

Foundations Lesson #16A

The Laying On of Hands, Part 1

God loves to bless his people and impart various aspects of his nature to them. The doctrine of the laying on of hands shows us that one of the ways God chooses to impart these things is by having one of his servants lay hands on another believer, or in the case of physical healing for example, by one of God's servants laying hands even on an unbeliever. The laying on of hands represents a physical action which has life, meaning, and purpose in it because of what God does in participating with that physical action. In the natural, physical realm, all that takes place is a touch. That's very common and usually not greatly significant. But what makes that ordinary action unique and powerful is how God flows through it. Just as copper wire carries electricity to its desired location, so that its power can accomplish things otherwise impossible, so also the hands of believers can bring the power and blessing of God to those who are spiritually hungry or in need.

Hands represent an extension of the person himself. With our hands we perform work; we provide for our needs; we fight with our enemies; we make agreements (as in the shaking of hands); we create written documents, and much more. Without our hands, we're pretty helpless. Our hands represent our strength and the power to do. God has decided that this part of our body can be used by him as an instrument of impartation to others.

There are 59 passages of Scripture (22 from the Old Testament and 37 from the New Testament) that deal with what we're studying – the doctrine of the laying on of hands ***where impartation takes place as the unseen realm participates with the physical realm***. There are 42 other passages of Scripture that mention the laying on of hands, but they refer to something else. If you're interested, in the ***Additional Resources*** section of this web page you'll find a Scripture Study on the laying on of hands that gives all those references and what they refer to. Interestingly enough, 21 times the Scripture speaks of the hand of the LORD being or coming or laying or resting upon someone. All of them are in the Old Testament, and almost all of them refer to the working of the Holy Spirit. So there's a strong connection in the Bible between the hand of the LORD and the Spirit of the LORD.

I want to encourage you that there are no dead forms in Christ. Everything God institutes has meaning, purpose and ***life*** in it. The touch itself may not have great significance, but what God does in flowing through that touch is eternal, so that's very significant.

I've heard the testimony of a man who got stung four times by a box jellyfish. One sting is enough to be fatal. The man finally got to the hospital but died there. Jesus met him and gave him the option of going back to earth, which he accepted. The man testified that for the next roughly 24 hours, he was able to see all kinds of things in the unseen, spiritual realm – angels, demons, you name it. During that time, he walked into a church service – there was nothing unusual or profound about that particular service – and he saw some demons sitting on people's shoulders, angels ministering to various people, and other activities in the unseen realm that greatly surprised him. The guest speaker at that service had something like an aura about six feet in diameter around him. It was made of an atmosphere that could perhaps be described as light-energy. After the message was preached, the pastor prayed for the guest speaker with the laying on of hands. But before praying, the pastor invited each person in the congregation from their pew to stretch out their hand toward the guest speaker and agree in prayer. As they did so, this light-energy came from the hands of each of the people in the congregation and traveled to the guest speaker, and as a result, the aura around him grew from being about six feet in diameter to being about twelve feet in diameter. I mention this because most Christians would probably be very surprised at what goes on in the realm that we can't see with our natural eyes. But I also mention it because actions that we would consider insignificant in the natural realm, like the stretching forth of hands – let's face it: if they don't touch anything what difference does it make in the physical realm? – such actions, if they're blessed as a tool in the hands of the LORD, can have great impact.

In the ministry of the laying on of hands, we see the sovereignty of God as well as the humility of

God. Regarding God's sovereignty, Donald Gee has said this:

QUOTE

*"[The laying on of hands] does not in any way contradict the sovereignty of God in bestowing spiritual gifts; it is only consistent with the beautiful revelation of the whole of the Bible that **The Almighty** condescends to work through, and by the cooperation of, human channels. Never make the mistake that by the laying on of hands men have it in their own power and will to bestow any spiritual gift. This beautiful and appropriate ordinance is powerful only as those who exercise it are in the will of God and full of the Holy Spirit. It should be remembered, however, that this is a perfectly scriptural ordinance, and we do quite well to submit to it from recognized godly brethren when seeking spiritual gifts or blessings. We may safely depend on the Lord's honoring his own appointed methods. We have seen that in bestowing spiritual gifts, God is sovereign. That sovereignty may express itself by the direct bestowal of the gifts without any human intervention, or by their bestowal through the laying on of hands."*

Regarding the humility of God, we see that **The Almighty**, who certainly doesn't need any assistance from mortal men, nonetheless chooses to bestow giftings and graces through the channel of hands made of flesh. That's a method he has ordained. Someone full of pride wouldn't use such a method at all. Receiving life from God in the New Covenant will at times require submission to other believers.

