

Messages for Building up New Believers

Chapter Seven_The Laying on of Hands

Scripture Reading: Heb. 6:1-2; Acts 8:14-17; 19:5-6; Psa. 133; Lev. 1:4; 3:2, 8, 13; 4:4, 15, 24, 29, 33

“New believers need to realize that as believers, we cannot live alone. We cannot be solitary Christians. We must be fellow members together with other children of God. We must also learn to submit to the authority of the Head. We cannot be rebellious. We must submit to God together with the other children of God. If we do this, the anointing will be manifested in our living and our work spontaneously, and we will have a way to go on before the Lord.”

I. The laying on of hands—a foundational truth

- A. Foundations of the Christian life, which should never be compromised includes repentance, faith, baptism, laying on of hands, resurrection and judgment.
- B. One cannot be careless about the foundation. One cannot build a house upon a poorly laid foundation.

II. The significance of the laying on of hands

- A. The first significance of the laying on of hands is identification—ref. identification of offeror of offerings in the old testament with the offering—Lev 1, 3 and 4.
- B. The second significance of the laying on of hands is transmission of blessings—ref. Jacob laying on his hands on his two grandsons—Gen 48:10–16.

III. The Body of Christ and the anointing

- A. Psalms 133 reveals that the anointing was not poured upon Aaron’s body but upon his head. We must all submit to the Head and stand in the position the Head wants us to stand. Only then will we receive blessing.
- B. When a person receives the laying on of hands, his head is lowered. This means that from that day on, he will no longer expose his own head. His head will submit to authority. It will not expose itself but will instead be under authority.

IV. How to receive the laying on of hands

- A. We need to see the authority of the head
- B. We need to see the importance of identification
- C. We need to see that we live by the Body

Note: This outline is mainly taken from *Chapter seven, Messages for Building Up New Believers, Watchman Nee.*

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE LAYING ON OF HANDS

Scripture Reading: Heb. 6:1-2; Acts 8:14-17; 19:5-6; Psa. 133; Lev. 1:4; 3:2, 8, 13; 4:4, 15, 24, 29, 33

The Bible clearly shows us that a man needs to be baptized. The Bible also clearly shows us that a man needs to receive the laying on of hands. We can see this in two instances in Acts—in Samaria and in Ephesus. In both cases baptism was followed by the laying on of hands. This was clearly the apostles' practice in their days. Today, if God's children are only baptized without experiencing the laying on of hands, their experience is not complete. The Bible clearly contains both the teaching and the pattern for this matter.

I. THE LAYING ON OF HANDS—A FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH

Hebrews 6:1 tells us that we should leave the word of the beginning of Christ and be brought on to maturity. There are several truths in the Christian life which should never be compromised. They are the foundation. A believer does not need to lay this foundation again and again. However, it does need to be laid. What is the word of the beginning of Christ? It is repentance, faith, baptism, the laying on of hands, resurrection, and judgment. The Bible shows us clearly that the foundation of the word of Christ includes baptism and the laying on of hands. If we have received baptism without receiving the laying on of hands, we are short of this foundation in our pursuit of the Lord.

The error of the church today is altogether different from the error the Hebrew believers fell into at that time. The Hebrew believers already had laid the foundation, yet they wanted to lay the same foundation again and again, thus going about in circles. What about the church today? It has made some progress, but its foundation is not well laid. The apostle told the Hebrew believers to leave the word of the beginning of Christ and strive to be brought on to maturity. In the case of Christians today, they move forward too fast without laying this foundation at all. This is too hasty. You have to see that the laying on of hands is part of the foundation of the word of Christ. Those who have laid this foundation need to move forward, whereas those who have not must do so. Our teaching today is different from the apostle's teaching. He admonished people to leave something behind, whereas we exhort people to turn back to pick up these things.

If you have to build a house with six rocks as the foundation, you cannot afford to miss one. If one is missing, a problem will occur someday. Anything that serves as a foundation is indispensable. If baptism, as one part of the foundation, is missing, trouble will arise in the future. If the laying on of hands, as another part of the foundation, is missing, trouble will also arise down the road. One cannot be careless about the foundation. One cannot build a house upon a poorly laid foundation. If part of the foundation is missing, it must be completed before he can proceed with the rest of the building.

II. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE LAYING ON OF HANDS

We have covered baptism and what it does for us. Baptism delivers us out of the world. Through baptism a man is saved and delivered out of the world. At the same time, baptism puts one into Christ and entitles him to a share in His resurrection. But what does the laying on of hands do for us? What does the laying on of hands mean?

The answers to these questions can be found in Leviticus 1, 3, and 4. These passages most frequently refer to the matter of the laying on of hands in the Old Testament. What is the meaning of a person laying his hands on the head of an animal in the Old Testament? There are two meanings.

A. Identification

The first meaning is identification. Laying hands on an animal's head in Leviticus 1 meant that the offerer and the offering were united as one. This poses a question: Why did a person who came to the Lord to offer something, whether it was a sin offering or a burnt offering, not offer himself instead of a bull or a goat? God owns the bulls and the goats of the whole world. Does God have a need for just offerings of bulls and goats? When a man comes before the Lord, he must first offer up himself. Anything short of this will not satisfy God. An offering is a consecration of the offerer, not merely a sacrifice of a bull or a goat.

However, if I came to the altar and sacrificed myself, giving my body to be killed and burned as a burnt offering, would I not be the same as the Molech worshippers in the Old Testament? Those who worshipped Molech did not sacrifice bulls and goats to Molech; they sacrificed their own children. If our God demands that we sacrifice ourselves to Him, then is our God not the same as Molech? Molech demands our children's blood, and God demands that we present ourselves as offerings. If we have to put ourselves in the fire, does this not mean that God's demand is more severe than Molech's demand?

In one sense, God's demand is more severe than Molech's demand. But at the same time, God gives us a way to offer ourselves without being burned to death. What is this way? It is to take a bull and lay one's hands on its head. The most important part of a bull is its head. One can also take a goat and lay hands on its head. I lay both my hands on the bull's or goat's head. Before God, whether aloud or in silence, I pray, "This is me. I am the one who should be on the altar. I am the one who should be burned. I should be the sacrifice, and I should be the one to redeem my own sin. I deserve to die. I offer myself to You as a burnt offering of sweet savor. Lord! I am bringing this bull to You with my hands on its head. This means that the bull and I are one and the same. My charge to the priest to kill it means that I am being killed. When its blood is shed, my blood is shed. When it lies on the altar, I am on the altar."

Did this not happen to us when we were baptized? When we went into the water, we said "This is my grave. The Lord is burying me here." We took the water as our grave. Now, as we lay our hands on the bull's head, we identify ourselves with the bull. When we offer the bull to God, we are actually offering ourselves to Him. The bull represents us.

Hence, the laying on of hands signifies identification. In the Old Testament the primary meaning of the laying on of hands is identification with the offering. The offering and I have become one. We both stand in the same position. When the offering is brought before God, I am brought before God as well.

B. Transmitting Blessings

The laying on of hands carries another meaning in the Old Testament. In Genesis Isaac laid his hands upon his two sons. Jacob did the same thing to his two grandsons, Ephraim and Manasseh. When Jacob laid his hands on his two grandsons, he put one hand on each of his grandsons' heads and blessed them. He transmitted his blessings to his two grandsons. He was blessing them and petitioning blessings for them. As a result, the blessings came and were bestowed upon them.

We must see the significance of the laying on of hands in these two aspects. One is union, or identification, and the other is transmission. Both are a kind of fellowship. Fellowship joins us to others and makes us one. Fellowship also transmits our strength to others.

III. THE BODY OF CHRIST AND THE ANOINTING

We need to go on to see why Christians should receive the laying on of hands. After we have believed in the Lord and are baptized, why do we need the apostles as representatives of the Body to come and lay hands on us?

A. God Pouring Oil on the Entire Body of Christ

First, let us explain briefly the Body of Christ and the anointing. Please read 1 Corinthians 12:12-13 and Psalm 133. Christianity is truly peculiar. What is so peculiar about it? It has to do with God gaining a man on earth. This man subjected Himself perfectly to God; He absolutely represented God and absolutely lived out the life of God. Today God has made this man both Lord and Christ. God has poured out His own Spirit upon this man, Jesus the Nazarene. When God poured His Spirit upon Him and endued Him with the Spirit, God did not pour the Spirit upon Him individually. He poured it upon Him as the Head of the Body. God's anointing is on the Head. The Lord Jesus did not receive the anointing from God as an individual; He was standing in the position of the Head of the Body when He received the Spirit upon His head. In other words, He was anointed by God for the sake of the Body.

