

**THE SCRIPTURAL ORDINANCE  
OF  
“THE LAYING ON of HANDS”  
AFTER BAPTISM,  
For the Gift of the Holy Spirit.**

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## The Laying on of Hands after Baptism for the Gift of the Holy Spirit.

QUESTION.—Why does The Old Baptist Union practise “ the Laying on of Hands, ” after baptism, seeing that other Baptist bodies appear to regard it as merely a sacerdotal form, unnecessary and useless ?

ANSWER.—We “ Old Baptists ” do not take our faith or practice from other religious bodies, whether Baptist or Pedobaptist ; our rule of faith is the teaching of the New Testament. And while we would not choose to multiply or magnify those matters upon which we differ from others, we certainly cannot regard them as non-essential or unnecessary, if they are founded upon the teaching or practice of our Divine Lord and His inspired Apostles, as set forth in the holy Scriptures.

As to the Laying on of Hands being “ merely a sacerdotal form, ” such an assertion could only be based upon ignorance, and merits the rebuke of our Lord to the Sadducees, “ Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God, ” It is true that this ordinance is practised by such “ priestly ” churches as the Roman Catholic, the Greek Church, the Armenian, Assyrian and Coptic Churches, and the Episcopal Church of England ; but this fact does not prove that it is not Scriptural and right, but rather to the contrary. If otherwise, then we should have

to reject Ordination, the Lord's Supper, and even Baptism ; because these ordinances are all upheld and professedly practised in one form or another by the very same churches.

The simple truth is, that all these ordinances, including the Laying on of Hands, were once derived from the teaching and example of the first Christian churches founded by Christ and the Apostles, as set forth in the Scriptures ; and although many changes have since been made in their meaning and mode of administration, we can always go back to the original truth if we desire to " continue steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship " ; and take as our pattern the New Testament church.

This, we Old Baptists have done, and are doing, in our practice of laying hands upon those who have been immersed, that they may receive more of the Holy Spirit. And if we are thereby mistakenly doing that which is unnecessary and useless, then Peter, John and Paul, who did the same thing were equally foolish and mis-led. But, on the other hand, if the Apostles were Divinely guided and upheld in what they did,—then, so are we. Let unbelieving critics beware how they speak of the example set by men who were filled with the Holy Ghost, lest they fall into condemnation.

We will now turn to the sacred Scriptures, and examine the foundation upon which this doctrine of the Laying on of Hands rests.

It would appear that the patriarchs in very early times laid their hands in blessing upon their children (Gen. xlviii. 14) ; and it was by Divine commandment that the priests and Elders of Israel laid their hands on the victims offered in sacrifice for the sins of the people, and also upon the scape-goat ; which were all typical of Christ, “ the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world ” (see Lev. iii. 1, 2 ; Lev. iv. 15 ; Exod. xxix. 10 ; Lev. viii. 14 ; Lev. xvi. 21, etc.).

Our Saviour, too, laid His hands in blessing upon the young children who were brought to Him for the purpose (Matt. xix. 13, 15 ; Mark x. 16) ; and both He, and His disciples laid hands upon the sick and healed them. The importance of this Laying on of Hands in Divine Healing is also emphasized in the promises of Christ to His believing children unto the end of time, in Mark xvi. 17, 18.

But when we come to the Laying on of Hands for the Divine bestowal of the Holy Spirit (which is the doctrine with which we are now dealing), we can assert with Scriptural proof, that—

**Its origin stands as firmly upon the authority of God  
Himself, as does the Baptism of Water.**

The statement of John's Gospel (Chapter i. 6, 33), sets it beyond doubt for those who believe the Scriptures, that God the Father sent John the Baptist to baptize with water. And that God Himself is the

Author of the Laying on of Hands for the conferring of the Holy Spirit, is equally proved by the testimony of Num. xxvii. 18, 23 ; and Deut. xxxiv. 9, where it reads : " Take thee Joshua the son Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay thine hand upon him. And he laid his hands upon him, and gave him a charge as the Lord commanded by the hand of Moses. " " And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the Spirit of wisdom ; for Moses had laid his hands upon him. "

Our Lord Jesus Christ did not Himself baptize anyone in water, but He commanded His disciples to do so ; and thereby was responsible for " baptizing more disciples than John " the Baptist. Even so, with the Laying on of Hands for the gift of the Holy Spirit ; there is no record that our Lord Himself practised this ordinance, but as it is included among " the foundation " truths and " the first principles of the teaching of Christ " (Heb. vi. 1, 2), and as it was practised by the disciples of the Lord, and its observance was honoured by the Holy Spirit being actually given (Acts viii. 14-17 ; xix. 1-7), it is incontestible that both Baptism and the Laying on of Hands are of great importance in the sight of God ; because He is the Author of both.