Going to our outline, let's look at Roman Numeral number one, the laying on of hands: to accommodate an impartation of blessing. The first blessing mentioned is that of healing.

Mt. 8:2-3

A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."

Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately he was cured of his leprosy.

Mt. 20:32-34

Jesus stopped and called them. "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked. "Lord," they answered, "we want our sight."

Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him.

We see a little variety in these two examples of healing with the laying on of hands. In the first instance, Jesus also said, "Be clean!" In the second instance, it's not recorded that he said anything. Jesus did have great diversity in the way he ministered healing to people. Then in Mark 6 it says,

Mk. 6:5-6

He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. And he was amazed at their lack of faith.

What had happened? Jesus had returned to Nazareth, the town where he grew up. The people of Nazareth still thought of him as the boy who'd grown up with their sons and daughters, rather than seeing him for who he was, the Son of God and the Savior of the world. So they carried with them an attitude of 'who does he think he is?' Verse 3 tells us that they took offense at him. Matthew's gospel tell us that he didn't do many miracles there **because of** their lack of faith. Despite all that, he was still able to lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. How well we open ourselves up to God can determine how much we receive from God.

Mk. 16:17-18

[Jesus speaking] And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; 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."

It's **those who believe** who are identified in this Scripture as people who, when they see sick folks, they lay their hands on them, and the sick get well. Perhaps those who believed were moved with great compassion, perhaps they had great confidence that God would heal, or perhaps, as often is the case, both of these attitudes were present. Do you believe? If so, you're a candidate. A few more scriptures:

Lk. 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.

Lk. 22:50-51 And one of them struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear. But Jesus answered, "No more of this!" And he touched the man's ear and healed him.

Ac. 28:8 [tells us that Publius'] 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.

So there are many examples in Scripture of God healing people as believers place their hands on those who are sick. One story that illustrates the laying on of hands in the ministry of healing is told by Dennis Bennett in his book, Nine O'Clock in the Morning:

QUOTE Rupe was a man with a destroyed diaphragm, one lung partially collapsed, and a heart that was displaced so far that it was on the wrong side of his chest. One night when he, his friend Bill, and Bill's wife Ellee were kneeling around the big hassock in Rupe's living room, Bill said: "My hands are on fire! They're hurting me!"

Rupe relays the rest of the story in his own words: *I said, "Put 'em on me!" I shuffled around the hassock on my knees to where Bill and his wife were kneeling, and he laid his hands on my chest. I felt as though all my insides had fallen out! I sprang to my feet, and literally had to grab at my trousers to keep them from falling off; they were suddenly too loose. I had to struggle to get my coat unbuttoned, it was now so tight. The whole outward configuration of my body was changing as my internal organs were renewed and went back into their proper positions. My heart was thumping like a hammer, of course, and I felt it move three or four inches, back into its normal place under my breast-bone. Not only was my diaphragm restored, but my physical body was changed so much that I had to get all new suits!*

Although others have testified that their hands felt warm or tingly when God wanted them to participate in the ministry of the laying on of hands, that's not the usual way God does things. Let's just be ready to submit ourselves to the Lord however he wants to do his work.

The next blessing on our outline that can be imparted with the laying on of hands is the baptism in the Holy Spirit. We've already covered that in lesson five, so for now I'll just read the Scriptures on that topic:

Ac. 8:17 Then Peter and John placed their hands on them [the Samaritan believers], and they received the Holy Spirit.

Ac. 9:17-18a 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." Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again.

Ac. 19:6 When Paul placed his hands on them [the twelve Ephesian disciples], the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.

Recently at a church in upstate New York, just before the pre-service prayer meeting, two of the ladies of the church asked a young man if they could pray for him, because he was leaving for a conference on evangelism that week and he'd never been filled with the Holy Spirit. He agreed to be prayed for, and he later testified that when someone laid their hand on his back, he could feel some kind of warmth or energy coming from that hand, and he started speaking in tongues, which was later identified as Greek. I'm very grateful that God still does today what Scripture records him doing thousands of years ago.

Then on our outline we see that the blessing of children can take place accommodated by the laying on of hands.

Mk. 10:13-16 People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.

