

## **Chapter Seven**

# **THE LAYING ON OF HANDS FOR ORDINATION**

In Hebrews 6:1, 2 there is a list of foundational teachings, one of which is “...and laying on of hands...” This is surprising since nowhere else in Scripture is it mentioned as an important doctrine. On the other hand there are numerous occasions, both in the Old and the New Testaments of hands being laid on another. There are several purposes for this action which we will see, but the importance for us in this study is the laying on of hands for ordination into ministry. A proper understanding of this action and a proper application could be an answer to our problems of authority and accountability in the church.

Though our interest is in the imposition of hands for ordination, all of the purposes are instructive. Therefore we will cover most of the biblical references to get a general view of its significance.

### **A. In the Old Testament**

We begin with the Old Testament where we find four purposes for this spiritually significant action.

## **1. To impart a blessing**

- a. Isaac in Genesis 27 and Jacob in Genesis 48 laid hands on their sons and grandsons to impart a paternal blessing.
- b. The blessing of the people of God by Moses and Aaron in Leviticus 9:22, 23. Since Israel was too numerous for them to lay their hands on all of them, they lifted up their hands toward the people, which was equivalent to the imposition of hands.

## **2. As an act of identification**

In Numbers 8:10 the Israelites laid their hands on the Levites. By this they were identifying with the Levites, who became their representatives in their service to God. This is not an ordination. Nowhere else in Scripture does ordination come from the people served. This is identification, not ordination. The ordination to ministry came at the hands of Aaron and his sons, who presented them as a wave offering to the Lord, Numbers 8:11-22.

## **3. An act of imputation of sin**

This is similar to “identification” above, but it goes further. It is a legal act attributing the sins of the repentant Israelite to the sacrificial animal. Leviticus 1:4; 3:2; 4:4; 8:14; 16:21.

## **4. To ordain someone into his ministry**

Moses ordained Joshua in this way, Numbers 27: 18-23; Deuteronomy 34:9. The act of anointing with oil was probably equivalent to laying on of hands. There were many instances

where this occurred: Aaron, Saul, David, Elisha, Jehu, etc. (I Kings 19:15, 16)

Concerning Joshua's ordination in Deuteronomy 34:9 we read that he received a spirit of wisdom as a consequence of Moses laying his hands on him. This appears to have been an additional unction, since he already was a man with the Spirit, Numbers 27:18. By this public act Israel would now recognize Joshua's God-given authority.

There are other Old Testament references to laying hands on someone, but they are to be understood in a literal sense, for example: Leviticus 24:14; Deuteronomy 13:9; 17:7; Job 9:33, etc.

**We do not see healings occurring** with the laying on of hands in the Old Testament. The closest to this are the cases of the young lads being resurrected by Elijah in I Kings 17 and by Elisha in II Kings 4. In both instances the prophet's body touched the boy's body. Another resurrection occurred through physical contact with Elisha's bones in II Kings 13.

## **B. In the New Testament**

In the New Testament the practice of laying on of hands was more frequent. Jesus did so for three purposes and the apostles for four.

### **1. Jesus used His hands to bless**

He blessed the children in Matthew 19:13-15 and He blessed His disciples, lifting up His hands in Luke 24:50.

### **2. He imparted strength by a touch**

In Matthew 17:7 on the mountain of transfiguration He strengthened His disciples, touching them, and in Revelation 1:17 He does the same for John.

### **3. For healing the sick and for resurrecting one from the dead**

In eleven instances of healing or resurrection **Jesus laid His hands on the person:** the leper, Matthew 8:3; Peter's mother-in-law, Matthew 8:15; Jairus' daughter, Matthew 9:25; the two blind men, Matthew 9:29; the healings at Nazareth, Mark 6:5; the blind man, Mark 8:22-25; the boy with the deaf and dumb spirit, Mark 9:27; the deaf mute, Mark 7:32, 33; the two blind men at Jericho, Matthew 20:34; the woman bent double, Luke 13:13; Malchus' severed ear, Luke 22:51.

