



LESSON EIGHT - THE DOCTRINE OF LAYING ON OF HANDS

The ministry of the laying on of hands is a real and vital part of an apostolic church. It did not originate with man, but with God who is the power source of this ministry. In both the Old and New Testaments, God operated through the human instrument by the “laying on of hands”. It has the following purposes:

Ordination & Identification

One of the first references to laying on of hands was in the “ordination” of Joshua as the successor of Moses to lead the children of Israel. (Numbers 27:15 – 23) The word, “ordain” is from the Gr: poieo (Mark 3:14) and literally means “to point the finger” or “appoint”; also Gr. Horizo (Acts 10:42) meaning “to limit”; Gr. Chierotoneo (Acts 14:23) means to “choose”; and Gr. Kathistemi (Titus 1:5) meaning “to make a ruler”. The ordination by laying on of hands is to identify publicly that one is receiving an appointment to an office of authority. Moses set Joshua before Eleazar the priest and before the congregation of Israel, and then laid his hands upon Joshua.

- Numbers 27:15-23 – Moses identified Joshua as the new shepherd
- Galatians 2: 9 – Paul and Barnabas receive the “right hand of fellowship”
- Acts 13:1-3 – the apostles are sent forth
- Acts 6:6 – deacons appointed
- 1 Timothy 4:14 – in the context of the ministry

Note that ordination implies that the one who is doing the laying on of hands has the authority to make the appointment. Moses for example had the authority to ordain Joshua. When Paul and Barnabas received the “right hand of fellowship”, they received it from the other apostles. In Acts

13, the elders of the church ordained Paul and Barnabas as apostles. The deacons were appointed or ordained by the 12 apostles in Jerusalem. Timothy received his ordination from the “presbyters” – which another word for elders or overseers. “Laying on of hands” should not be taken lightly. It is an operation of faith where one builds a bridge between God and another person. However, it associates the one who is doing the “laying on of the hands” with the person receiving the laying on of hands. For this reason, Timothy was instructed to be slow and cautious in this act in regards to the ordination of elders.

1 Timothy 5:22 - Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure.

Impartation

The “laying on of hands” is also used to “impart” or give to another a gift. It is a time when the giver, under the authority of God, becomes empowered to transfer a gift or power to another person. Just as in ordination, the person who is empowered to lay on hands to impart a gift, would have that gift themselves. We see the laying on of hands used when someone is given the Holy Spirit, but Paul also speaks of imparting spiritual gifts to the Romans and to Timothy by the laying on of hands.

- Deuteronomy 34:9 – Moses imparts the spirit of wisdom to Joshua
- Acts 8:18; 9:17-19 – impartation of the Holy Spirit
- Romans 1:11; 1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6 – impartation of spiritual gifts



Judgment

Not seen in the New Testament, but in the Old Testament, laying on of hands was used in judgment. The hands of the priest were laid upon the head of a bullock or ram when a burnt offering was made for the sins of the people. This was to imply that the guilt of the people was transferred to the sacrifice that was to be slain. When we go to Number 8: 5 - 12, we see an interesting ceremony. Offerings and sacrifices were both for redemption and consecration. When God chose the Levite, they were first brought before the children of Israel. The children of Israel laid their hands upon the Levites. (v10). The Levites were then “offered” to the Lord (v.11). The Levites would in turn lay their hands upon the sin offering (v.12) which would be taking the sins of the people, through the Levites to the sacrifices.

Another illustration of this “transfer of guilt and judgment” is the ceremony of the “scapegoat” found in Leviticus 16: 5 – 22. Here, two goats were brought to the tabernacle. In v.8, lots were cast, and one goat became the sin offering. This is a type of Jesus Christ. He was our substitution, and he became our sacrifice. The second goat was known as the “scapegoat” (v10) – that is the goat that would escape judgment. After the first goat was slain, the live goat was brought to the priest who would lay his hands upon him and confess all the sins of the people (v.20 – 21). The sins were “put upon the head of the goat”. The goat was released to the wilderness and would bear upon his head all the sins and transgressions of the people.

Blessing

- Genesis 48:14-15 – Jacob in blessing Josephs children
- Matthew 19:13-15

Healing the Sick

- Matthew 8:3, 15; Mark 6:5; Mark 16:18

- Acts 5:12, Acts 19:11, Acts 28:8
- James 5:14

In association with prophecy in regard to ordination or blessing

- 1 Timothy 4:14
- Acts 13:1-3 (the Holy Spirit said...)
- Genesis 48:13-22
- Acts 22:13 - 15

Some Guidelines for Laying on of Hands

One other area where laying on of hands is used often in Apostolic or Pentecostal churches is when praying for others, either at an altar of repentance, or for healing, or for blessing, or perhaps even for deliverance. However, there seems to be that some feel that the “heavier the hand” the greater the results. This is poor training indeed whether it be done by a minister or saint. I’m appalled that some feel that someone must “fall out” or fall down in order that the prayer appears to work. First of all, “falling out” does happen as was the case of Daniel who was brought to his knees as the touch of the angel (Daniel 10:10). John, on the other hand, was “slain in the spirit” without the touch of the Lord, but rather the laying on of hands revived him (Revelation 1:17). These incidents however, are extra-ordinary rather than a usual occurrence. In either case, it appears that there was a “touch”, not a shove, a head wringing, or bombast of “heavy handedness” that is often witnessed at Pentecostal altars. I for one remember my knees going limp when being prayed for on one occasion. So I indeed know that there is a reality where the power of God comes as a charge of electricity. This was once in my life. But I have witnessed for years the same individuals repeated-



ly expressing this form of emotion at almost every occasion of being prayed for.

In reality, some fall out as avoidance for continual prayer, or because of “Pentecostal acculturation”.

This comes across, I realize as skepticism, but there is little evidence that this was a common or even usual occurrence in the Bible associated with the laying on of hands and it should not be propagated as such. Saints and ministers should be sure that the power of God is not mocked by make believe. Let the power of God be real.