



Laying on of Hands

By George M Stahnke

Introduction: As mentioned in Hebrews 6:2, this is a foundational teaching. The gesture of laying on of hands was used in eight basic ways: (1) in the offering for atonement, (2) establishing the Levitical priesthood, (3) establishing governing authority, (4) establishing New Testament church authority, (5) imparting a blessing, (6) imparting spiritual gifts, (7) in the healing of sickness, (8) in connection with the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The touch of the human hand has been considered symbolic from the earliest times but is to be considered more than just tradition. It is a very real and important part of our Christian heritage.

Hebrews 6:1-2 (NASB) Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.

1. Offerings for Atonement

On the day of atonement, the high priest placed his hands on the head of the scapegoat and confessed the sins of the people over it, thus transferring all their iniquities to the goat (Lev 16:21, 22). The worshiper always laid his hand on the head of the animal he was offering as a sacrifice, in order to identify himself with the animal dying in his place.

Leviticus 1:1-4 (NASB) ¹Then the LORD called to Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting, saying, ²“Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘When any man of you brings an offering to the LORD, you shall bring your offering of animals from the herd or the flock. ³‘If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer it, a male without defect; he shall offer it at the doorway of the tent of meeting, that he may be accepted before the LORD. ⁴‘He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, that it may be accepted for him to make atonement on his behalf.



Leviticus 4:4 (NIV) He is to present the bull at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting before the LORD. He is to lay his hand on its head and slaughter it before the LORD.

“The laying on of hands meant **ACCEPTANCE**. The offerer by laying his hand upon the victim’s head signified that he acknowledged the offering to be for himself. . . The laying of the hand upon the head of the sacrifice meant a **transference** of guilt to the victim, and, furthermore, a confidence in the efficacy of the sacrifice there and then presented. The believing Jew said, “This bullock represents to me the sacrifice which God has provided, and I rejoice in it because it is the symbol of a sacrifice which does in very deed take away sin.””

Once more, this laying of the hand upon the head of the victim meant **IDENTIFICATION**. The worshipper who laid his hand on the bullock said, “Be pleased, O great Lord, to identify me with this bullock, and this bullock with me. There has been a

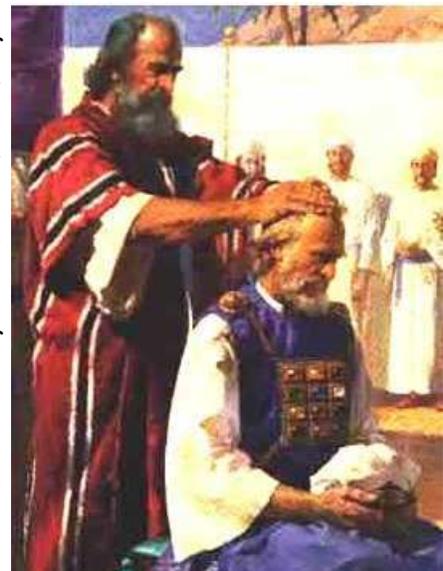
transferring of my sin, now I beseech Thee let me be judged as being in the victim, and represented thereby.” Now consider that which happened to the sacrifice. The knife was unsheathed, and the victim was slain. He was not merely bound, but killed; and the man stood there and said, “That is me; that is the fate which I deserve.” The poor creature struggled, it wallowed in the sand in its dying agonies, and if the worshipper was a right-minded person, and not a mere formalist, he stood with tears in his eyes, and felt in his heart, “That death is mine.” I beseech you when you think of our blessed Lord to identify yourselves with Him. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) —Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament

If we want an offering of ours accepted of God, we must show it in some way. If we want a share in that which another offers, we must let that be manifest also. It is not for us to stand off, or to sit upright, while the minister prays, or the choir sings, ourselves having no part in the service of prayer or song. We must in some way put our hand on the head of that offering, and say Amen, or join—feebly and unmelodiously though it may be—in the chorus. If we fail of this, we fail of any share in the offering and in its benefits. The Lord wants us to rest confidently on His provisions of grace for us. He wants us to lean hard on the Substitute offered and accepted in our behalf. We are not able to stand alone. God understands that very well. But we ought to be able to lean on a sure support. That support is provided. Do you rest on it? (*H. C. Trumbull.*)

2. Establishing the Levitical Priesthood

The laying on of hands is an act by which those in leadership positions commission others, investing them with authority in keeping with God’s will for their lives and their service to the congregation. The first example is Moses establishing the tribe of Levi as the Priests of the Lord.

