



Should Christians Be Practicing “Laying on of Hands”?

1 Timothy 4:14: (NASB) *Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery.*



In the 2,000 years since Jesus walked the earth, Christianity has in some ways progressed but in many ways fragmented. Depending on the doctrine or ritual we are looking at, we can find groups that have a laser focus on it or a minimized approach to it. The early Christian ritual of the “laying on of hands” is a good example of this dichotomy. Some of us centralize its importance and others of us see it as a thing of the past. If laying on of hands was central, then why was it NOT used consistently? If it was of little significance, then why was it used at all? The fact is, the act of laying on of hands was clearly present in the Old Testament and the apostles did plainly use this ritual several times. So, what is the bottom-line application of laying on of hands for Christians living today?

The laying on of hands is a religious practice done throughout the Christian world by Roman Catholicism, the Eastern Orthodox Church, Baptists, Pentecostals, Mormons and others. It is a physical act used for various purposes, like formally ordaining clergy, faith healing, to give blessings, and to invoke the holy spirit.



**Is the laying on of hands scriptural?
Is it required for Christians?
Should we be doing it?**

In the letter to the Hebrews, we are shown that the laying on of hands is an *elementary teaching*.

Hebrews 6:1-2: (NASB) *Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, ²of instruction about washings and **laying on <1936> of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.***

Laying on: Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance #1936 *epithesis*;
an imposition (of hands officially)

The above scriptures speak of fundamental Christian ideals. These fundamental truths had a basis in Judaism, so they were recognizable to Jewish Christians. Remember, Christianity started within the Jewish nation with only Jewish people and later expanded to the Gentile nations.

Christian ideals the Jewish Christians would have been familiar with include:

- Repentance from a sinful life is a commonly taught New Testament basis for Christianity.
- Faith toward God is repeatedly taught as foundational throughout all Scripture.
- Washings, which refers to Christian baptism, is clarified several times in the New Testament as a symbolic starting point for Christians.



Baptism is a comprehensive topic. There were many types of baptisms at the beginning of Christianity, such as being baptized with the holy spirit at Pentecost.



Unlocking the importance, meaning and application of baptism

- The resurrection and judgment are explained in many places throughout the New Testament.

These fundamentals are repeated often throughout the New Testament. The laying on of hands does not seem to fit with these other doctrines. It was not taught as something necessary for all to participate; it was just done as an action. Why is there this discrepancy?

There was one caution about this process:

1 Timothy 5:22: (NASB) *Do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily and thereby share responsibility for the sins of others; keep yourself free from sin.*

We will come back to this text later on page 15.



In the Old Testament, the laying on of hands showed authority coming from God. This authority needed to be carried over, transferred to the New Testament, to the body of Christ.

Laying on of hands in the Old Testament was used to sanctify the sacrificial animals and offerings in the Tabernacle and Temple to show they were recognized, accepted and blessed by God. The laying on of hands was used to designate that the priests were the ones carrying out God’s instructions. The laying on of hands in the early New Testament conveyed much the same thought - this person was going to be used by God for a special service. This would have been familiar and understandable to the Jews.



This would show the Jewish people a legitimate authority to bridge from the Old Testament to the New Testament. The Christian faith is founded upon Jewish beliefs and practices.

Here is a quick view of the Old Testament practice of laying on of hands for blessing, showing authority and healing:

(Source: McClintock and Strong’s Biblical Cyclopedia) II. Classification of Biblical Uses. More particularly, the imposition of hands, in the Old Testament may be divided into (1) the patriarchal-typical laying on of hands in blessing; (2) the legal-symbolical, in consecration to office; and (3) the prophetic-dynamical in healing.

We want to set a foundation for where laying on of hands will fit in the New Testament. Let’s look at how it was used in the Old Testament.

Old Testament laying on of hands for blessing:

Genesis 48:14: (NASB) *But Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on the head of Ephraim, who was the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh's head, crossing his hands, although Manasseh was the firstborn.*

When Jacob blessed his grandsons, his right hand offered the highest blessing. That is why he crossed his hands - he was changing the primary blessing to the younger child.

...For consecration to office and for the offering of a sacrifice:

Numbers 8:9-12: (NASB) *⁹So you shall present the Levites before the tent of meeting. You shall also assemble the whole congregation of the sons of Israel, ¹⁰and present the Levites before the LORD; and the sons of Israel shall lay their hands on the Levites. ¹¹Aaron then shall present the Levites before the LORD as a wave offering from the sons of Israel, that they may qualify to perform the service of the LORD. ¹²Now the Levites shall lay their hands on the heads of the bulls; then offer the one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering to the LORD, to make atonement for the Levites.*

The people of Israel first laid their hands on the priests which sanctioned them to lead. The congregation of the people laid hands on the priests, and then the priests laid hands on the animals to transfer the sin onto the animal for sacrifice. We can see the sanctity and importance of this type of laying on of hands in the Old Testament.

