

THE ANOINTING - Anointed Hands

Hebrews 6:1-3, ***“Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.”*** Notice that the Bible considers the "laying on of hands" as part of the basic ABC's of doctrine (code of belief of Christianity) - along with repentance and baptism.

The first account in the Bible of "laying on of hands" is found in Genesis 48. Joseph brings his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh before his father, Israel (Jacob), when he was old and soon to die. In verse 20 it states, ***“So he **blessed** them that day.”*** Note, this was an account of a blessing placed upon children! Jacob, laid his hands on the heads of his sons, and then blessed them in the name of the Lord. But a unique example of the blessing of the “laying on of hands” is found in the New Testament. We read in the book of Mark, that Jesus gave special spiritual power (or authority) to His twelve disciples. ***“So they went out and preached that people should repent. And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick, and healed them”*** (Mark 6:12-13). Jesus' last instructions to His disciples was: ***“And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons... they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover”*** (Mark 16:17-18).

The “anointing oil” and the “laying on of hands,” and how God uses them is truly amazing. However, it is important that we understand their spiritual significance, and apply them the way God intended. Solomon warned, ***“There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death”*** (Proverbs 14:12). With that in mind let's find out why the laying on of hands is considered a fundamental Christian “doctrine.”

In our opening passage (Romans 6:1-3), we are told to mature in Christ by not laying again the basic foundational doctrines. One of these doctrines is "the laying on of hands." However, "laying on of hands" in this passage is a symbol of the **eternal blessing** which replaces the curse on man's fallen state - because sin was borne by Christ on the cross. Note, the laying on of hands was used frequently in Old Testament times, especially in sacrifices: the person bringing the victim (Leviticus 16:21), laid his hands on its head, confessed his sins over it, and then gave it to the priest to be offered to God. This was done that a sacrifice might make atonement for the man's transgressions. This ritual was pointing to Jesus Christ, that Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29).

Therefore, this basic doctrine has its roots in past traditions but was only fulfilled through Christ and His work on the cross. The "laying on of hands" now takes on a different dimension in that it is established on a true sacrificial system; and, by and through it, the communication of the various gifts of the Holy Spirit for the instruction of the saints and the edification of the Church. We must understand that unless Christ had taken away the sins of the world, we would get no results when praying for people. However, because every sin was placed upon the Lamb of God, and every curse has therefore been removed, our hands are now instruments of blessing. Christ's anointing flows through them!

Yet, there is a time to "lay hands on" people, and a time to "anoint them with oil" - and also a time not to! They must both be Holy Spirit led! Laying hands on people and anointing the sick are definitely acceptable things to do. Jesus said we would lay hands on the sick and they will recover, and we are also told to call the elders of the church to anoint the sick with oil and the Lord will raise them up (James 5:14-15). Consequently, both the laying on of hands and the anointing with oil produce positive results! These practices enforce the truth that we are the Body of Christ.

Jesus dwells in us, and He will use us as His Body to touch those in need (through us) - as we yield our bodies to Him. It is not that we wield the power, but that we yield to the power of Christ who is able to heal. He is the healer, we are the hands! Our ministry is rooted and grounded in the reality of the promise at the close of Matthew's Gospel, "***Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.***" Jesus is present with us wherever we are! Therefore, all we need to do is simply step out in faith, knowing that He is here, that He loves us, and that He desires to use our presence in every situation. We are His own Body, and therefore, He cannot help but manifest His presence to the person for whom we are praying.

We need not worry about how much faith we need! Faith the size of a grain of mustard seed will suffice. We need to remember, and act with the sure knowledge, that it is not our faith which transmits or effects the healing power of God. It is His faithfulness! Our faith simply opens the door, and invites Him to enter in and help Himself to our presence - that He might make our body His own. In the laying on of hands, there is much communicated to the other person. The love of God flows through the touch of one person to another. The laying on of hands can be a comfort to God's vessel, as well as the supplicant. I believe God loves us enough to seek to reveal His presence in every negative circumstance.

Now, what about anointing with oil? Oil has always symbolised God's Spirit, and it has been associated with healing. David was anointed by Samuel, and the Spirit of the Lord was upon him. The Samaritan poured oil and wine into the wounds of the assaulted traveler. That was the first aid treatment of the day. While my normal procedure for anointing is to make the sign of the cross on the forehead of the one for whom I am praying. There is nothing to prevent me from anointing of the portion of the body that is diseased. The Holy Spirit will direct me as necessary!

