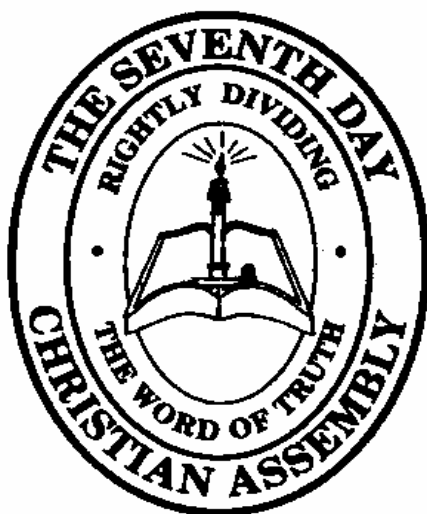


Rightly Dividing

THE
WORD OF TRUTH

Bible Study Course

Lesson Nine:
Laying On Of Hands



*I*srael stretched out his right hand, and laid it upon Ephraim's head...and his left hand upon Manasseh's head...and he blessed them that day. (Genesis 48:14-20)

*T*hey shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover. (Mark 16:18)

*N*eglect not the gift that is in you, which was given to you...with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. (1 Timothy 4:14)

*T*hen they laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. (Acts 8:17)

an open letter from

The Pastor

The laying on of hands was used in various contexts in the early Church: for blessing, healing, ordination, and receipt of the Holy Spirit. The practice was by no means a new invention by the Church – it was a rather common practice in Judaism and in the religious history of the entire Israelite nation. The idea contained in the practice was that there is signified a transference of certain qualities from one person to another – assuming, of course, that the person *has the right and authority to transfer those certain qualities to someone else*. It appears that the practice involves *a divine warrant* that God honors – even *requires* – the laying on of hands in order for those things to be authenticated, justified, and guaranteed. It necessitates, therefore, that we look at this practice as it is described in God’s word so we can understand what God expects of us relative to it. Before we get into the study itself, we will get a sampling of its meaning based on the four scriptures cited above.

If you get technical about it, Genesis 2:7 could be the first time in human history for the *laying on of hands*. The creative energy of the Lord God is transferred to some clods of earth to mold the first human into a physical form. The word *formed* is translated from the Hebrew term *yatsar* – which means to mold something into a form by squeezing it into shape. It is as if the Lord God had a lump of modeling clay and used His own form as the model for the body of the new human (see Genesis 1:26, 27). When He had finished *laying hands* on this form, causing it to become *flesh*, He performed cardio-pulmonary resuscitation on it to cause it to become a living, breathing being. I have no idea that the practice of *laying on of hands* came from an ancient religious rite that imitated that creative act by the Lord God. The most I will venture to say in that regard is that it would not surprise me if that were the case. I have no supporting proof for the idea.

Here is something that is known about the practice. Its significance is derived from the *hand* itself. Anytime the laying on of hands is employed, it is always with an *open hand*. The Hebrew term for that is *yad*. This is different from the *closed hand* (fist), which is *kaph*. While both have to do with *power*, you should be able to see the difference between *the*

power of the open hand and *the power of the fist*. In his inaugural speech in January of 2009, President Obama said to the Islamic world that the United States would *extend the open hand* to them if they would *unclench their fists* toward us. The symbolism in that statement is rich with meaning. It is also significant that during the 1960s, the symbol of Black Power was the raised, clenched fist – but there were so many clenched fists during that tumultuous time.

So, *yad* (the open hand) indicates two things: (a) beneficent power and (b) agency – that is, one through whom something is accomplished. It is in this context that we must understand the idea of the *transference* of certain qualities or blessings from one person to another – as well as the idea of that person having the right and authority, as an *agent* of a given source, to extend the open hand. For example, the idea of sitting on someone’s *right hand* (see Hebrews 1:13) symbolizes the transference of some degree of power, authority, agency to the one granted that privilege.

In Genesis 48:14-20, we find one of the first mentions of the laying on of hands in scripture. As I said before, I think that it is safe to conclude that this was something that was generally known in the ancient world. Just because scripture mentions it for the first time in a given context does not mean that it was not widely practiced before that time. In this case, it is probably the peculiarity of the situation that causes it to be mentioned first.

It was the normal practice to bless the eldest son – unless, of course, God directed otherwise or circumstances prevented it (see Genesis 17:15-21 and 1 Chronicles 5:1). Here, Jacob is adopting Joseph’s sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, as his very own sons (vv. 3-6). They were to be counted as *Jacob’s* heirs, not Joseph’s.

When Jacob was about to pronounce his blessing upon them, Joseph placed them in front of Jacob so that Jacob’s right hand would be upon Manasseh, the firstborn, and his left hand upon Ephraim, the second-born. But, for some reason attributed only to divine guidance, Jacob *crossed his hands* and blessed Ephraim with his right hand and Manasseh with his left – which, in effect, put *Ephraim* in the inheritance position of the *first-born*. Since Jacob was near blind, Joseph attempted to correct what he thought was a gross error. Jacob’s answer was in-

(Continued on p. 15)

Laying on of Hands

Some consider sacraments and rites to be *unnecessary* and *superficial* in the salvation process. They say that all they do is add to the pomp and circumstance (the ostentatious display of ceremonies) of a given church body. Baptism is one such sacrament; laying on of hands is another.

What is the difference between a sacrament and a rite? A *sacrament* is defined by most dictionaries as a formal religious act or rite held to have been instituted by Jesus Christ. They give examples of baptism and the Eucharist. A *rite* is a *set form* for conducting a sacrament or liturgy. For example, a worship service (a part of a liturgy) might have a *set form* – but, not all church bodies conduct them in the same way.

Did Jesus Christ institute either *baptism* or the *Eucharist*? No. Baptism was instituted prior to the coming of Jesus. He set the *format* that His Church is to use. The Eucharist is, supposedly, the institution of taking wine and unleavened bread as symbols of the blood and body of Jesus Christ. While it is true that Jesus Christ instituted the taking of wine and unleavened bread – as symbols of His shed blood and broken body – at His last Passover meal with His disciples, it must be understood that, in fact, He was *changing* the *Passover* symbols of the sacrificed lamb, bitter herbs, and unleavened bread – which were *foreshadows* of His sinlessness and His sacrificial death (see 1 Corinthians 5:7, 8; 11:23-30). These symbols were very much a part of the original Passover prior to the Exodus – maybe even dating back to the Garden of Eden. Jesus had presaged the change in John 6:28-59. In the same way, it cannot be said that Jesus Christ *instituted* the laying on of hands. It can be said, however, that He has *required* its use in various ways within His Church.

It is this *requirement* of various things in the salvation process that galls some people – probably because they believe that salvation is by *faith* and *grace* only and no *requirements* can be placed upon them. If that were true, then it would not even be *required* of you to *call upon the name of the Lord* or *believe in the Lord Jesus Christ!* So, let's get this right. Let's understand God's *revealed truth* about this matter. You know the drill: get out your Bible, your paper, and pen/pencil; write down the scriptures and the answers to the questions provided; practice your Bible study tactics; and *ask God to direct your learning in this matter*.

Lesson Nine

The Odd Nature of Some of God's Requirements

Have you ever taken the time to read very much of the Old Testament to see the things that the Lord God – who later became Jesus Christ – required of various people in regard to covenants and religious rituals? If you think that many of them are simply stupid and weird, remember that they are the *requirements* of the *Creator God*. Who are we that we should make such judgments about what *He* values as proper and necessary? So, if we see references to something like *laying on of hands* for blessings, healing the sick, ordinations, and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, we should not think that it is a

strange or stupid or weird thing. It is what it is. It is what God expects it to be. Let's consider a few examples.