Gen. 48:12-14 When Israel saw the sons of Joseph, he asked, "Who are these?"
"They are the sons God has given me here," Joseph said to his father.
Then Israel said, "Bring them to me so I may bless them."
Now Israel's eyes were failing because of old age, and he could hardly see. So Joseph brought his sons close to him, and his father kissed them and embraced them.
Israel said to Joseph, "I never expected to see your face again, and now God has allowed me to see your children too."
Then Joseph removed them from Israel's knees and bowed down with his face to the ground. And Joseph took both of them, Ephraim on his right toward Israel's left hand and Manasseh on his left toward Israel's right hand, and brought them close to him. But Israel reached out his right hand and put it on Ephraim's head, though he was the younger, and crossing his arms, he put his left hand on Manasseh's head, even though Manasseh was the firstborn.

skipping to v. 17 When Joseph saw his father placing his right hand on Ephraim's head he was displeased; so he took hold of his father's hand to move it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. Joseph said to him, "No, my father, this one is the firstborn; put your right hand on his head."

But his father refused and said, "I know, my son, I know. He too will become a people, and he too will become great. Nevertheless, his younger brother will be greater than he, and his descendants will become a group of nations." He blessed them that day and said,

"In your name will Israel pronounce this blessing:
'May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh.'"

So he put Ephraim ahead of Manasseh.

In this passage of Scripture, it's interesting to note that both Joseph and his father Israel understood that the stronger blessing was somehow imparted with the right hand. Don't ask me how that works; it's just what Scripture tells us. Joseph wanted that stronger blessing to go to his firstborn son, Manasseh, but Israel sensed prophetically that it should be spoken over Manasseh's younger brother, Ephraim. So that's how he blessed both of his grandsons.

Then we also see that God may impart the grace needed to do a new job or ministry well through the laying on of hands. Three incidents in Scripture give us examples of this.

Nu. 8:9-11 Bring the Levites to the front of the Tent of Meeting and assemble the whole Israelite community. You are to bring the Levites before the LORD, and the Israelites are to lay

their hands on them. Aaron is to present the Levites before the LORD as a wave offering from the Israelites, so that they may be ready to do the work of the LORD.

On this occasion, the Levites were commissioned into their work of service at the Tent of Meeting. There were about 22,000 Levites. There were hundreds of thousands of Israelites. It's clear that this service had great logistical challenges. But apparently, in the mind and heart of God, it was so important to have the ministry of the laying on of hands in operation that the logistical challenges had to be overcome.

Ac. 6:3-6 [the Twelve apostles are speaking] Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."

This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; and also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

What was happening? The Grecian widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. The apostles rightly discerned that they were not to forsake the more important matters of prayer and the ministry of the word in order to deal with that problem. But someone had to make sure that the food was being distributed properly and fairly, so seven men were selected. It's interesting to note that in the early church even men who had the job of waiting on tables were required to be spiritually qualified. They had to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. But before any of them actually handled the food, or heard the concerns of those who were being overlooked, or devised better methods of distribution, they received the prayers of the apostles, with the laying on of hands. Then, and only then, did they start handling their new responsibilities. The next verse says,

verse 7 So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

When everything is set in order the way God has ordained, good things result!

Ac. 13:1-3 In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

This passage of Scripture describes the birthing of Paul's first missionary journey. At this point in his life he was still known as Saul. The Holy Spirit spoke, directing that he and Barnabas be sent off to minister. Before they left to do the work they'd been called to do, hands were laid on them. So in these three circumstances we see hands being laid on people to impart grace that's needed to do a new job or ministry well.

Then, the last blessing on our outline is the impartation of spiritual gifts.

1Ti. 4:14 [the apostle Paul writes to his protege, Timothy] Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you.

2Ti. 1:6 [Paul is again writing to Timothy] For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.

In both of these verses, the older, more experienced minister Paul is writing to Timothy,

apparently concerned that the younger man may be neglecting or disregarding giftings that the Lord had placed in his life. So he reminds his younger colleague of the original impartation which took place with the laying on of hands, perhaps so that there would be less opportunity for doubting what God had done. We don't know what these giftings were, but we do know that in both cases they were imparted through the laying on of hands.

So there we have our list from Scripture. Again, when a servant of the Most High God lays his or her hands on another, God can use that gesture to impart blessing, whether it's a blessing from the list on our outline or one that's not listed. God isn't restricted, he's not limited to doing what he's recorded in his written word. God can do anything. For nothing is impossible with God. Amen.

