

The Elementary Principles of Christ (5) – Laying on of Hands

Hebrews 6:1-3

Introduction

1. The elementary principle of the **"laying on of hands"** might present more of a challenge in determining what it refers to, and how it relates to what is elementary and foundational in comparison to the others listed.
 2. However, a consideration of the logical sequence of the list is enlightening:
 - a. Repentance and faith are preconditions for the washing of baptism – believers are baptized, and such are those who have had a change of mind concerning their sin, and desire to be freed from it.
 - b. The "new beginning" which relates to baptism requires immediate guidance and nourishment. This is where the **"laying on of hands"** fits in.
 3. Those who repent of their sins, turn in faith toward God, and submit to the provided washing of Jesus' blood in baptism desperately need Divine guidance for their new walk. God provides that guidance in His word, and the **"laying on of hands"** had much to do with that at the beginning of the church.
- I. What is the laying on of hands?
- A. The Phrase
 - a. It is a physical gesture with symbolic meaning indicating the identification with or participation of the active participant and passive participant in the conferring of a gift, trust, or blessing.
 - b. **Conferring a gift – Acts 8:17** – Apostles laying hands to confer the Holy Spirit.
 - c. **Conferring trust – Acts 6:3, 6; 13:2-3** – setting apart individuals to a specific work or ministry.
 - d. **Conferring healing – Mark 6:5; Acts 28:8** – giving visual of the source of the power to heal.
 - e. **Old Testament:**
 - i. The gesture was used in the same way in regard to conferring a gift, trust, or blessing.
 - ii. Additional – "The person presenting a peace offering (**Lev. 3:1f.**) or a sin offering (**Lev. 3:8, 13; 4:4; Nu. 8:12**) was to lay his hands upon the animal so that he identified himself with the animal being offered." (ISBE)
 - B. The Writer's Reference
 - a. Varying views:

- i. It refers to the Old Testament prescription of dealing with sin by laying hands on the sacrificial victim to be offered. The Hebrew writer is calling the brethren to move on from this obsolete system.
 - ii. It refers to the gesture used when ordaining an individual to an office, thus, the elementary principle of appointing qualified leaders in local churches.
 - iii. It refers to the conferring of miraculous spiritual gifts by the laying on of the apostles' hands.
- b. Though arguments may be made for each of these views the context deserves heavy consideration.
- c. Contextual considerations:
 - i. Elementary principles pertaining to individual faith.
 - 1. **Hebrews 5:11-14** – you, teachers, teach you again, everyone, he is a babe, those who are of full age, senses exercised.
 - 2. **Hebrews 6:4-6** – those once enlightened..., they fall away, renew them, they crucify again.
 - 3. The section does not relate to the church as a whole or institution, but addresses the saints on the individual level, calling them to the duty of individual diligence in growth.
 - ii. Elementary principles of Christ.
 - 1. The list of principles does not represent matters which must be left behind in the sense that he has called them to leave the Jewish system behind.
 - 2. **"leaving the discussion"** – not leaving the principles altogether, but not having to teach them again – **Hebrews 5:12; 6:1**
 - 3. If he is calling them to totally abandon the obsolete way of dealing with sin from the OT how does that view relate to the first two and the last two?
 - iii. The sequence of the elementary principles listed.
 - 1. The list appears to have a logical sequence.
 - 2. This is especially true of the final two – resurrection, judgment.
 - 3. This seems to be the case in the first two – repent from (turn away), faith toward (turn to).

4. The second and the third maintain sequence within the elementary stages of an individual's faith – **"he who believes (faith) and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16).**
 5. Though this is potentially coincidental, given the first two, along with the connection of the third principle to fulfillment of washing in Christian baptism, the sequence is logical.
- d. **The conferring of miraculous gifts by the laying on of the apostles' hands.**
- i. **"the elements of the beginning of the oracles of God" (5:12, YLT); "the word of the beginning of the Christ" (6:1, YLT)** – what, like understanding repentance, faith, baptism, and resurrection to eternal judgment, is vital to the beginning of an individual's walk with Christ?
 - ii. **Urgency – Acts 8:14-17; 19:2, 5-6** – first thought (after their baptism/conversion) was they needed the Holy Spirit through the laying on of the apostles' hands.
 1. **19:6** – shows the product of receiving the Holy Spirit in that way – miraculous gifts, namely here, tongues and prophecy.
 - iii. **Function – 1 Corinthians 12-13** – the urgency for those who believed to receive the Spirit in this way is understood when the function of the gifts is known.
 1. **1 Corinthians 12:4-7** – for the profit of all.
 - a. Profit in context – **1 Corinthians 14:12** – for the edification of the church through understanding.
 2. **1 Corinthians 13:8-10** – revelation of God's will – piecemeal (in part) until the complete (perfect) is established.
 3. Elementary principle – **"word of the beginning" – 1 Corinthians 13:11-12** – infancy of the church – cessation of the miraculous gifts once their purpose is served.
 - iv. **"the word of the beginning of the Christ" (6:1, YLT) – Hebrews 1:2; 2:1-4** – speaks now by His Son, a beginning to the hearing, fuller revelation and confirmation by God through miraculous signs.