Numbers 8:5-13 (NASB) ⁵Again the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ⁶“Take the Levites from among the sons of Israel and cleanse them. ⁷“Thus you shall do to them, for their cleansing: *sprinkle* purifying water on them, and let them use a razor over their whole body and wash their clothes, and they will be clean. ⁸“Then let them take a bull with its grain offering, fine flour mixed with oil; and a second bull you shall take for a sin offering. ⁹“So you shall present the Levites before the tent of meeting. You shall also assemble the whole congregation of the sons of Israel, ¹⁰and present the Levites before the LORD; and the sons of Israel shall lay their hands on the Levites. ¹¹“Aaron then shall present the Levites before the LORD as a wave offering from the sons of Israel, that they may qualify to perform the service of the LORD. ¹²“Now the Levites shall lay their hands on the heads of the bulls; then offer the one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering to the LORD, to make atonement for the Levites. ¹³“You shall have the Levites stand before Aaron and before his sons so as to present them as a wave offering to the LORD.



3. Establishing Governing Authority

The principle here is authority establishes ongoing authority. In keeping with God's command Moses vested Joshua with authority by the laying on of his hands when he commissioned Joshua.

Numbers 27:15-23 (NASB) ¹⁵Then Moses spoke to the LORD, saying, ¹⁶“May the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation, ¹⁷who will go out and come in before them, and who will lead them out and bring them in, so that the congregation of the LORD will not be like sheep which have no shepherd.” ¹⁸So the LORD said to Moses, “Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him; ¹⁹and have him stand before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation, and commission him in their sight. ²⁰“You shall put some of your authority on him, in order that all the congregation of the sons of Israel may obey *him*.²¹ “Moreover, he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before the LORD. At his command they shall go out and at his command they shall come in, *both* he and the sons of Israel with him, even all the congregation.” ²²Moses did just as the LORD commanded him; and he took Joshua and set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation. ²³Then he laid his hands on him and commissioned him, just as the LORD had spoken through Moses.

Notice again the biblical pattern of ordination. The perspective candidate is brought before established leadership and the entire congregation. By proclamation and the laying on of hands authority is conferred on him and he is publicly commissioned (set into office) and released for service.

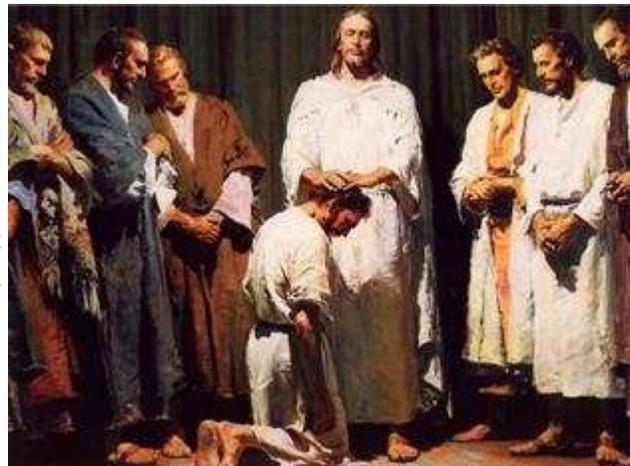
4. Establishing New Testament Church Authority

The fourth function of the laying on of hands was to ordain a man to a certain office or assignment in the service of the Lord. The purpose is clearly stated that this person was to be set apart from the local body where he received his training in ministering, and for the specific work to which the Holy Spirit has already called him. The laying on of hands is a recognition of a divine commission, the spiritual and practical preparedness of the individual to accomplish the task set before him. It is also the delegation of spiritual authority.

