HE GAVE GIFTS UNTO MEN

Catechism Two, Lessons 23

Reading: Ephesians 4:9–15; Numbers 11:16–30; Numbers 27:15–23

(Be sure to take time to read all three Scripture suggestions, since the lesson is taken primarily from these passages.)

1. How Does God Provide Leadership For His People?

God gives men as gifts to other men. God chooses certain individuals and specially prepares them for their duties in His kingdom. This preparation begins even before birth, in the selection of genetic characteristics—the strengths and weaknesses we inherit from our family. God uses our total background to develop us into the person He can use.

God not only calls people into His service but specifically equips them with the abilities needed to fulfill this calling. These abilities are both natural talents as quickened and stimulated by God’s Spirit, and supernatural abilities or “gifts” specially endowed by the Holy Spirit.

The person and all of his natural and supernatural abilities or gifts is in turn given to God’s people as a “gift.” What he is as a person becomes an asset or benefit to those he serves. God moves upon the people to receive His person as a gift. They respond to his God-given charisma for leadership.

Very often, at some point in time, leaders of the community designate their approval of God’s choice by publicly laying hands upon the person and specifying his area of service. This crystallizes the calling of God within the individual and gives him the confidence he needs to stand before the people in his area of service. We must remember that the local leaders are acting only to confirm what God long since had purposed. Selection of leadership is not the prerogative of present leaders but results from God’s own initiative. Nevertheless, God will confirm His choice through the present leadership.

And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron (Heb. 5:4).

2. What Do We Learn About Leadership From God’s Appointments Through Moses?

This is a picture of orderly transition of leadership. God desires such order both as leadership passes from the hands of one leader to another and as leadership is extended through the appointment of assistants. Leadership must have continuity or the people will become restless and scattered. For this reason, God trains the successor and prepares him before the present leader leaves his position. Very often this training consists of active apprenticeship—that is, learning how to govern by working in close association with the present leadership. Leadership is not suddenly imported from outside, but is nurtured from within the group to be governed.

A. God-appointed leadership is a necessity, not an option.

Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, which may go out before them, and which may go in before them, and which may lead them out, and which may bring them in; that the congregation of the Lord be not as sheep which have no shepherd (Num. 27:16, 17).

B. God’s appointed leaders must be given public honor to insure the obedience of the people.

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; and set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation; and give him a charge in their sight. And thou shalt put some of thine honour upon him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient (Num. 27:18–20).

C. The laying on of hands communicates both challenge and strength.

And he laid his hands upon him, and gave him a charge, as the Lord commanded by the hand of Moses (Num. 27:23).

But charge Joshua, and encourage him, and strengthen him: for he shall go over before this people, and he shall cause them to inherit the land which thou shalt see (Deut. 3:28).

D. Laying on of hands for appointment to service includes impartation of spiritual enabling.

And the Lord came down in a cloud, and spake unto him, and took of the spirit that was upon him [Moses], and gave it unto the seventy elders: and it came to pass, that, when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied, and did not cease (Num. 11:25).

3. What is “Ordination”?

The word “ordination,” as it is used in ecclesiastical language, simply refers to God’s choosing of leaders and man’s laying his hands upon them to confirm His choice and to publicly approve their ministry. This word comes from the Latin verb ordinare, which means “to put in order or arrange; to appoint.” Webster lists at least four purposes for ordination:

(1) to introduce to the Christian ministry by the laying on of hands.

(2) to set apart by the ceremony of ordination.

(3) to invest with official functions.

(4) to establish appointment by decree of supreme authority.

4. Is There Bible Precedent For Ordination?

Yes, both the Old and New Testaments give examples of setting God’s appointed leaders into their places of service through public recognition and the laying on of hands for spiritual impartation.

In both the tabernacle and temple (as outlined in the: Old Testament), we find great detail concerning the various orders of ministry. People were selected by virtue of their God-given abilities, called into God’s service, and publicly established in their own place of ministry. This place could be filled by no one else because God Himself had prepared the individual to “fit” into the particular area of service.