1. Genesis 3:21 – What do you think is the *significance* of this verse relative to the *sin* of Adam and Eve? How do you suppose the Lord God got His hands on some *animal skins* in order to make some clothing for them? Did He *kill* them? In doing so, did He conduct anything we could consider as a *sacrament* or *ritual*? What *meaning* might He have attached to it? ***Think about this situation.***

2. Genesis 4:3, 4 – Why did Cain and Abel begin the practice of *sacrificing* to the Lord God? From where did they acquire, or learn, the practice? Was it from what happened in Genesis 3:21? Does it appear to be *stupid* or *weird* that someone would *set on fire*

some vegetation or animals to *worship* God? Does God appear to have a preference for a particular type of sacrifice? Why or why not? (Read also Hebrews 11:4.)

Comment: God was not appealing to their *primitive* nature – and later getting more *sophisticated* with us because we are more sophisticated. Malachi 3:6 is one of at least three places where it proclaims that the Lord God (the One who later became Jesus Christ) does not *change* (see also Hebrews 13:8 and James 1:17). We must understand that this is the way by which the Lord God decided to communicate *spiritual meaning* to mankind at that stage of our spiritual development. To borrow an expression from *Thomas Magnum, P.I.*, “I know what you’re thinking.” You’re thinking that I said above that Jesus *changed* the Passover symbols from lamb and unleavened bread to wine and unleavened bread. And you’re wondering whether or not that constitutes *change* and contradicts the statements in Malachi, Hebrews, and James. Let’s see.

Some scholars say that is difficult to tell exactly what Malachi 3:6 means. In the *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew/English Lexicon* I use, it treats the term as though it means “to make or become *different*.” The *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* – which also contains a Hebrew and Greek dictionary – gives the possibility of it meaning “being *duplicitous*.” While both are definitions for the term *change*, the Lord God does not claim that He never does anything differently or change His mind about something. It is clear from what we have studied in other lessons that He does *change* His mind about things (read Exodus 32 for a great example).

It would stand to reason, then, that the Lord God, therefore, is not *duplicitous* – that is, **He does not deceive us by pretending to feel or act one way while doing something totally opposite to it.** Nor is He a *changeling*. He is not like the character Odo on *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* – who had the ability to be whatever he wanted to be...from a ship’s bulkhead to any kind of plant, animal, or creature in the universe. God simply does not adapt Himself to be the various “gods” of all other religions and to, supposedly, lead the people of different religions to the same eternal reward. He is what He is (Exodus 3:14), and all of mankind must accept that (Romans 9:20, 21). *You* cannot re-make *Him* into any image that suits *you* (see Romans 1:18-32).

3. Hebrews 10:1-10 – Was the original law regarding sacrifices a “*shadow of good things to come*”? If a *shadow* is a *type* or *symbol*, what did the *sin sacrifices and offerings* symbolize?

4. Was there a *change* that took place in the sacrificial system? Why do you suppose that *change* took place?

5. How do you think this might have related to Genesis 3:21?

Comment: Think about the term *fulfill*. But, please do not think like many do and relate it to “filling to the full.” That sounds like you are putting something into a container until it almost overflows. *Fulfill* can mean either “to put something into effect” or “to bring something to an end.” Many believe that Jesus Christ brought God’s law to an *end*. In Romans 10:4, where Paul says that “...Christ is the *end* of the law...,” he uses the Greek term *telos*, which means “the *end* or *goal* toward which a movement is being directed, *outcome*.” Understand this very clearly: Galatians 3:24 shows that the *goal* of the law is to bring us to *Christ*. Not only does it bring us the *person* known as *Jesus Christ* – the only “...name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved...” (Acts 4:12) – it also brings us to the kind of *mind* that He has (compare 1 Corinthians 2:16, Galatians 2:20; 4:19, and Philippians 2:5 to Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Isaiah 55:8, 9). Very few believe that He actually puts the true, spiritual meaning of the law into effect!

Isaiah 42:21 prophesied that Jesus Christ would *magnify* the law and make it honorable. That certainly does not sound as though He would be bringing the law to an *end*. Matthew 5:17-19 does not lend itself to bringing the law to an *end*. Jesus plainly says that He did not come to *destroy* the law. The term *fulfill*, in this scripture, means that He will bring it to its true, spiritual intent – to the *goal* toward which it is directed (see Ephesians 1:4-12). Read Matthew 5:21-48 and notice how Jesus says: “You have heard...but I say...” In this, He is fulfilling Isaiah 42:21 by *magnifying the law* in its proper, spiritual intent. This means not only spelling out the deeper spiritual applications of God’s law, but also bringing its *symbolic* meaning to reality. Let’s consider an example.

When Jesus became the Passover sacrifice (1 Corinthians 5:7), He *fulfilled* the *shadow* of the sin offerings and sacrifices – thereby causing a *change*

from *repeated* sacrifices to *one* sacrifice for all people for all times. So, Hebrews 10:9 says that He took away the *first* (law of sacrifice), that He may establish the *second* (law of sacrifice). This means that the *law of sacrifice* itself still exists in the *sacrifice of Jesus Christ Himself* because it was brought to its full, spiritual intent by His crucifixion. So, it appears that the things God chose to *represent* some future event or benefit (“good things to come”) have great significance to Him. Such is the case with the *laying on of hands*. We must not allow ourselves to disdain these things simply because we consider them to be unnecessary, stupid, weird, inconvenient, or primitive. They have special meaning to God Himself. Whatever they mean to Him, that’s what they should mean to us.

6. Exodus 29 – Look up the definition of the terms *consecrate* and *ordain* (vv. 22, 26, 27, 29, 31, 33-35). The Hebrew term is *yad* (discussed in the **Open Letter** above). Who is responsible for the *authority* and *power* part of this exercise (see 25:1 and follow the references to *thou*)? (Read Exodus 3 to see where he [*thou*] was vested with this *authority* and *power*.)

7. What do you think is happening when he *consecrates* Aaron and his sons (v. 9)? Will he lay *open hands* upon their heads?

8. What does it mean that Aaron and his sons would be made or declared *sacred*? Look up the definition of *sacred* and apply the definition to this situation.

9. Is all of this done by the *commandment* of the Lord God? Was Israel to have a *special regard* for Aaron and his sons as a result of this event? So, this was *God’s* law and not *Moses’* law? What is the difference?

10. Now, read again vv. 10, 15, and 19. Why do Aaron and his sons put *their* hands upon the heads of the animals to be sacrificed?

Comment: [I am indebted to Adam Clarke for his commentary over these verses (*Adam Clarke’s Commentary*, Ralph Earle, editor; Baker Book House: Grand Rapids, 1967; pp. 141, 158).] The bullock is a *sin offering*; the first ram is a *burnt offering*; and the second ram is a *ram of consecration*. What does this mean? Placing their hands upon the *bullock* is symbolic of two things: (a) the animal was

consecrated to God and was then considered to be proper for sacrifice, and (b) they were offering the *life* of the animal to make *atonement* for their sins in order to redeem their lives from the death they deserved because of their sins. The Hebrew term is *chattah*, which means “missing the mark.” The sinner is continuously aiming at and seeking happiness, but he misses it because he does not seek it in *God*.

Aaron and his sons would place their hands between the bullock’s horns and confess their sins by saying: “I have sinned; I have done iniquity; I have trespassed by doing [this or that] and return to You by repentance. With this sacrifice, I make atonement.” With that confession of guilt, the animal was then considered as *vicariously* bearing the sins of the one who brought the animal for sacrifice. Their sins would be *symbolically transferred* to the sacrificial animal. Thereby, they would acknowledge God as the *Judge* of men, the *Punisher* of sin, and the only one who can *forgive* and *pardon* sinful mankind. This would be a necessary prelude to *vesting* them – that is, before “filling their hands” with priestly authority during the *consecration* ceremony.

