

Eternity Daily Bible Study - No. 373  
Series: The Primal Church - Acts Chapters 1-8  
Verses: Acts 6:6-8  
Topic: Stephen's anointing / The Laying On Of Hands  
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[Today's devotional is a bit longer as, at the end, I have attached all the NT references to the laying on of hands, under the relevant headings.]

Acts 6:6-8 MKJV They set these before the apostles. And having prayed, they laid hands on them. (7) And the Word of God was increasing. And the number of the disciples in Jerusalem was multiplying exceedingly; even a great crowd of the priests obeyed the faith. (8) And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.

Stephen was not one of the original Twelve and prior to his ordination in verse 6 there is no record of his doing any miracles despite the fact that Stephen was full of faith and the Holy Spirit. Up until Stephen all the recorded miracles had happened through the apostles hands. Now they were happening through a deacon. Something about the laying on of hands conferred power upon Stephen and his ministry.

The laying on of hands is a basic Christian practice that is associated with receiving the Holy Spirit, healing, spiritual empowerment and the working of miracles. Because it is easily "paganised" it has been treated with great caution by the traditional church as well as by the more rationalistic liberal theologians. However it is not a superstitious practice but a thoroughly biblical way of passing on the anointing. I found 18 major references to the "laying on of hands" in the NT and I have classified them under headings at the end of this devotional.

Christianity is an intensely personal faith that is transmitted from person to person via disciple-making and through the laying on of hands. God has Personhood and in a way "got personal" in Christ Jesus who laid His hands on the apostles, the sick and even on small children.

Stephen is a great example of the effective laying on of hands. He was already faithful, Spirit-filled and wise. As he moved into ministry via the apostolic laying on of hands he was ready for the anointing given via the hands of the apostles and as a result the anointing came upon Stephen strongly and he did great works of power.

Stephen is a "third generation" miracle-worker, first Jesus, then the apostles, then Stephen. Stephen's anointing indicates that a person of Greek-speaking background, who was a deacon and not an apostle, can still do mighty works. It is thus a strong indication that miracles can still be done today.

The attributes of Stephen's personality that led to the working of signs and wonders

were that he was “full of faith and power”. There are varying levels of faith discussed in the New Testament –“unbelief” “little faith”, “great faith”, “full of faith” “faith that moves mountains” and Paul even talks about a “measure of faith” that each believer has. (Romans 12:3-6)

Romans 12:3-6 MKJV For I say, through the grace given to me, to every one who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think. But set your mind to be right-minded, even as God has dealt to every man the measure of faith. .... (6) Then having gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, if prophecy, according to the proportion of faith;

Stephen was full of faith and power – that is he had a high measure of faith and was able to translate that into action. Now this faith in action resulted in miracles and great signs and wonders. Another person’s faith may result in prophecy – and so on and so forth through the various gifts.

As a result of Stephen’s witness many priests were becoming disciples and the old order of Judaism was beginning to crumble. At this stage Christianity was not a separate faith but a reform movement within Judaism – and it was winning – but the “old guard” had quite a few tricks left (as we shall see tomorrow).

There was simply no arguing with anointing. The Christians had “it” and could pass “it” on via the laying on of hands. In contrast the Jewish leaders did not have a true anointing, did no works of power and were of no help to the people but rather just laid burdens on their backs (see Matthew 23).

The anointing breaks the yoke.

Isaiah 10:27 MKJV And it shall be, in that day his burden shall be taken away from off your shoulder, and his yoke from off your neck, and the yoke shall be destroyed because of the anointing.

The yoke of the Law was being broken by the anointing of the Holy Spirit passed on through the laying on of hands and the ministry of anointed individuals. On another level bondages of infirmity, sickness and demon possession were being shattered by Stephen and by the apostles.

With the anointing the Church is a transformational force in the world, without the anointing it is just so much dead wood. The Holy Spirit is God’s to dispense and is the secret of power in ministry. We must seek His anointing in our lives.

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## NEW TESTAMENT REFERENCES TO THE LAYING ON OF HANDS

### A FOUNDATION OF THE FAITH

Hebrews 6:1-3 MKJV Therefore, having left the discourse of the beginning of Christ, let us go on to full growth, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, (2) of the baptisms, of doctrine, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. (3) And this

we will do, if God permits.

#### RECEIVING THE HOLY SPIRIT

Acts 8:17 MKJV Then they laid *their* hands on them, and they received *the* Holy Spirit.

Acts 9:17 MKJV And Ananias went and entered into the house. And putting his hands on him, *he* said, Brother Saul, the Lord, Jesus, who appeared to you in the way in which you came, has sent me to you that you might see and be filled with *the* Holy Spirit.

Acts 19:6 MKJV And as Paul laid *his* hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.

#### HEALING

Luke 4:40 MKJV And the sun sinking, all, as many as had sick ones with different kinds of diseases brought them to Him. And laying hands on each of them, He healed them.

Luke 13:11-13 MKJV And behold, there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and she was bowed together and was not able to be completely erect. (12) And when Jesus saw her, He called and said to her, Woman, you are delivered from your infirmity. (13) And He laid *His* hands on her. And instantly she was made erect, and she glorified God.

Mark 6:5 MKJV And He could do no work of power there, except that He laid His hands on a few sick ones, He healed them.

Mark 8:23-25 MKJV And He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the town. And when He had spat on his eyes and had put *His* hands on him, He asked Him if he saw anything. (24) And he looked up and said, I see men as trees, walking. (25) And after that He put *His* hands again on his eyes and made him look up. And he was restored and saw all clearly.

Mark 16:17-18 MKJV And *miraculous* signs will follow to those believing these things: in My name they will cast out demons; they will speak new tongues; (18) they will take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them. They will lay hands on *the* sick, and they will be well.

Acts 28:8-9 MKJV And it happened the father of Publius was lying down, suffering fevers and dysentery; to whom Paul entered in, and praying and laying on his hands, he healed him. (9) Then this taking place, the rest who were having infirmities in the island also came, and were healed.

#### MIRACLES

Acts 5:12 MKJV And many miracles and wonders were done among the people by the hands of the apostles; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch.

Acts 14:3 MKJV Therefore they stayed a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who bore witness to the word of His grace, giving miracles and wonders to be done by their hands.

Acts 19:11-12 MKJV And God did works of power through the hands of Paul, (12) so that even handkerchiefs or aprons from his skin being brought onto the sick, the diseases were released, and the evil spirits went out of them.

#### SPIRITUAL EMPOWERMENT

Acts 6:6 MKJV They set these before the apostles. And having prayed, they laid hands on them. (later Stephen does great works)

Acts 13:1-3 MKJV And in Antioch some among the existing church were prophets and teachers. (such as Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, the foster-brother of Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. (2) As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, So, then, separate Barnabas and Saul to Me for the work to which I have called them. (3) Then having fasted and prayed and laid hands on them, they let them go.

1 Timothy 4:14 MKJV Do not neglect the gift in you, which was given you by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the body of elders.

1 Timothy 5:22 MKJV Do not lay hands quickly on anyone, neither be partaker of the sins of others. Keep yourself pure.

2 Timothy 1:6 MKJV Therefore I remind you to inflame anew the gift of God, which is in you by the putting on of my hands.

Blessings,

John Edmiston

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