

Foundations of Life, Part 11

The Laying On Of Hands

Before Jesus was received into Heaven, He told us that those that believe in the gospel and are baptized will also be able to lay hands on the sick in His name and they will recover. The book of Acts is full of examples of the apostles using their hands with the same power that Jesus had with "many signs and wonders." Ananias laid his hands on Paul, restoring his sight. The apostles Barnabas and Paul had the power, Paul healed many by laying on of hands and God's power is described as "special miracles by the hands of Paul." When Paul laid his hands on the father of Publius and healed him, others also came and were healed, so many that they were honored with many necessary provisions. James writes, "Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he has committed sins, they shall be forgiven him." Jesus in the Apocalypse held seven stars in His right hand and laid His hand on John.

Early in church history, the anointing with oil replaced much of the laying on of hands. The Biblical imperative of laying on of hands is the reason given for chrismation (anointing with oil) following baptism in the Orthodox church, marking a convert with myrrh. Chrismation represents the seal of the grace-giving powers that are bestowed through the ceremony for spiritual life. The practice of laying on of hands were retained in the Middle Ages through the ceremonial functions and the custom of applying and the prayers of healing. It has always been used for ordination or setting apart for service. The laying on of hands was considered a sacrament and divine mystery, a visible representation of receiving the Holy Ghost. The Wesleyan and Whitefield revivals, the Great Awakening and the holiness movement saw the power and faith restored apart for more than mere ceremony, tradition and formality. *Jay Atkinson, The Latter Rain Page*

Laying on of Hands

Continuing on the Six Foundational Points of Reference to build your Faith in Christ upon. We come to the fourth and it is concerning laying on of hands. There are three types overall that are described in the scripture record.

1. Imparting a Blessing.
2. Anointing of or Granting Authority.
3. Healing of Body and Soul.

" Laying on of hands " is an act in which one person places his hands upon another person with some definite spiritual purpose. Normally this act is accompanied by prayer or by prophetic utterance or both. Outside the sphere of religion, this act of laying on of hands is not something strange or foreign to normal human behavior. For example in some parts of the world, when two men meet who are friends, it is normal to lay their hands on one another's shoulder. This act constitutes acknowledgment of their friendship and pleasure at meeting on another.

Within the sphere of religion, the practice of laying on of hands may thus be considered as an extension or an adaptation of what is basically a natural human action. As a religious act, the laying on of the hands normally signifies one of three possible things.

1. The person laying on hands may thereby transmit spiritual blessing or authority to the one upon whom hands are laid.
2. The person laying on hands may thereby acknowledge publicly some spiritual blessing or authority already received from God by the one upon whom hands are laid.
3. The person laying on hands may thereby publicly commit to God for some special task or ministry the one upon whom hands are laid.

In the church we impart blessings in many ways through laying on of hands. Whether its through the waters of baptism and prayer, or for the purpose of Ordination or other aspects of church service. We hand off or grant authority to the ministry, believers or etc,etc.. Through the act of laying on of hands, with words fitly spoken concerning the biblical call in the person's life or need.

Numbers 27: 18-20

18 So the Lord said to Moses, 'Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay your hand upon him;

19 have him stand before Eleazar the priest and all the congregation, and commission him in their sight.

20 You shall give him some of your authority, so that all the congregation of the Israelites may obey.

Here in the Book of Numbers is a common practice in the Church or the Jewish faith. A commissioning of service for the Lord. Here God passes on His blessing and anointing for a defined purpose and role in His divine plan. Here it is the anointing of Joshua for the service of the Lord among the congregation of Israel that the people would understand his place of authority and separation unto God as a surrogate for His Cause.

Here is another example in the Old Testament, this one is concerning Elisha and Joash.

2 Kings 13:15-17

15 Elisha said to him, 'Take a bow and arrows'; so he took a bow and arrows.

16 Then he said to the king of Israel, 'Draw the bow'; and he drew it. Elisha laid his hands on the king's hands.

17 Then he said, 'Open the window to the east'; and he opened it. Elisha said, 'Shoot'; and he shot. Then he said, 'The Lord's arrow of victory, the arrow of victory over Aram! For you shall fight the Arameans in Aphek until you have made an end of them.'

Here Joash King of Israel is paying his last respects to Elisha the prophet. Elisha has Joash shoot an arrow eastward through the window symbolizing a victory that will be gained over the Syrians. By this act of laying on of hands and prophetic promise our God acknowledged the appointment of Joash as the leader who would bring deliverance to Israel.

Now here there is an impartation of blessing as the one passed on as the next leader of Israel with God's blessing and authority or anointing toward God's place with the people of Israel in securing the victory over Syria by faith through God's servant Joash. This lets us know that sometimes more than one aspect of anointing and or impartation of graces is being related in one particular instance in the scriptures.

Healing is a very important aspect of New Testament Ministry, and linked many times with Laying on of Hands.

Mark 16:17-18

17 And these signs will accompany those who believe: by using my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues;

18 they will pick up snakes in their hands,* and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.'

Now Jesus rarely laid hands on people for their healing. Instead, He many times would just speak the word, or have the believer act out their faith in His promises. However, the disciples were commissioned and advised to lay hands on the sick and believe God and signs would follow those who believe and put their trust in Christ Jesus. As evidenced in this preceding scriptural reference. There are others as well.

James 5:14,15 (Disciples)

14 Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord.

15 The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven.

Luke 4:40 (Jesus)

40 As the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various kinds of diseases brought them to him; and he laid his hands on each of them and cured them.

God's Anointing and Blessing by Imparting the Gift of the Holy Spirit Baptism was quite normally received through the laying on of hands.

Acts 8: 17, 18 (Filled with the Holy Ghost)

17 Then Peter and John* laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

18 Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money,

Acts 9:17 (Healing and Baptism of the Holy Ghost)

17 So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul* and said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.'

It is sometimes suggested that it was only the apostles or special church officials whom were able to exercise this ministry of laying on of hands. There is no such suggestion in Acts:9:17. it only says in verse 10 that a " certain disciple " should meet with Saul. Yet he is directed by God Himself to lay hands upon the one called Saul, so that he will find his destiny and calling of the Lord through his healing and the impartation of the Holy Spirit.

Undoubtedly the laying on of hands in the early church was a means of connecting the message with the messenger, or the spiritual gift with the gifted giver. It provided a "sign" authenticating him through whom the physical manifestation of a spiritual gift was bestowed. We need to understand very carefully that there are no magical biblical formulas for the ministry of the Church. Laying on of hands has no power in itself. Laying on of hands is only used by God when it is done in agreement with God's Word. *S. Michael Houdmann*