- **Jesus Appointing the Twelve**

Mark 3:13-15 (NASB) ¹³And He went up on the mountain and summoned those whom He Himself wanted, and they came to Him. ¹⁴And He appointed twelve, so that they would be with Him and that He could send them out to preach, ¹⁵and to have authority to cast out the demons.

The scripture does not say that Jesus laid hands upon the twelve disciples. Under-



standing the biblical protocol of appointing someone to public ministry it would make sense that Jesus himself would follow the example that was still customary at that time. The laying on of hands is also employed in the Pauline epistles.

- **Saul and Barnabas**

The kingdom of God was extended as men were sent out and consecrated (set apart) for their task by the laying on of hands.

Acts 13:1-2 ¹Now there were in Antioch, in the Church there—as Prophets and teachers—Barnabas, Symeon surnamed ‘the black,’ Lucius the Cyrenean, Manaen (who was Herod the Tetrarch’s foster-brother), and Saul. ²While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for Me, now at once, Barnabas and Saul, for the work to which I have called them.” ³So, after fasting and prayer and the laying on of hands, they let them go.



- **Deacons Ordained**

Acts 6:1-7 ¹Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. ²So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. ³"Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. ⁴"But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." ⁵The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. ⁶And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them. ⁷The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.

- **Elders Ordained**

Titus 1:5 (AMP) For this reason I left you [behind] in Crete, that you might set right what was defective and finish what was left undone, and that you might appoint elders and set them over the churches (assemblies) in every city as I directed you.

Again, while this text does not say that hands were laid on those ordained as elders, it is reasonable to conclude that there would not be a departure for the accepted practice.

WARNING concerning laying on of hands and ordination

1 Timothy 5:17-22 (NASB) The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of

double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing,” and “The laborer is worthy of his wages.” Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses. Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful *of sinning*. I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of *His* chosen angels, to maintain these *principles* without bias, doing nothing in a *spirit of* partiality. Do not lay hands upon anyone *too* hastily and thereby share *responsibility for* the sins of others; keep yourself free from sin.

Character matters! It’s not about charisma, giftedness, politics or popularity. All people who are commissioned publicly to serve **MUST** be biblically qualified. 1 Timothy 3:1-12 and Titus 1:6-9 establish the criteria for leadership. There are 30 specific requirements encompassing 3 specific areas, (1) personal character qualifications, (2) if married, wife and children’s character, (3) and four ministry qualifications.

1 Timothy 3:1-12 (NIV) ¹Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. ²Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. ⁵(If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) ⁶He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. ⁷He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap. ⁸Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. ⁹They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons. ¹¹In the same way, their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything. ¹²A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well (see Titus 1:6-9)

Every Christian should desire to meet these standards of personal, relational and spiritual development.

5. Imparting a Blessing

Throughout Scripture, we see the importance of verbal blessings in conjunction with the laying on of hands. In the Old Testament Jacob laid his hands on the sons of Joseph to convey his blessing.

Genesis 48:13-20 (NASB) ¹³Joseph took them both, Ephraim with his right hand toward Israel’s left, and Manasseh with his left hand toward Israel’s right, and brought them close



to him. ¹⁴But Israel stretched 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, although Manasseh was the firstborn. ¹⁵He blessed Joseph, and said, "The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, The God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, ¹⁶ The angel who has redeemed me from all evil, Bless the lads; And may my name live on in them, And the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; And may they grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth."¹⁷When Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on Ephraim's head, it displeased him; and he grasped his father's hand to remove it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. ¹⁸Joseph said to his father, "Not so, my father, for this one is the firstborn. Place your right hand on his head."¹⁹But his father refused and said, "I know, my son, I know; he also will become a people and he also will be great. However, his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations."²⁰He blessed them that day, saying, "By you Israel will pronounce blessing, saying, 'May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh!' "Thus he put Ephraim before Manasseh. ²¹Then Israel said to Joseph, "Behold, I am about to die, but God will be with you, and bring you back to the land of your fathers. ²²"I give you one portion more than your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and my bow."

Among the Jews, it was customary for children to be brought to the Rabbi, that he might lay his hands upon them and pray a blessing. Jesus being recognized as a teacher (Rabbi) was sought out for this purpose.

