

The Laying on of Hands

First of all we know that this is in the New Testament and that it is there in several connections. Firstly it is there in connection with those who had acknowledged the Lord Jesus as Saviour and as Lord; who had come into the place of confessing Christ, and in their case it was associated with their baptism.

In Acts 8 you have the case of the Samaritan converts. They received the Word of God which was preached, were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, and Peter and John laid hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.

The next is in the case of Paul himself, at his conversion when Ananias went in to him and said: "*Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost*", putting his hands upon him, and he received sight, arose and was baptized. (Acts 9:17,18).

The next occasion is Acts 19 when Ephesian disciples who had evidently under the ministry of Apollos had some teaching with regard to the Lord Jesus, but had never been fully instructed in the matter of the Holy Spirit, and were not enlightened as to the fact of the Holy Spirit's coming. Paul explained the whole thing to them and the meaning of baptism, and after they had with new understanding received the truth, they were baptized and Paul laid his hands upon them and they received the Holy Spirit.

The first occasion then is when those who confess Christ are baptized. Then we have another occasion in the definite recognition of those whom the Lord has called and appointed to specific ministry. It is not ordaining, in the generally accepted sense of that word. The Holy Ghost ordains. Man does not ordain. Man never ordains anybody, but the Lord calls upon His spiritual people who have discernment to recognize in the assembly those whom He has called for ministry, and when His time comes to send them forth, and in so doing to commit themselves, that is the assembly, to that ministry; to identify themselves with those who go out. And that is done in the act of identification, in the laying on of hands.

Barnabas and Paul at Antioch (Acts 14); and we have Paul's own words concerning Timothy, that that is what happened in his case.

The third occasion we have in James, linking us with the Gospels, in the case of anointing with oil and laying on of the hands of the elders in the case of the sick. Here you have the laying on of hands as a recognized thing and as applied for different purposes.

There is one rule which governs all the different applications and makes the testimony one, and that is the rule of identification, the law of oneness. In the case of the converts, the testimony by laying on of hands is that of the oneness of the Body of Christ; that all coming into Christ become a part of the oneness of that Body, and the assembly testifies to the oneness.

In the case of the ministry and the going forth to specific ministry, it is not departmental, detached, isolated, or personal; it is the ministry of the whole Body of Christ. Whenever one servant goes out to minister, the whole Body is supposed to go spiritually into that ministry, and commits itself thereto, and that ministry has to be regarded in relation to the whole Body, and not as someone's personal, private ministry.

The same thing applies to the sick. It is the relation of all members of the one Body, and cooperation with a sick and suffering member for that one's renewal, so that the suffering member is, by reason of the fellowship of the saints, through their representatives, called elders or overseers (whatever you like to call them); bishop is the same word in the Greek, although none of us here would dare to take the name on ourselves! But through such as are representative of the assembly, the whole assembly comes alongside of a suffering member to seek the Lord's incoming for that one's renewal and restoration. The law is the same in every case: oneness, identification.

There is something else which is also general in the whole testimony and it is the Holy Spirit.

You notice that the Holy Spirit was associated with the passages which we have mentioned, Acts 8, 9 and 19; the gift of the Holy Spirit. Now this is the thing I want to point out. The normal course of things in the New Testament was, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, be baptized, receive the Holy Spirit. That was the normal course. That, normally, would all take place right at the beginning of the Christian life. We have in the New Testament what is not the normal in the case of the Ephesian disciples. There had been a postponement by reason of insufficient instruction in enlightenment. Apollos had not given the full teaching on the Holy Spirit and identification with Christ, and what baptism meant. When Paul gave them the full enlightenment they came into the good of their faith in the Lord Jesus but that is not the normal. That is something which was by reason of a breakdown somewhere. Now today we very rarely have the normal, for this reason, that usually the teaching is not full enough, and the believer is not sufficiently enlightened and instructed as to the meaning of these things. How many new converts, for example, new believers know at the outset, right at the beginning when they believe, about the representative work of the Lord Jesus in His cross? They know about the substitutional, that He died for them. How many know He died as them; He took them to the cross; when He died they died? Further, how many know, that coming into the Lord Jesus is coming into a Body, the Body of Christ; and what that Body means? So, on the one hand the enlightenment about the thing is insufficient; on the other hand we have such conditions today as create quite an extra normal condition. If you had lived in New Testament times, and you had dared to take the Name of Jesus of Nazareth upon you, it would have cost you everything, and you would have done it at the peril of your life. As either Jew or Gentile you would have had to face the ultimate question: If I do this my life is at stake and I am to be prepared to die now for the step I take. Things would be utter, would they not, if you took a step of that kind. Suppose you knew that outside of this building there was the world, the religious world and irreligious which, if it knew you had taken the Name of the Lord Jesus upon you, would set itself against your very life. Well now, you would face the question of taking that Name seriously, would you not? And you would know it is an utter matter. That is how it was, and therefore they came into such a position of utterness with the Lord as to make possible the Lord being utter with them, and they came at once into a fulness of the Holy Spirit, which in itself believers do not know until they have been on the road for years. Very many are not baptized until they have been saved for years. In the New Testament the normal course was believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, be baptized and the Holy Spirit was given.