The person officiating at this ceremony – in this case, Moses – kills the sacrifice “before the Lord” (v.11 – significantly, to the *north* of the great altar... *symbolically* in the direction of God’s throne – read Isaiah 14:12-14). He then dips his finger in the blood and (a) anoints the horns of the altar (the four directions N, S, E, W), (b) dumps the remainder of it at the base of the altar, (c) burns certain inward parts on the altar, and (d) burns the flesh, hide, and dung outside the camp. Nothing was eaten. The blood was a “*covering for sin*”; therefore, it *symbolized* the work of Jesus Christ as our perfect sacrifice for sins (read Isaiah 53, 2 Corinthians 5:10-21, and Hebrews 9:19-28). But, what about placing their hands on the two rams?

The first ram was not a *sin offering* (a *chattah*). It was a *burnt offering* (Hebrew = *owlah*). Aaron and his sons had to lay their hands on the head of this sacrificial animal, too. Notice in vv. 15-18 that this ram is slain, and its blood is sprinkled around and upon the altar. It is then cut into pieces, and the innards and other parts are washed. Finally, the entire ram is burned up completely – everything, as it were, was for *God’s* consumption, not *man’s*. As it turns into smoke and rises into the air, it is expressive of the complete and full sacrifice of Jesus Christ – because that is the only thing that could make atonement for the sin of the world. The smoke is

representative of Christ's ascension *in spirit* to the throne of God (read Acts 1:9). It is also described as a sacrifice for *praise* and *adoration of God*. Laying their hands on this animal was also a symbol of *transferring their own lives* to this animal to represent their own complete and full surrender to God for His service. [Aborigines, like the Native Americans, have used a similar type of this symbolism when they have smoked the "peace pipe" with others in discussing and making treaties with one another. The smoke represents "spirit."]

The second ram is the peculiar one with regard to what God *required* of them. Again, Aaron and his sons lay hands upon the head of this sacrifice. It is called *a ram of consecration* (v. 22) – which means that it is the sacrifice for their ordination as priests of God. The blood is used similarly to the blood of the bullock and the first ram – but...with one *unusual exception*. Some of the blood was to be put upon the tips of their right ears, upon their right thumbs, and upon their right big toes. *What? Doesn't this brink on the verge of stupidity?* Remember that *the Lord God is requiring* this of them. It is steeped in *spiritual* meaning and symbolism. I know what you're thinking: *Why this?*

What do we do with our ears? Hear/listen. What about our hands? Typically – work. And our big toes? Balance as we go about our business. The *right side* is typically the side of great prominence and intimacy (read Hebrews 1:1-3, 13). They are symbolically being consecrated to service at the *right hand* of God – dedicating all of their faculties and powers to the service of God: (a) their *ears* to the hearing and study of God's word; (b) their *hands* to diligence in the sacred ministry and to all acts of obedience; and (c) their *feet* to walking in the way of God's thoughts and ways. All of this also presupposes that God will provide them with the spiritual discernment and wisdom they will need to serve as His priests among His people. None of this would be possible without the sprinkling of the sacrificial blood.

There were several types of sacrifice included in this *consecration*: (a) *milluim*, which means "to fill," (b) *terumah*, which is a *heave offering*, (c) *tenupha*, which is a *wave offering*, and (d) *mincha*, which is a *thank offering*. First of all, Exodus 29:22 calls this ram an *eil milluim*: "the ram of filling up." This worked two ways: (a) the person to be consecrated to God has his hands *filled* with a particular offering appropriate for the situation, and (b) he leaves the

presence of God with his hands *filled* with authority and power from God Himself to act on His behalf. If there is any aspect of "filling to the full" in this ceremony, this is it. Verses 19-28 describe the *tenupha*, the *mincha*, and the *terumah*.

The *mincha* in this case consists of three different types of unleavened bread: (1) *matstsoth* – the unleavened loaf, (2) *challoth* – prickly, perforated cakes, and (3) *rekikey* – an extremely flat wafer. They and the choice rump and other parts of the ram were *waved* (*tenupha*) before the Lord God – moved back and forth from the right hand to the left hand in a waving motion – as an acknowledgment that the bread that sustains our lives and the mercy of God that brings to us salvation comes from God alone (read John 6:31-58 to see the fulfillment of these symbols of bread, meat, and blood). All of this is intended to acknowledge God as *Creator, Governor, Provider of every good and perfect gift, and Preserver of all things* – a *shadow* of the coming salvation and reconciliation of all things to God through Jesus Christ. All of this is then burnt before God as an *owlam* (v. 25).

The breast portion is a *tenupha* – a *wave offering* – that is to be eaten by Moses (v. 26). The shoulder is a *terumah* – a *heave offering* – that is both *waved* and *heaved*. Being *heaved*, it was moved up and down. This was an offering of *firstfruits* acknowledging God's goodness as Provider (waved), but it was also lifted toward heaven as an acknowledgment of their dependence upon God for His bountiful provision of meat in due season and their obligation to God for His continual and liberal supply of all their wants and needs (read carefully Matthew 6:19-34).

If you understand the point I am making here, then you can understand the connection these sacrifices have to Jesus' statement in John 5:39: "Search the *scriptures* [in this case, the Old Testament]; for in *them* you think you have *eternal life*: *and they are they which testify of me*" (emphases added). In one way or another, all of this we have discussed here relates to the coming of Jesus Christ to be the sacrifice for our sins in order that we might be presented to God as His children through Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:4-14 and Hebrews 2). How, then, can we *disdain* the very things God has *inspired* to *testify* of His *truth* in Christ? That is a very dangerous position and attitude to take!

Laying on Hands: Blessing

Let's look at a few examples of laying on of hands for the purpose of blessing. Some of the situations are direct references to the practice, but there are others which seem to imply at least an attempt to do so for the spiritual and physical well-being of people whom God is attempting to draw to Himself. Study these situations carefully so you can understand the spiritual significance of this most important doctrine of Christ from Hebrews 6:2.

1. Matthew 19:13-15 – For what purpose were the little children brought to Jesus Christ? Does it appear from this that *laying on of hands* was a known practice with regard to *blessings*?

2. Does Jesus on this occasion *institute* the *rite* of blessing little children? Would it be *wrong* for His Church to practice this blessing on a regular basis? Could it be done *in the name of Jesus Christ* – on His behalf by His ministry?

Comment: It should be obvious that people had heard of the *power* Jesus exhibited in the use of His hands and wanted that mighty power of God to be used to bless their children. They would have considered it a great honor to be so blessed by this very famous man. There is no record that He uttered anything when He did this. It could have been a mere touch – probably both hands upon their heads. More than likely, though, He probably would have uttered some kind of blessing *thought* upon each child He touched.

His disciples did not want Him to be bothered. It could have been that they felt that the requests were trivial and beneath the notice of Jesus. On the other hand, they might have noticed the toll that such things had on Him. Mark 5:30 says that “virtue went out of Him” when the woman with the issue of blood touched the hem of His garment. He was conscious of the fact that healing power had been released from His body. Did the constant flow of that power from His fleshly body *exhaust* Him? There is no scriptural indication that it did – only the fact that He was conscious of it when it happened.

The important lesson of Matthew 19:13-15 is obvious: Jesus felt that it was important for little children to be included in the experience. He did not want anything to be a barrier to their experience with the power of God – no barriers to their access to blessings from God. Those experiences would be

valuable for their future growth and development when they would have to make decisions about their relationships to God and His offer of salvation. While Jesus did not *institute* a *rite* by blessing these children, the churches in the Church of God Seventh Day tradition set aside at least one time during the year when the ministry has a blessing of little children ceremony. Prayers on behalf of the children for their protection and spiritual and physical growth and development are made. We do this because Jesus Christ set us the example (1 Peter 2:21).

3. What relationship between little children and the Kingdom of God did Jesus cite? What is your reaction to this object lesson? Can you explain His reasoning here?

4. Leviticus 9:22 – Does this example suggest that *raising the hands in blessing* over a group is similar to *laying on of hands*? Would you suppose that such a practice is used when there is a large crowd – as opposed to going out and touching each person individually?