This is why He is called *the Anointed One*, and we are also called *the anointed ones*. His name is *Christos*, while our name is *Christoi*—Christians, Christmen. He is the Head, and the church is the Body. God does not want to have one individual man on earth. Rather, He is after a corporate man—the church. In itself, the church on earth cannot satisfy God; it cannot carry out what should be carried out; and it cannot maintain God's testimony, because it does not have God's power. Therefore, God has to anoint the church. When the church receives the anointing, it can satisfy God's demand. The anointing signifies God's authority. God's authority is poured upon the church through His anointing.

However, God does not anoint one or two members, nor does He anoint all the members. God only anoints the Head. In order for God's children to know the Holy Spirit, they must first know the Body. The Holy Spirit is not given firstly to the Body but to the Head. The whole Body receives the anointing because God has anointed the Head. Is this clear? It is not a matter of a single member receiving the Holy Spirit. It is neither a matter of all the members receiving the Holy Spirit. It is a matter of the Head receiving the anointing.

B. Receiving the Anointing by Standing in the Position of the Body

How then can we receive the anointing oil? We must stand in the position of the Body in order to receive it. If I stand in the position of the Body and take a proper place within the Body, the anointing will come to me spontaneously when it is poured upon the Head. The anointing is not given just to me. It is impossible for me to ask for the anointing for myself. Many people are deprived of any blessing because they come to God alone, hoping to receive the Holy Spirit and the anointing by themselves.

Please remember that the oil was poured upon Aaron's head. It flowed down to his beard and then to his garment. Aaron had a long garment which reached his feet and covered his whole body. As the oil was poured upon his head, it flowed to the lowest part of his body. Today a person enjoys the anointing because of his position in the Body, not because of his condition before God. If you stand under the Head, the anointing will reach you. If you do not stand under the Head, the anointing will not reach you. Receiving the anointing is not a personal matter, nor a matter of the whole Body. It is a matter of being in the Body and under the Head. When the Body submits to the Head and stands on the proper ground, it will receive the anointing.

In our spiritual walk, we need the power of the Holy Spirit. We will not walk according to the flesh only when the anointing becomes our power. The anointing is not poured upon man's flesh. Let us remind ourselves of this. We cannot act according to our own ideas. We need the anointing, but we cannot receive the anointing through asking and praying for it by ourselves. It is only as we stand in a normal relationship to the Body that we will receive the anointing.

We must see that the Bible never speaks about the anointing of the Body. Only the Head is anointed. But when the Head is anointed, we as His Body are also anointed. The anointing was not poured upon Aaron's body but upon his head. But the anointing flowed from Aaron's head down to his garment and eventually all over of his body. Only foolish ones will seek for an individual anointing or an anointing just for the Body. We must all submit to the Head and stand in the position the Head wants us to stand. Only then will we receive the anointing.

C. The Laying On of Hands Being Done by the Representatives of Christ and His Body—the Apostles

God's Word shows us that each time a person is baptized into Christ, the representative authority established by God, such as the apostles, should lay hands upon such a one on behalf of the Head and the Body. This shows us the significance of the laying on of hands. When a person receives the laying on of hands, his head is

lowered. This means that from that day on, he will no longer expose his own head. His head will submit to authority. It will not expose itself but will instead be under authority.

When an apostle, a representative of the Body, lays his hand on me, it means that he and I have fellowship and that we have become one. The apostles represent the Body because God has placed the apostles in the church first. This is why they represent the church. When an apostle, who represents the church, lays his hands on you and says, "Brother, you are one with the Body of Christ," the anointing from the Head will flow to you. Because you are one with the Body, the anointing comes to you as well. This is the reason the apostle lays his hands upon you. The laying on of hands identifies you with the Body of Christ.

The apostles represent not only the church but also Christ. God has placed the apostles in the church first. Being first means having authority. In other words, the apostles are the representative authority. Therefore, when an apostle's hand is upon your head, it is not only the church that is laying hands on you but also Christ who is laying His hands on you. This means that the Lord is bringing you under His authority. From that point on, you are under the headship of Christ.

IV. HOW TO RECEIVE THE LAYING ON OF HANDS

A. The Need to Submit to the Authority of the Head

We must be under the authority of the Head, and we must act as members in the Body of Christ. We should never presume that we can go on by ourselves. The very nature that we received when we were saved makes us members in the Body. This very nature does not allow us to be alone. Once we are by ourselves, we will die. We can live only when we are attached to the Body.