In other cases of healing, **the sick touched Jesus**, Mark 3:10; Mark 6:56; Luke 6:19. In the story of the ailing woman who touched Jesus' garment, Mark 5:25-34, it says Jesus sensed that power had gone out of Him. So we may say that from the proper person, operating by faith with the power of the Holy Spirit, there actually is an impartation by the laying on of hands.

Many were healed **without a touch**, so we cannot say there must be the imposition of hands to receive healing.

**The disciples also laid their hands on the sick** to bring healing. Jesus promised this in Mark 16:18. Examples: the cripple at the Beautiful Gate, Acts 3:7; Paul's healing, Acts 9:17; Eutychus' restoration, Acts 20:9, 10, and Publius' father, Acts 28:8. James admonishes the sick to call for the elders who would anoint them with oil (5:14), which would either involve touching or would be equivalent to touching.

**Signs and wonders**, including healings were brought about through the laying on of hands: Acts 5:12; 14:3, 19:11.

#### **4. To impart the baptism in the Holy Spirit**

Three times in the book of Acts the Holy Spirit baptism was given by the imposition of hands: the Samaritans, 8:17, 18; Paul, 9:17; the twelve Ephesians, 19:6.

#### **5. To impart a gift or a “charisma” of the Spirit**

In I Timothy 4:14 and II Timothy 1:6, Paul says that Timothy had received a gift through the laying on of hands — his hands and those of the presbytery. It is not clear whether it refers to a gift of ministry (see I Peter 4:10 and Romans 12:6 where 'charisma is used, referring to a ministry) or to a gift of the Spirit (see I Corinthians 12:4, 9 where “charisma” is also used). Since a ministry gift is less likely to be neglected than a gift of the Spirit, it is more probable that it is referring to one of the spiritual gifts in I Corinthians 12:8-10. However, we cannot be

emphatic. These two verses in Timothy (I Timothy 4:14; II Timothy 1:6) may also refer to an ordination service. See ahead.

## **6. To ordain to ministry** (See ahead)

**To summarize** before we get to the matter of laying on of hands for ordination, we find the following purposes for this action:

- 1) To communicate a blessing - a father's blessing or a spiritual leader's blessing.
- 2) To identify with the person or animal.
- 3) To impart healing or perform signs and wonders, even the raising of the dead.
- 4) To impart strength.
- 5) To impart the baptism in the Holy Spirit.
- 6) To impart a gift of the Spirit or a ministry gift.

## **C. Laying on of Hands for Ordination to Ministry**

First we need to note there is no mention in the gospels of a formal act of ordination with Christ laying His hands on the twelve apostles. This could have occurred but it is not recorded. Something could have happened at their original choosing, Mark 3:13-19. Another more appropriate time would have been in the upper room, John 20:19-23. Here Jesus commissions them and breathes on them. Maybe this is equivalent to the laying on of hands. On the other hand it does not appear that the Old Testament prophets had hands laid on them, although some, like Elisha probably did. Maybe we can say that when a

man has a personal, visible, tangible encounter with the Lord as Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and others as well as the apostles, there is no laying on of hands. Paul, too, fits into this category. See I Corinthians 15:5, 7, 8; 9:1; Acts 9:3-6; 26:14-18.

**1. Acts 6:6** The first to receive the laying on of hands for investiture were **the seven men** whom we call **deacons**. Their office was to serve tables and care for the widows. The apostles laid hands on them. Stephen and Philip subsequently began preaching and evangelizing, but the purpose of the apostles' action in verse 6 was for deaconship, not for eldership, that is, not for spiritual leadership.

**2. Acts 13:3 Paul and Barnabas** were sent out as apostles by their co-laborers after the imposition of hands. It marks the beginning of their apostolic ministry. Paul and Barnabas returned periodically to the Antioch church; this gives a good example of one's accountability to those who laid hands on him.

**3. In Acts 14:23** it refers to the **elders** set in by Paul and Barnabas. The Greek word is "to stretch out the hand" and it means to choose or to appoint. In view of our other texts, it might also imply the laying on of hands.

