

THE LESSONS OF LAYING ON OF HANDS

By Kimberly Rogers

It is such common practice in the world and the church that few stop to consider the ramifications of the "laying on of hands". Unbelievers use the practice of "laying on of hands" and it is often a murky doctrine among Believers. It is a common belief that anyone and everyone has the right to lay hands on another Believer, but this is not so. It isn't that the doctrine of "laying on of hands" needs to be called into question, but rather its practice and who has the right to "lay on hands".

We must understand the purposes of "laying on of hands". The first instance of it appears in Genesis when Israel confers the blessing upon Ephraim and Manasseh.

Genesis 48:14 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.

This is not the first time that a man passed on a blessing. The first time was when Isaac blessed Jacob. However, Isaac's touch was not one of blessing, but of determining the identity of Esau. The "laying on of hands" involves putting the right hand on the head of the person to be blessed. Often, the left hand of the giver of the blessing is laid upon the left shoulder of the one who is to be blessed. Israel laid his right hand on Ephraim's head and his left upon Manasseh's head. This is the first actual example of the "laying on of hands" in the Bible.

Biblical pattern shows us the primary reason for the "laying on of hands" is to give a blessing. The next instance was Moses' ordination of Joshua.

Numbers 27:18 And the LORD said unto Moses, Take thee Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay thine hand upon him;

19 And set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation; and give him a charge in their sight.

20 And thou shalt put some of thine honour upon him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient.

This episode shows a little more about the subject of "laying on of hands" in that we can see that such action produces an impartation of authority and something "spiritual", in this case honor, from one person to another. We have here the first ordination of leadership not associated with the blessing of the firstborn.

We now see that God is showing us that one who is in authority can transfer that authority to another. Note that this transference of authority was God's will, not Moses' or anyone else's. Later, Moses would activate Joshua's authority in Deuteronomy 31 by announcing Joshua's authority before the entire nation, but Moses did not lay hands on Joshua this time. The "laying on of hands" occurred much earlier.

The anointing of priesthood performed by Moses did not occur the same way as the transference of authority from Moses to Joshua. Aaron and his sons were ritually cleansed and anointed. This is a totally different process than the "laying on of hands". This is our first clue that there is a difference between anointing and ordination. Aaron and his sons became "God's Anointed" while Joshua, while given authority by the will of God, was ordained. Anointing and ordination, then, have different purposes.

Transference of authority was directed by the Holy Spirit in the early Ecclesia. The Apostles transferred their authority that Yeshua had given to them.

Acts 6:2 Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.

3 Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.

4 But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.

5 And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch:

6 Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.

7 And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.

Acts 13:1 Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

2 As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.

3 And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

We can now see that “laying on of hands” has guidelines. First, there must be someone who is in possession of some kind of authority. Second, that person must be willing to pass along that authority to another. Third, God is the One Who directs where that authority will be passed to. Fourth, the recipient of the authority must be willing to receive it because of the great responsibility that comes with it. This is no small matter and is taken too lightly by Believers today.

There are those who claim that no “spirit” can be imparted from one person to another. This is contrary to the teaching of scripture.

Acts 8:18 And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money,

19 Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.

Acts 9:17 And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.

The Apostles used the “laying on of hands” to give others the Holy Spirit. But can someone confer an evil spirit to another? Yes. How do we know that evil can be transferred to another? Because this is the method of salvation taught in the Bible.

In the Old Testament, the “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.

Numbers 8:6 Take the Levites from among the children of Israel, and cleanse them.

7 And thus shalt thou do unto them, to cleanse them: Sprinkle water of purifying upon them, and let them shave all their flesh, and let them wash their clothes, and so make themselves clean.

8 Then let them take a young bullock with his meat offering, even fine flour mingled with oil, and another young bullock shalt thou take for a sin offering.

9 And thou shalt bring the Levites before the tabernacle of the congregation: and thou shalt gather the whole assembly of the children of Israel together:

10 And thou shalt bring the Levites before the LORD: and the children of Israel shall put their hands upon the Levites:

11 And Aaron shall offer the Levites before the LORD for an offering of the children of Israel, that they may execute the service of the LORD.

12 And the Levites shall lay their hands upon the heads of the bullocks: and thou shalt offer the one for a sin offering, and the other for a burnt offering, unto the LORD, to make an atonement for the Levites.

13 And thou shalt set the Levites before Aaron, and before his sons, and offer them for an offering unto the LORD.

The children of Israel laid their hands upon the Levites making the Levites the receptacle of sin just as Yeshua would later become the receptacle for our sin. But notice that it was the ordinary people of the nation who transferred their sins by “laying on of hands”.

Throughout the Torah, we see that the method of transferring sin from a guilty person to another is through the “laying on of hands”. The guilty person who brought the sacrifice would lay both hands on the head of the animal and by force of will would transfer sin from himself into the animal. The person who should have died for his

sins was then “saved” from his fate, but the poor animal paid the price! This is the theme of sacrifice throughout the Bible. This should be enough to convince Believers that it is possible to transfer an evil spirit from one person to another.