Foundations Lesson #16A

The Laying On of Hands, Part 2

Roman Numeral number two on our outline deals with the laying on of hands to accommodate an impartation of transfer. Under the Old Covenant, the Old Testament, sin was transferred to a sacrificial animal through the laying on of hands. Let me read to you from Leviticus 16 verses 20 through 22.

Lev. 16:20-22 [regulations for the Day of Atonement] “When Aaron has finished making atonement for the Most Holy Place, the Tent of Meeting and the altar, he shall bring forward the live goat. He is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites – all their sins – and put them on the goat’s head. He shall send the goat away into the desert in the care of a man appointed for the task. The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a solitary place; and the man shall release it in the desert.

This stretches our understanding a bit. You can't see, hear, smell, taste, or touch sin. Perhaps you could see, or witness, sinful actions, but sin itself is a concept. Here, sin gets transferred onto the head of a goat. If we're restricting our minds to the physical realm, this doesn't make any sense. So we have to remember, again, that the laying on of hands represents a partnership between the physical realm and the unseen realm. If you're interested in studying the Bible further on the subject of sin being transferred onto a sacrificial animal, other passages in Leviticus are listed on the outline for you to look up if you wish.

Then we also see that the laying on of hands is used to accommodate an impartation of transfer from a leader to his replacement.

Nu. 27:15-23 Moses said to the LORD, “May the LORD, the God of the spirits of all mankind, appoint a man over this community to go out and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in, so the LORD's people will not be like sheep without a shepherd.”

So the LORD said to Moses, “Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay your hand on him. Have him stand before Eleazar the priest and the entire assembly and commission him in their presence. Give him some of your authority so the whole Israelite community will obey him. He is to stand before Eleazar the priest, who will obtain decisions for him by inquiring of the Urim before the LORD. At his command he and the entire community of the Israelites will go out, and at his command they will come in.”

Moses did as the LORD commanded him. He took Joshua and had him stand before Eleazar the priest and the whole assembly. Then he laid his hands on him and commissioned him, as the LORD instructed through Moses.

Dt. 34:9

Now Joshua son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands on him. So the Israelites listened to him and did what the LORD had commanded Moses.

Moses was here instructed by the Lord to transfer some of his authority to the younger man, Joshua, and this was done with the laying on of hands. But as we've read in the verse from Deuteronomy, not only was authority transferred, Joshua also received an impartation of wisdom because Moses laid his hands on him.

Lastly, I've listed two cautions in Roman Numeral number three.

1Ti. 5:22

Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure.

It's interesting to note that here Paul instructs us not to be hasty in the laying on of hands, but he gives no explanation why. A few possible reasons come to mind. Perhaps we can be so zealous to see people blessed and empowered that we fail to see or consider that they may not yet be able to handle the responsibility that comes with receiving such things. Perhaps the impartations would be better received under different circumstances or at a different time. Perhaps if people receive certain blessings too quickly they'll tend to treat them too lightly. Other possibilities certainly exist. But Paul's instruction not to be hasty in the laying on of hands should remind us not to be flippant or too casual with the things of God. Let's remember to check with the Lord on what he wants us to do in all circumstances. Let's be sober-minded and careful as we minister to others. We may not understand all the reasons behind our need not to be hasty in the laying on of hands, but Scripture says it, so we need to receive it, accept it, believe it, and live by it.

The second caution pointed out to us on the outline is that in all the New Testament accounts of the laying on of hands – every single one of them – this ministry was carried out by someone of mature spiritual stature: Jesus, the apostles, Ananias, the prophets and teachers at Antioch, Paul, or the body of elders. I believe that's no accident. To put this truth in its proper perspective, I'd like to point out that just because the body of evidence in the New Testament shows us that it was people of mature spirituality who ministered in this way, doesn't in and of itself restrict others from that ministry. We should keep the pattern in mind, but Mark's gospel tells us that the laying on of hands for physical healing would accompany those who simply believe, not just those seasoned in ministry. I've heard reports of children, when they received the baptism in the Spirit at a church meeting, going to their friends and classmates around the altar area and, laying their hands on them, seeing them also receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit and speak in tongues, without any adult ministering the laying on of hands. We have to keep the patterns of Scripture in mind, but we also need to remember that God is greater than patterns. He can do anything. For nothing is impossible with God. Amen. God bless you all.