**4. In I Timothy 5:22** Paul warns Timothy about laying hands on someone too quickly. Since the context is dealing with elders, it is reasonable to recognize this as referring to **the**

**ordination of elders.** It is a serious matter to lay hands on a person who has unresolved sin in his life or a person who does not have a genuine call or anointing for ministry. An ordination may also be premature, especially if that one has not had an adequate preparation. Preparation involves study of the Word, spiritual growth or maturity, which results in spiritual perception. All of this means time. The twelve apostles had four years of preparation (beginning with John the Baptist's discipling), and this seems like a reasonable minimum for today.

**5.** The two passages, **I Timothy 4:14** and **II Timothy 1:6**, probably refer to an **ordination service** for Timothy. From this we see that a presbytery of church leaders laid hands on him. There were prophetic utterances at the time and a gift was imparted. This gives us a pattern to follow today.

**6. What is the imposition of hands and for whom is it?**

a. The laying on of hands is a public confirmation by leaders in the church who are recognizing the call of the Lord on an individual and the anointing of the Spirit for a particular ministry in the church. This ministry may be eldership or one of the five-fold ministries of Ephesians 4:11 or it may be deaconship. Since deacons were set in by the laying on of hands, there is no reason why Sunday School teachers or any other officially recognized servant of the church could not have hands laid on them.

b. When Aaron and his sons were set in their office, an interesting and significant Hebrew expression was used and translated “ordain” (K.J. consecrate): that is, “to fill the hand.” (Ex. 28:4 1; 29:9, 29, 33, 35; Lev. 8:33, etc). It could be said that the laying on of hands is the filling of the hands of the person being ordained.

c. Laying on hands is a conferring of authority on a new leader of the church. Numbers 27:20.

#### **D. Counsel in Reference to the Ceremony of Laying on of Hands for Ordination to the Leadership Ministry**

There are three considerations that should be clearly understood by all:

##### **1. The persons who are laying on hands are worthy**

We cannot impart what we ourselves do not have. To use the expression above, the one who has nothing in his hand can't fill the hand of another.

a. They should have an exemplary life, I Timothy 3:1-7. Some ministers' lives are such that they shouldn't lay hands on anyone.

b. They should have a valid Ephesians 4:11 ministry, recognized by other ministers and the Church. These men may be elders but not deacons.

c. They should have an anointing on their own ministry. A minister with little fruit and little of the Holy Spirit has nothing to impart to another. Since we can expect a spiritual impartation, only men with a genuine anointing should be involved.

## **2. The intention of the imposition of hands**

Since we can lay hands on people for deaconship, eldership or other ministries, it needs to be very clear to all what it is for. Hands laid on for deaconship or Sunday School teaching does not mean pastoring a church.

## **3. The words pronounced at the time of the imposition of hands**

These words should clearly give the intention of the ordination. This is a time when one can expect the Holy Spirit to give prophetic words. A tape recording could be made.

As Timothy received a gifting at this time it is quite right to expect as much today. Once again, if those laying on hands have a poor or mediocre ministry and have little unction, there will probably be little impartation.

## **E. Four Questions that Every Minister and Church Worker should be Asked:**

**1.** Who laid hands on you?

**2.** What did they ordain you to do or what did they authorize you to do?

**3.** Do you recognize your accountability to them?

**4.** Would you submit to them if they needed to correct you?

Anyone who fails to say yes to these last two questions should not be ordained or even in the ministry. Those who have left traditional churches because of their pentecostal experience (or for other valid reasons) should seek other pastors of like persuasion to lay hands on them again. These will be the ones to whom they will now be accountable.

#### **F. Conclusions Drawn from these Scriptures:**

**1.** The ordained servant of God is accountable to those who laid their hands on him, as well as any others with whom he is in relation.

**2.** Those who lay their hands on another have an obligation to follow the ministry of the ones they ordained. They should be the ones to correct and to discipline when needed.

If this was universally recognized and followed, there would be fewer independent, unsubmitted men claiming to be God's servants. Many problems of authority could be resolved. This may appear idealistic and unattainable, but we dare not lower the perfect standard the Lord has set for His Church. The Holy Spirit has written: "... and laying on of hands..."