

LAYING ON OF HANDS.

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The laying on of hands, for the blessing and setting apart of persons for religious services, was a practice in primitive Bible times, by those said to have received divine guidance. Jacob laid his hands upon Manasseh and Ephraim and blessed them. (a) And Moses, by the command of God, laid his hands upon Joshua, and blessed him as his successor, in the leading of the Israelites. (b)

This ordinance has become almost universally discarded by modern worshipers, as something of no value, especially in some of its most important services; nevertheless, we have the most ample and satisfactory proofs that it was believed in, taught and practiced by Jesus and the Apostles, as something of importance, and of very essential benefit to believers.

I. THE HOLY GHOST IS GIVEN BY THE LAYING ON OF HANDS.

We read in the book of Acts, that one Philip went down to Samaria and preached the word, and the people received his teachings and were baptized.

"Now when the Apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: who when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Ghost, for as yet he had fallen upon none of them; only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. *Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.* And when Simon saw that through *laying on of the Apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given*, he offered them money, saying, Give me this power, that on whomsoever I *lay hands*, he may receive the Holy Ghost." (c)

"And when Paul had *laid his hands* upon them, the *Holy Ghost came on them*; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied." (d)

Comment upon these texts could not make them plainer; for the first, and most palpable thought that impresses the mind while reading them is, that the Apostles *laid their hands* upon those who had been baptized, that *they might receive the Holy Ghost*; and that they did, through obedience to this ordinance, receive the Spirit. Not before baptism, but after; not without the laying on of hands, but with. Will any one take the responsibility of saying that those who were baptized would have

received the Holy Ghost, otherwise than by the laying on of hands; or that they received it before baptism? Was not the laying on of hands a means; and the receiving of the Holy Ghost, the result?

The mission of Peter and John to Samaria was, that the baptized believers there might be confirmed by being endowed with the Holy Spirit. If they could have received the Spirit without prayer and the imposition of hands, the mission of Peter and John was of no consequence—a journey in vain—a superfluous labor.

To them was committed the responsible duty of teaching "all nations" to "observe all things" whatsoever Jesus had commanded them. (e). And they taught the people of Samaria to observe the laying on of hands for the receiving of the Holy Ghost; the people obeyed the injunction, and thus received the promise made by John, when he said,—

"I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance; but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire." (f)

When the laying on of hands, as taught in the New Testament was made obligatory upon believers, that they might become the recipients of the joys of the Holy Ghost, it was enjoined as a duty by commandment of the highest authority; and he that will show his faith by his works, and thus manifest the love of God in his heart, will keep this ordinance.—For Jesus says:—

"If a man love me, he will keep my words." (g). For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments." (h).

I do not wish, here, to speculate with reference to the philosophical relationship existing between those officiating and those receiving this ordinance; for it is sufficient for me to know that the Bible teaches it. Still, to obviate the difficulties that may arise, in the minds of some, (as this is peculiarly a speculative age), and to answer the queries of others, I will say, that it is not held that the Holy Ghost is given by the power and will of those officiating, as though they by some magnetic influence emanating from themselves, were able to communicate to, and influence believers, as some are wont to believe; but that the Holy Ghost is given of God,

(a) Gen. 48: 14. (b) Num. 27: 18-23. (c) Acts 8: 14-19. (d) Acts 19: 6.

(e) Matt. 28: 20. (f) Matt. 3: 11. (g) John 14: 23. (h) 1 John 5: 3.

through prayer and the imposition of hands. Man is the instrument to officiate; God is the great source from which the Spirit comes. Hence, it is written: "They spake in tongues and prophesied."

"And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us." (i).

Paul wrote to Timothy, saying:—

"Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery, [body of Elders]." (j).

Again he wrote:—

"Wherefore I put thee in remembrance, that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands." (k).

Here, we are informed that Timothy received a gift by prophecy, through the laying on of hands.

Paul, being a man of God, laid his hands upon Timothy and prayed; God, respecting his prayer, sent down the Holy Ghost upon them, and Paul was enabled to predict concerning Timothy's future usefulness, if faithful, and manifest his most excellent gift. Not by any wisdom or subtle power belonging to Paul's nature, or the attendance on that occasion of his deceased friends, but by the Holy Spirit of God. For

"Prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." (l).

II. IT IS A DOCTRINE OF CHRIST.

If it can be shown that Jesus taught the laying on of hands as a doctrine—a commandment—this ought to satisfy the most doubting mind, who believes the Bible, of its essential character and binding force at the present time. For what Christian is there, that can believe that the Savior would impose a doctrine upon men which was of no validity; or which was not essential to their good? Paul wrote:—

"Therefore [not] leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith towards God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment." (m).

