HANDS ARE FOR GIVING

Catechism Two, Lesson 19

Reading: Genesis 48:8–22

1. Why Is The Hand So Important?

Throughout Scripture the hand is considered deeply significant. It is the extension of the person himself. It is his power to labor with skill and his ability to fight against enemies. It is in his hands that man carries gifts to bestow upon others or he brings sacrifices to God. It is the hand that is joined with another’s to forge a friendship. The hand lifted up in oath is important in creating a covenant. Without hands, a man is pretty helpless. His hands are his strength and power to do.

God speaks of His active power in the earth as His hands. Whenever God intervened mightily in the affairs of men, they sang His praise in terms of what His hands had done. The Father speaks of Jesus, the Messiah, as His hand. Jesus similarly speaks of the Holy Spirit as His continued power to act on earth after His ascension.

Thy right hand, O Lord, is become glorious in power: thy right hand, O Lord, hath dashed in pieces the enemy (Exod. 15:6).

More important than all, the hand is the vehicle of blessing. We lift our hands in worship and praise to bless God. We lift our hands, extend our hands, and lay hands upon others, to communicate the blessing of God through us as a human channel.

2. How Were The Hands Used In Worship And In Blessing Others?

When we have something to give to someone else, we bring it in our hands. We sometimes speak of being empty-handed, meaning we have nothing to offer. Or we speak of our hands being full when we are brimming over with good things to share. It is with our hands that we either withhold or release benefits to others.

In the Old Testament they thought of the hands as an extension of the person himself. To give someone your hand meant to give yourself in commitment. To lay your hands upon something was to transfer what you were to the thing on which you laid your hands. In some parts of the world the hand is still the signature of a person. It is dipped in some dark liquid to make an imprint or it is traced.

A. Lifting up the hand in praise and worship means surrender to another.

Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice (Psa. 141:2).

B. The priests communicated God’s favor to the people through an uplifted, open hand.

And Aaron lifted up his hand toward the people, and blessed them, and came down from offering of the sin offering, and the burnt offering, and peace offerings (Lev. 9:22).

C. Lifting up hands in response to God’s words meant commitment.

My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved; and I mill meditate in thy statutes (Psa. 119:48).

D. The Hebrew word for “to consecrate” means “to fill the hands.”

The gold for things of gold, and the silver for things of silver, and for all manner of work to be made by the hands of the artificers. And who then is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the Lord? (1 Chron. 29:5).

E. The hands were a means of transferring personal guilt to a sacrificial victim.

God demanded that sin be paid for with death of the sinner. However, He would accept a substitute sacrifice; in the stead of the guilty sinner. This substitute would die in his place, as a vicarious sacrifice. The laying on of hands made possible the transfer or imputation of the sinner’s guilt to the animal he brought to be sacrificed.

And he shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering; and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him (Lev. 1:4).

F. A superior would impart blessing to another by laying hands upon him and praying or prophesying.

The father would pass on his strength and authority by imparting his own personal blessing in conjunction with God’s blessing. His hands became the channel for the flow of benefits into the person he was blessing.

And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom; for Moses had laid his hands upon him: and the children of Israel hearkened unto him, and did as the Lord commanded Moses (Deut. 34:9).

3. Was Blessing Through Laying On Of Hands A Formality Or A Reality?

God never asks us to do anything without purpose. Worship of the living God knows no dead forms. Even in the Old Testament, when many of the specific acts required of Israel pictured fuller realities to come in Christ, nothing was without real significance. In the Scripture we just read, Deuteronomy 34:9, Joshua was changed because Moses laid his hands upon him. He had something he did not have before—the spirit of wisdom. Laying on of hands was not merely ceremonial; as ordained of God it became the channel for impartation of life and blessing.

A. Israel (Jacob) guided his hands specifically to bless Joseph’s children.

The right hand always contained the greater blessing. Usually this was placed upon the first born child’s head since he inherited both the tribal blessing and the birthright.

And Israel stretched out his right hand, and laid it upon Ephraim’s head, who was the younger, and his left hand upon Manasseh’s head, guiding his hands wittingly; for Manasseh was the firstborn. And he

blessed Joseph [through his sons], and said, God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk,

the God which fed me all my life long unto this day. The Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth (Gen. 48:14–16).