Comment: I once heard someone explain the famous split-finger salute made by Mr. Spock on the original *Star Trek* series. Apparently, it was the idea of Leonard Nimoy, who played Spock in that series. As I remember it, Nimoy saw his rabbi make the gesture during the benediction at a Yom Kippur service – he peeked during the benediction prayer and saw the rabbi raise his hands and make the gesture. Nimoy thought that it would be an interesting “alien” practice (somewhat similar to *aloha* in Hawaii): a greeting, a salute, a blessing, and a farewell. Perhaps – and this is *very* speculative – this is the source from which our practice of *waving* to one another came.

The idea here in Leviticus 9:22 seems simple enough: the High Priest has his hands *filled* with power and authority from God. Using those hands to invoke, or distribute, God's blessings is part of the responsibility of God's ministers. It is a gesture of generosity. It is a gesture of grace. It is a gesture of love.

You will not find *laying on of hands* used every time there is a blessing uttered in scripture. You should understand, however, that the laying on of hands is a *principle of the doctrine of Jesus Christ* (Hebrews 6:1). Reading this in relationship to Hebrews 5:11-14 is necessary for better understanding.

The Greek term for *principle* (*arche*) is expressive of *elementary doctrines* (RSV) – or, *beginning teachings*. The reason Paul speaks of “leaving the principles” has nothing to do with casting them aside; rather, it has to do with being able to comprehend them as foundational concepts to be learned early in the Christian faith to provide the practical support needed for the more complex doctrines Jesus Christ wants His followers to learn so they can become mature, spirit-minded Christians who worship God in spirit and in truth. As this happens, the individual becomes *skilled in the word of righteousness* – as opposed to someone who professes faith in something about which he knows very little and about which he could very easily mislead others through his ignorance. This is the danger of the “Christian” whose spiritual growth and development practically stops after his profession of faith in Jesus Christ.

Laying on of Hands: Healing

Laying hands upon the sick does not consist of standing them in front of you and blowing on them or smacking them smartly upon the forehead. To a world that monotonously – and almost rhetorically (a *rhetorical* question is one that does not seek an answer: “Do you want me to *beat* you?”) – asks: “What would Jesus do?”, I would suggest that you look at examples of His *practice*. While we are looking, see if you can find any semblance of some of the bizarre antics of some widely known “faith healers.”

1. Mark 6:1-6 – Where was Jesus at this time? Why was Jesus not able to do *mighty works* there?
2. Why did Jesus *marvel* at this? How did He effect the healing of the *few* who were healed?
3. What would you conclude from this example about one’s *attitude* interfering with God’s will and power regarding one’s healing?
4. Mark 7:31-37 – What was the problem with which Jesus was confronted? What did the people ask Jesus to do? So, it included *laying on of hands*?
5. Would you consider Jesus’ method in this case *bizarre* or *grotesque*? What possible benefit could there be in touching someone’s tongue with *your spit* and *poking your fingers into his ears*?

6. Did Jesus make *a great show* in front of the people who were gathered there? What did He do instead? So, the multitude saw the *results* of what Jesus did and not the *action* itself?

Comment: In John 9:1-38, Jesus performed a healing in the company of His *disciples* – not in front of the multitudes. Again, He used an odd method to get it done: He mixed His own spittle with some dirt and made a clay poultice. Why didn’t He simply *speak* and *command* that the man be healed? Frankly, I do not know – nor is it revealed. When He painted the man’s eyelids with the clay, He commanded him to go to the pool of Siloam and wash it off. The man could have been indignant and complained about being contaminated with spit and dirt – but he did as he was told and was healed. It appears that the benefit comes from faithfully following the directions of Jesus Christ, regardless of how odd they might have seemed, rather than from the chemical combination of spittle and dirt. Those who knew him became aware of his having been healed when he came home without assistance and spoke plainly to them. This event became part of the first verse of the hymn “Amazing Grace”: “...I once was lost but now am found, Was *blind* but now I *see*” (v. 25).

7. Mark 16:15-20 – To whom does Jesus supposedly address this instruction? How do vv. 1-16 compare to Matthew 28 and Luke 24:44-49? Do Matthew and Luke contain instruction about laying on of hands, handling poisonous snakes, and drinking poison?

Comment: I need to preface any questions from these verses with this piece of information: It is a well-documented fact that Mark 16:9-20 is not found in most ancient manuscripts. In a footnote in the *Living Bible*, there is speculation that they were added later as a copyist’s appendix of additional facts. According to the RSV, which separates v. 8 and v. 9 with an additional space: “...one authority concludes the book by adding after verse 8 the following: *But they reported briefly to Peter and those with him all that they had been told. And after this, Jesus himself sent out by means of them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation.*”

I call your attention to this information because there are a couple of textual problems like this that you will encounter in scripture due to the number of various manuscripts that were referenced in putting

together various translations of the Bible. That in and of itself does not make the truth of the Bible suspect, although it might make suspect the *motives* of some copyists and translators for including or excluding certain material. This kind of textual problem has caused many to construct various *theological conspiracy* theories like *Da Vinci's Code* and *A Skeleton in God's Closet*, two *fictional* literary works based on such theories: (a) Jesus Christ being married to Mary Magdalene, and (b) Jesus Christ not actually being raised from the dead. Hugh J. Schonfeld's *Passover Plot* is an example of a serious scholarly work about the supposed conspiratorial nature of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

My first question would be whether or not Jesus Christ intended His followers to make a regular display of their *faith* by actually handling poisonous snakes and drinking poison – like arsenic. That would appear to be a contradiction of Matthew 4:7 (quoted from Deuteronomy 6:16). The flip-side of this is simple: we have plain instruction in other parts of scripture regarding the laying on of hands. Does God's word have a solution for this textual problem? Yes. Note carefully the following scripture.

8. Luke 10:16-19 – To whom does Jesus Christ address this instruction? Is it similar to Mark 16:15-20? So, this is instruction, in effect, to Christ's *ministry*? For what reason?

9. Acts 28:1-9 – Did the Apostle Paul *play with the viper* until it bit him? So, this was an *accident*? Was Paul *harmed* by this venomous bite?

10. Did he also lay hands upon the sick? What was the result?

11. What do you suppose would have happened if an *enemy* had given Paul a poisonous drink in order to get rid of him and the work he was doing for Jesus Christ? Do you understand Mark 16:15-20 better now because of these examples?

12. Acts 19:11 – What did Paul send to those whom he could not personally visit? Would you assume that Paul anointed these cloths with oil and laid hands upon them as he prayed for the people to whom they were to be sent?

Comment: This is practiced by The Seventh Day Christian Assembly and other similar minis-

tries throughout the world. I use pieces of new, clean, white handkerchiefs. In the process, I anoint them with virgin olive oil and lay hands upon them while praying for God's intervention through Jesus Christ. If you ever need such intervention, please get in touch with me and make your request – realizing, of course, that the healing comes from God, not from me. I will send instructions about how to use the anointed cloth.

The Nature of Christ's Church

Read carefully the following quote: "If it is objected that the church of the N.T. knows nothing of a priesthood parallel to that of the sons of Aaron within Israel, it is well to recall that *the dedication and consecration to a priestly office pertains to every church member received into full communicant membership, and that the Christian ministry is a vocation within the universal priesthood of the whole Christian church*" (*The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 2, 1953 edition, p. 42; emphases added). This idea is part and parcel to Luther's statement that every believer is a priest under Jesus Christ and has the right to read and interpret scripture for himself as the Holy Spirit leads him. I think we need to understand the following three points: (a) the current role of true Christians before the establishment of the Kingdom of God, (b) the current role of those serving in the true ministry of Jesus Christ, and (c) the future role of all True Christians.