A. Duties were distributed, making each person a “specialist” instead of his trying to do every kind of labor.

And he [David] gathered together all the princes of Israel, with the priests and the Levites.… of which, twenty and four thousand were to set forward the work of the house of the Lord, and six thousand were officers and judges (1 Chron. 23:2, 4).

B. People were separated to their specific duties by royal appointment; they did not assign themselves to positions.

Moreover David and the captains of the host separated to the service of the sons of Asaph, and of Heman, and of Jeduthun, who should, prophesy with harps, with psalteries, and with cymbals; and the number of the workmen according to their service was … (1 Chron. 25:1).

C. Since these appointments were from God, they were perpetual except in the case of moral breach.

The sons of Amram; Aaron and Moses: and Aaron was separated, that he should sanctify the most holy things, he and his sons for ever, to burn incense before the Lord, to minister unto him, and to bless in his name for ever (1 Chron. 23:13).

D. Even the smallest positions were chosen by lot—that is by divine leadership.

Among these were the divisions of the porters, even among the chief men, having wards one against another, to minister in the house of the Lord. And they cast lots, as well the small as the great, according to the house of their fathers, for every gate (1 Chron. 26:12, 13).

E. Appointment for ministry was not a matter of status but of work or service.

These were the sons of Levi after the house of their fathers; even the chief of the fathers, as they were counted by number of names, by their polls, that did the work for the service of the house of the Lord, from the age of twenty years and upward (1 Chron. 23:24).

Notice the difference between the way God chooses leaders and workers and the way men do it. People are always seeking to climb the ladder of success and prestige. But God’s work is based upon calling and qualification to serve. No task, no matter how seemingly insignificant, is to be assigned without seeking God’s guidance. God has a choice for each place; we have no right to appoint anyone but the one God has chosen from before the foundation of the world. Only the Holy Spirit can make it manifest who God’s choice is for each position.

5. How Were People Placed In Positions Of Ministry In The New Testament Church?

This was not confined to one method. Instead we find, as we examine the New Testament record, that there were at least three important means by which individuals found their particular callings or places in the Body of Christ:

A. Some were directly commissioned by Christ, but later confirmed for specific service by local church leadership.

(1) Paul was called sovereignly by direct encounter with the risen Christ (Acts 9:1–8).

(2) Paul received further instructions through the disciples in Damascus (Acts 9:9–19).

(3) Paul became submissive to the local church in Antioch of Syria (Acts 11:26).

(4) Paul’s calling and ministry were recognized within that local church (Acts 13:1).

(5) In God’s timing, Paul was separated and publicly approved for a specific mission (Acts 13:2, 3).

B. Some voluntarily served and in so doing discovered their best avenues of contribution.

(1) The house of Stephanas became devoted to hospitality and ministering in practical ways to the saints (1 Cor. 16:15, 16).

(2) Dorcas found a place of ministry in her work as a seamstress (Acts 9:36, 39).

C. Laying on of hands by the presbytery added spiritual strength and public approval to those who were already ministering (1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6). We find no New Testament precedent for creating a brand new ministry through the laying on of hands and prophecy. This ministry was more for the purpose of helping those that God had already chosen to find themselves in God. It often came at the time in their lives when confirmation was most desperately needed.

All three of these means are as valid today as in New Testament times. Probably the most common way of finding our place of service remains the second of these, that of simply doing what we find open to us to the best of our ability and faithfulness. Since our gift makes a way for us, we will eventually find our niche in the local church assembly. If our place is in a wider circulating ministry, we will come into this by the route of the local church sending us out.

Home Study: Lesson 23

Name\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. List the five ascension-ministry gifts?

a.

b.

c.

d.

e.

2. What three reasons does the Bible give that we must have these five ministries?

a.

b.

c.

3. How does public laying on of hands help establish God’s leaders? Give examples.

4. What is “ordination”?

5. Were women ever appointed as leaders? Give examples.