Here, the laying on of hands is declared to be a principle of the doctrine of Christ. And Jesus said:—

"My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me." (n).

"For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I

should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting." (o).

The teachings of Christ were the commandments of the Father, wherein is promised "life everlasting." Hence, Paul, who did not shun to declare the whole counsel of God, wrote concerning the gospel,

"I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." (p).

By revelation, then, Paul was taught that the fourth principle of the doctrine of Christ, was the laying on of hands; as found in the sixth chapter of Hebrews. And if it was considered to be of such great importance and benefit that God revealed it unto men for their good, is it not singularly strange that it is almost universally discarded by the late reformers? Who can say that it is not binding now? To reject it is to be left destitute of the Holy Spirit, that giveth utterance.

III. LAYING ON OF HANDS, FOR THE RECEPTION OF THE HOLY GHOST, WAS PRACTICED BY THE EARLY CHRISTIANS AFTER THE DEATH OF THE NEW TESTAMENT WRITERS.

Tertullian, who wrote in the latter part of the second century, says that,

"After baptism, succeeds the laying on of hands, with prayer, calling for the Holy Ghost."

Cyprian, a writer of the third century says:—

"Our practice is, that those who have been baptized in the Church should be presented, * * * that by prayer and imposition of hands they may receive the Holy Ghost." (q).

Chrysostom, who wrote in the fourth century, says,

"That confirmation * * gives us the Holy Ghost."

Augustine, who also lived in the fourth century, says that they

"Still do what the Apostles did, when they laid their hands on the Samaritans and called down the Holy Ghost upon them."

And Mosheim, and Gahan, Church historians, say in substance that, the laying on of hands for confirmation and reception of the Holy Ghost was practiced in the third century. (r)

These authors are quoted, not because the New Testament does not speak sufficiently plainly and positively on this subject, but to show that primitive Christians, who lived immediately after the death of the Apostles, taught and practiced what the Apostles enjoined,—that this doctrine was of universal belief and practice, and

(i) Acts 15 : 8. (j) 1 Tim. 4 : 14. (k) 2 Tim. 1 : 6. (l) 2 Peter 1 : 21. (m) Heb. 6 : 1, 2. (n) John 7 : 16.

(o) John 12 : 49, 50. (p) Gal. 1 : 11, 12. (q) Epistle Ixxiii. (r) Gahan's C. H. page 93. Mosheim's C. H. vol. 1, page 91.

received with as much faith and reverence, as any ordinance taught in the gospel.

And if, as has been shown, the Apostles, with their inspired wisdom and authority, instituted confirmation by the laying on of hands for the reception of the Holy Ghost, may any one with impunity slight and condemn it? Are we competent to determine better than they, what we—*“must do to be saved?”*

IV. WHY DOES BAPTISM PRECEDE THE LAYING ON OF HANDS?

For the best of reasons. The Holy Ghost will not dwell in the heart of the sinner. For this reason, John came preaching “the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins;” with the promise, “He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.” (s)

None could expect to receive the Holy Ghost, save those who attended unto the “baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.” Hence, Ananias said to Saul, the convicted sinner,

“And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins.” (t).

Peter said to the multitude who had not received the “washing of regeneration,” “Be baptized every one of you in the name of Jusus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.” (u)

The Holy Ghost was promised after the remission of sins; and baptism was declared to be “for the remission of sins.” No wonder then that Peter and John did not lay hands on the Samaritans until they had been baptized by Philip!

Jesus said, “I will send you another comforter, which the world cannot receive,”—sent expressly for the Disciples, who had been “translated,” by the remission of their sins, “from the power of darkness into the kingdom of his dear Son.” (v)

The Disciples were not of the world, but had been created anew in Christ, by “putting off the old man, and putting on the new,” by the remission of their sins; and were therefore entitled to the Holy Spirit, by the laying on of hands.

V. FOR THE BLESSING OF CHILDREN.

“Then were brought unto him little children, that he should put his hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them. * * * And he laid his hands on them, and departed thence.” (w).

Jesus said of little children, “of such is the kingdom of heaven.” (x). They are without sin, having been made alive by the power of the atonement; hence, they are holy without baptism, having committed no sin, and are therefore entitled to the blessing of the Spirit.

The perversion of this doctrine and custom may be seen in an ordinance now of such universal prevalence, that of *sprinkling infants*; called by moderns, baptism. Not a single text can be found in all the Bible, to warrant and sustain this custom. “Of such,” said Jesus, “is the kingdom of heaven.” And to those of mature years he said, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” Of course, with their children. Jesus says, little children are “of the kingdom of heaven.” But these modern worshipers present their children to be sprinkled, as though they, by this practice, could make them any more the children of the kingdom than they were before, holding that such as receive not this rite, and should die in such a state, would be lost; as though God was such an unjust being as to save, or think more of a child that was sprinkled, than of one which was not; when neither one nor the other, could have, or manifest any desire as to whether it would or would not be sprinkled.