First of all, are all "Christians" *presently* priests under Jesus Christ? It is difficult to accept such an idea in the context into which Luther cast it. How could such an idea apply to today's 32,000+ so-called "Christian" denominations that teach so many *contradicting* things about Christ, His gospel, and the fundamental doctrines of Christ we have been studying? If those great *contradictory* teachings are indicative of the leadership of the *Holy Spirit* over this supposed "priesthood," then something is terribly *schizophrenic* about it! Also, if Luther is correct, then no one has the right to *contradict* anyone else's scriptural teachings *even if they plainly contradict God's revealed truth!* Let's consider this carefully.

1. Exodus 19:5, 6 – Does the Lord God tell Moses to tell the Israelites that they would be unto Him a nation of *priests*? What conditions did they have to meet?

2. Based on what you now know, was *every* man, woman, and child in Israel a *priest*? Again, based on what you now know, did the Lord God designate one tribe to be His *priests*? Did Israel *ever* become a nation in which *everyone* was a *priest*?

Comment: God *planned* for Israel to become an exceptional, spiritual nation for His glory – one that would be a beacon of true spiritual light on God’s behalf. Read Deuteronomy 4:5-10. Moses lays this responsibility upon the people: (a) learn God’s laws and observe them; (b) be faithful to God in all you do; (c) be a faithful example to those not in the true faith; and (d) teach them to your children and grandchildren so that future generations will also know them and live by them.

In verses 32-40, Moses shows them that the instruction they were to receive was to be very special instruction that no other nations were capable of receiving from their false gods; so, Israel was to be diligent in learning this instruction and living by it. The net effect was to be that other nations would hear of this God and His laws and become curious about how *they* might be included in such a relationship. This is the prelude to the fulfillment prophesied in Isaiah 2:1-5 – which we will discuss in more detail later.

The idea is simple: while God did designate the Levites to be the priests, the *entire nation* had a *corporate* responsibility to maintain themselves as a *holy nation*. Had they done that as God willed it to be done, His Kingdom might have been established long before now. But, the rise and fall of each succeeding generation opened up the possibility of the *nation* going astray – of being lured away by the beliefs and practices of the ungodly (vv. 23-31 – see also 5:29). Each succeeding generation had the same responsibility laid out in vv. 5-10. The net effect was that the *nation* was in a *sanctified* relationship with God just like God’s appointed priests. So, every man, woman, and child had an *individual responsibility* to contribute to the *corporate responsibility* of maintaining – and influencing others in the community to maintain – God’s righteous expectations. Make note that they were a *holy nation* that included the *priestly* family of Levi.

3. 1 Peter 2:5-9 – How are Peter’s remarks to True Christians *similar* to Moses’s remarks to physical Israel? Does it appear that he is telling God’s True Church that they are being offered the same unique position and relationship that was offered to Israel –

who, through their disobedience and failure to keep covenant with God, lost their unique position and relationship with Him?

Comment: If you check Peter’s comments carefully, you will see that he is *quoting scriptures* when he makes his comments about God’s True Church. Notice especially vv. 6-11. The order in which these scriptures are quoted is as follows: Isaiah 28:16; Psalm 118:22; Isaiah 8:14; Isaiah 43:20, 21; Hosea 1:9 and allusions to Hosea 2; and Psalm 39:12. What Peter is doing, apparently, is drawing a comparison of the Church with ancient Israel with regard to their covenant relationships with the Lord God (the one who became Jesus Christ). In order to understand the position of God’s *true ministry* among His True Church and the *ordination* they are to undergo, it is important to understand what Peter is doing. This will also properly explain the concept of true believers and their roles as *priests* – *necessary because it has been greatly misconstrued*.

I will be basing my explanation on a few more modern translations of Peter’s comments. For example, William Barclay’s *Daily Study Bible* translates 1 Peter 2:5 like this: “Be yourselves, *like* living stones, built into a spiritual house, until you become a *holy priesthood*, to offer spiritual sacrifices...” (emphases added). The *NIV* puts it like this: “You also, *like* living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a *holy priesthood*...” (emphases added). *Moffatt* is thus: “Come and, *like* living stones yourselves, be built into a spiritual house, to form a consecrated *priesthood*...” (emphases added). If we follow Barclay’s lead, then we should see that *becoming* a *holy priesthood* is a goal toward which God’s True Church is now working, not a goal they have already attained. The *NIV* gives the impression that it is a *work in progress*, not something already attained. *Moffat*, on the other hand, translates it to appear like *an invitation to join a process*. Yet, the popular perception is that *every member* of the Church is *presently* ordained into a holy priesthood – I suppose by virtue of their confessions of faith and baptisms. I can understand how such an idea impresses upon the individual believer the seriousness of his/her position in the Church, but that seriousness is there by virtue of *membership*, not *position*. Let’s see how this works.

4. 1 Corinthians 6:15-20 – How does Paul describe the individual members of the Church? What does he mean that each individual is a *member of Christ*?

5. 1 Corinthians 12 – Read the entire chapter so you will understand the questions. In vv. 1-11, are a diversity of gifts given to a diversity of individuals? Would you say, then, that individual *members* are given *different* gifts from one another?

6. Verse 12-27 – How does Paul describe the function of the various *members*? How does he demonstrate that, although they serve different *functions*, they make up *one body*? What does he mean that the various *members* constitute *the body of Christ*?

7. Genesis 2:18-24 – How is the union of man and woman described? What does God mean when He describes this union as *one flesh*? Is this typical of the *marriage* of man and woman?

8. Ephesians 5:22-33 – Why does Paul insist on the *sanctity* of the marriage institution? Of what is it a representation?

9. Verse 30 – What does Paul mean that “We are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bone”? Does this describe two *separate* entities that constitute *one body* – like Genesis 2:18-24?

10. Verse 32 – Explain Paul’s conclusion in light of this discussion. Is the Church’s relationship to Christ considered to be *many different bodies* or *one single body*?

11. Ephesians 4:3-6 – How does Paul describe the “unity of spirit in the bond of peace” that is to exist in God’s Church? Do you think the existence of 32,000+ different, contradicting, so-called “Christian” churches fulfills this description?

12. Verses 11-16 – Is *every member* of the body of Christ (at present, His *affianced* Bride – not yet His *married* Bride; see 2 Corinthians 11:2 and Revelation 19:5-9) placed into *an office of ordained ministry*? What does Paul mean by the term *some*? Why are *some* put into those positions? Does it include the *priesthood*?

13. Compare v. 15 to 1 Corinthians 11:3. What does Paul mean that Christ is the *head* of His *body*? Is he referring to Christ as the head (a single member) of the body (other single members) – or, is he referring to Christ as the head of *a marriage union*? So, Christ will not be *married* to millions of *separate*

individuals, but to *a single body* bound together in spiritual unity?

Comment: You must understand that this *marriage* is a *metaphor* for the unique relationship that is to exist between Christ and God’s True Church. He is presently offering that unique relationship to the *firstfruits* He is calling out from the beginning of this present world until His return – popularly referred to as His *second coming*. It is the same unique relationship He offered Israel. He, in fact, *metaphorically* “married” Israel, but she became adulterous and was divorced. The faithful who remained after that divorce are those who became the core around whom He began building His Church (see Matthew 16:13-20 and Romans 11) – He Himself being the *Rock* (the *petra*) upon whom it was to be founded and built, not Peter, the *small pebble* (the *petros*). This is why Peter uses the scriptures he uses in 1 Peter 2 to describe individual Christians as being individual stones built into the fabric and edifice of the Church – the single, unified edifice (just like individual bricks are made to become a single building).

14. Revelation 19:1-9 – Does this prophecy imply that the *marriage* of Christ and His Church is yet *future*? Is the Church, at this future time, still made up of *flesh and blood human beings*?

15. 1 Corinthians 15:50-58; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 – Is it safe to say that God’s Church is not *presently* a *spirit-composed* family? Would you conclude that the Church, therefore, is *being built* into a spiritual family that is capable of *marrying* an *eternal* Spirit-being and inheriting an *eternal* Kingdom?