When we remember that until the Atonement of Christ, and His Ascension to obtain " gifts for men, that the Lord God might dwell among them " (Psalm lxxviii. 18), " the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified " (John vii. 39), we understand

why neither Jesus nor His disciples laid their hands, for the gift of the Holy Spirit, upon those who were baptized during our Lord's earthly ministry. And the explanation as to the source of the disciples' knowledge which led them to practise it afterwards, is seen in Acts i. 2, 3: "After that Jesus through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the Apostles whom He had chosen . . . being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God."

The Apostles "were unlettered men," and not of the tribe of Levi, or of the Jewish priesthood, and therefore must have owed to the teaching of Christ and the Holy Spirit, all they knew, and did, in their ministry.

### **Christ Himself taught the Laying on of Hands**

according to the testimony of Heb. vi. 1, 2, where it is declared to be among those foundation principles which were builded upon their faith in Christ, by the Hebrew believers. There is nothing said in Acts ii. as to the manner in which the promise of Peter at Pentecost,—“Ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost ”—was fulfilled; but as Heb. vi. 1, 2, includes this ordinance with repentance, faith and baptism, which the Hebrew Christians had accepted as the first principles of Christ's teaching, it is only reasonable to conclude that the Laying on of Hands followed their baptism. “Therefore, 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 " (Heb. vi. 1, 2).

Some writers have contended (merely because the word " Baptisms " might be rendered " washings ") that notwithstanding this " foundation " is called " the first principles of Christ " (or literally, " the beginning of Christ "), it only has reference to the ceremonies of the Law of Moses, which the Hebrews had emerged from, and left behind, as no longer required. But let such remember that Baptism is referred to as washing by both Peter and Paul. 1 Peter iii. 21, speaks of Baptism as not being for " the putting away of the filth of the flesh, " which could only be said of washing : and in Acts xxii. 16, the Apostle Paul says that at his conversion Ananias commanded him to " Arise and be baptized and wash away thy sins. " There is good warrant, therefore, for saying that by the " Baptisms " included in " the doctrine of Christ " (in Heb. vi. 1, 2), Christian Baptism is meant (of water and the Holy Spirit), and it is evident that none of these foundation truths had any connection with the teachings of the Levitical Law, because that Law nowhere taught " Repentance from dead works, " or " the Resurrection from the dead, and eternal Judgment. " As great an authority as Dr. Farrar observes upon this text, that leaving these first principles of Christ's teaching, did not mean leaving them " in the sense of neglecting or forgetting them, but in the sense of making an advance. "

After His ascension, our Lord appeared in a vision to Ananias of Damascus, and *sent him to lay hands* on Paul for the restoration of his sight, and the outpouring of the Holy Ghost. “ *And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he prayeth, and hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight. And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house ; and putting his hands on him 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* ” (Acts ix. 10-18).

**The Laying on of Hands was carefully observed by the  
Apostles and Elders of the Church, after Pentecost,  
and honoured by God when they practised it.**

As we have already pointed out, it was observed in the Jerusalem church, as is evident from the epistle to the Hebrews, where they are reminded of having laid as a part of their foundation on the doctrines of Christ, “ the Laying on of Hands ” (Heb. v. 12-14 : vi. 1, 2). This may, or may not, have taken place on the day of Pentecost ; there was ample time afterwards, in the days that succeeded, for the administration of this

ordinance, for these converts “continued steadfastly *in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship*” (Acts ii. 42).

It was considered of such importance among the Apostles that they sent Peter and John from Jerusalem to Samaria to lead the Samaritans who had so far received the Gospel, and were baptized by Philip, into further obedience. “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 were come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Ghost, for as yet He was 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*” (Acts viii. 14-17).

The Ephesian believers did not receive the Holy Spirit until they had submitted to this ordinance. “Paul, having passed through the upper coasts, came to Ephesus, and finding certain disciples, he said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost . . . When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus And when Paul had *laid his hands upon them*, the Holy Ghost came on them, and they spake with tongues and prophesied” (Acts xix. 1-7).

