

## Laying on of Hands Frank Borg

The '*laying on of hands*' is a crucial and foundational doctrine of the Church of God (Hebrews 6:2). It is a doctrine with profound meaning and significance, so we must know it and deeply understand it!

What exactly does the 'laying on of hands' represent and how is it applied in God's true Church?

As we shall see from Biblical examples of the '*laying on of hands*', this ceremony symbolizes a *transfer* or an *assigning* of "something". The *hands* (of God's servants) which are used in the ceremony are not important, but there is something significant and special each time the *laying on of hands* takes place. At the outset, it is imperative to understand that the authority for this ceremony comes from God (Num.27:18) and the *laying on of hands* ceremony is performed by one of His servants as a *visible sign*. As already mentioned, the physical hands don't actually do anything! It is God, through the power of His Holy Spirit that does the transferring and the assigning! The ceremony of the *laying on of hands* is the endorsement and confirmation of God's purpose.

When God was delivering His nation out of the land of Egypt, Aaron and the righteous leaders that followed him *laid their hands* on certain of the sacrificial animals. Let us take a look at an Old Testament scripture which demonstrates this '*laying on of hands*' ceremony: "And Aaron shall *lay both his hands* upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness: and the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited: and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness" (Leviticus 16:21-22).

In this case, the '*laying on of hands*' ceremony was a sign and a reminder to the unconverted nation of Israel that, at Christ's second coming, He will *assign* blame to where it belongs; all of man's sins will be *transferred* upon the head of Satan the Devil.

Another example found in the Old Testament that demonstrates the '*laying on of hands*' was to fulfill the biblical *transfer* of birthright promises: "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. And he blessed Joseph, and said, God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long into this day. The Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads, and let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth" (Genesis 48:16-18). The United States and Britain would not have received the birthright blessings if it were not for the *laying on of hands* ceremony. The *transfer* and *assigning* that took place in this ceremony shows just how important the *laying on of hands* is!

The '*laying on of hands*' ceremony was used in the Old Testament for the *transferring of authority* during the *ordination* of servants to a position of responsibility: "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*; And set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation; and give him a charge in their sight. And thou shalt put some of thine honour upon him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient. And he *laid his hands upon him*, and gave him a charge, as the Lord commanded by the hand of Moses" (Num. 27:18-20, 23). In any ordination, authority is *transferred* through the *laying on of hands* ceremony.

Moses laid his hands upon Joshua as a *symbol*, or a *sign*, that God Himself was placing Joshua in an office of responsibility.

The New Testament also records a number of examples of the '*laying on of hands*' ceremony. At this juncture, it is appropriate to emphasize that the phrase '*laying on of hands*' in the original Greek language (Strong's 1936 and 5495) indicates that this ceremony symbolizes the '*transfer of power*'. This complements what we have already seen and will help clarify further illustrations and examples of this most important ceremony.

In the New Testament we see examples of the *laying on of hands* performed immediately after baptism: "When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had *laid his hands upon them*, the Holy Spirit came on them..." (Acts 19:5-6). This *laying on of hands* ceremony is always performed by an ordained minister. It represents the *transmittal* of a portion of His Holy Spirit, by God Himself, to the individual who just got baptized (Acts 8:17).

The ordination into the office of deacon, or deaconess, is done through the *laying on of hands* ceremony (Acts 6:5-6). Before ordination, God requires that certain qualities and fruit are displayed in the individual's life: "Likewise must the deacons be grave [*honest and honorable*], not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre, holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these be first proved, then let them use the office of deacon, being first found blameless". God *transmits* a further portion of His Holy Spirit to the individual being ordained. This takes place during the *laying on of hands* ceremony and helps the individual to perform and carry out *physical* tasks related to the smooth running of the congregation.

Acts 13:1-3 documents examples of men being ordained into the office of minister – this is an *aspiritual* office of service to God and His people: "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.' Then, having fasted and prayed, and *laid hands* on them, they sent them away." Before ordination of a man into the ministry, deep meditation, close contact with God, and fasting takes place by God's servant. God ultimately decides every ordination, and the ceremony is then performed through His servant (Num 27:23; Acts 8:18-20). God, through fruit, circumstances and other conditions (1 Tim 3:2-7) will indicate when the time is right for an ordination to take place. One can only be placed into the ministry through the *laying on of hands* of the elders before him. It is crucial that this authority and government in God's Church is recognized - it can be traced back to the foundation of the Church when the original twelve apostles were called, chosen and ordained by the Head of the Church, Jesus Christ.

1 Tim 5:21-22 indicate that diligence and care is to be taken before an ordination takes place, making sure that God's will is being carried out: "I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality. *Lay hands suddenly on no man...*". Scripture clearly demonstrates that ordaining a person into the ministry should never be done in haste, indicating the implications and seriousness of this ceremony.

God wants to see fruit in the life of a man (Matt 7:16) before the ordination into the office of an elder: "A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober [*self controlled and discreet*], of good behavior [*orderly and modest*], given to hospitality, apt to teach, not given to wine, no striker [*argumentative or contentious*], not greedy of filthy lucre, but patient, not a brawler, not covetous, one that rules well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity... not a novice [*new convert*] ... moreover, he must have a good report of them that are without" (1 Tim. 3-7). With ordination comes the *transmittal* of

authority (Acts 13:1-2). God *assigns* a further portion of the Holy Spirit to the individual who has been chosen by God to serve in this spiritual capacity. The office given to an ordained person is bestowed upon the individual by God through the *laying on of hands ceremony*.

Other examples given in the New Testament of this ceremony include anointing during sickness (James 5:14). We see an example of this recorded in Luke 4:40: "Now when the sun was setting, all they that had any sick with divers diseases brought them unto him; and he *laid his hands on every one of them*, and healed them". This example demonstrates the proper steps we should take as we rely on God for healing (James 5). We are to go to the ministry and ask them for anointing. The minister will then, in faith, anoint with oil and laying on of hands. Following these steps shows that we are truly submitting our bodies to Jesus Christ and, in faith, relying on God for intervention and healing. It also shows obedience which God is looking for in His people. As *hands are laid* on the individual during anointing, the minister humbly asks God to *assign* healing to that individual according to His will and timing. This is carried out in fulfillment of James 5:14-15.

The *laying on of hands* is also performed on other occasions, such as the 'blessing of the little children'. This is a custom which is performed once on young children and traditionally takes place during the Feast of Tabernacles. "Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should *put his hands on them*, and pray" (Matt 19:13). During this ceremony, the minister asks God to *assign* special care and protection over the young child that is being blest.

The *laying on of hands* is also administered during the marriage ceremony. Marriage is God-ordained and represents a loving God-plane relationship. The *laying on of hands* during the marriage ceremony demonstrates an acknowledgment that the marriage-covenant is an agreement which is bound and sealed by Almighty God who resides in heaven. Authority is *transferred* unto the wedded couple whereby the husband is to lead his wife in love, and the wife is to submit herself unto her husband (Gen 2:24-25; Eph. 5:22-25).

What a blessing that God's Church understands the deep meaning and significance of this most vital and basic doctrine of God! Now it is up to us to inculcate this truth in our minds, see that it is applied the way God intended, and ensure that we give this ceremony the proper respect it is due!