16. Compare 1 Corinthians 6:2, 3, Revelation 5:8-10, and Revelation 20:4-6 – Is all of this information cast in the *future tense*? What three positions will True Christians occupy in that *future* Kingdom? *Judges*? *Kings*? *Priests*?

17. Romans 4:17 – What does Paul mean when he says that “God...speaks of *future events* with as much certainty *as though they were already past*” (*Living Bible*; emphasis added)?

Comment: There are, of course, some differences in the various translations of this verse, but they are basically similar in meaning. For examples: (a) *KJV* = “calls those things that be not as though they were”; (b) *RSV* = “calls into existence

the things that do not [presently] exist”; (c) *NIV* = “calls things that are not as though they were”; and (d) *Modern Language* = “calls into existence what has no being.”

So, the gist of the idea is that God *plans* for future events. This verse does not claim that those future events *presently exist*. What it claims is that they are presently *planned*, and God has an *unswerving determination to bring them into existence*. While the *individual priesthood* of the believer does not *presently exist*, it will, in fact, exist when the individual inherits *eternal life – life capable of perpetuating God’s plans infinitely*. So, what function does Christ’s Church play in this present life? Pay close attention to what follows.

18. 1 Corinthians 3:9, 16, 17 – What three things does Paul use to describe the Church? Is each a *single body*?

Comment: When Paul uses the term *you* in these descriptions, it is *plural*, not *singular*. He is not speaking to *individuals*; he is speaking to the *singular body of believers*. The *corporate Church* has an assigned responsibility to be holy, without blame, and loving (see Ephesians 1:4) and to be a messenger of the coming Kingdom of God (see Matthew 28:19, 20). It is God’s *field* to be constantly worked and tended – laborers doing their assigned tasks, but God is responsible for the actual growth and success of the “crops.”

Beginning with v. 10, Paul describes the *corporate Church* as God’s *building*. He describes himself as an *expert builder* (an Apostle) who has laid the only proper foundation on which the Church is to be built: Jesus Christ. Read through v. 15 and note that the *building, or construction, is in progress* – not yet completed. Paul warns about the materials one uses to construct God’s building. Why? He says that the building’s *ability to survive the coming fire* will depend on the *quality* of those materials – which are chosen by the individual workers. ***The fire will reveal it!*** Peter, faced with a similar situation to Paul’s, describes True Christians as “living stones” (1 Peter 2:5) – which would indicate the ability to survive the *fire*. These are important literary symbols. It is important to understand them.

In vv. 16, 17, Paul describes the *corporate Church* as being God’s *temple* in which God’s Spirit resides. He warns against two things: (a) doing things that lead to the destruction of that *temple* and (b) having a disregard for the *sacred* nature of that

temple. While it is true that each individual Christian must possess God’s Holy Spirit, that is for making that individual a *living stone* that is to have its place in God’s *building: God’s temple*. And, who would you expect to reside in God’s temple? *A holy priesthood – with Jesus Christ as the High Priest!* If there is a priesthood currently being served, it is by the *corporate Church*, not the individuals who make up that body.

Clarke says that the reference to the Church as a *house* is a *metonymy*: a figure of speech using the name of one thing for that of something with which it is associated. Here are a couple of examples: (a) “You can’t fight *city hall*” and (b) “Standing on the corner watching the *skirts* go by.” One associates *city hall* with any force stronger than its opponent, and *skirts* is plainly a reference to women. In the same way, the *Church* is associated with a *priesthood* because of its unique position relative to God’s plan and purpose: a *holy temple* set aside for a holy purpose.

So, where does that put us in this discussion? Jesus Christ is *building* God’s Church – one generation after another. It is a work in progress. Those who make up the corporate body of that Church are presently receiving training and instruction *to become* judges, priests, and kings who will have the authority and power to judge the nations and angels during the 1,000-year Kingdom of God on the earth. While we are not *presently* judges, priests, and kings, it is our God-given responsibility to be seriously engaged in our training. Somewhere in the future, there is a *test* coming that will determine whether or not we have made the cut.

Read Matthew 25:14-30 and Luke 19:11-27 to understand the way Christ rewards His people when He comes to set up God’s Kingdom. Matthew shows that the reward consists of rulership, and Luke shows that the amount of responsibility is in proportion to how wisely you developed and used the gifts given to you. Peter says that “It is time for *judgment to begin* with the House of God; and if it *begins* with us, what shall be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?” (1 Peter 4:17; emphasis added). What we are presently doing as *stewards* while our Lord is *away* will determine to what degree we will be rewarded when He returns. Think carefully about these things *that shall be*.

With that instruction, perhaps you can now understand the role of God’s true ministry among Christ’s Church. Is it merely a *vocation* among

those called out to become judges, priests, and kings? Let's see what God reveals about it.

Laying on of Hands: Ordination

Ordination is the means by which an individual is set aside, or admitted, to the various levels of the ministry or to the priesthood. Laying on of hands is employed in most ceremonies of ordination. We should understand what God's word reveals about how the individuals who represent Him are to be set aside for the *true* ministry.

1. Numbers 8:5-22 – How is this *different* from Exodus 29? Does it suggest that *lay members* have the authority to lay hands on ministers for ordination purposes?

Comment: Pay close attention to what is actually happening in this ceremony. God is *redeeming* the Levites from among the 12 tribes of Israel to be the priests. Up to this point, the common practice was for the head of the household – the *firstborn* – to be the “priests” of the family. Notice vv. 17-19 where God made the statement that He *sanctified* the *firstborn* during the Passover preceding the Exodus. Verse 18 says that He *substituted* the tribe of Levi for all the firstborn of Israel. This is referred to as a *redemption* (see also Exodus 34:18-20; Leviticus 25:23-34 for other examples). Verse 19 shows that the Levites would, thereafter, serve in the Tabernacle as various levels of priests. In other scriptures, you can learn that the Levites got no *land inheritance* like the other tribes did. They were distributed among the other tribes to serve as teachers, judges, and priests. The tithes and portions of the sacrifices were their assigned inheritance. But, why did God command that the *Israelites* were to lay hands on the Levites?

This is a *transference of power* ceremony. So, part of this ordination ceremony allowed for the *transfer* of the priestly duties and authority *from the firstborn* of each family *to the Levites*. Each individual Israelite did not have to lay hands on each individual Levite – of whom there were over 20,000. You have to understand the *symbolism* involved in this ceremony. Finally, this instruction supplements Exodus 29 and Leviticus 8.

2. Numbers 27:15-23 – What request did Moses make of the Lord God? Why did he make this request? Why did the Lord God tell Moses to “...lay

your hand upon him...give him a *charge* in their sight...And...put some of your *honor* upon him” (emphasis added)?

Comment: Moses was about to die, and he did not want God's work among the Israelites to come to nothing. They would need a leader to continue to teach them God's thoughts and ways. The symbolism Moses used is summed up in the expression “...that the congregation of the Lord should not be as *sheep* which have no *shepherd*...” (remember Psalm 23; emphasis added). A *charge* is the imposing of a task or responsibility upon someone – commanding them to act in a particular capacity to get a task completed. That is the nature of the expression that someone is *in charge* of something. We see in 2 Kings 2:9-15 a very good example of how *honor* is transferred from one of God's servants to another. That should be adequate for framing your answer. Pay very close attention to what is happening here.

3. Numbers 16 – Read the entire chapter carefully, making note of the problem that Korah, Dathan, and Abiram presented to Moses in v. 3. What was their claim when they said “All the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them”? What does Moses accuse Korah of in vv. 9, 10? How did God settle this dispute?

Comment: Korah was a *Levite* – a member of the *priestly* family, but he was not in the family of Aaron, the high priest. Those of Aaron's family were the only ones who could be appointed as the high priest. Dathan and Abiram were of the tribe of *Reuben* – a non-priestly family. Moses (a Levite: read Exodus 2), apparently, believed Korah was pushing to be the high priest...in spite of not being qualified for the office because he was not a member of *Aaron's* family.

