

THE LAYING ON OF HANDS

What precisely are we to understand by this phrase, “laying on of hands”? It is an act in which one person places his hands upon the body of another person, with some definite spiritual purpose. Normally this act is accompanied either by prayer, a prophetic utterance, or both.

As a religious act, the laying on of hands signifies one of three possible things.

- First, the person laying on hands may thereby transmit spiritual blessing or authority to the one upon whom hands are laid.
- Second, 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.
- Third, the person laying on hands may thereby publicly commit to God for some special task or ministry the one upon whom hands are laid.
- At times, all these three purposes may be combined in one and the same act of laying on of hands.

Genesis 48:14

And Israel reached out his right hand and laid it on the head of Ephraim, who was the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh's head, crossing his hands intentionally, for Manasseh was the firstborn.

- We see here that the laying on of hands was already an accepted practice in the earliest records of God's people.
- At first, Joseph thought his father had made a mistake, and he tried to make his father switch his hands.
- However, Jacob indicated that he had been conscious of divine guidance in placing his hands the way he did.
- With his hands still crossed in this position, he then proceeded to bless the two boys, giving the first and greater blessing to Ephraim and the lesser blessing to Manasseh.
- Blessings are transmitted through the laying on of hands.

Numbers 27:18-23

And the Lord said to Moses “Take Joshua the son of Nun with you, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hands on him; set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation, and inaugurate him in their sight. And you shall give some of your authority to him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient. So Moses did as the Lord commanded him. He took Joshua and 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 result produced in Joshua is recorded in Deuteronomy 34:9:

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.

- This act of Moses laying his hands upon Joshua was one of great significance both for Joshua individually and for the whole congregation of Israel collectively.
- By this divinely ordained act, Moses accomplished two main purposes.
- First, he transmitted to Joshua a measure of the spiritual wisdom and honor that he had received from God.
- Second, he publicly acknowledged before the whole congregation of Israel God’s appointment of Joshua as the leader who was to succeed him.

Let us now turn to the New Testament and see what part this ordinance of laying on of hands plays there. We shall find that there are five distinct purposes for which laying on of hands may be used, according to the precepts and examples of the New Testament.

Luke 4:40

Now at the setting of the sun, indicating the end of the Sabbath, all those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to Him, and He laid His hands upon every one of them and cured them.

- The laying on of hands for physical healing.

Acts 8:15-17

And they came down and prayed for them that the Samaritans might receive the Holy Spirit; for He had not yet fallen upon any of them, but they had only been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. Then the apostles laid their hands on them one by one, and they received the Holy Spirit.

- **To impart the baptism in the Holy Spirit.**

I Timothy 4:14

Do not neglect the gift which is in you, that special inward endowment which was directly imparted to you by the Holy Spirit by prophetic utterance when the elders laid their hands upon you at your ordination.

- **For imparting spiritual gifts.**

Acts 13:2-3

While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Separate now for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. Then after fasting and praying, they put their hands on them and sent them away.

- **For sending out Christian workers from the local Church.**

Acts 6:6

These they presented to the apostles, who after prayer laid their hands on them.

- **For the appointment of deacons or elders in the local Church.**

The doctrine of the laying on of hands is a vital part of the Christian faith, even though many modern churches do not teach about it or practice it. Under the anointing and unction of the Holy Spirit, the laying on of hands is a mighty tool given to the Church by our loving Father and Savior Jesus Christ to bless us with healings as needed, imparting spiritual gifts, and recognizing individuals given special assignments from the Lord.