...For healing, as in Elisha healing the Shunammite's son:

2 Kings 4:34: (NASB) *And he went up and lay on the child, and put his mouth on his mouth and his eyes on his eyes and his hands on his hands, and he stretched himself on him; and the flesh of the child became warm.*

We have clear cut examples of laying on of hands here, this being is a foundation for Christians too. How did Jesus use this action?



Jesus himself continued this Old Testament approach by laying hands on others

Jesus demonstrated the blessing aspect with the little children:

Mark 10:13-16: (NASB) *¹³And they were bringing children to him so that he might touch them; but the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, Permit the children to come to me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. ¹⁵Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all. ¹⁶And he took them in his arms and began blessing them, laying his hands on them.*

This is such a tender picture of Jesus blessing the innocence of the children. Here he applies the blessing aspect of the laying on of hands.

Jesus demonstrated the healing aspect at the house of Simon and several other places:

Luke 4:40: (NASB) *While the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to him; and laying his hands on each one of them, he was healing them.*

But Jesus did not always physically touch the people he healed. He performed long-distance healings with the Syrophenician woman's daughter (Mark 7:24-30), the Centurion's servant (Matthew 8:5-13) and the Capernaum official's son (John 4:46-54). So the laying on of hands was not required for him to heal.



However, when Jesus did lay his hands on some, it was done intentionally as a carryover to show authority - much like it was done in the Old Testament.

In a very symbolic way, he led the apostles to a demonstration of the consecration (setting apart for God’s work, dedication) to office by clearly preparing them for God’s spirit which would give them authority.

While Jesus would not physically be there to pronounce the leadership of the eleven, the spirit would make it obvious:

Acts 1:4-5: (NASB) ⁴Gathering them together, he commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, Which, he said, you heard of from me; ⁵for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the holy spirit not many days from now.

Right before his ascension to heaven, the gesture in this next verse seems like he is going to do the laying on of hands action. Jesus started the motion...

Luke 24:50: (NASB) And he led them out as far as Bethany, and he lifted up his hands and blessed them.

...and at Pentecost, the holy spirit “completed” the motion:

Acts 2:3: (NASB) And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them.

Jesus raised his hands and now the holy spirit would rest upon the disciples, completing the motion and possibly showing an indirect laying on of hands. The spirit gave them authority - they had God’s holy influence and direction built into them through God’s holy spirit descending upon them.



We want to be Christlike.

If Jesus blessed people in this way, should we do this as well?

While we want to be Christlike, we are not capable of doing what Jesus did. We are not capable of conferring blessing the way he did. We ARE capable of communicating, fellowshiping, co-laboring and encouraging others, but we are not capable of doing what our Master did on earth. Remember, he was filled with God’s spirit and was the Master. We need to look at that with awe and respect and think about what we can take away from these lessons.

Lessons learned from the Laying on of Hands:



This activity had a strong Jewish background and was used regarding godly blessings, appointments and actions.

Jewish Christians clearly recognized its significance and authority.

Jesus followed in the Jewish pattern with an even higher focus.

His use of laying on of hands was yet another bridge between the Old and New Testaments.

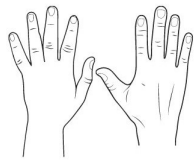
We have a basis in the Old Testament that Jesus brings into the New Testament. The laying on of hands has a rich heritage in the way God deals with us. We need to pay attention to these lessons.



With such clear Jewish laying on of hands groundwork, do we get a consistent usage of it in the New Testament?

As we shall see, the short answer is no; the New Testament lacks a consistent application of the practice. What we do have standing in the place of consistency, is variety. The instances in which laying on of hands is used spans several aspects of the things necessary to establish the legitimacy of Christianity. We will be looking at the laying on of hands as a basic, fundamental introduction to establish the legitimacy of Christianity.

We will see three examples where the laying on of hands was used to prove the authority of Christianity.



Establishing the AUTHORITY of Christianity

Example 1: The establishing of deacons in the church



The apostles were overworked trying to care for the physical and spiritual needs of all, especially the widows, so they told the brethren:

Acts 6:3-6: (NASB) ³Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. ⁴But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word. ⁵The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the holy spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. ⁶And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they **laid <2007>** their hands on them.

Laid: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #2007 *epitithemi*;
to impose (in a friendly or hostile sense)

To impose sounds “imposing,” overwhelming and powerful! When we impose our hands on something, we show our agreement and authority to approve, or that we back something. This should be a respectful imposition.

Laying on of hands was used here by the apostles to publicly demonstrate the acceptance of a decision that the whole congregation made. It also showed the responsibility given to the deacons who were being separated out for a specific service. The apostles were using an action this Jewish Christian group would easily recognize. They are laying their hands on them after fasting and praying to show approval that these are the individuals sanctioned for this specific work.



Does this mean we are supposed to do this in our local churches to decide who will serve us? Is the congregation supposed to lay their hands on our clergy?

What kind of answer to this question does the Bible give us? We can make the mistake of seeing something written in Scripture and think we should do it too. While the Bible records this practice being used in the early church, they do not teach that congregations should be doing this today. This incident did establish the need for such servants to help with the physical needs as well as others to take care of the spiritual needs of a congregation.