1. The subject is revelation, and the signs, wonders, miracles, and spiritual gifts relate to it.
 - a. **Revelation** – such as in the gift of prophecy.
 - b. **Confirmation** – **Mark 16:20** – confirming the word through signs.
 2. Given through the laying on of the apostles' hands – **Acts 8:17-18; 19:6; Hebrews 6:2**
 - v. The elementary principle of the **"laying on of hands"** in **Hebrews 6:2** refers to the impartation of spiritual gifts through the laying of the apostles' hands on the new convert in the infancy of the church for the revelation and confirmation of God's word leading to the growth of said convert, and other Christians.
- II. The Laying on of Hands
- A. Revelation and Confirmation
- a. The **"laying on of hands"** is less an elementary principle for its mechanism as it is for its function and production.
 - i. I.e. the principle is not the process of the conferring of the gifts.
 - ii. The principle is function of the gifts – to reveal and confirm God's word – and then the need and importance of the product which is the revealed and confirmed word of God.
 - b. Context:
 - i. The admonition which caused the pause in discussing the priesthood of Christ after Melchizedek was due to their dullness of hearing – **Hebrews 5:11; 6:11-12**
 1. **"dull" (5:11)** = **"sluggish" (6:12)** – *nōthros* – "sluggish, i.e. (literally) lazy" (STRONG)
 2. **"of hearing"** – lazy in their hearing. Hearing what? – **5:12** – **"the oracles of God"**
 3. What does laziness in hearing God's word look like? – **5:14** – NOT exercising the senses – reading, meditating, applying.
 - ii. Up to this point – repentance, faith, baptism, laying on of hands – **"let us press on to maturity" (6:1, NASB)**
 1. Pressing on to maturity after becoming a child of God through baptism directly connects with the revelation of God's word through the laying on of hands.
 2. **1 Peter 2:2-3** – tasting the Lord is gracious, you desire the word to grow.

3. **"tasted the Lord is gracious"** – corresponds to the Hebrew writer's warning of apostasy – **Hebrews 6:4-6**
 - a. Their laziness of hearing corresponds to their devaluing of God's word.
 - b. This will lead to apostasy.
 - c. **"laying on of hands"** in connection with **"you have become dull of hearing"** – **1 Thessalonians 5:19-22**
 - i. Not making use of the spiritual gifts.
 - ii. Perhaps, misusing the spiritual gifts – **1 Corinthians 14:26**
 - d. Present day application:
 - i. We have God's word – **2 Timothy 3:16-17**
 - ii. We need to be diligent in studying God's word to grow and be pleasing to Him – **1 Timothy 4:15-16; 2 Timothy 2:15**
 - e. The elementary principle of **"laying on of hands"** regarding the function of the confirmation of God's will:
 - i. What you heard back at the beginning was something confirmed in an unmistakably miraculous way – **Hebrews 2:3-4**
 - ii. Jesus has not changed and will not change – **Hebrews 13:8**
 - iii. Hold fast your confession from the beginning – **Hebrews 3:14**
- B. Edification
- a. Building on the foundation of the **"laying on of hands"** includes making use of its product of the revealed and confirmed word of God.
 - b. This leads to edification – literally, "(the act of) building, building up" (THAYER) – **Ephesians 4:11-16**
 - i. Such a principle is understood to be elementary, foundational, and imperative when considering that the edification to which it leads accomplishes what the Hebrew writer is calling them to.
 - ii. **(v. 13)** – coming to a perfect (mature) man.
 - iii. **(v. 14)** – not being misled by error – **Hebrews 13:9**
 - c. **The fact that we have the fully revealed word of God is significant, but that elementary principle must be left to build on it by studying and applying that word!**

Conclusion

1. God has graciously provided us with His eternal will through the revelation of His word, and the confirmation of it.
2. The word of God is vital for the life of God's children. It is important that, having received God's word, we make use of it to build our lives to maturity, rather than to neglect it and fall away.