

Laying On of Hands

Acts 6:3-6

Introduction: Much confusion exists with the first century practice of the laying on of hands. Some present day religions make a practice of laying hands upon their members. Television programs display “faith healing” ceremonies. Therefore, many people mistakenly believe that miraculous wonders are imparted to this day.

What does the Bible say concerning the laying on of hands?

I. The first recorded example of the laying on of hands is found in the Old Testament. Moses laid his hands on Joshua per the command of God (Num. 27:18, 23; Deut. 34:9). The result was the imparting of a noteworthy amount of wisdom upon Joshua.

II. In the New Testament, the laying on of hands has a more prominent role.

A. Timothy received a gift through the laying on of Paul’s hands (2 Tim. 1:6; 1 Tim. 4:14).

B. The seven in Acts 6:3-6 had hands laid upon them by the Apostles. We have record of two of these men, Stephen and Philip, being henceforth able to perform miracles (Acts 6:8; 8:6).

C. Twelve men received gifts of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of Paul’s hand (Acts 19:1-7).

D. Those in Samaria received the Holy Spirit through the laying on of Peter’s and John’s hands (Acts 8:14-17). Notice two things:

1. Though the Samaritans were baptized, they did not possess the Holy Spirit until the Apostles laid hands on them.

2. The imparting of the Holy Spirit was done in person.

III. The laying on of hands which imparted the Holy Spirit was an ability not given to just any Christian.

A. In all four of the previous examples, an Apostle was always involved in the imparting of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of their hands.

B. In fact, we find a conversation in Acts 8:18-24 concerning the ability to impart the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands.

1. Simon was already a Christian (Acts 8:13), and he was among the Samaritan Christians that Peter and John imparted the Holy Spirit through the laying on of their hands (Acts 8:14-17). In other words, though Simon was a Christian who had the Holy Spirit, he did not have this ability to impart the Holy Spirit to others. Yet, he wanted it.

2. Notice Simon's observation in Acts 8:18. "*Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostle's hands the Holy Spirit was given.*" What Simon did not understand was the fact that only the Apostles had the ability to impart the Holy Spirit. He was condemned for coveting this gift (Acts 8:20). Therefore, we understand two things:

a. The ability to lay hands on another was a gift separate from other gifts of the Holy Spirit.

b. Only the Apostles possessed the gift to impart the Holy Spirit.

3. The imparting of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands was done in person. The Apostles had to physically be present.

a. Paul mentions this concept (Rom. 1:11).

b. Remember Philip in Acts 8 baptized many people and performed miracles but none of them had the Holy Spirit until Peter and John gave it to them.

IV. A few exceptions to the above circumstances.

A. In Acts 2:1-4 and Acts 10:44-46 the Holy Spirit was bestowed on men directly without the laying on of hands. Acts 1:5 calls this the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

B. In Acts 9:17, Ananias who was not an Apostle, laid hands on Paul who received the Holy Spirit. However, we should note that the Lord sent him for the expressed purpose to heal Paul (then Saul) both physically and spiritually (Acts 9:10-19).

C. In other words, the exception to the provision that the Apostles had to personally lay hands on someone in order for them to obtain any gift of the Holy Spirit was an exception only by the direct conduct of the Lord Himself.

V. The purpose of the imparted gifts of the Holy Spirit.

A. These gifts were not toys, rewards for good behavior or provisions for personal gain and comfort. Their purpose was to confirm the word of God (Mark 16:20; Heb. 2:4).

B. This is evident when Paul left Trophimus sick in Miletus (2 Tim. 4:20). Yet, we know Paul could have healed him if it wasn't for the purpose of the gifts (Acts 28:1-10).

C. The gifts have fulfilled their purpose (1 Cor. 13:8-10). God's word which is the perfect has come (James 1:25). There remains no purpose for the gifts of the Holy Spirit today.

Conclusion: When the Apostles died, the imparting of the gifts ceased; there remains no abilities to perform any gifts or miracles that were once given. We now have our Bibles and the words contain therein have been confirmed.