Paul—who had himself received the Laying on of Hands twice, first

by Ananias for healing and the gift of the Holy Spirit, and afterward in being separated to the ministry by certain prophets and teachers acting under the Lord's instructions at Antioch (Acts xiii. 1-3), exhorted Timothy, "Stir up the gift of God *which is in thee by the putting on of my hands*" (2 Tim. i, 6, 14) ; and again, "Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, *with the Laying on of the Hands of the Presbytery*" (1 Tim. iv. 14). And he further instructs him, "Lay hands suddenly on no man" (1 Tim. v. 22)—a warning which certainly had reference to this ordinance, for the early saints were not given to brawling.

So then—whatever may be said to the contrary—the New Testament teaches that the Holy Spirit was imparted by the Laying on of Hands, and God's glorious gifts followed and remained with the believer.

### **Why Not Now ?**

Those who contend that only the Apostles had the right to impose hands for the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and that the gifts of the Spirit were confined to Apostolical times, might as well reason that only the Apostles had the right to baptize, administer the communion, or even preach the gospel. And if the wondrous gifts of the Spirit were only intended for the Apostles' day, how is it that we contend for faith and divine guidance and believe that our prayers will be heard and answered as well now as then ? Surely, if we reject any part of the teaching or

promises of the covenant of grace, we have as good a right to reject the whole ; and if we contend for *some* of the ancient power and blessings, we ought to believe in and look for the enduement of *all*. Peter declared that the Holy Spirit's power, which was miraculously manifested at Pentecost, was not confined to the Apostles, but " the promise is unto you and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call " (Acts ii. 39). " Contend earnestly," says Jude (Jude 17), " for the faith once delivered unto the saints " ; and that faith led the ancients to believe in God's unchangeableness and consequent willingness to bestow His blessings and gifts—whether miraculous or otherwise—upon His people in all ages. To possess the Holy Spirit—for which all Christians contend—is to have the power by which all the miracles of the Old and New Testaments were wrought ; yet multitudes who profess to have received Him, so far from manifesting His miraculous gifts, rather deny His present ability or willingness to bestow them. Do we not now *need* these gifts in the church ? Does not the world sneer at the powerlessness of modern Christianity ? If God " set them in the church "—(1 Cor. xii. 28)—why are they not still there ?

Too many sincere and earnest Christians have grown so fearful of forms and ceremonies in consequence of the spreading of impotent ritualism, as to be in danger of neglecting *true Spiritual ordinances*.

Hence, there are thousands of professed believers who never celebrate

the Lord's Supper, and thousands more who reject the Baptism of Water in every form ; while, as for the Laying on of Hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost, this has come to be erroneously looked upon as a mere form without power, or a priestly assumption empty and un-Scriptural. And yet, the Apostle Paul exhorts, " Keep the ordinances as I delivered them to you " (1 Cor. xi. 2). We readily admit the worthlessness of " a form without the power, " but we ask— whenever did God's servants obey God's ordinances in His way, and fail to receive the power—that Divine accompaniment which manifests God's approval of their obedience ?

Those who reject the ordinances of the Gospel, because they think them but empty ceremonies, have certainly never observed them in the Scriptural way ; and are as certainly guilty of charging God with folly in instituting them. No member of Christ has ever partaken of the Lord's Supper, in a proper and humble spirit, discerning the Lord's Body, but he received a blessing.

All who have properly obeyed Christ's command in Baptism can testify to the grace and blessing which follow ; and in like manner everyone who has submitted to the ordinance of the Laying on of Hands, and lived for the promised gifts of the Holy Ghost, can set to his seal that " through the Laying on of Hands the Holy Ghost is given. " But, as the late Rev. H. Augustus Squire often said, " We must live for the things for which we pray. "

God is a Being of order, and only in His declared way will He impart His blessings. Men may deny this, and reason unscripturally to show another way, but the Lord will never deny Himself to please their disobedient minds, or allow them to “change the ordinances” with impunity or without suffering loss.

If the New Testament be true, the way into communion with God and Christ was, is now, and will be for all time, as John set forth, “Who-soever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ—hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son” (2 John 9).

**The Laying on of Hands after Baptism did not cease to be taught and observed after Apostolical times.**

In the reader's mind the question probably arises, how did the early Christians after the Apostles' days, act and teach with respect to the Laying on of Hands for the Gift of the Holy Ghost?

The enquiry is soon answered. It is undeniable that for nearly eight hundred years after Christ, the Laying on of Hands always followed Baptism.

TERTULLIAN (A.D. 195 to 216) assures us that in his day, “When we come out of the water, hands are laid on with blessings, calling on and inviting the Holy Spirit.” So that over 150 years after Peter and John

had laid their hands on the Samaritan believers, the church still practised this doctrine of Christ in its rightful connection.