B. The Need to See the Importance of Identification

We must see the importance of identification. After we see the importance of identification we can receive the blessing of transmission. If we do not see the importance of identification, there will be no blessing of transmission. The main thought behind the laying on of hands is identification. Although it also carries the function of transmitting, its main significance is identification.

C. The Need to See That We Live by the Whole Body

Today when brothers lay hands on you, it is not a vain or mindless act. Your eyes must be opened to see that from that day on, you have become a child among many children, a cell among many cells, and a member among many members. As a member, you live by the whole Body. If you live as an individual Christian, you are finished and you are useless. As soon as you cease fellowshiping with other children of God, trouble will come. No matter how strong you are, you cannot survive on your own. No matter how great and how wonderful you are, you are dead if you are severed from the Body. You cannot boast of your power. You are powerful only

because you are in the Body. This is what the laying on of hands does for you. Once you leave the Body, you are finished.

As others lay their hands on you, you should have a realization within yourself: “Lord, I cannot live by myself. I confess that I am a member in the Body. Without the Body I cannot live. Without the Body I cannot have the anointing.” Is this clear? The anointing is on the Head. Therefore, you have to come under the headship; you have to submit to the authority of the Head along with all the other children of God. Individually you have to submit to Him, and you have to submit to Him in oneness with others. You have to submit directly, and you have to submit indirectly together with the whole Body. When you do this, the anointing will come to you. When you stand in this position, the anointing will spontaneously flow to you.

V. TWO CASES OF THE LAYING ON OF HANDS IN ACTS

A. The Case in Samaria

Finally, we should look at the two cases in Samaria and Ephesus. As a result of Philip’s evangelistic visit to Samaria, a group of people believed and were baptized. But they did not receive the Holy Spirit. The apostles in Jerusalem heard of this and sent Peter and John to Samaria to pray for the Holy Spirit to come upon them. While they prayed, they laid hands on them. As a result, the Holy Spirit came upon and anointed them.

Baptism is a declaration that we have forsaken the world, whereas the laying on of hands is a declaration that we have entered the Body. These are two sides of one thing. On the one hand, we are baptized and have forsaken the world, which is on the negative side. On the other hand, we entered into the Body the very moment someone laid his hands upon us. Since we are in the Body, we need to be identified with all the children of God and need to submit to the authority of the Head. If we put our entire being under the authority of the Head, we will experience the flowing of the anointing within. Once our position is right, the anointing will flow to us. If our position is wrong, the anointing will not flow to us. The Samaritans believed in the Lord and were saved. But they were in a peculiar predicament—the Holy Spirit had not come upon them. The apostles came and laid their hands on their heads, thus placing them under the authority of the Head, uniting and joining them to the entire Body. At that very moment a marvelous thing happened: The Holy Spirit descended upon them and the anointing flowed to them.

B. The Case in Ephesus

Let us now look at the case in Ephesus. During one of his evangelistic journeys, Paul arrived in Ephesus, where he met twelve disciples who had received only the baptism of John. Paul asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” They replied, “On the contrary, we did not even hear whether there is a Holy Spirit.” Paul then asked, “Into what then were you baptized?” (Acts 19:2-3). Paul saw the problem; they did not have the proper foundation.

How could a person not have the Holy Spirit if he had already believed in Jesus? There was definitely something wrong with their foundation. Into what were they baptized? The answer could be easily found. They had received only the baptism of John and had not been put into Christ. Therefore, Paul said that they needed to be baptized again, this time into the name of Christ. Then Paul laid hands on them. The laying on of hands follows baptism. One needs to get into the Body and submit to the authority of the Head. This is the meaning of the laying on of hands.

If a man is not baptized, he cannot receive the laying on of hands. A person must first be baptized, forsake the world, and enter into Christ, having died and resurrected. Then he must see that he should live by the Body and be under the authority of the Head. Then when he receives the laying on of hands, the Holy Spirit will descend upon him. The outward manifestation of the Spirit is not the primary focus of what is received. Rather, I must emphasize the inward flowing of the anointing.

