

## **The Laying on of Hands (2)**

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

*"Wherefore leaving the doctrine of the first principles of Christ, let us press on to full growth; not laying again a foundation of ... the laying on of hands" (Heb. 6:1-2).*

*"For when by reason of the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need again that some one teach you the rudiments of the first principles of the oracles of God" (Heb. 5:12).*

It is not our wish to take up this matter in any controversial way, although it may be impossible to avoid that element arising in the minds of some who read. We desire only to pass on what light we have, and be as constructive as possible. But contrasts are inevitable, and there must of necessity be a corrective factor. The present pressing in of this subject upon the notice of the Lord's people calls for some faithful and spiritual facing of it, and presentation of the truth concerning it; not, let us repeat, in the way of controversy, but for clarifying, safeguarding, warning, and building up of the "Body". It would be the best thing for us first to recognise the place which "the laying on of hands" has in the Scriptures. We leave the fuller explanation for later, and do little more than refer to the fact.

Genesis 22. Abraham was elected as head of a chosen race, and the promises were secured in him. These promises were inherited by the son who was elected by God to become the head in his generation, and were passed on by laying on of hands. Genesis 28; 27:34. This was repeated when Isaac laid his *right* hand upon Ephraim and his left hand on Manasseh. (The right hand is always the symbol of strength and honour).

Exodus 29:10-15 etc.; Lev: 1:4; 3:2,8,13; 4:24,29,33; 8:14,18; Lev. 16:21. Here we have one truth representing the many aspects of fellowship with God, namely, the identification of the person with the offering by the act of laying on of hands. The hands are the symbols or tokens of the entire man and, in, laying them on he commits himself entirely.

Numbers 8:10; 2 Chron. 29:23. Here the whole people are represented as laying their hands upon the Levites. Thus the Levites in taking the place of the firstborn sons are identified with every family in Israel, and every family is identified with them. They are in effect Israel as a "kingdom of priests", and foreshadow the whole priestly company of the saints — "*The Church of the firstborn ones*" (Heb. 12:23).

Numbers 27:16,17,18,23; Deuteronomy 34:9. Moses was commanded to appoint his successor. Joshua was appointed, and the equipment for his ministry came to him at the time that Moses laid his hands upon him.

There is another realm in the Old Testament which represents the same principles of both identification and equipment. It is that in which so frequently occurs the phrase "*The hand of the Lord was upon ...*". Usually this is connected with the Prophets. They represented God and God was with them. Their words were His words, and God stood by them. The way of expressing the wisdom, power, acts, experiences, movements, revelations, etcetera, was "The hand of the Lord — upon". See Daniel, Ezekiel, Elijah, Elisha, etc.

### **In the Gospels**

In the Gospels the laying on of hands as to its practise is confined almost solely to the quickening of the mortal body, and the bringing into blessing. Thus we have the ruler of the synagogue asking the Lord Jesus to come and lay His hand upon his sick daughter, or rather upon his daughter who "*is even now dead*".

Mark tells us (Mark 6:5) that while unbelief paralysed Him amongst His own people and He could do no mighty work in His own country, He did lay His hands upon a few sick folk and healed them.

In Decapolis they brought to Jesus a man with an impediment in his speech and besought Him *"to lay His hand upon him"* (Mark 7:32).

Again to Bethsaida they brought to Him a blind man and *"besought Him to touch him"* and *"Jesus put His hands upon him"* (Mark 8:23).

At the close of Mark's Gospel the final commission is given to the apostles and the promise is given that *"they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover"* (Mark 16:18). Similar instances are recorded by Luke (4:40; 5:13; 13;13). Then as to blessing by identification, this was the portion of the children (Mark 10:13,15,16; Luke 18:15). And finally the Lord at the time of His Ascension *"lifted up His hands and blessed them"* (Luke 24:50).

### **In the "Acts" and the Epistles**

As there was a sovereign act of God in the case of Abraham, Moses, and the Lord Jesus, without any act of man, thus constituting them "Heads" in their respectively representative capacity, so Pentecost was another such sovereign act in relation to the Headship of Christ to the Church which is His Body. No human act is connected with that initial constituting of God. God gave *"Him to be Head of the Church which is His Body"* (Eph. 1:22; 4:15; 5:23; Col. 1:18; 2:19). As such He was the Anointed Head and in the first setting up of the Church — the Body — the fact of the anointing had to be spontaneous. The House of Cornelius was the complement of Pentecost as the Gentile half of one fact — the One Body, Jew and Gentile. So there also it was spontaneous and the explanation of Peter was *"The Holy Spirit fell on them as on us at the beginning"* (Acts 11:15).