EUSEBIUS 50 years or more later (about A.D. 256), informs us that "prayer and Laying on of Hands was practised" in his day "on persons to be admitted to the church, and this practice was then called the ancient manner or mode."

URBAN of ROME (in A.D. 225) exhorts, "That the sacrament of confirmation be immediately given after baptism, and that all the faithful are to wait for the Spirit, by the imposition of hands." CYPRIAN (A.D. 250), says of backsliders returning to the church, "They disapproved of receiving them by Laying on of Hands" unless they were re-baptized.

MELCHIADES (who was Bishop of Rome A.D. 311) says, "That baptism and imposition of hands are to be joined together—the one ought not to be performed without the other." JEROME (who flourished about A.D. 378) declares, "That it is the custom of the church, that upon those that are baptized, hands should be imposed." And he adds, "The Apostles observed that ordinance."

Other early writers who allude to this ordinance then practised universally in Christendom, are:—Theophilus Antiochinus (A.D. 170); Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 190 to 200); Origen (A.D. 185 to 252); Firmilian (A.D. 250); Cornelius (A.D. 260); Augustin, Bishop of Hippo, in Africa (A.D. 400), so that the truth is established in the mouths of many witnesses.

Indeed, their testimony, and the continuous practice of the Laying on of Hands, which subsequently became known as "confirmation," in the Eastern, Roman and Anglican churches, go to prove that the early church viewed the ordinance of the Laying on of Hands as one which was not confined to the Apostles of their day, but which as an ordinance of the Gospel was to be observed in all ages, equally with Baptism and the Lord's Supper, by all Christians.

**The Laying on of Hands was taught and practised by the Baptists in the 17th century ; and it has never ceased to be observed by " Old Baptist " Churches.**

The first British church was an Old Baptist church, in that it practised the immersion of believers and the Laying on of Hands after baptism. But the first published " Confessions of Faith " of the Baptists belong to the 17th century ; and we will quote from these to show that some of the oldest existing Baptist churches formerly practised the Laying on of Hands in conjunction with baptism ; as their successors, the churches of the International Old Baptist Union, do at the present day.

The Confession of Faith of the Baptist churches in London, A.D. 1660, which was endorsed by many names of " Elders, Deacons and brethren, on the behalf of themselves, and many others unto whom they belong,

in London, and in several counties of this nation, who are of same faith with us, ”— Crosby tells us, contained after the names, the following sentence—“ *Owned and approved by more than twenty thousand.*” This Confession of Faith may be taken as the expression of the belief and practice of the Old Baptist Union to-day, so exactly do its tenets concur with our own. In its 12th section it declares :—

“ That it is the duty of *all such who are believers baptized*, to draw nigh unto God *in submission to that principle of Christ's doctrine*, to wit, *prayer and laying on of hands*, that they may receive the promise of the Holy Spirit, Heb. vi. 1, 2 ; Acts viii. 12, 15, 17 ; &c., whereby they may mortify the deeds of the body, Rom. viii. 13 ; and live in all things answerable to their professed intentions and desires, even to the honour of Him, who hath called them out of darkness into His marvellous light.”

In Article xxxii. of the Baptist Creed of 1678 occurs the following :—“ *Of prayer with laying on of hands.* Prayer, with *imposition of hands* by the Bishop or Elder, on *baptized believers*, as such, *for the reception of the Holy promised Spirit of Christ*, we believe is a *principle of Christ's doctrine*, and ought to be practised and submitted to by every baptized believer, in order to receive the promised Spirit of the Father and the Son. Acts viii. 12, &c. ; xix, 6, 7 ; II. Tim. i. 6, 7 ; Heb. vi. 2 ; John xiii. 16, &c. ; xvi. 7 ; Eph. i. 13, 14 ; Acts ii. 38, 39.”

Knight's History of the General Six-principle Baptists (published in

1827), says :—“ In 1688 there were in the City of London six General Baptist churches, which were associated together to maintain the doctrine of the Laying on of Hands after Baptism, and all the principles of Christ’s doctrine set forth in Heb. vi. 1, 2.” And it is an indisputable fact that even in the eighteenth century a large number of Baptist churches in England adhered firmly to this Scriptural practice, and Knight gives the names of over 200 of those churches, which had not given up this truth as late as the beginning of the nineteenth century.

The first pastor of the church now meeting in the Metropolitan Tabernacle\* was William Ryder, who, about the year 1652, published a work in vindication of the Laying on of Hands ; and as late as nearly a century afterwards during the ministry of Benjamin Stinton, the Laying on of Hands after Baptism for the gift of the Holy Ghost was practised in that church. Indeed, in others of the older churches there is evidence that this ordinance has been laid aside only during the last fifty years.

