, or willingly submit to the laying on of hands by a qualified servant of God, we are acknowledging that authority.

We are saying to God:

"I willingly place myself under Your authority.

This may be a human being laying hands upon me, but through that act I am submitting myself to You, Father.

"That is why the laying on of hands is such a significant act.

Turn now to Deuteronomy 34, beginning in verse 5.

"So, Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD."

He was buried in the valley in the land of Moab opposite Beth Peor. No one knows the location of his grave to this day. Scripture tells us:

"Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died. His eyes were not dim nor his natural vigor diminished."

The children of Israel mourned for Moses for thirty days. Then we read something very significant.

"Now Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him; so the children of Israel heeded him, and did as the LORD had commanded Moses."

To me, this is one of the clearest illustrations of how God works. We began by establishing that the hand of God represents His might and His power. Now we see that power entering the human realm through the Body of Christ and through delegated authority. The importance of this action is emphasized again by Paul in his instructions to Timothy. Turn to 1 Timothy 5, beginning in verse 17.

Paul writes:

"Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine."

He then quotes an Old Testament principle:

"You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain."

And:

"The laborer is worthy of his wages."

Paul continues:

"Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses."

"Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear."

Then he gives Timothy this solemn charge:

"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."

Immediately after that comes an important instruction:

"Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people's sins; keep yourself pure."

Take your time. Make certain. Examine the person's reputation.

Be sure of the individual's godly character before ordination takes place. I don't know that we've always done that properly. Perhaps I shouldn't say "we."

I'll simply say that, in my own experience, there have been people ordained who should never have been ordained. They did not meet the biblical qualifications. In my opinion, the Church has paid dearly for that.

Paul's warning is clear:

"Do not lay hands on anyone hastily."

It is a caution that deserves to be taken seriously.

Earlier this week we reviewed 1 Timothy 3 and the qualifications for an elder.

Now I want to look at the matter from a slightly different perspective. Turn to 2 Timothy 2, beginning in verse 14.

Paul writes:

"Remind them of these things, charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers."

These are practical instructions for shepherding God's people.

Paul continues:

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

Those qualities produce a solid shepherd.

Then he says:

"But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness."

"And their message will spread like cancer." Paul names individuals who had departed from the truth by claiming that the resurrection had already taken place. As a result:

"...they overthrow the faith of some."

Part of the shepherd's responsibility is to prevent that from happening. When error appears, faithful shepherds intervene and set the record straight.

Paul then reminds Timothy:

"Nevertheless, the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: 'The Lord knows those who are His,' and, 'Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity.'"

He continues:

"But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but

also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor."

"Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work."

Helping God's people become that kind of vessel is one of the shepherd's responsibilities.

Continuing in 2 Timothy 2:

"Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart."

Then Paul adds another instruction:

"But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife."

Notice the character that is required of God's servants.

"And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient..."

"...in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth..."

"...and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will."

That is the work of a shepherd.

Take care of My people. Protect My flock. Those who have oversight must exercise mature, godly leadership. As we read earlier, Christ purchased the Church with His own blood.

To assign someone to care for His flock is both a privilege and a tremendous responsibility. The hand of God is mighty. It is powerful. It remains fully extended toward His people. God, the great and almighty Creator, interacts with mankind today through the Body of Christ. Turn now

to Jeremiah 32, beginning in verse 16.

Jeremiah says:

"Now when I had delivered the purchase deed to Baruch the son of Neriah, I prayed to the LORD, saying..."

Then he declares:

"Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and outstretched arm."

Then comes this great statement:

"There is nothing too hard for You."

The next time you feel as though you are running into a brick wall, remember those words. There is nothing too hard for God.

Nothing.

Jeremiah continues:

"You have set signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, to this day, and

in Israel and among other men; and You have made Yourself a name, as it is this day."

Then:

"You have brought Your people Israel out of the land of Egypt with signs and wonders, with a strong hand and an outstretched arm, and with great terror."

Bring that passage over into the life of the Church. You have also been brought out of Egypt by the strong hand of God. You have been placed into a very important position in relation to the rest of mankind. We need to understand that. As members of the Body of Christ, we are connected with the power of Almighty God.

God used Moses to lead Israel toward a land flowing with milk and honey. The view from the top of the mountain that Moses saw must have been magnificent—his final view of the land promised to Israel. Today, Christ has a ministry that leads His people toward the Kingdom of God.

Turn finally to Hebrews 7:24–25.
Speaking of Jesus Christ, the living
Head of the Church, Scripture says:

"But He, because He continues
forever, has an unchangeable
priesthood."

We continue to hold firmly to the core
doctrines of the Church. We do not
attempt to change them. We do not
read our own ideas into them.

One of those foundational doctrines is
the laying on of hands. The mighty
hand of God reaches out to each one
of us. That power is available to every
one of God's people.

So, the next time you call for a
minister to anoint you—or whenever
you participate in any act involving
the laying on of hands—remember
the true source. It is all about the
Source. Turn to Jeremiah 16:21.
God says:

"Therefore behold, I will this once
cause them to know, I will cause
them to know My hand and My might;

and they shall know that My name is
the LORD."

The Source is the mighty hand of
God.

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