

12. LAYING ON OF HANDS

DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

The laying on of hands is a ceremony performed by the ministry on special occasions such as for the receiving of God's Holy Spirit after baptism, at ordination and for other special purposes. It symbolizes one's submission to God and to the Church which is God's instrument on earth. Such a ceremony is the occasion of God conferring a spiritual gift, blessing or service to the person.

DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

Hebrews 6:2 calls the laying-on-of-hands ceremony one of the fundamental doctrines of the Church. It is an old and important religious ceremony with both the Old and New Testaments being replete with examples of its use.

The "laying-on-of-hands" is the act of one person in religious authority putting his hands upon the head of one on whom a blessing, a special religious office or some other spiritual gift is conferred. It is usually accompanied by a prayer that delineates the nature of the spiritual blessing and asks God to grant it to the individual.

The significance of this act is to show that the individual person is being set apart for a spiritually related reason. It shows that he is being acknowledged as qualified for a particular task or being given a blessing out of the ordinary. As such the laying on of hands is often a public ceremony in front of members of the congregation.

The act of laying on of hands itself has special symbolic meaning. It shows that God works through fallible human beings in administering church government. When a minister lays his hands upon a person to confer the spiritual blessing or gift, he does so as an agent or representative of God fulfilling a position of spiritual authority within the Church. Likewise, one who submits to this ceremony during ordination, after baptism, during anointing for healing or under any other special circumstances is acknowledging the authority God has placed in the Church and ministry and shows submission to this authority. The minister, of course, is not an agent of God on his own, but only through the Church. He does not administer his own authority but only that of the Church as empowered by God. The minister does not confer anything of his own by the laying on of hands, but only symbolizes what God confers.

The earliest examples of the use of the ceremony are to be found in the Old Testament. Jacob laid his hands upon the heads of Ephraim and Manasseh to pass along this birthright and the promises God made to his grandfather, Abraham. When God chose a physical priesthood, they were set apart for their holy duty by the laying on of hands. Only a tribe specially consecrated by this special ceremony could officiate in God's temple (Num. 8:9-11, 14-15). Likewise, Joshua also had hands laid upon him to show God had set him apart to become the new ruler of Israel (Num. 27:18-19).

The New Testament shows through command and example various times when the laying on of hands should be used by the Church. It is most often used by the ministry for the conferring of the Holy Spirit upon a person after baptism in accordance with Acts 8:15-17 and other scriptures. At this time the minister places his hands upon the head of the newly baptized individual and prays to God, asking Him to give the new convert His Holy Spirit. Thus, through this ceremony, a person is set apart as a chosen, begotten son of God.

James 5:14, Mark 16:18 and other scriptures show that God's ministers should lay hands upon and anoint with oil those who come to them to request God's divine healing for their sicknesses. Again the act symbolizes that God will set aside the person for special consideration or attention and illustrates God's government through His Church and ministry.

Another application of the laying on of hands ceremony is during the ordination of elders, deacons and deaconesses. All these offices are positions of authority and responsibility within the Church. Ordination by the laying on of hands is God's way of setting apart and conferring upon a human instrument God's Church government (This implies that the individual has learned how to serve faithfully under this authority himself – Acts 6:6; 13:3.)

The Church also uses this ceremony as a tradition of the Church in the blessing of little children in accordance with the example set by Jesus in Matthew 19:13-15. God's ministers on special occasions place their hands upon, and ask God's blessing for, small children who have never before undergone this blessing ceremony. It symbolizes the child's sanctification by God for special physical protection and spiritual blessings.

During the marriage ceremony, the officiating minister of the Church of God places his hands upon the joined hands of a couple while they kneel with him in prayer. The symbolism of this act is that the couple call on God to enter this marriage and set them apart as special to Him as well as to each other. They are also making a covenant with God to follow His laws.

The laying on of hands is a simple but deeply symbolic ceremony which has special application in special circumstances as explained above. It is of critical importance to Christianity, because it shows that God works and deals with mankind through other human beings whom He chooses and sets apart for His purpose, though they are fallible and imperfect.

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This publication is intended to be used as a personal study tool. Please know it is not wise to take any man's word for anything, so prove all things for yourself from the pages of your own Bible.

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