Read Hebrews 5-8 to understand how Jesus Christ became *our* high priest – even though He was from the tribe of Judah, not Levi...not from Aaron's branch of the Levites. Pay attention to 5:4: “No man takes this honor unto himself, *but he that is called of God, as was Aaron*” (emphases added). In spite of his claims that *all the congregation* was holy, Korah was not appointed by God to be high priest. Verse 5 explains that even Jesus did not presume to appoint Himself to the High Priesthood, but He was appointed by God. Notice that it was *to the order of Melchisedec* (King of Salem; read Genesis 14:17-20), not *to the order of Levi*, that Jesus was appointed. Hebrews 7 explains how and why the change of the

priesthood was made. Verse 16 explains that the difference is that Levi was assigned *by the law* as a *temporary* priesthood, while Melchisedec is “after the power of endless life” – that is, it is an *eternal* priesthood.

The *pregnant* point of this example is that God’s *true ministry* is appointed by God – they are “called” into that office and given a *charge* to preach and teach God’s unadulterated *truth*. To be *shepherds* to God’s True Church. And, sadly enough, there are many so-called *ministers* who have taken this office upon themselves and have no business being in that position.

4. 2 Corinthians 11:4, 13-15 – What is Paul’s reason for warning us about this problem? Was there a problem with *false ministers*? In whose service were they really acting? With the existence of 32,000+ “Christian” denominations, why should we be concerned?

5. Jude 4 – Should God’s True Church be concerned about *imposters* coming among them to lead them astray from God’s truth (read also Galatians 1:6-12)? Why? (See John 4:23, 24 to help frame your answer.)

6. Ephesians 4:11-16 – List three responsibilities of God’s ministers and the reasons why they are charged with those responsibilities. What does this have to do with vv. 4-6? If every so-called “priest under Jesus Christ” is doing *his own thing*, can that kind of *unity (oneness)* ever be achieved? Explain your answer.

7. What does the following comment mean: “No *individual* Christian makes a *Church*”? Is it clear yet that the *individual* is called to be a *member* of a *unified body of believers* who worship God in *spirit* and in *truth*? Is it also clear that, once the Levitical priesthood was set aside, God still needed men who would act on His behalf to educate and shepherd His people? That God Himself would appoint them?

8. 1 Corinthians 3 – Read the entire chapter. If God’s true ministry is *appointed by God Himself*, what should our attitude be toward such men? Can we lightly disregard them if they are speaking God’s truth to educate and guide us? Should we be willing to listen only to those that we personally like? Why?

9. 2 Timothy 2:15 – Remembering that this is a *pastoral* letter reminding Timothy of his duties as a minister of God, why should God’s true ministers devote time to studying God’s word? In vv. 17, 18, what was the great error being taught by Hymeneus and Philetus? Why were they a *danger* to God’s Church?

10. 2 Timothy 4:1-5 – What other great problems will God’s true ministers find among those who claim to be of the true faith? Would you agree, then, that God’s true ministers need to be given an extra measure of God’s Holy Spirit to be able to confront and disprove all of the false doctrines that arise among those claiming to be “Christians”?

11. Write a brief explanation of why God’s true ministers are: (a) appointed by God Himself and (b) are to have hands laid upon them by men who have been similarly ordained. What great benefit is that to God’s Church? Be as complete as possible.

12. Are God’s ministers considered to be *priests* at present? Are they anywhere called that?

Laying on of Hands: Receiving the Gift of the Holy Spirit

Many in radio and television ministries miss the point about receiving the Holy Spirit in the manner that God’s word *requires* of us. Simply believing in Jesus Christ does not *automatically* bring upon you the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is important to understand this because of what Paul said in Romans 8:9: “You are not controlled by the flesh, but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God dwells in you. *But, anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ in him does not belong to Him*” (emphases added). The point is quite simple: *Do things the way God reveals them – or, you will be putting your eternal life in jeopardy.* Let’s see what God has revealed in His word.

1. Acts 2:38 – What three things does Peter say must be done initially by those who want their sins forgiven? How many did this as Peter commanded (v. 41)? Do you imagine that the 12 disciples had time for long, drawn out ceremonies for laying hands upon all those people?

Comment: I have read commentaries that suggest that there were too many people for the disciples to follow through with all of the requirements

– maybe leaving off the laying on of hands. Some suggest that they did not lay on hands because that is not mentioned in the account. Actually, it would have taken less time for the laying on of hands than for the baptism. If some of the disciples baptized and some laid on hands, they could have done their job quite successfully – but it still would have taken several hours to complete it. Considering the seriousness of the occasion, I suspect that they were in no hurry to leave.

2. Acts 6:1-8 – What conflict arose among the new Christian sect? How was it settled? What qualifications were the men to have? Were they *ordained* to the ministry assigned them? How can you tell?

Comment: This is generally accepted as the ordination of the first *deacons*. Some do not consider deacons to be in the ranks of the ministry. Some groups ordain them for only a period of time – and only if they are elected by the congregation. It is clear from this account that the congregation was instructed to select them in this case. Is it always necessary for this to be the practice? No. *Deacons* can be appointed by various means: congregations, committees, deacon boards, and ministers. But, their ordination constitutes a lower level of God’s ministry that takes care of the day-to-day business of a given Church congregation – which frees the pastor and other ministers to carry out the teaching and preaching of God’s word (the education and training of the congregation).

3. Acts 8:5-17 – Did Philip preach the gospel and baptize converts? Did Philip lay hands on any of them? Why did Peter and John go to Samaria (vv. 14-17)? Why had none of these converts received the Holy Spirit?

Comment: In vv. 18-24, a converted sorcerer named Simon Magus had been baptized. It appears that he observed Peter and John laying hands on the other converts and wanted to have that power also. He offered them money for it, but Peter rebuked him and refused to give him the power, as well as, apparently, to lay hands on him for the receipt of the Holy Spirit. This attempt to buy a Church office has come to be known as *simony*.

Also, in vv. 25-40, Philip is shown still preaching and baptizing. It does not say that he laid hands upon the Ethiopian after baptizing him. We cannot assume that it did not happen. Sometimes the bibli-

cal record does not give every detail of situations that occur.

4. Acts 9:1-9 – Does this describe the conversion of the Apostle Paul – formerly known as Saul of Tarsus? What happened to him as a result of the bright light that enveloped him?

5. Verse 10-22 – Whom did God send to help Saul? Was he eager to do what the Lord told him to do? Why/why not? Did he lay hands on Saul? Was Saul healed? Did Saul receive the Holy Spirit? Was Saul baptized? In which order did it occur?

Comment: Some accounts in Acts show that God gave the Holy Spirit *before* baptism so He could show that He accepted certain unusual people into His Church. Since Ananias was skeptical about Saul, God gave Saul the Holy Spirit as a sign that he was now God’s servant. Read Acts 10 to understand what the entire situation mentioned there was *really* about – the Jewish prejudice against Gentiles (vv. 28, 34-36). In vv. 44-48, it shows that God gave them the Holy Spirit as a seal of approval – then Peter baptized them.

6. Acts 18:24-28 – Was Apollos very knowledgeable about the scriptures? Did he teach the things of the Lord? What kind of baptism did he practice? Did he preach Jesus as the Christ?

Comment: Make note that Apollos was preaching God’s truth – but, he was practicing *John’s* baptism of repentance. He was eloquent and fervent, and he had many converts among the Jews. Regardless of these things, we are about to discover that there was something lacking in his approach that needed to be corrected.

7. Acts 19:1-6 – What basic question about the Holy Spirit did Paul ask some of Apollos’s converts? What was their answer? What basic question did Paul ask them about their baptism? What was their answer? What was the problem? How did Paul correct it?