We, however, do not have the apostolic authority to lay our hands on those chosen for this service.

We are given a different way to choose our church servants. It has a similarity but is distinctly different:

Acts 14:21-23: (NASB) ²¹After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, ²²strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith... ²³ When they had **appointed <5500>** elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

Appointed: Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance #5500 *cheirotoneo*; from a compound of #5495 and teino (to stretch); to be a hand-reacher or voter (by raising the hand), i.e. (generally) to select or appoint: King James Version translates this word as choose, ordain

To put it simply, the congregation elected their spiritual leaders from within their church by raising their hands in a vote.



Uncovering what biblical church organization and leadership look like



Here we have a principle put in place that we can follow and learn from: the *raising of the hand* rather than *laying on of hands*. It is similar but distinctly different. We follow these principles given to us and learn lessons from the establishment of Christianity.

The early church required apostolic power to fit the church with those who would serve it best and establish it quickly. They needed to appoint deacons to help serve the needy in the church, thus freeing the apostles to serve the spiritual needs. Today, we are supposed to scripturally require the showing of acceptance and approval in the choosing or election of officers in our Christian churches.



Lessons learned from the Laying on of Hands:

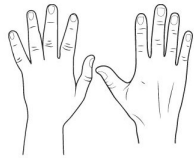
While the literal laying on of hands established servanthood within the brotherhood, it did not remain a necessary process.

The voting we are still instructed to do does express an imposition of the hand and will of the voter.

By raising our hands, it is imposing (in a positive way), saying we are in favor of this. This still has to do with the hands but is different from the laying on of hands. Why? The laying on of hands was used to establish the need for deacons - it gave the early church the authority to choose these needed servants. It was a visible acknowledgement that God (through the apostles) recognized this need.



We carry on the practice of choosing church leaders through the raising of our hands in a vote. We do not have the authority nor the need to lay on hands like the apostles did. We are not establishing a new practice; we are continuing a principle given to us in this early practice.



Establishing the AUTHORITY of Christianity

Example 2: Simon the Magician wants to pay for the power to lay hands on others to give the holy spirit

The second example of laying on of hands showing legitimacy and authority is when Simon the magician wants to pay for the power to lay hands on others to give them the holy spirit. His account begins in Acts 8:9 and is worth reading for homework. Simon had become a believer after hearing Philip preach the gospel in Samaria.

People were responding to Philip’s teachings but were not receiving the holy spirit. The Apostles Peter and

John were sent to the area.

We pick up the account as they prayed:

Acts 8:17-21: (NASB) ¹⁷Then they began **laying** <2007> their hands on them, and they were receiving the holy spirit. ¹⁸Now when Simon saw that the spirit was bestowed through the **laying on** <1936> of the apostles’ hands, he offered them money, ¹⁹saying, Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I **lay** <2007> my hands may receive the holy spirit. ²⁰But Peter said to him, May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! ²¹You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God.

Laid: Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance #2007 *epitithemi*; to impose (in a friendly or hostile sense)

Laying on: Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance #1936 *epithesis*; an imposition (of hands officially)

Laying on, while coming from the same root word as “laid” or “lay,” has a little different definition. It is an imposing or putting forth of authority.

Why did Simon want this gift? This is talking about the begetting of the spirit, the in-dwelling of the spirit in individuals. Laying on of hands was publicly used by the apostles to confer the holy spirit on individuals. It was a public acknowledgement that these individuals had opened their hearts to following Jesus and were being given the influence of the holy spirit in their lives. This does not mean it has to always happen this way.

HOMEWORK ACTS 8
 Learn more about Simon the Magician
 Episode 1211:
 Is the Devil in the Details of My Life?

 **Episode 946:**
How Can I Get the Holy Spirit?

What the holy spirit is, what it does, who gets it and why

 **Episode 1188:**
Do We Have the Purpose of the Holy Spirit Backwards?

Distinguishing God's power from our own desires in our daily life



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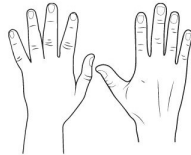
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Does this mean we are supposed to lay our hands on people who have accepted Jesus so they can receive the holy spirit? If the apostles did it, shouldn't we be doing it?

No, because we are not the apostles. They were given established apostolic authority, power and selectivity to choose who would be given God's spirit. We have not been given this same authority as the apostles.

There is no scriptural basis giving us the same authority from God that the apostles had. We do not have the authority to lay our hands on others to give them the holy spirit, based on Scripture. We are not given the authority to establish new traditions. Just because the apostles did this does not mean we can do it.



Establishing the **AUTHORITY** of Christianity

Example 3: Paul lays hands on the believers at Ephesus



Believers in Jesus in Ephesus had been baptized into John's baptism of repentance but did not have knowledge that Jesus had a separate baptism.

When the Apostle Paul finds them, he teaches them further:

Acts 19:5-7: (NASB) ⁵When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the holy spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying. ⁷There were in all about twelve men.

Laying on of hands was used primarily by the apostles and those appointed by them. Jewish Christians would have an understanding that the laying on of hands was a symbol of spiritual authority.



