

THE LAYING OF HANDS

By Denver Cheddie

HOME

In many churches today, people horde to the altars not to repent of their sins or cry out to God, but to seek the hand of the power evangelist or "anointed" man of God. Their hope is that he would lay hands on them and their problems would all go away – they would be healed, made financially prosperous, get some anointing, and I don't know what else. First we will examine whether there is a scriptural case for any transference of spirit or anointing or blessing when hands are laid, then we will look at the various purposes of laying on of hands.

Transference of spirits?

Some believe that when hands are laid, there is a spiritual transfer of anointing. They claim it is like a dead battery being charged by a live one. Just to reinforce this, in practice, when hands are laid, some people jump, oscillate, vibrate, buckle, fall and roll. Personally I could care less how others react as long as it does not affect me. I am more interested in what the Bible says, not what people experience. Remember the deaf and dumb spirit of Mark 9:26.

Numbers 11:16-29

16 And the LORD said unto Moses, Gather unto me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom thou knowest to be the elders of the people, and officers over them; and bring them unto the tabernacle of the congregation, that they may stand there with thee. 17 And I will come down and talk with thee there: and I will take of the spirit which *is* upon thee, and will put *it* upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with thee, that thou bear *it* not thyself alone. 24 And Moses went out, and told the people the words of the LORD, and gathered the seventy men of the elders of the people, and set them round about the tabernacle. 25 And the LORD came down in a cloud, and spake unto him, and took of the spirit that *was* upon him, and gave *it* unto the seventy elders: and it came to pass, *that*, when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied, and did not cease. 26 But there remained two *of the* men in the camp, the name of the one *was* Eldad, and the name of the other Medad: and the spirit rested upon them; and they *were* of them that were written, but went not out unto the tabernacle: and they prophesied in the camp. 27 And there ran a young man, and told Moses, and said, Eldad and Medad do prophesy in the camp. 28 And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of Moses, *one* of his young men, answered and said, My lord Moses, forbid them. 29 And Moses said unto him, Enviest thou for my sake? would God that all the LORD'S people were prophets, *and* that the LORD would put his spirit upon them!

God took of the spirit that was on Moses and placed some on the 70 elders. It does appear to signify some sort of transference. But it must be noted that in this instance, Moses laid hands on no one. It was purely an act of God to sanction and anoint these 70 men to help Moses. Secondly 2 elders who were not even invited to the Tent of Meeting also received of the Spirit. God freely gives His Spirit and he uses different means to do it.

Numbers 27:18-23

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. 21 And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall ask *counsel* for him after the judgment of Urim before the LORD: at his word shall they go out, and at his word they shall come in, *both* he, and all the children of Israel with him, even all the congregation. 22 And Moses did as the LORD commanded him: and he took Joshua, and

set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation: 23 And he laid his hands upon him, and gave him a charge, as the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses.

According to the KJV, when Moses laid hands on Joshua, some of his 'honour' came upon him. The NIV uses the word "authority". Considering the fact that the purpose of Moses laying hands was to give Joshua a charge or to commission him in front of everyone so they would recognize his leadership (Deut. 34:9), I think the NIV renders a better translation. Moses commissioned Joshua. This was God's means of sanctioning him and letting the people know that God's authority rested on him to lead them. There was no transference of anything.

Luke 8:43-48

43 And a woman having an issue of blood twelve years, which had spent all her living upon physicians, neither could be healed of any, 44 Came behind *him*, and touched the border of his garment: and immediately her issue of blood stanchèd. 45 And Jesus said, Who touched me? When all denied, Peter and they that were with him said, Master, the multitude throng thee and press *thee*, and sayest thou, Who touched me? 46 And Jesus said, Somebody hath touched me: for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me. 47 And when the woman saw that she was not hid, she came trembling, and falling down before him, she declared unto him before all the people for what cause she had touched him, and how she was healed immediately. 48 And he said unto her, Daughter, be of good comfort: thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace.

Virtue went out of Jesus when a woman touched his garment. It is clear that power was transferred from Jesus to heal the woman. This is not at all difficult to understand since Jesus is God. However this text is used to "prove" that the anointing is transferable to clothing and other objects. Consequently I have friends who have prayer cloths and sacred oils from TV ministries that were supposedly anointed by the TV evangelist. Tell me, how is this different from superstition?