We cannot get very far until we recognise that God, apart from any act of man, has set up something and anointed that with the Holy Spirit. There are no more *advents* of the Holy Spirit from heaven, but there is a coming into and under the anointing which is upon what God has constituted. This word of explanation and warning is necessary because the truth contained in what we have just said governs everything from Pentecost onwards. *It is now contrary to the New Testament and an exceedingly dangerous thing to 'wait' for the 'coming' of the Holy Spirit. We do not wait for Him, we move into that where He is.* After Pentecost there is not a single instance of 'waiting for the Spirit'. The state created by this 'waiting' is often a psychical one which opens the door to any inrush of false spirit power and delusion. But we must return for the moment to the New Testament record of *"the laying on of hands"*. To take the matter in order it is as follows. (We include also the connection of hands with the incidents, not only the "laying on").

In Acts 5:12 Luke mentions that many signs and wonders were done by the *hands* of the apostles.

Then Peter took the lame man by the *hand* (Acts 3:7).

In Acts 6 the deacons chosen to relieve the apostles of the pressure of temporal demands were identified with the house of God in that capacity by the laying on of hands, so that their ministry was recognised to be essentially spiritual, as it proved to be, specially in the case of Philip and Stephen.

Acts 8 brings us to the case of the Samaritan converts who had also been baptised (8:16). When the apostles laid their hands upon them following or during definite prayer, the Holy Spirit came upon them. There is no mention of any peculiar manifestations or

signs in this instance, but they knew quite definitely that they had received the Holy Spirit, and Simon the sorcerer saw something.

Acts 9 brings the matter in connection with Paul at his conversion. Ananias — *not an apostle* — in obedience to a declaration of the divine sovereignty in connection with Saul, went to him and in recognition of the family truth of the house of God laid his hands upon him and said "Brother", thus identifying him with the family, and there followed restored sight, baptism, and the receiving of the Spirit. We do not know the exact order of things in this instance, but we know that connected closely with the one *were* the others.

Acts 13 sees the great transition *from* Jerusalem to Antioch in relation to the world extension of the testimony. Barnabas, a man without prejudices or personal interests is the divinely chosen link, making possible this delicate transition without a break in fellowship. The great principle that all ministry is one and not personal or separate, but the ministry of all, is brought beautifully into view in this instance. There were five men — *not apostles* — who ministered to the Lord and fasted and the Holy Spirit said to them, Separate me Barnabas and Saul unto the work whereto I have called them. 'Then when they had fasted and prayed and *laid their hands on them*, they sent them away.' So they being sent forth by the Holy Spirit. That the great apostle Paul, with all the sovereignty of God back of his election; and all the wonderful appearing of the Lord of Glory to him, and all that he had been told as to his ministry, had to go out to his life-work through an act of representative men of the assembly — not apostles, one of them probably a foreigner, is something to think about.

As to direct references to laying on of hands there remain Paul's words to Timothy on two occasions.

*"Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery (elders)"* (1Tim. 4:14).

*"Stir up the gift of God that is in thee through the laying on of my hands"* (2 Tim. 1:6).

We do not know whether these references are to two different events or to the same. What we do know is that Timothy was equipped for ministry when the Holy Spirit operated in connection with prayer and the laying on of hands, and that prayer was prophetic in its substance as to what Timothy would especially fulfil as to the nature of his ministry.

We should be justified, we feel, in linking in 1 Corinthians 12, where gifts of the Spirit are referred to as equipment for ministry to the building up of the Body of Christ. It is not said so, but from these last references of Paul and the other Scriptures cited, we may find good reason to believe that these divine gifts within the "Body" were connected with the laying on of hands. There is one thing that we note as we pass on, it is that Paul did not repudiate this procedure at the end of his life, any more than he repudiated baptism as no longer belonging to the dispensation. If he had come to a time when what are called "ordinances" (we do not endorse the term) no longer applied, then as an honest man he ought to have said so, and not referred to their validity as he did to the end. His last letters, Ephesians, Colossians and Timothy refer to baptism and the laying on of hands rather with emphasis than with dismissal.

There remains but the passage of Scripture, Hebrews 6:1-2, with which this consideration started. It is clear from the context that the apostle was handicapped in his writing by the unduly delayed maturity of those to whom he wrote in Heb. 5:11, he deplored that after so long a time it was still necessary that someone taught them the "first principles". Then in Hebrews 6 he urged that the "first principles" should be settled once for all and that they should go on to full growth. He then enumerated those "first principles" and called them "foundations". They are six, and the fourth is "the laying on of hands".