Were only the apostles able to miraculously bestow the holy spirit by the laying on of hands or otherwise?

Yes, with one possible exception of Ananias and Saul that we will discuss shortly.



Peter and Cornelius

The gift of the holy spirit received *without* the laying on of hands

Now the opposite experience: Peter traveled to see Cornelius, who would be the first Gentile convert to Christianity.

Upon meeting Cornelius and his household, Peter preached Jesus to them:

Acts 10:44-48: (NASB) ⁴⁴While Peter was still speaking these words, the holy spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. ⁴⁵All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the holy spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. ⁴⁶For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter

answered, ⁴⁷Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the holy spirit just as we did, can he? ⁴⁸And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days.

Peter did not lay hands on Cornelius or anyone else in this instance. This was an historic moment in time. Cornelius must have been in awe for the privilege to come into Christ.

There was no laying on of hands here - was it because this was not a Jewish audience? These Gentiles would not have had any background or understanding in laying on of hands from an Old Testament understanding. Maybe it is good in this case that the miracle did not come through Peter and instead had a heavenly sign.

Further, this was not about apostolic authority, nor was it about any public demonstration of the power of the gospel. This was about Gentiles coming to Christ for the very first time. God’s plan was to make it clear that He drove the expansion of this calling to the Gentiles through the Lord Jesus and him alone. *Peter was simply the messenger.* It was clear that Peter spoke the words and God, through Christ from heaven, gave the spirit. Peter was the messenger they could look up to and learn from, but it is important to have the distinction of what happened in this instance.

This shows it was not necessary to lay hands on someone for them to receive the holy spirit.

This is why we say it is not consistent in the New Testament. Though just because it is not consistent does not mean it is not important.

Lessons learned from the Laying on of Hands:



While the literal laying on of hands was sometimes used to open some to receive the spirit by the apostles, it clearly was not a constant necessity.

We know God begets with His spirit whomever He calls and accepts. The examples of apostolic authority remind us of the fact that the Gospel of Jesus Christ was first and foremost delivered to the world through the apostles.



Is apostolic authority the same as apostolic succession which is practiced in the Catholic Church and the Church of England?

These are two very different things. While we see apostolic authority clearly taught in the New Testament, there is zero scriptural evidence of apostolic succession. We have to be very careful with this. Just because they did it does not mean we can. While apostolic authority is scriptural, apostolic succession is not.

Even if laying on of hands is not for the common Christian use, the examples we are seeing are truly inspiring!

Are there deeper lessons to learn in the exploration of healing through the laying on of hands?

The act of healing both in the Bible and in the world is a massive subject. We can affirmatively say that the Christian healing in the early church was clearly miraculous. However, there is mounting scientific evidence of the healing power of touch. While this is completely different than biblical healing, it is worthy of notice.



We have all been affected by COVID-19 and the things that make us most human was taken away - our personal interactions with each other, being able to physically touch. Putting our hands on someone's shoulders, hugging, holding hands - these can be very calming and loving. Anyone who has had a massage to relieve stress can attest

to the power of touch. God created our skin with millions of receptors that send messages to the brain. Touch is known to reduce heart rates, lower blood pressure and reduce stress levels. It is well known that babies not held in orphanages have a greater number of behavioral problems and do not grow to their expected height and weight. This is just how we were made - we are tactile. Touch is important.



When my wife and I get together with close friends from church, we hold hands to pray at mealtime. We become connected in a very physical and emotional way. This is very moving to us.



Jonathan and Julie, you both have been to my mom's house for Sunday dinner. It is legendary! There are so many people at a massive table. When we have the prayer for the meal, everybody holds hands like at Jonathan's. It is connecting.

While touch is an important aspect of our lives, it is not what the Scriptures are talking about when they speak of laying on of hands.

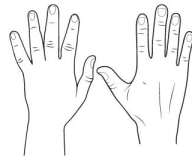
We know that Jesus healed by laying on of hands:

Mark 6:5: (NASB) *And he could do no miracle there (in Nazareth) except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them.*

We also know he certainly did not need this gesture to heal:

Mark 5:34: (NASB) *And he said to her, Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your affliction.*

This shows us that while Jesus often did heal with laying on of hands, he also healed without touching someone. There is this practice in the ministry of Jesus, but it is not consistent. He healed both with and *without* the laying on of hands.



Ananias and Saul

The authority to lay hands came directly from Jesus.

There is one unique New Testament example of the laying on of hands that seems to capture being healed, bringing the holy spirit and recognizing the authority being given to the individual. Ananias had a vision of Jesus who told him to seek out Saul of Tarsus and lay hands on him. Ananias was confused and likely afraid of Saul, who had been severely persecuting Christians.

While Ananias was NOT an apostle, his authority came directly through instructions from the resurrected Jesus:

Acts 9:13-18: (NASB) ¹³But Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to your saints at Jerusalem; ¹⁴and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name. ¹⁵But the Lord said to him, Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine, to bear my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; ¹⁶for I will show him how much he must suffer for my name's sake.