Now the point is this. When we believe, if our faith in the Lord Jesus is true, and we are obedient to all the light that we have, we potentially inherit all that that faith contains. We inherit the good of the representative work of the Lord Jesus as well as the substitutional, and we inherit the good of the truth of the Body, and the good of the Holy Spirit. We do not know all about it. Then the Lord begins to give us light; years after perhaps. The Lord gives us light and convicts us about baptism, and we are obedient. Well, we are not converted all over again when we are baptized; we have only brought things up-to-date. We have only taken a step spiritually back to our conversion and said, "Well, this belongs to that." Then we get light about the Body of Christ and we accept that, the testimony in the laying on of hands, the oneness of the Body, and the members

all one; identification not only with Christ individually but Christ corporately. We have gone back to what was involved in our first step. Then the matter of the Holy Spirit. We get light, we are obedient. We come into a new experience of the Holy Spirit. It only brings things back to the foundation. It was all there in the thought of God for us right at the beginning. We did not have the light but God put it to our account. He expects when we get the light that we put it into practice. God never intended that you and I should be baptized ten years after we were converted. God never intended that you and I should come into the truth of the one Body years after we were saved. God never intended we should come into the knowledge of the Holy Spirit years after we were born again. These with Him, are foundations. Hebrews 6 proves this.

Now my word here is just this, that the thing which governs all these testimonies pre-eminently is the Holy Spirit. He is the Spirit of our being born again. He is the Spirit which makes good the substitutionary work of Christ, the Spirit Who makes good the representative work of Christ, makes good the truth of the Body. Now you notice, when hands were laid on, the Holy Spirit came into evidence. We are in what is not the normal order. That happened in the New Testament, in the main, right at the beginning.

Now imagine some come to see the truth by the Spirit, and they are obedient to that truth. Does it mean that they are going to receive the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands? You friends who are going to be obedient to this testimony, are you expecting to receive the Holy Spirit? If you are you will be disappointed. If you have believed in Christ you have received the Spirit. You are bringing things up-to-date now; you are testifying to the fact that your relationship to the Lord Jesus and your relationship to all the other members of His Body involves, in itself, the Holy Spirit. You are testifying to something. Let me put it this way. You are being baptized in the water today. Does it mean that today you died with Christ? A young man when he was baptized, coming up out of the water, was asked the question: "Now where are your sins?" and he said: "In the water." Did you die with Christ today? No, you died with Christ two thousand years ago. You receive the testimony of the laying on of hands today. Did you receive the Holy Spirit today? No. Paul said to the Ephesian believers: "*Did ye receive the Holy Spirit when ye believed?*" (Acts 19:2). But that does not exempt from the testimony. The Lord waits for us to have the light, and to be obedient to the light before we come into the full good of what we have already received.

That is the value of a testimony; otherwise it would be a mere formality. That is where a lot of people are. They say that they received the Holy Spirit when they believed and what is the need of these testimonies. When the thing is done in the right realm it is not a formality. Everyone who comes into it aright says: "That day stands out for me as having brought something I never had before." Is that true in your experience? What was it that happened? It was your coming into the good of that which was yours when you believed. The testimony does not give you that, the testimony brings you into the good of it. And some have argued that you can prove it the other way — "When I believed I received everything and there is no need for me to be baptized", and they have been disobedient to the voice of the Lord in that connection and they have lost out. I have seen tragedy along that line. The Holy Spirit wanted something by which they would come into the good of what was theirs already, and they have refused that. It is very important. We are not looking for the descent of the Holy Spirit from the laying on of hands, but we are looking for the witness of the Spirit in us, that this is according to His Word, that this is in the mind of the Lord; and that witness will be for us a fulness of the Lord which we have not known hitherto. There is a release of the Lord in us which comes by obedience to every bit of the light.

That is what is the meaning, in brief, of the testimony we shall bear.