Finally, we come to the doctrine of “laying on of hands” for the purpose of healing.

1 Corinthians 12:7 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.
8 For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit;
9 To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit;
10 To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues:
11 But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.

It is a common belief that all Believers have the right, indeed the obligation, to “lay hands” on someone for the purpose of healing. This is a disregard for the teaching that healing is a gift given by God to particular Believers. Not everyone is called to heal.

1 Corinthians 12:27 ¶Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.
28 And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.
29 Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles?
30 Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?
31 But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.

Not everyone is a healer. Healing is a special ministry in which it is necessary to “lay on hands”. Our example of this is Yeshua Who taught the Disciples to heal others in the same way by “laying on of hands”.

We can see that the act of “laying on of hands” is a very special activity in the Bible. We take it too lightly and do not understand all of the ramifications of doing it to others and having it done to us. The act of “laying on hands” has implications for both parties. Not only can the person who is having hands laid on him be contaminated, but the opposite is also true.

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

This is a very clear teaching that when someone lays hands on another to confer authority, that person may become a partaker in that person’s sin. It is necessary to know the character of the person on whom you are going to lay hands to transfer authority, to ordain or to heal. This is one of the reasons why the Bible is clear that a healing also involves the forgiveness of sins for the one healed. It is not only an act of mercy on the part of God to forgive someone when He heals them via a Believer who has the gift of healing, but also because the healer can become contaminated by the other person’s sins.

“Laying on hands” can be for the purpose of violence, according to the Bible.

Matthew 21:46 But when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitude, because they took him for a prophet.

Today, many people answer the call to step forward to the church altar, but it is not always for the purpose of repentance. Quite often it is for the purpose of having the hands of some self-proclaimed prophet laid on them in an effort to acquire a “spiritual experience”. It is sad that this activity is so rampant in the Church because the sins of each person transfers between them contaminating each of them. Is it any wonder, then, that Satan so loves the use of “laying on of hands”?

The practice of “laying on of hands” needs to be cleaned up. We must recognize the Biblical principle that it is those in authority – Elders and healers called by God whose lives are above reproach – that are to “lay on hands”. The laity should not lay hands on anyone, nor should they allow just anyone to lay hands on them.

James 5:14 Is any sick among you? **let him call for the elders** of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord:

15 And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.

Why the elders? The reason we are to call on the Elders for healing, not just willy-nilly lay on hands or accept the laying on of hands, is because the Elders are in authority. The authority of Elders is given by the flock. These are not appointed directly by God even though we understand that God directs all things. The children of Israel appointed the Judges – God did not appoint judges – so that the people would have the right to remove Elders and judges for misbehavior. This is as much a test to the flock as it is to the appointed Elder or Judge.

There are requirements for Elders or for those in ministry. The Books of Timothy and Titus show us that we have the right as members of a congregation to know the private character of the men whom we set over us. We are willingly submitting ourselves spiritually to whomever we allow to lay hands on us. Therefore, we need to know if they walk in all of God's paths. Is he, according to 1 Timothy 3: 2-12:

- Blameless
- The husband of one wife
- Vigilant
- Temperate (has control of his temper)
- Sober/Serious-minded
- Of good behavior
- Given to hospitality
- Ready to teach
- Not given to wine
- No striker
- Not greedy
- Patient
- Not a brawler
- Not covetous
- Rules his own house well
- One whose children are obedient to him
- Not a spiritual novice, but one who is spiritually mature
- Not double-tongued

1 Timothy 3:2 A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach;

3 Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous;

4 One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity;

5 (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)

6 Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.

7 Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

8 ¶Likewise must the deacons be grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre;

9 Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.

10 And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless.

11 Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things.

12 Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.

It is this kind of man that flocks must set over themselves because it is these men who have the duty of "laying on of hands". If the Elder does not have the above characteristics, he will not have enough discernment to know upon whom he can lay hands to confer authority, to impart blessing or to heal. In not knowing this, he may make himself a partaker in the sins of those upon whom he lays his hands.

We must be careful in this matter because it is very serious. As laity, we must be careful whom we allow to lay hands on us or pray for us.

A word about the role of prayer in “laying on of hands”: In the Messianic Movement, this is increasingly important because we know that the god served by our New Covenant brethren is not the God of the Torah and of Yeshua. The god of the New Covenant brethren is a liar, one who does not keep his word when he says that something is forever, such as the Sabbath, the annual Festivals, etc. That god is one on whom no one should depend for their salvation because he is fickle, saying one thing, then later changing his mind. This is not the kind of god that we should want to have someone praying to for us. Prayer is often associated with “laying on of hands”, therefore we must be careful of both.