Matthew 19:13-15 ¹³Then *some* children were brought to Him so that He might lay His hands on them and pray; and the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴But Jesus said, "Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."¹⁵After laying His hands on them, He departed from there.



Let the Children Come by Liz Lemon Swindle
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Mark 10:16 And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.

Two very common expressions that you may not have associated with this topic would be the marriage ceremony and infant dedication. In the marriage ceremony typically, the minister will have the couple take each other's hands as they exchange their vows. At the conclusion the minister and perhaps the parents will lay their hands on the couple specifically to invoke God's blessing upon this new union. In the case of infant/child dedication, the parents will bring the child before the congregation. The pastor, lay his hands on the child (generally holding the child in his arms) and prays God's blessing on the child and the parents. These are public



proclamations should never become mundane but spoken reverently with authority and the leading of the Holy Spirit in keeping with the scripture.

6. Imparting Spiritual Gifts

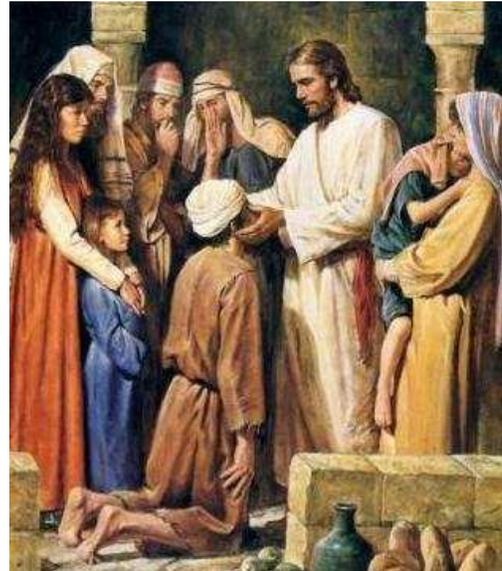
Deuteronomy 34:9 (NASB) Now Joshua the son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him; and the sons of Israel listened to him and did as the LORD had commanded Moses.

1 Timothy 4:14 Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you.

2 Timothy 1:5-7 (NIV) ⁵I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also. ⁶For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. ⁷For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.

7. Invoking Healing

We know from the Scriptures that God is able and willing to heal those who are emotionally, spiritually and physically sick or diseased. My wife and I have personally experienced the blessing of divine healing.



Mark 5:22 Then one of the synagogue rulers, named Jairus, came there. Seeing Jesus, he fell at his feet and pleaded earnestly with him, "My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live."

Mark 6:5 He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them.

Mark 8:23 He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, "Do you see anything?"

Mark 8:25 Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.

Mark 16:18 they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well."

Luke 4:40 When the sun was setting, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying his hands on each one, he healed them.

Luke 13:13 Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God.

Acts 9:12 In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.

Acts 28:8 His father was sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him and, after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him.

James 5:14-15 ¹⁴Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven.

8. Receive the Baptism of the Holy Spirit

We believe in the Baptism of the Holy Spirit as a real experience, at or subsequent to salvation, empowering believers to live victorious and productive lives as witnesses of Christ. This was the normal experience of believers in the early Christian church. It also provides believers with specific spiritual gifts for more effective ministry. (Luke 24:49, Acts 1:4-5, 2:1-4, 8:14-17, 10:44-46).

Acts 8:14-22 (NASB) ¹⁴Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, ¹⁵who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. ¹⁶For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, ¹⁹saying, "Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." ²⁰But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! ²¹"You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. ²²"Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you.



Acts 9:17 Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

Acts 19:1-7 ¹It happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus, and found some disciples. ²He said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said to him, "No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit." ³And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" And they said, "Into John's baptism." ⁴Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus." ⁵When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying.

Conclusion:

With the weight of scriptural evidence it is clear to see that the laying on of hands is not only biblical but also a proper expression of our faith in God. As we lay our hands on those of the Body of Christ, whether for bestowing a blessing, invoking the healing power of God, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, or in setting a man in a specific office we are showing forth a tangible and outward expression of our faith. By the laying on of hands we are coming into agreement with what we believe to be the word of God and the direction of the Holy Spirit.