So far we have just brought forward the Scriptures which refer to the subject. Before we go on to the interpretation in the light of the fuller range of truth, we feel it necessary to say one or two things by way of bringing the matter into its right place. Let us stress very definitely the principle that the value of any one truth depends upon it being kept in its right relationship to all the rest of the truth, and of it being kept in its place. This we shall show more fully later. If this law is not observed then the results will be perilous to spiritual life. These results are for the most part of three kinds.

The "laying on of hands" can be, and very often is, only A MERELY RELIGIOUS ORDINANCE gone through without any living inward spiritual foundation or outcome. An institution as a part of a recognised order, and unless family traditions or common religious acceptances are to be violated or ignored it is expected to be observed. It is a religion. Then secondly, the "laying on of hands" with a certain implied or interpreted meaning can be, and very often is, entered into and received in real and genuine religious sincerity. The aspirations are good. The intentions are the purest. There is reverence, solemnity, and devoutness. In such cases the surroundings and accompaniments — building, vestments, tone, music, aestheticism — leave a lasting impression, and the people concerned always refer to that day as the most solemn in their lives, and think of it as having been a great "blessing" to them. Faithfulness requires that we shall point out that this also is capable of being a great peril. We must never judge the spiritual value of things by their impressiveness or the measure of religious emotion which they bestir, mysticism and aestheticism are so often confused with spirituality. There is a very wide gap between being devoutly, passionately, sincerely, abandoned to religion and being truly born from above, born anew of the Holy Spirit. The artistic temperament can conceive and produce the most sublime things and pass through the most acute religious ecstasies. In the realm of religion the artistic and emotional have put more people in a false position than any amount of false doctrine. Indeed false doctrine has captured multitudes because it has been dealt out in beautiful, fascinating, impressive, captivating forms and dress. The Serpent depends upon such for the success of his first delusion. Not religion but regeneration is the only safe foundation of any 'experience'.

Much more ought to be said in this connection, and a whole disclosure of the difference between soul and spirit is necessary to make things quite clear, but we must go on, and when all is said we shall see that not an experience on an occasion but the abiding and ever-growing inward knowledge of the Lord Himself is the proof and test of the genuineness of such experiences.

There is however, a further realm in which the laying on of hands can be

### **Positively Dangerous and Damaging**

This is the realm where things are psychic in a more intense degree. In this realm the thing is usually something in itself, and is detached and given an importance and emphasis which is bound up almost entirely with the *experience* which may come by it — the experience as such. It is a matter of getting something, experiencing something, feeling something, bringing spiritual things into the sphere of the senses. The accompaniments and associations of the imposition of hands here are usually high-tensioned atmospheres charged with emotion, worked up in some way, by singing, loud praying, manipulation and movement or pressure of the hands or fingers, and an assertion of soul-force. Very often a mediumistic state is produced, and too often a condition of seeking to possess something is thought to be an exercise of faith. The soul is stretched out or else it sinks into an unnatural quiescence and passivity. Such a state exposes those who are concerned to an inrush of spiritual forces which are not the Holy Spirit. The sensations may be very wonderful and seemingly subliminal, other supernatural

elements may be present. Even the Lord Jesus may be praised and extolled. This may go on for a considerable time and then, without explanation, it may all go just as suddenly as it came. Immediately it is gone there is thrust into the mind the suggestion of the sin against the Holy Spirit, which, of course, is unpardonable. When once this suggestion has found lodgement and has been accepted or entertained, the individual is under the awful and deadly weight of condemnation with which it is almost impossible to deal. All those blessed means of saving grace which are for the sinner who has never known the Saviour are robbed of their virtue by this lie. The Blood, the Word, the love of God, the Advocate; none can help when things are "unpardonable". And so the delusion works. It is worth the devil's while to allow and even inspire an extolling of the Lord Jesus if he can secure the ground for such a fatal blow at Him by undermining faith in every one of His virtues by a lie and deception. This is the state of not a few dear children of God today, and it is one of the most difficult and exhausting tasks which the Lord's servants have presented to them. Indeed, the enemy loves nothing better than to get the laugh at the servants of God by presenting them with these "cases". The chief weapon against him has been paralysed by unbelief, namely, the precious Blood. But it is not only in those concerned directly that the enemy gains his advantage, but because of such things abounding, many of the Lord's people repudiate the whole ...

(Message incomplete).