In his Condensed History of the “ General Baptists of the New Connexion ” (1847), Wood tells us, that “ The ministers of the Old [Baptist] Connexion seemed unable to relinquish some of their ancient tenets and practices,” when other General Baptist churches had forsaken them. At the Boston (Lincolnshire) Association, in 1785, it was stated that they could not unite [with those of the New Connexion] unless the New Con-

*[\*Destroyed by enemy action in World War II.]*

nexion practised the Laying on of Hands on all persons received into fellowship, and abstained from eating of blood.”

The first Baptist churches in America were formed in Rhode Island, in 1636, by the Rev. Roger Williams, who founded that State.

These churches from their commencement taught and practised the Laying on of Hands after Baptism ; as their surviving successors, who became part of the International Old Baptist Union in 1901, do to this day. And the latest Religious Statistics published in 1926, by the U.S. Government, show that other American Baptist Societies still maintain this ordinance.

And formerly, Baptist churches in Sweden, Holland and Germany, practised the Laying on of Hands after Baptism ; as did the Russian Baptist churches until their recent persecution and practical dissolution by the Soviet Republic.

### **“ And what shall we more say ? ”**

Surely, it is a most serious thing to “ change the ordinances ” of the unchangeable God ! For if these ordinances are not of God, the Apostles and early saints were not led of God, and their statements of God having honoured the observance of these things (Acts viii. 17, 18, &c.) were terrible errors that should be blotted out of the New Testament.

We know that the Holy Ghost fell with power upon Cornelius and his friends (Acts x.), when, as yet, they had not even been baptized. But

the context proves that this was not the God-made rule, but an exceptional case for a special reason.

We also gladly recognize the fact that sinners are led to repentance, and faith in Christ, by the operation of the Holy Spirit ; and that many have been blessed with a measure of the Holy Ghost, and even used of God, who have not been baptized or received the Laying on of Hands.

Sometimes the words of Jesus, in Luke xi. 13, are quoted to show that the Holy Spirit was given simply by prayerful asking ; and therefore no Laying on of Hands is needed :—" How much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit *to them that ask Him.*" But we would point out that when those words were spoken, the Holy Spirit was only given to be *with* the disciple, and not as an *inward*, ever-abiding Guest, Seal and Guide. Before the coming of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost, Jesus said of Him, to the disciples,— " He is *with you*, and SHALL BE *in you.*" If any reader, therefore, is satisfied with a pre-Pentecostal experience let him by all means reject the appointed way into greater blessing through the Laying on of Hands. But we firmly maintain that the Scriptural way for God's people to receive *the fulness of the Holy Spirit, with His promised gifts and power*, is by Obedience to every word of God.

Evangelical Christendom has been mightily stirred of late years with the knowledge of its need of more of the Holy Spirit. Conferences

have been, and are still being held, and many books have been written on this theme, but with the very key in their hand to unlock the door of power and blessing, men still stumble and fumble at the portals, and are rebuked even by unbelievers for their unspiritual condition and impotence. Is it any wonder, while they prefer to endeavour to climb up some other way, and refuse to make use of the written instructions of God's word? They talk about the exhortations of Paul to the Ephesians, "Be filled with the Spirit," and ignore the way the Ephesians went which gave them the privilege and blessing (Acts xix. 5, 6). They wrest a promise of the Word of God from the conditions which surround it, and will not take Peter's advice, "*Repent and be baptized* every one of you, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts ii. 38). "Whom," he afterwards added (Acts v. 32), "God hath given *to them that obey Him.*" Or, perhaps filled with an imitative power which may be known by its leading the possessed away from, instead of "into all truth," they imagine that they have been baptized with the Holy Ghost, and are confirmed in their disobedience. "Be not deceived, God is not mocked." If He gave the Holy Spirit *to the obedient*—to repentant, baptized believers, through the Laying on of Hands, in the first century, and has nowhere changed His ordinances or altered His will, then, it is in vain that men confer together or express their uninspired opinions in contrariety to His way. No man can "abide in the doctrine of Christ" and neglect the Laying on of Hands, seeing that this ordinance is included

in Christ's practice and teaching ; and none can " Observe all things whatsoever " He has commanded, and leave out this part of His teaching. Let us go back to Apostolical faith, obedience and teaching ; and we may reasonably claim the Apostolical power and gifts which the sin-blighted world needs to-day as much as it did at Pentecost.