The reason the gospels were written was to present Jesus as being distinct from any other person, not to set a precedent for all men. It does not mean that we can transfer the anointing to physical objects. In Acts 19:12, Paul's handkerchiefs were used to heal people. But the Bible specifically calls it special or extraordinary miracles. Since when is the extraordinary the norm? It would be revealing to see the results of those ministries which use prayer cloths and other such gimmicks. Once in every thousand cases, they produce a positive testimony which could very well have been attributed to some other cause than any miracle. I believe we fabricate too many miracles. God does not need our help.

Some people even take this "transference of spirit" to the other extreme. They are very careful of whom they allow to lay hands on them, since whatever spirit that person has might come upon them. This is such garbage. This belief betrays an utter lack of confidence in the God they serve. The Greater One is in me than the one in the world, no demon could come on me by accident. I am a son of God, not a son of Sceva (Acts 19:14).

The Biblical Practice of Laying of Hands

Invoking of Blessings

The laying of hands was a custom of the Jews that dated back to Genesis. Jacob laid hands on his children and pronounced various blessings on them (Gen. 48:17). Laying of hands was done to invoke blessings on someone.

Even in the NT, Jesus laid hands on children to show His approval of them (Mt. 19:15).

OT Sacrifices

The practice later became authorized under the Law. In the OT sacrificial system, the priest would lay his hands on the animal being sacrificed, symbolically to transfer the sins of the people to the animal (scapegoat) (Lev. 16:21). There was no physical or spiritual transfer of sin, it was purely symbolic. Surely this is not needed today. The true fulfillment of the OT sacrifices of course was Christ's atonement.

Healing

There are many NT examples of Jesus and the apostles laying hands on people for healing. Actually the fact that people requested Jesus to lay hands on them suggested that this was the traditional accepted means of imparting healing. But does that apply to us today? The disputed Mark 16:18 states that all believers could lay hands on the sick for healing. Also in James 5:14, we are to call for the elders who would pray for us anointing us with oil. It is hard to anoint someone with oil without touching them (laying hands). Surely it is not wrong to lay hands on someone while praying for their healing, is it? But point of contact is not needed for healing to take place. It is God who heals even without human contact. To suggest that contact is needed to transfer the healing power is absurd at best.

Imparting the Holy Spirit

There were times when laying of hands was the means by which God gave to people the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:17; 9:17; 19:6). It was by no means the only means (Acts 10:44). So the laying of hands was not always necessary for the impartation of the Holy Spirit. In any case there is no transfer of the Holy Spirit from person to person, since it is God who freely gives of His Spirit (Luke 11:12). No man has any monopoly on God the Spirit.

Commissioning

In Acts 13:3 Paul and Barnabas were commissioned by prophecy and the laying on of hands. Paul called it the right hand of fellowship (Gal. 2:9). It was a sanction of approval. Through the laying of hands Timothy received "the gift". This most likely refers to one of the gifts of the Spirit associated with his calling. Comparing 1 Tim. 1:18; 4:14 and 2 Tim. 1:6, Timothy received the gift by prophesy and the laying on the Paul's hands. Later on the elders also laid hands on him. There is no transfer from Paul to Timothy since God gives gifts as He pleases (1 Cor. 12:11). What most likely happened is that Timothy received his commission together with the prophesy and the laying on of Paul's hands. This was very much how Paul received his calling. God gave him the gift, but through prophesy he came to know when it was time for him to fulfill his call, and through the laying on of hands, he received the sanction of the relevant authorities.

Conclusion

Some people interpret Hebrews 6:2 to mean that laying of hands is a fundamental doctrine of the church. I disagree. I believe in the context of Hebrews, where the New Covenant in Christ is constantly being contrasted with the Old Covenant, the fundamental principles of Heb 6:1,2 refer to the rudimentary elements of Judaism. It is upon this foundation, Christianity is built. However laying of hands was practiced by Christ and His apostles. I believe it can still be used today when praying for healing, praying for people to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, and for commissioning of ministers. I do not believe that the scriptures teach anything about transference of spirit or anointing, and laying of hands was never used for such purposes in the Bible.

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