Comment: John’s baptism was for the forgiveness of sins by repentance of those sins. In the process, he pointed out that *he* was not the Messiah – that the Messiah would come after him (see John 1:19-42). Once John saw Jesus Christ pursuing His ministry, he “bare record” that He was the Christ. It was God’s plan that John would come as a messenger to point out the presence of the Christ among

Israel. Apollos was following John's lead in witnessing that Jesus was Christ.

John 4:1, 2 shows that Jesus Christ "made and baptized more disciples than John," but Jesus Himself had His disciples do the actual baptizing. The baptism of Jesus Christ was different from John's in two important ways: (a) there was the promise of salvation and (b) there was the promise of the Holy Spirit – which they did not actually receive until after Jesus had ascended to the Father as the wave-sheaf offering. John 20:22 shows Him breathing upon His disciples and saying to them: "Receive a holy spirit" (*Anchor Bible*) – which corresponds to Genesis 2:7 as though He was breathing life into a new creation. The more general gift of the Holy Spirit upon "sons and daughters" (as opposed to just the disciples) did not come until Pentecost – which Peter describes as the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy (compare Acts 2:16-21 to Joel 2:28-32). Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:5 that baptism and receipt of the Holy Spirit were necessary for salvation. So, it would stand to reason that Jesus' baptism contained elements that John's did not; therefore, *re-baptism* and laying on of hands for receipt of the Holy Spirit were necessary.

It would stand to reason also that there are many who have similarly fallen prey to things that are not part of the truth of God – namely, the means by which one begins the salvation process. This can include the type of "baptism" one receives and whether or not hands were laid upon them by one of God's true ministers. It can also include whether or not this was conducted by God's True Church as opposed to some of the imposters who preach and teach falsehoods in the name of Jesus Christ. With that understanding, Paul set about correcting a problem that existed at that time – a problem that exists to this very day.

Summary

We have seen the four purposes for laying on of hands, which is revealed in God's word as one of the principles of the doctrine of Christ (Hebrews 6:1, 2): blessing, healing, ordination, and receipt of the Holy Spirit. It is important for us to understand why God uses the methods He uses to accomplish things that He wills for His people. We should not shrink back from them because we consider them to be weird or unnecessary. They are what they are because *God* has made them. We are not privileged to second-

guess Him or to denigrate them in any manner because of our own lack of understanding or unwillingness to obey Him. I hope that you have learned valuable lessons in faith in this lesson. The next lesson will cover resurrections from the dead.

an open letter from

The Pastor

dicative of his awareness of divine guidance: "I know, my son, I know." And he explained to Joseph how each would be blessed. You can see in Jeremiah 31:9 how, centuries later, God inspires Jeremiah to refer to Ephraim as God's *first-born*. So, this employment of the laying on of hands is an example of its use to transfer a blessing from one person to another.

Mark 16:18 lays out one of the *gifts* bestowed upon true believers: *laying hands upon the sick*. James 5:14-16 gives us a picture of how this duty is divided between the ministry and the laity. The sick are to call for the elders (ministers) of the Church for the purpose of: (a) praying over them and (b) anointing them with oil. The anointing with oil serves two functions: (1) the laying on of hands and (2) the transference of the *healing Spirit of God* (symbolized in the oil). This is part of the transference of God's beneficence to the one who is sick.

The duty of the sick and those who are not ordained is to join in with the *effectual, fervent prayers of faith*. The confession of faults, both by the sick and others, helps to bring mental and physical relief – and the feeling of being forgiven of spiritual or physical sins can create a renewed vigor for life. Elwood Worcester and Samuel McComb wrote in their book *Body, Mind and Spirit* (Boston: Marshall Jones Co., 1931, p. 308): "It is now an ascertained fact that, other things being equal, the sick person who prays for himself and has others pray for him has a better chance of recovery than he who refuses the hope and stimulus that prayer can bestow. Through prayer we are united with God, and this union means increase of comfort and peace, which in turn help on the process of nature's healing virtue." *If no minister is available*, certainly true believers among the laity are permitted to lay hands upon the sick and pray for their recovery.

In 1 Timothy 4:14, Paul is giving Timothy some *pastoral* instruction about the care and education of God's people. This verse points out the aspects of *beneficent power, authority* and *agency* being bestowed upon God's true ministers by someone with the right and authority to do so. Paul draws Timothy's attention to three important aspects of his power, authority and agency: (a) the *gift* that was in him, (b) the *prophecy* involved in its bestowal, and (c) the *laying on of hands* by the *presbytery*.

The *gift*, no doubt, refers to the extra measure of Holy Spirit given to Timothy for the execution of his duties as one of God's true ministers. If he is to be counted among those listed in Ephesians 4:11-16 – a spiritual educator endowed with the Spirit of God and charged with the responsibility of bringing God's people to spiritual maturity – then he must be spiritually equipped to do so. The *prophecy* involved is reminiscent of Acts 13:3. It points out – and appropriately so – that the selection of Paul and Barnabas was made under the direction of the Holy Spirit, which is, in many ways, the Spirit of prophecy.

In The Seventh Day Christian Assembly's ordination certificate and ceremony, it is made clear that anyone who is ordained into the office of *Minister of God* is "...chosen by the will of God to be a minister of Jesus Christ in the proclamation of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God..." The selection of the individual to be ordained is made by the revelation and under the direction of the Holy Spirit. In this way, the gift of the *authority* to perform and of the *power* necessary to accomplish God's will – the minister's charge and commission to become an agent for God – is consummated and put into force when *hands are laid upon him* by one or more (a *presbytery*, in this case, is a group of ministers who have an interest in the ordination of others) having the authority to transfer to him his own *beneficent power* and *authority* to act on God's behalf as one of God's *agents* in accordance with God's will.

Several ministers participated in my ordination – each laying hands upon me as an act of transferring special spiritual benefits upon me for the ministry I was about to undertake. The presiding minister took the lead and prayed for special spiritual endowments, wisdom, and willingness on my part to surrender to the guidance of the Holy Spirit – some of which also took on the tone of *prophetic utterances* (as some translate Paul's comment to Timothy).

Finally, we come to the example of Acts 8:17: "Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit." This is the responsibility of God's true ministers. In this case, Philip had baptized many in Samaria. I'm not sure why he did not lay hands on them when he baptized them. Perhaps it was something that, at first, was the duty of the Apostles – but...this Philip was not an Apostle (see Acts 6:5; 8; 21:8, 9). There might be the off-chance that Philip did not *know* about the laying on of hands for the receipt of the Holy Spirit, but I think it was a duty originally reserved for the Apostles – and later, because of the growth and expansion of territories in which Christians were to be found, it became *necessary* for local ministers to perform this post-baptism laying on of hands.

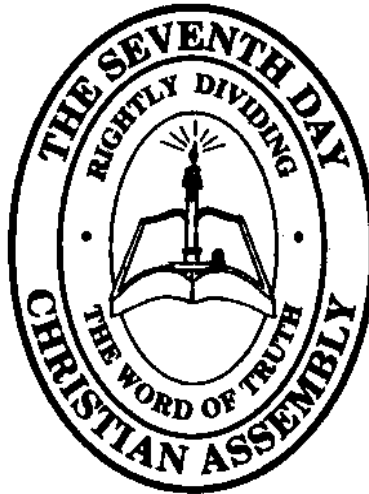
This is not the privilege of the laity. It is a duty specifically assigned to God's true ministers for the purpose of transferring the Holy Spirit in whatever measure from God to the individual believer. It is a *requirement* in the process of salvation. We will look at this more closely as we get into the study.

So, we have seen four examples of the purposes for the laying on of hands: blessing, healing, ordination, and receipt of the Holy Spirit. We will go into more depth and explore many scriptures to firmly fix this basic doctrine into our faith and practice. We must, by all means possible, learn to live by every word of God. We must, by all means possible, obey the revealed will of God.

In Christ's Service,

Larry E. Ford, Pastor

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Straight Talk . . . Plain Truth

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