Ananias was worried and questioned Jesus for good reason - Saul had caused the Jewish Christians great suffering. Jesus answers, assuring Ananias that he will show Saul how much he must suffer for his sake (for the sake of spreading the gospel of Jesus around the known world). Jesus turns the argument around and tells him Saul will suffer for Jesus the way the Jewish Christians have had to suffer for Jesus' sake at Saul's hands. This changes the way Ananias sees this whole event.

¹⁷So Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the holy spirit. ¹⁸And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he got up and was baptized;

In this vision, Jesus tells Ananias to lay his hands on Saul of Tarsus. Ananias had the unique privilege of healing, baptizing and recognizing Saul of Tarsus as a chosen instrument of Jesus. All three of the uses of this action in the New Testament were represented.

The laying on of hands here was to exhibit the authenticity of Saul's call:

- First to Saul himself, the “Pharisee of Pharisees” - as a Pharisee, he would understand the Law and see the significance of this action.
- Then to Ananias as the messenger of Jesus - he would also recognize the authority given here by the laying on of hands. Plus, he would know that an unusual honor was bestowed upon him to be this messenger.
- Later to the body of Christ - Saul (later called Paul) was a newcomer with a bad reputation among Jewish Christians. This would give him the sanction of Jesus and the extra authority to take on the role of apostle.

Saul was well-versed in Jewish Law and customs. He is blind at this point, but he would *feel* the laying on of hands and recognize this as conveying authority; with Saul's Jewish background, he would realize this was coming from God.

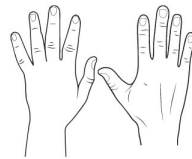
...the Lord Jesus...has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the holy spirit. ...and he regained his sight, and he got up and was baptized - we are not specifically told whether or not he received the holy spirit through the laying on of hands, but he was healed.

This shows the validity of Paul’s appointment as an apostle. The other 11 apostles had the spirit come to rest upon them at Pentecost. Jesus commands Ananias to be the instrument of the spirit resting on him just like the others.



Clear evidence to prove Paul or Matthias as the 12th Apostle

This is a dramatic example - maybe *the* most dramatic example in the New Testament - of the laying on of hands because it entails all three purposes of the uses of laying on of hands. We do not know if he received the holy spirit immediately because of the laying on of hands or whether he received it upon his baptism. But we do know the laying on of hands opened the door for those things to happen. It indicates specifically that something new was happening - a new apostle was being appointed and needed to be recognized.



Paul

Healing using the laying on of hands

Paul was being sent to Rome as a prisoner and was shipwrecked. He and all on board survived and swam to the Island of Malta.

They were cared for by Publius, a leading citizen of that Island:

Acts 28:8-9: (NASB) ⁸And it happened that the father of Publius was lying in bed afflicted with recurrent fever and dysentery; and Paul went in to see him and after he had prayed, he laid his hands on him and healed him. ⁹After this had happened, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases were coming to him and getting cured.

Again, we have laying on of hands for healing. Why here? Perhaps to physically show the authority of the apostle to these people who likely did not even know anything about the gospel. They lived on an island and in a relatively closed society. They were somewhat isolated.

...the rest of the people on the island...getting cured:

(Source: Bible Commentary by David Guzik) This word for healed is not the customary word for a miraculous healing. The word more literally means, “to receive medical attention.” It may be that Luke (who was a physician according to Colossians 4:14) served as a medical missionary on Malta.



If they were not Jewish, why was there a laying on of hands?
Why would the miracle not come directly from heaven?

This is a good question - previously we were saying this was a symbol especially for those with a Jewish background who would recognize the significance. Maybe this was to show them that this healing did not come from *their* gods. This would verify that when the Apostle Paul prays and lays his hands on and heals this individual, the source comes from Jesus, the one Paul was talking about. It could not come from their gods, as Paul had no affiliation with their false gods.



Peter

Healing *without* the laying on of hands

On the other side of the issue, the Apostle Peter demonstrated a clear authority that *did not* need laying on of hands, as his reputation and the gospel were well-established:

Acts 5:14-16: (NKJV) ¹⁴And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, ¹⁵so that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them. ¹⁶Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

Peter followed the pattern of Jesus for healing. Similar to Jesus' ministry, it says *they were all healed*. We see that pattern here, but without the laying on of hands. It was not a necessary action. It only shows up in certain circumstances and for a specific purpose.

In the Old Testament, laying on of hands showed God was with them through His servants, the priests. It was brought to the New Testament to say that God was behind the many different ways His chosen messengers used to spread the gospel in all of these different ways.

Lessons learned from the Laying on of Hands:



While the literal laying on of hands was sometimes used **to bring healing**, it obviously was not necessary in order for miraculous healing to occur.

Again we see that this physical action was used to deepen the understanding and appreciation of those who received the gift of healing.

Laying on of hands had a purpose but was not a necessity.

The power of miraculous healing is beyond us. In New Testament times, the laying on of hands helped that power of healing to be understood.

With all of this said, is laying on of hands something we should do to authenticate the authority of fellow Christians?

