

The Laying on of Hands, Part I

God's Hand of Blessing Upon Us

Please turn to Psalms 139. What does it mean to have [God's hand of blessing upon us](#)?

The ["hand of the Lord"](#) is a biblical figure of speech which [indicates the actions God performs](#), whether [in judgment or in blessing](#).

The practice of the laying on of hands reflects [God's laying His hand of blessing](#) on our lives.

Today's teaching is the first of a two-part series. We will begin our survey in the Old Testament. Here we see that God speaks of laying His hand on us to bless us.

Psalms 139:5:

You hem me in, behind and before, and [lay your hand upon me](#).

What a tender and beautiful verse! Just imagine your heavenly Father stepping up to place His hand on your shoulder. Could any touch be more intimate and heartfelt? [The hand of the Lord on His beloved children is a hand of blessing](#).

In ancient Near Eastern culture, [the right hand was the hand of blessing](#). It was therefore customary [when pronouncing a blessing](#) on a descendant as part of one's final wishes, to [lay one's right hand on their head](#).

When visiting his father Israel on his deathbed, Joseph brought his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, for whom he sought their grandfather's blessing. Israel, pursuant to God's instruction, surprised Joseph when he crossed his hands such that his right hand rested on the younger, Ephraim, rather than the elder, Manasseh. The fact that such a blessing could not later be retracted shows the importance attached to performing the blessing as required, with the right hand, showing preference to the firstborn.

God has shown preference to His firstborn Son by seating him at His right hand, the highest position of blessing. In like manner, Christ the good shepherd has placed his flock under his personal care and protection, a secure spot of rest and contentment that can never be violated.

John 10:29:

I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.

If Christ's people are in his hand, it is because he has laid his hand upon them. Like his Father God, Christ's hand upon his people secures a [blessing that can never be snatched away](#).

God's Purpose in the Laying on of Hands

Christians hear all kinds of things about [the laying on of hands](#), and most are not sure when it is and is not called for. From a biblical perspective, just what is the point of the laying on of hands? Does God have a [specific purpose](#) in mind for it?

The applications of the practice of the laying on of hands are too numerous to cover in a single presentation. This first installment will concentrate on the way in which the laying on of hands relates to

salvation. A second iteration will develop the intent of the practice as it relates to *ministry*.

Please turn to Isaiah 53. The action of laying on of hands has its roots in Bible passages that might at first escape our notice. For instance, Isaiah notes in speaking of the coming Redeemer that “*the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*”

Isaiah 53:6:

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

If you want to lay something on somebody, how do you do it? Whatever approach you take, it will involve one part of your body: your hands! *How then did the LORD lay our iniquity on the Lord Jesus Christ? By stretching forth His mighty hand!*

Turn if you will to the Gospel of John. Thinking back to Psalm 139, *in what way was the LORD able to lay his hand on you? By sending the Lord Jesus Christ* to redeem you! He laid His hand on you by *providing a sacrificial victim to take your place* in the punishment of death and completely expunge your sin and guilt. This is what John speaks of in his Gospel.

John 1:29:

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

This maps back perfectly to Isaiah 53. *The one on whom God laid His hand in Isaiah was in John “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”, the Lord Jesus Christ.* What a perfect plan of redemption! *When God laid our sin on the Lord Jesus Christ, He’s not taking it back; Christ took it away!*

Laying on Hands is for Transference

A central idea to understand in our quest is that [the laying on of hands is for transference](#).

To redeem mankind, God had to have a way [to legally transfer man's sin and guilt onto a substitute sacrificial victim](#), the Lord Jesus Christ. This He accomplished [by the laying on of His hand](#). Instead of laying hands on us to mete out the deserved punishment of death, He would place His hand instead on the head of His Son who would take the rap in our stead.

Take a look at Genesis 22. God foreshadowed His plan of action as to how [He would accomplish this redemptive transfer by way of sacrifice](#). We see this illustrated when Abraham was preparing to sacrifice Isaac.

Genesis 22:12:

Do not [lay your hand on the boy](#) or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.”

Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his only child of promise Isaac was a foretaste of the [willingness of God to lay His hand on His only Son our promised seed as a sacrificial victim on our behalf](#).

The saga continues with animal sacrifices in Leviticus, the third book of the Bible.

Leviticus 1:4:

He shall [lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering](#), and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him [in his place].

Leviticus 3:2:

And he shall [lay his hand on the head of his offering](#) and kill it...

Leviticus 4:15:

And the elders of the congregation shall [lay their hands on the head of the bull before the LORD](#), and the bull shall be killed before the LORD.

These actions of laying on hands and the [imputed transfer of sin](#) stemming from these actions forms the basis for the biblical [doctrine of propitiation, whereby satisfaction is made for the offense](#).

Transference and propitiation literally go “hand in hand.” [Our sin is transferred to the sacrifice](#) along with the deserved punishment, [with the result that the price is paid](#).

Laying on Hands is for Identification

Associated with the idea of transference is the concept of *identification*. [A primary purpose of the laying on of hands is for our identification with him](#).

Both under the Law and under Grace, the [laying on of hands identifies the one doing it with the Christ](#), whether in anticipation, in realization, or in retrospect. In the Old Testament, they looked forward in their thoughts and actions to Christ’s first coming. In the Gospels, they enjoyed his personal presence. In Acts and moving forward, we recognize Christ’s accomplishments by looking back on them as a finished body of work.

Let’s move forward a few chapters to Leviticus 16. We’ve already visited several verses pertaining to sacrifice. Something to remember is that [not all sacrifices were slain; some were living](#).

On the Day of Atonement, we see Aaron [laying hands on the “escaped” goat, the one](#) who would escape from being slain and instead be [allowed to live](#). But before letting it go, the escaped goat

would have to become *the vessel of transference*, the one on whom God by His hand would symbolically transfer all Israel's transgressions.

Leviticus 16:21,22:

And Aaron shall *lay both his hands on the head of the live goat*, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins.

And he shall *put them on the head of the goat* and send it away into the wilderness *by the hand of a man who is in readiness*.

This scenario exactly depicts what Isaiah later talked about, that “the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all”. *The Lord Jesus Christ was this living sacrifice for us*, carrying away our sin to a place from which it could never return.

Transference and Identification

The concepts of *transference* and *identification* are inextricably linked, the one being the result of the other. *The transfer of our punishment effected the benefit of our identification* by means of his redemptive work, allowing us to be released from our guilt and eternally set free.

Simply put, *transference* teaches that in Christ's sufferings and glory, *he took our place*. He *died in our place*; having risen from the dead, he *lives in our place*; and having ascended to the right hand of God, he is *seated in our place*, where God always wanted us.

Equally simple, *identification* teaches that in Christ's sufferings and glory, *we are identified with him*. Since he died in our place, *we died with him, assuming the place he took for us in death*. Having arisen from the dead spiritually, *we live with him, assuming the place he took*

for us in life. What's more, now that he ascended to God's right hand, we are seated with him, assuming the place he took for us in glory.

Transference was the *first step, his taking our place*. *Identification* is the *next step, us assuming the place he took for us*. Now for you dancers, that's the perfect two-step! Following in his steps, we take ownership of everything he did for us with all its commensurate blessings.

Our God of grace calls out softly to us, moving us gently along each step of the way. Our Lord and Savior moves in tandem with God, and we move in tandem with him. Christ steps, we step; Christ steps, we step; Christ steps, we step. At the end of our journey is an unconditional welcome into the glorious family of God. *Truly God the Father and Christ the Son have laid their hands upon us!*