VI. FOR THE HEALING OF THE SICK.

“And he could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them.” (y).

“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.” (z).

“And he laid his hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.” (a).

“They shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.” (b).

It is here very plainly taught that the Savior practiced the laying on of hands for the healing of the sick, and that the sick were by this healed.

It is also just as plainly taught, in the sixteenth chapter of Mark, that the *believers*, in every age and time, should be blessed with signs, “They shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover.”—Hence, James says:—

“Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.” (c).

The regular order seems to be, as here set forth, that the Elders are to be sent for, and they are to anoint with oil, lay their hands upon and pray over the sick; and the promise is, “the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise them up.”

James here but confirms what Jesus had

(s) Matt. 3: 11. (t) Acts 22: 16. (u) Acts 2: 38. (v) Col. 1: 13. (w) Matt. 19: 13, 15. (x) Matt. 19: 14.

(y) Mark 6: 5 (z) Luke 4: 40. (a) Luke 13: 13. (b) Mark 16: 18. (c) James 5: 14, 15.

before taught, when he said, "these signs shall follow them that believe; in my name they shall cast out devils, * * they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover." Thus showing that this ordinance and blessing was not confined to a favored few, at any one time or place; but was made to all believers; hence the language, "Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders," etc. Hence, all believers in Christ have equal claims upon him, in the hour of distress and pain, for the restoration of their health, through the prayer of faith and the imposition of hands. And although this promise is not enjoyed by many professed Christians of the present day, it is not because it is not taught and promised to the believers, but because their prayers, for some reason, do not seem to be efficacious when made in behalf of the afflicted. And now, for a long time, this custom has been discarded; not because there were no sick and diseased who needed to be healed; but, in the language of the great reformer, Mr. Wesley, the Christians "turned heathen again," and had only a "dead form left." The power of God was not made manifest among them.

VII. ELDERS ARE AUTHORIZED TO LAY ON HANDS.

The New Testament does not speak very plainly concerning the *duty* of Elders, yet it is quite certain that they held a very worthy and responsible position, for Paul exhorted them, saying,

"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God." (d).

And Peter wrote to the Elders,

"Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof." (e).

Thus we learn that the Elders had the chief charge of the flock in the absence of the Apostles, and were authorized to "feed them." They convened in council with the Apostles in investigating important matters, and had a voice with them. (f) Indeed, the office of an Elder seems to be so nearly related to that of an Apostle, that the Apostles themselves frequently used the term Elder to designate their own office. In fact, an Apostle is an Elder. For Peter says:—

"The Elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an Elder." (g).

John commenced his Second and Third Epistles, "The Elder unto the elect lady."

(d) Acts 20: 28. (e) 1 Peter 5: 2. (f) Acts 15: 6. (g) 1 Peter 5: 1.

"The Elder unto the well beloved Gaius."

The Elders had important duties to perform, but they are not mentioned in detail. But if there is one thing made clearer than another, it is that they were authorized to lay on hands.

James says:—

"If any are sick among you, let him call for the Elders of the church; and let them pray over them; anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord."

And Mark informs us, that the praying for the sick is to be accompanied with the laying on of hands. Hence, "they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover." (h)

We learn from this, then, that it is the duty of the Elders to pray over, anoint with oil, and lay hands upon the sick.

Philip was authorized to baptize the Samaritans, but probably not to lay on hands that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For if he could have done so, why was it necessary for Peter and John to be sent down to attend to that ordinance? The most reasonable conclusion that could be drawn from this transaction is, that Philip was not authorized to lay on hands; but that Peter and John held that authority; hence they went to do that which Philip could not do. Because Peter and John were the ones who officiated on this occasion it has been supposed, even by the learned, that the Apostles only, were authorized to lay on hands. But this is a mistake. The case of the Samaritans is the only one mentioned where the Apostles were called upon to render that service.

Ananias came to Paul and said:—

"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." (i).

This instance utterly defeats the idea that none could lay on hands but the Apostles; for Ananias was not an Apostle, but in all probability an Elder. And he was especially sent, that Saul might receive his sight and be filled with the Holy Ghost; hence, he put his hands upon him.

Hence, we learn that others than the Apostles, laid on hands for the receiving of the Holy Ghost, and the healing of the sick; and every proof goes to show that they were Elders.

To present the authority for the doctrine of "laying on of hands," these lines have been written. And we think there can be no difference of opinion arise, when viewed dispassionately and with candor.

(h) Mark 16: 18. (i) Acts 9: 17.