Joseph was distressed because he thought Jacob was mistaken in the placing of his hands. But Jacob insisted that he had done this purposefully because God was making an exception in blessing the younger with the right hand.

B. Jacob himself had schemed to obtain both the birthright and the blessing.

Jacob had finally learned after a lifetime of scheming and running that God is perfectly able to reverse custom to get His will done. He had taken advantage of his brother Esau’s hunger and weakness to make him sell his birthright. He had gone to considerable lengths to deceive his aging and blind father, Isaac, in order to receive the blessing of the firstborn. Had he believed the prophecy concerning himself at birth, he would have trusted God to guide his father’s hands instead of resorting to wearing a sheep’s skin and herb-seasoned kid. He knew by experience the reality of a blessing communicated through the laying on of hands.

(Read the entire chapter, Genesis 27).

(1) The blessing for each child was specific.

(2) Once the blessing was given to Jacob, it could not be taken away.

(3) Esau could only receive a minor blessing, since Jacob had taken his portion.

In none of this are we dealing with mere form. Something real had transpired.

C. Laying on of hands to transmit blessing required faith in God.

Empty hands communicate nothing but good will. If a patriarch wanted to give something to his descendants, he had to believe God to flow through this human means. Spiritual blessing is not within us to give; God has to give His own blessing through our hands.

By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff (Heb. 11:20, 21).

4. Was Laying On Of Hands Related To Positions Of Authority?

Yes. Only those with authority could pass it on to others. But more than this, it made a great deal of difference which hand was used to communicate the blessing. As we have seen in the examples of Jacob and of Joseph’s children, the right hand was the blessing of authority. The child who received the blessing through the right hand received the tribal authority. But being near enough to receive any blessing at all meant something in terms of authority. Notice the importance Mrs. Zebedee put on the placing at Jesus’ right and left hand:

And he [Jesus] said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit,

the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom (Matt. 20:21).

Jesus’ response shows us that He agreed with her estimate of the importance of these positions. Also, when He is talking about the final judgment of nations, He speaks of the right hand as a position of favor and the left hand as a position of judgment (Matt. 25:31–46).

5. Why Is The Right Hand So Important?

From the beginning, the right hand was considered the hand of strength, of honor, and of personal favor. This probably came about for several reasons. The right hand was considered more valuable in battle. For this reason, if one person was protecting another he was placed at the right hand. Similarly, God stands at our right hand to protect us.

The right hand was the one used in entering covenant, declaring fellowship, or creating a federation. This was because the innermost person was believed to be honestly expressed through the right hand, while the left hand may be deceitful. Because the right hand spoke of honor, it was the one that had to do with the blessing of God (1 Kings 2:19; Psalm 16:8; 45:9; 73:23; 110:5, etc.). Speaking of God in terms of the right hand communicates His power and ability to keep, deliver, and intervene for us.

In the New Testament this term “at the right hand” is taken up to speak of Jesus’ position of power and authority since His ascension. He sits at the Father’s right hand on a throne of authority and power. He is actively ruling in this world of ours, and most specially in our lives.

The Baptism in the Spirit was shed forth as the first act of Jesus’ resumed position of glory and honor at the right hand of His Father in heaven. In fact, Peter spoke of the coming of the Spirit as the most important evidence that the Father had indeed accepted Jesus’ redemptive work and honored Him as a Son in whom He was pleased. Had Jesus’ person and work not been perfect before the Father, He would not have been able to fulfill His promise to send another Comforter to remain with us forever.

A. The Baptism in the Spirit gives assurance that Jesus is indeed Lord and Christ.

Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36).

B. The Baptism in the Spirit makes possible Jesus’ continued activity on earth through His people.

… of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen (Acts 1:1, 2).

C. The Baptism in the Spirit makes us personal witnesses to the reality of the risen Christ.

But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8).

D. The Holy Spirit takes of what belongs to Jesus and makes it real to us.

All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you (John 16:15).

E. The Holy Spirit is God’s active hand toward the world even to this day, in three important ways:

And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged (John 16:8–11).

Home Study: Lesson 19

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

1. How essential are hands?

2. What does the term “consecrate” really mean?

3. Is anything real transferred through the laying on of hands? Give reasons for your answer.

4. What makes possible the conveying of spiritual blessing through the laying on of hands?

It is only a five letter word, but it is absolutely necessary \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_.

5. What was the usual meaning of the right hand?