

The Laying On Of Hands

Hebrews 6:1-2

The Laying On Of Hands

- Heb. 6:1-2 - “Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, 2 of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.”
 - What was its purpose?
 - Was it just a custom of those times?
 - Does it have a role in the church today?

Old Testament

- Bestowing blessings

- Gen. 48:14, 17-20 - “Then Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on Ephraim's head, who was the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh's head, guiding his hands knowingly, for Manasseh was the firstborn. 17 Now when Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him; so he took hold of his father's hand to remove it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. 18 And Joseph said to his father, Not so, my father, for this one is the firstborn; put your right hand on his head. 19 But his father refused and said, I know, my son, I know. He also shall become a people, and he also shall be great; but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations. 20 So he blessed them that day, saying, ‘By you Israel will bless, saying, ‘May God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh!’ And thus he set Ephraim before Manasseh.”

Old Testament

- Offering sacrifices
 - Lev. 3:1-2, 8, 13 - “When his offering is a sacrifice of a peace offering, if he offers it of the herd, whether male or female, he shall offer it without blemish before the LORD. 2 And he shall lay his hand on the head of his offering, and kill it at the door of the tabernacle of meeting; and Aaron's sons, the priests, shall sprinkle the blood all around on the altar. 8 And he shall lay his hand on the head of his offering, and kill it before the tabernacle of meeting; and Aaron's sons shall sprinkle its blood all around on the altar. 13 He shall lay his hand on its head and kill it before the tabernacle of meeting; and the sons of Aaron shall sprinkle its blood all around on the altar.”
 - Lev. 4:4 - “He shall bring the bull to the door of the tabernacle of meeting before the LORD, lay his hand on the bull's head, and kill the bull before the LORD.”

Old Testament

- Practiced at the ordination of the Aaronic high priesthood
 - Lev. 8:14, 22 - “And he brought the bull for the sin offering. Then Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the bull for the sin offering, 22 And he brought the second ram, the ram of consecration. Then Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the ram.”

Old Testament

- Practiced at the Levites' dedication
 - Num. 8:12 - “Then the Levites shall lay their hands on the heads of the young bulls, and you shall offer one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering to the LORD, to make atonement for the Levites.”

Old Testament

- Practiced on the annual day of atonement
 - Lev. 16:21 - “Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, confess over it all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, concerning all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and shall send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a suitable man.”

Old Testament

- Ordaining leaders to service
 - Num. 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 hand on him; 19 set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation, and inaugurate him in their sight. 20 And you shall give some of your authority to him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient.”
 - Deut. 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.”

Old Testament

- Rendering judgments
 - Lev. 24:14 - “Take outside the camp him who has cursed; then let all who heard him lay their hands on his head, and let all the congregation stone him.”

New Testament

- Jesus blessed children through laying on of hands with prayer.
 - Matt. 19:13-15 - “Then little children were brought to Him that He might put His hands on them and pray, but the disciples rebuked them. 14 But Jesus said, Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven. 15 And He laid His hands on them and departed from there.”
 - Mark 10:16 - “He took them up in His arms, put His hands on them, and blessed them.”

New Testament

- Jesus healed people by laying on hands.
 - Matt. 9:18, 25 - “While He spoke these things to them, behold, a ruler came and worshiped Him, saying, ‘My daughter has just died, but come and lay Your hand on her and she will live.’ 25 But when the crowd was put outside, He went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose.”
 - Mark 6:5 - “Now He could do no mighty work there, except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them.”

New Testament

- Jesus healed people by laying on hands.
 - Luke 4:40 - “When the sun was setting, all those who had any that were sick with various diseases brought them to Him; and He laid His hands on every one of them and healed them.”
 - Luke 13:13 - “And He laid His hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.”

New Testament

- The apostles healed by laying on hands.
 - Mark 16:18 - “They will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.”
 - Acts 5:12 - “And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people.”
 - Acts 28:8 - “And it happened that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and dysentery. Paul went in to him and prayed, and he laid his hands on him and healed him.”

New Testament

- Ananias restored Saul's sight by the laying on of hands.
 - Acts 9:12, 17 - “And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight. 17 And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’”

New Testament

- Spiritual gifts imparted by laying on hands.
 - Acts 8:14-17 - “Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, 15 who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. 16 For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 17 Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.”

New Testament

- Spiritual gifts imparted by laying on hands.
 - Acts 19:6 - “And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.”
 - 1Tim. 4:14 - “Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership.”
 - 2Tim. 1:6 - “Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.”

New Testament

- Dedication to service by laying on hands
 - Acts 6:1-6 - "...when they had prayed, they laid hands on them"
 - Acts 13:2-3 - "As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. 3 Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away."

New Testament

- Caution was urged in laying on hands.
 - 1Tim. 5:22 - “Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people's sins; keep yourself pure.”
- Laying on hands implied endorsement.
 - 1Tim. 5:19-21 - “Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. 20 Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear. 21 I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality.”

In The Church Today

- There is certainly no need to lay hands on sacrifices as in the OT.
 - That could not truly remove sin - Heb. 10:1-4
 - That came to an end with the sacrifice of Christ - Heb. 10:5-14
- The purpose for miraculous spiritual gifts has been fulfilled.
 - To reveal and confirm the Word - Mark 16:19-20; Heb. 2:3-4
 - That were designed to be temporary - 1Cor. 13:8-10

In The Church Today

- Purposes that continue to the present
 - Indicating acceptance and approval of those who have been selected by the congregation
 - Acts 6:1-6
 - Beseeking God's blessing and protection on those who serve
 - Acts 13:1-3

In The Church Today

- “The imposition of hands, accompanied by fasting and prayer, was, in this case, as in that of the seven deacons, merely their formal separation to the special work to which they had been called. This, indeed, is sufficiently evident from the context. What they did was doubtless what they had been told to do by the Holy Spirit. But the Holy Spirit simply said to them, 'Separate me Barnabas and Saul to the work to which I have called them.' The fasting, prayer, and imposition of hands was, then, merely their separation to this work. It was a ceremony deemed by infinite wisdom suitable to such a purpose; and, therefore, whenever a congregation has a similar purpose to accomplish, they have, in this case, the judgments and will of God, which should be their guide.” (*J. W. McGarvey, commenting on Acts 13:1-3*)

In The Church Today

- In praying for those who are sick.
 - James 5:14-15
 - “The laying on of hands was accompanied by prayer, the imposition of hands being the outward symbol of the prayer.” (*Neil R. Lightfoot, commenting on Heb. 6:2*)

In The Church Today

- The Biblical evidence for this practice is rather scarce.
 - One tendency can be to make more of the practice than God intends,
 - Another can be to ignore it all together.
- Based upon what the Bible reveals, it is useful to have some symbol or sign that indicates endorsement and separation for a good work that has as similar a meaning today as laying on of hands did in the first century.
 - Like the holy kiss and washing of feet, the laying on of hands does not communicate what it did in the first century. However, we have practices that represent the same thing in our time as those things did in their time.

In The Church Today

- Current practices that require endorsement:
 - Services for the recognition of appointed elders and deacons
 - The right hand of fellowship
 - Holding the hands of the ill in hospitals
 - Embracing those who are suffering or sorrowing
- Since we still need to endorse good people for good works, and since we must still comfort the sick and sorrowful, let us use the means that speak to these purposes.