This New Testament practice (authenticating the authority of fellow Christians, like Ananias did for Paul) was not very common. When it did take place, it seemed to be in very specific circumstances for very specific reasons. We need to observe the “what” and the “why,” and then see what the lesson teaches and in which direction our instruction should lead us.

We want to be very focused in this final segment as we look at the ways laying on of hands authenticated authority. We will be looking at the brotherhood at Antioch laying hands on Paul and Barnabas at the start of Paul’s first missionary journey and Paul’s transfer of his work to Timothy at the end of Paul’s life:

1



TWO UNIQUE SITUATIONS

The brotherhood at Antioch laying hands on Paul and Barnabas at the start of Paul’s first missionary journey

2



Paul transferring his work to Timothy near the end of Paul’s life

1

The New Testament laying on of hands was occasionally used as a symbol of a unified group conferring authority (meaning approving and passing of) upon specific individuals.

This is similar to the appointing of deacons we discussed earlier:

Acts 13:2-3: (NASB) ²While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the holy spirit said, Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. ³Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

This was the beginning of Paul’s first missionary journey. Notice it says, *Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul*. Paul had not yet been proven to be the strong authority he eventually became. He was still being tested by the brotherhood here. Through guidance of the holy spirit, he and Barnabas were being sent out to establish churches. The brotherhood in Antioch were clearly showing their support and blessing through this laying on of hands.

This was a formal commissioning of them, granting them the mission of going out to spread the gospel. And just a note: this is the second time we see hands on Paul. Remember Ananias first laid hands on him to heal his blindness when he was called Saul. Here again he has hands laid on him now for a different purpose.

This event was to confer the blessing from those at Antioch that these two individuals were going out on a missionary journey to set up churches. Again, this was a new and different situation that needed the clarity that said *this is the will of God*. The laying on of hands was a very outward way for God through Jesus to say: *This is how I am going to spread My gospel*.



The second unique situation was the three examples of the laying on of hands in connection with Timothy.

Paul begins his first letter to Timothy with a focus on Timothy’s special calling of service:

1 Timothy 1:18-19: (NASB) ¹⁸*This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you fight the good fight, ¹⁹keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith.*

There is a foreshadowing of Timothy’s role, with the reference to *the prophecies previously made concerning you*. But notice how the Apostle Paul is insistent that Timothy always remain focused and diligent. He is telling Timothy that he has something special working within him - different from most others. But even Timothy could have lost his faithfulness if he did not focus on it. ANYONE can lose what they are given if they are careless! This was the message from Paul to Timothy who was going to play a massive role as Christianity would continue.

Suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith - can you imagine if our faith was shipwrecked, how lost we would be? We would drown!

Example #1: Paul gets more specific later in the letter:

1 Timothy 4:11-16: (NASB) ¹¹*Prescribe and teach these things. ¹²Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe. ¹³Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching. ¹⁴Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the **laying on of hands** by the presbytery (elders or apostles; by some authority). ¹⁵Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress will be evident to all. ¹⁶Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.*

Paul is being specific near the end of his first letter to Timothy. The gift of prophecy was used in relation to Timothy and the role that would be set before him to maintain what Paul had started. He tells Timothy of a *spiritual gift bestowed on you* (this was the age of gifts of the spirit such as speaking in tongues, prophesying, etc.) by those in authority. This was serious. Paul tells Timothy he must live up to this role. It will take work, and he will have to pay attention and remain focused. The laying on of hands authenticated that Timothy was playing a very important role.

Example #2: Paul concludes his letter with the same focus he began: You, Timothy, are called to a serious level of responsibility within the flock. Be wise!

1 Timothy 5:20-22: (NASB) ²⁰*Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning. ²¹I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of His chosen angels, to maintain these principles without bias, doing nothing in a spirit of partiality. ²²Do not **lay hands upon** anyone too hastily and thereby share responsibility for the sins of others; keep yourself free from sin.*

Do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily - know them well before you appoint anyone. Do not give people work that they are not cut out to do.

Paul exhorts Timothy to be strong in the right things only. *Do not let emotions get the best of you, or let circumstances override you; do not let your age get in the way. Make sure you are scripturally sound in anything and everything you do, because your role is deeply important in the gospel.*

Example #3: In Paul’s last letter before he is executed, he again reminds Timothy of the depth of responsibility he was being given:

2 Timothy 1:5-8: (NASB) ⁵For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that it is in you as well. ⁶For this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you **through the laying on of my hands**. ⁷For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline. ⁸Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God.

This is the last letter Paul writes to Timothy and also the last letter he writes before he dies. Paul reminds him that Paul laid his hands on him because Timothy is especially important to the work of the gospel.

Why did this require the laying on of hands? Paul reminds him to be strong and fearlessly lead in his absence and carry the torch of the gospel at whatever the cost. He reminds Timothy that Paul’s own course is done and that of his spiritual son, Timothy, is beginning. The laying on of hands showed that Paul was conferring much of the responsibility onto the shoulders of Timothy.

This was a very unique example. The Apostle Paul transferring his whole body of work to his successor was a one-time deal. Do we see Timothy doing this to anyone else? No. This was a unique happening with the apostle, his authority and setting Timothy up to keep the gospel moving forward.