Remember, when we approach either method that God uses to bring healing, we must always be sure that God holds the initiative. That assurance requires that we be open to His leading. Are we to pray for this person? If so, how do we pray for this person? Do we lay our hands upon them or do we anoint them with oil? Ask the Father, "What is your will for this person?" After all, He is the healer! *Read Mark 5:23.*

Note, both anointing with oil and the laying on of hands act as confirmation of the presence of God. As you lay your hands on the sick, Jesus lays His hands on them through yours! As you anoint them with oil, the Holy Spirit moves through the outward sign to become the "inward reality" - releasing His resurrection power. In essence, we become the visible presence of the Lord for the one to whom He is ministering (blessing). The use of hands, or oil, as His hands or His touch, is a practice that sets us free to know that God is here, and that He is here to heal. Continued practice of this form of ministry enables us to do the work with God, rather than for God. Jesus told the seventy to go into every town and village where He Himself was about to come. When they got there, He was there with them (through the use of His Name). Likewise, He sends us out to heal the sick. And when we get there, He is there with us. We are not alone! As we continue to use our hands (or the oil), we come to the realisation that Jesus is **present**, and that we are the embodiment of His presence for those in need.

Jesus ministered to the sick and demonised in a great variety of ways: He spat on the ground and made mud, then rubbed it on blind eyes; He rebuked a fever; He commanded deaf and dumb spirits to leave; He even asked the person questions before and during ministry. In short, Jesus rarely ministered healing in the same way. John 5:19 tells us Jesus only did what He saw the Father doing, so we can assume Jesus was "in tune" with the Father and proceeded to heal as He was led.

Likewise, since each person we lay hands on is unique, we need to approach each opportunity with both a general "plan of action" as well as a 'hearing heart' as to what God may want to do at that time through us. There's no point in laying your hands on anyone aimlessly!

So, to end I'd like to provide a simplified three-step model that you can engage in when praying for the sick. But before each step, remember to ask the Holy Spirit to come and counsel you on what you should do. He knows you and He knows the other person's need. He also knows the Father's will in each case. Here are the three steps to follow:

1. Pray for the obvious

If someone is suffering from depression, for example, an obvious and simple prayer when laying hands on them might consist of one or more of the following:

+ "Lord, please heal and/or deliver <name> from depression, in Jesus' name."

+ "In Jesus' name, I take authority over depression and all underlying causative conditions in <name's> life and body."

+ "I command depression to leave <name> in the name of Jesus."

But allow the Holy Spirit to guide you even when praying for the obvious. The words we use, the commands we give, and the authoritarian actions we take are infused with much greater power if the Holy Spirit directs them. And remind yourself that Christ in you is the healer and that the Holy Spirit desires to reveal Christ in that situation.

2. Pray for more insight

If prayer for the obvious works (the person you've laid hands on is healed), this step may not be needed. However, you can still engage in this step to ask the Holy Spirit if there is any follow-up you or the other person needs to do. Of course, if the person is not healed, or if the person's condition is merely improved, this step may prove helpful in determining the cause(s) and possible ministry strategies. In this step, we seek specific insight from the Holy Spirit on what and how to pray. We may sense the need to pray for the obvious more persistently. Perhaps there are 'hidden' causes to the person's condition, and without the Holy Spirit's insight, those 'hidden' causes may never be addressed. Therefore, you may have to lay hands on someone again but use a different method (like anointing with oil). Be aware – spiritual receptivity is cultivated through intimacy with God. I know that all God needs is your hands, but He also requires your obedience!

3. Pray to be available

Ask God for assistance in improving your time management and your reordering of life's priorities so you can be available for ministry opportunities. Scripture is clear that we are the body of Christ, and each of us has different functions and varying gifts. However, when one is sick, we all suffer (1 Corinthians 12:26). This should encourage us to be prepared if God desires to use us in ministering healing to someone. If the sick person is an unbeliever, healing can provide us with an evangelistic entry point into their lives - as it did for Jesus and the early church. God wants us to be available – He will do the works! We are His own Body, and therefore, He cannot help but manifest His presence to the one for whom we pray. Confess, this with me, *“My hands are anointed because Christ in me reaches out every time a make myself available.”*