Psalm 133 shows us that the Head has been anointed. The anointing of the Head equals the anointing of the Body, which equals the anointing of every member. Thank and praise God that when the anointing oil flowed down from the Head, we received it because we are in the Body. When we have the anointing, it is a small matter whether or not the Lord gives us outward signs. Please note that the outward signs at Pentecost are too external; they are not that crucial. We believe that the Holy Spirit still comes upon man today. Outward signs are merely one manifestation of the anointing. As long as there is the anointing, it matters little whether or not there are any outward signs. What is important is the source of the anointing. The anointing comes when the anointing of the Head becomes the anointing of the members. For this reason, prayers that are accompanied by the laying on of hands bear tremendous significance.

VI. AN EXCEPTION IN THE BIBLE

There is only one exception in the Bible concerning the laying on of hands. It happened in Cornelius's house. The Holy Spirit descended upon Cornelius's house before there was any baptism or laying on of hands. Cornelius's house was an exception because after Pentecost, all the apostles thought that the Lord's grace was confined to the Jews. They were conscious that they were the Jews and that the Lord Jesus was also a Jew. At Pentecost the Holy Spirit only descended upon the Jews. The three thousand and five thousand people who were saved at that time were all Jews. Those who received the Lord's grace were scattered Jews in dispersion who had returned to Jerusalem. Up to this time, the Lord's grace had been experienced only by the Jews. They were not sure whether this grace could be shared by foreigners—the Gentiles. Some Chinese call foreigners *foreign devils*. The Jews cursed the foreigners even more. They considered foreigners as animals and beasts. Even Peter could not drop this attitude. He had the same view as the others.

It is not easy to break through the barrier of man's darkness. This is why it was a great matter for the Lord to send Peter to Cornelius's house to open the door for the Gentiles to believe in Him. He first gave Peter a vision—a vessel descending from heaven like a great sheet with many things inside. The Lord said to Peter, "Slay and eat!" (Acts 10:13). When Peter saw it, he said immediately, "By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything common and unclean" (v. 14). This means he had never

had any dealings with the Gentiles before. What should he do now? The sheet came down once, twice, three times. By then Peter became clear. Had it not been for this vision, Peter would never have become clear. Old concepts are really strong! This vessel came from heaven, and the Lord Himself spoke to him, yet Peter still had reservations about it. The Lord could do nothing except take back the sheet. When it came down from heaven the second time, the Lord spoke to him again, but he still could not understand. The sheet was taken back again. The third time the Lord sent the sheet down again and showed him the vision once more. He spoke to him again. By this third time, Peter became clear. He could not say, “My eyes were mistaken,” or, “I have forgotten what I have seen; I cannot remember clearly.”

After this vision was unveiled, men from Caesarea came. Then it occurred to Peter that the Gentiles were also able to receive God’s salvation. The dogs could eat the crumbs under the table. He went, but after he arrived at Cornelius’s house, he still dared not baptize anyone. Cornelius’s household had indeed believed, but Peter dared not baptize them for fear that the brothers who were with him might not accept it. They might say, “Peter, you are acting independently.” Peter was in an awkward position at that time. He was clear in himself, but the brothers were not clear.

At this point the Lord poured down the Spirit upon the Gentiles—before they were baptized and before they had received the laying on of hands. When Peter went back, he could say boldly, “I only said a few words; the gospel was not even clearly presented. Yet the Holy Spirit came anyway. I had no alternative but to make up the lack by baptizing them.” Baptism is to forsake the world and enter into Christ, whereas the laying on of hands is to receive the anointing. Cornelius’s household had already received the anointing. Hence there was no more need for them to receive the laying on of hands. This is why Peter only baptized them.

Later, when Paul returned from Gentile lands to the church in Jerusalem, an argument followed concerning the Gentiles. Peter brought up the incident again and broke the deadlock. From that point on, the door to the Gentiles was opened.

In Samaria there was the laying on of hands, but in Caesarea there was not the laying on of hands. However, God used the case in Caesarea to confirm Paul’s work and to settle the case in chapter fifteen. In chapter nineteen, when Paul came to Ephesus, he again practiced the laying on of hands. Therefore, the practice of the laying on of hands continued. It has not suffered an interruption since.

VII. GOING ALONG WITH OTHER CHILDREN OF GOD

New believers need to realize that as believers, we cannot live alone. We cannot be solitary Christians. We must be fellow members together with other children of God. We must also learn to submit to the authority of the Head. We cannot be rebellious. We must submit to God together with the other children of God. If we do this, the anointing will be manifested in our living and our work spontaneously, and we will have a way to go on before the Lord.