Lessons learned from the Laying on of Hands:



While the literal laying on of hands was sometimes used **to confer authority**, it seemed to be only when there was a new development of spiritual direction.

Paul’s first missionary journey and Timothy’s special responsibility to step in when Paul died are sober examples of this.

As we look on the whole discussion of laying on of hands, let’s go back:

Hebrews 6:1-2: (NASB) ¹Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, ²of instruction about washings and **laying on <1936>** of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.

Dead works - the works of the Law. The Jewish Christians were to leave the Law behind. They were Christians now and consecrated themselves to following Jesus.

Now that they had God’s spirit, they needed to move beyond their comfort zone and fully comprehend the very basic things: You understand *repentance*, you understand *faith*, you understand the *resurrection of the dead*, you understand *judgment*, and you understand what the *laying on of hands* showed you.



It showed that the authority of God’s work is now transferred onto Christianity fully and completely in every way. That is what happened - it was the transferring to the Christian work away from Judaism. The Jewish Christians needed to understand that. This was the primary use of the laying on of hands.

Overall, the laying on of hands referenced to the Hebrew Christians is revealed to be a doctrine solemnly recognizing and following the will and leading of God through Jesus. Each and every use of this action had to do with the apostles or those directly related to them. This action was to affirm the God-honoring growth of the gospel.

The New Testament Christian applications of laying on of hands were for:

1. healing,
2. imparting the gift of the holy spirit, and
3. conferring authority.

For Christians today:

1. We do not live in the age of gifts of the spirit. Laying on of hands for the Christian is inappropriate. That is not our job.



The how and why of early Christian healing and its place today

2. We do not impart the holy spirit by the laying on of hands. This comes from God through Jesus when we dedicate our lives to Him.



What the holy spirit is, what it does, who gets it and why

3. The Bible teaches that we are to raise our hand in electing spiritual leaders from within our congregations.



Uncovering what biblical church organization and leadership look like



Should Christians be practicing laying on of hands, and is it wrong if we do?



There is no scriptural indication that laying on of hands was to be perpetually observed by Christians for any purpose. It would not be appropriate for us to try to mimic what the apostles did because we do not have the scriptural guidance showing us to do so.

We have seen the use of laying on of hands was limited in the New Testament.

However, it is appropriate to “lay hands” on someone to be encouraging, supporting, co-laboring and to provide comfort in their lives. This fits into the healing power of touch we talked about.

Laying on of hands is not for us today because its purpose was fulfilled. The gospel and its authority have already been established for thousands of years. We are to continue the work to carry it forward.

Finally, while we do not have the authority to be laying on hands, we certainly do have the authority to uphold and verify the God-honoring work of the brotherhood related to the gospel.

This is subtly shown to us by Paul when it was clear that his ministry was mainly to Gentiles and Peter’s ministry was mainly to Jewish Christians:

Galatians 2:9: (NASB) *and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas (Peter) and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, so that we might go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.*

The right hand of fellowship - not the laying on of hands; it is the extending of the hand - the imposition to say, you are doing the work in that area, I am doing the work in this area; we are doing the same work in agreement. We are supporting one another because it is the work of Jesus Christ to spread the gospel everywhere we possibly can.

While we do not have the laying on of hands, we have the co-laboring of our hands so that we can work together. We have been given the authority of God’s spirit to preach the gospel, set up churches, encourage, teach, grow, develop, help others to mature and walk with each other in our trials. This is where the working together of our hands comes into play!

The laying on of hands is not appropriate now, but using our hands to work together, absolutely!

***So, should Christians be practicing “laying on of hands”?
For Jonathan, Rick, Julie and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!***

All quoted scriptures are from the 1995 version of NASB unless otherwise indicated.



Join us next week for our podcast on February 28, 2022
Ep. 1217: Is God’s Wrath Stronger than His Love? (Part I)
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Bonus Material and Study Questions

A little more regarding Old Testament laying on of hands:

(Source: McClintock and Strong's) I. Origin and symbolical Meaning of the Act. – The practice of the imposition of hands as a symbolical act is of remote antiquity. It is “a natural form by which benediction has been expressed in all ages and among all people. It is the act of one superior either by age or spiritual position towards an inferior, and by its very form it appears to bestow some gift, or to manifest a desire that some gift should be bestowed.... The biblical signification of the imposition of hands rests, in general, on the consideration of the hand as the organ of transmission, both in the real and in the symbolical sense.

Ecclesiastes 9:10: (ASV) *Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in Sheol, whither thou goest.*

Exodus 4:1-2: (NRSV) *¹Then Moses answered, But suppose they do not believe me or listen to me, but say, The LORD did not appear to you. ²The LORD said to him, What is that in your hand? He said, A staff.*

An early example of laying on of hands (full context):

Genesis 48:14-19: (NRSV) *¹⁴But Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on the head of Ephraim, who was the younger, and his left hand on the head of Manasseh, crossing his hands, for Manasseh was the firstborn. ¹⁵He blessed Joseph, and said, The God before whom my ancestors Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, ¹⁶the angel who has redeemed me from all harm, bless the boys; and in them let my name be perpetuated, and the name of my ancestors Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude on the earth. ¹⁷When Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him; so he took his father’s hand, to remove it from Ephraim’s head to Manasseh’s head. ¹⁸Joseph said to his father, Not so, my father! Since this one is the firstborn, put your right hand on his head. ¹⁹But his father refused, and said, I know, my son, I know; he also shall become a people, and he also shall be great. Nevertheless his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his offspring shall become a multitude of nations.*

Some other Old Testament examples of the laying on of hands:

Numbers 8:10-12: (NKJV) *¹⁰So you shall bring the Levites before the LORD, and the children of Israel shall lay their hands on the Levites; ¹¹and Aaron shall offer the Levites before the LORD like a wave offering from the children of Israel, that they may perform the work of the LORD. ¹²Then 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.*

Numbers 27:18-23: (NKJV) *¹⁸And 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; ¹⁹set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation, and inaugurate him in their sight. ²⁰And you shall give some of your authority to him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient. ²¹He shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire before the LORD for him by the judgment of the Urim. At his word they shall go out, and at his word they shall come in, he and all the children of Israel with him—all the congregation. ²²So Moses did as the LORD commanded him. He took Joshua and set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation. ²³And he laid his hands on him and inaugurated him, just as the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses.*

Deuteronomy 34:9: (NKJV) *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.*

Daniel 10:16-19: (NKJV) *¹⁶And suddenly, one having the likeness of the sons of men touched my lips; then I opened my mouth and spoke, saying to him who stood before me, My lord, because of the vision my sorrows have overwhelmed me, and I have retained no strength. ¹⁷For*



how can this servant of my lord talk with you, my lord? As for me, no strength remains in me now, nor is any breath left in me. ¹⁸Then again, the one having the likeness of a man touched me and strengthened me. ¹⁹And he said, O man greatly beloved, fear not! Peace be to you; be strong, yes, be strong! So when he spoke to me I was strengthened, and said, Let my lord speak, for you have strengthened me.

What can we determine from these Old Testament examples of laying on of hands?

- In all cases, there was a sacredness and a God-driven reason involved in this act.
- Numbers 8 and 27 were really a conferring of authority or responsibility of great importance.
- Daniel, while not as specific, was a significantly strengthening experience.

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Study QUESTIONS

Ep. 1217: Should Christians be Practicing “Laying on of Hands”?

<https://christianquestions.com/doctrine/1217-laying-on-of-hands/>

See:  CQ Rewind
SHOW NOTES

1. Why did laying on of hands continue to be used in the New Testament in early Christian churches? What fundamental Christian ideals would Jewish Christians find familiar? What message did this send to the Jewish Christians? (See Hebrews 6:1-2)
2. What were the three purposes of the practice of laying on of hands in the Old Testament? How was this done? (See Genesis 48:14, Numbers 8:9-12, 2 Kings 4:34)
3. How did Jesus use the laying on of hands in the New Testament? Why would Jesus use his hands to bless and heal when he was able to heal from a long distance? (See Mark 5:34, 6:5, 7:24-30, 30:13-16, Luke 4:40, Matthew 8:5-13, John 4:46-54)
4. What was the main purpose in laying on of hands in early Christianity? What is the biblical process of choosing spiritual leaders in our churches? How is this similar, but distinctly different from, laying on of hands? Why should we not use laying on of hands to choose our spiritual leaders today? (See Acts 6:3-6, 14:21-23)
5. How did the holy spirit come to Cornelius? What was Peter’s role in the process? How was the holy spirit conferred on Cornelius’ household? Why was this act significant? (See Acts 10)
6. What was unique about how Ananias healed and baptized Paul? Laying on of hands exhibited the authenticity of Saul’s call in what three ways? Why did Jesus choose this method? (See Acts 9:13-18)
7. Why was it necessary for Paul to use laying on of hands to heal on the island of Malta, but it was unnecessary for Peter to use this technique? Are we given the authority or power to participate in miraculous healing today? (See Acts 5:14-16, 28:8-9)
8. What are two specific circumstances in the New Testament in which laying on of hands was used to authenticate authority? Why was it important that a unified group of believers in Antioch used laying on of hands to commission Paul and Barnabas’ first missionary journey? (See Acts 13:2-3)
9. What were the admonitions given to Timothy in Paul’s letters to him? Why was it so important for Paul to use laying on of hands in Timothy’s case? (See 1 Timothy 1:18-19, 4:11-16, 5:20-22, 2 Timothy 1:5-8)
10. What did the laying on of hands show to the Jewish Christians? Laying on of hands was used for what three purposes in the New Testament? Compare those to the same purposes for how it is used today.
11. Why is it inappropriate today for Christians to use laying on of hands? What are the appropriate uses of touch to encourage our fellow Christians? (See Galatians 2:9)
12. What authority has God given to true Christians today? How are you lending your hands to help the brotherhood to co-labor for God and spread His message to mankind, or what could you do more of?