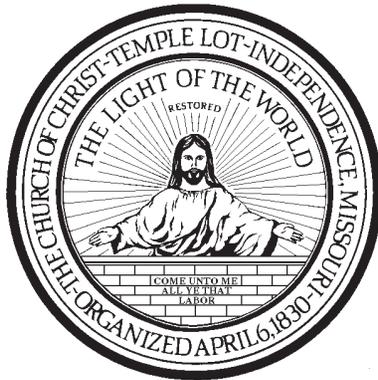


**A Principle
of the
Gospel**

**The Laying on
of Hands**

*Edited and Published by
The Board of Publications
Church of Christ
(Temple Lot)
P.O. Box 472
Independence, Missouri 64051*



Apostle B. C. Flint

2003 Edition

THE LAYING ON OF HANDS
for
THE BAPTISM OF
THE HOLY SPIRIT

This is one of the principles of the doctrine of Christ that is perhaps ignored, and given as little attention as anything that was instituted by the Lord as a part of His plan of salvation. We find it enumerated among the six fundamental principles of the doctrine of Christ in Hebrews 6:1, 2. It might be well, then, for us to examine it and see just what significance is attached to it in the sacred writings of the Scriptures.

In other tracts we have noted the place that the principles of Faith, Repentance, and Baptism in water hold in the plan that Christ gave His life on the cross to make effective for our salvation. We have held that the only way to apply the blood of Christ to our lives is for us to yield implicit obedience to the plan that Christ gave as a saving means, and we find Him addressing His disciples, just before His ascension into heaven, on this wise:

“...All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go

THE LAYING ON OF HANDS

ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe ALL things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen” Matthew 28:18-20. (Emphasis mine, B. C. F.)

We have emphasized the word “all” in the above text because we understand by that, that since ALL power is still in the hands of our Master because He says so, yet He was commissioning His disciples to go out and represent Him, and they were to teach “ALL” things whatsoever He had commanded them. So, if the imposition of hands was the ordinance by which the gift of the Holy Ghost, or the baptism of the spirit, was to be obtained, then it MUST of necessity be among the “ALL” things that His disciples were to teach; and to teach “less” than the “all” things would be to misrepresent Christ, and if by thus misrepresenting Him we have failed to give to the honest inquirer the correct answer to the question, What must I do to be saved? are we not driving one nail after the other into the cross of public opinion, upon which Christ,

represented by His gospel, is being crucified today? How can we escape that conclusion? We are told in the last chapter of the book of Revelation, and consequently the last book in the Bible, that man must not “add to” nor “take from” the commandments of God. If we do there are penalties attached. Let us read:

“For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away His part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things that are written in this book” Revelation 22:18-19.

It will be noted that it isn't the book itself that is not to be added to nor taken from, but the things that are written in the book. Obviously, we cannot limit God nor confine Him between the lids of any book. The command is “that man” (not God) shall not “add to” nor “take from” the “things” that are written in the book. And that

is exactly what Christ realized might happen when He gave that last commission to His disciples. He KNEW that men would do just that thing, for we find HIM saying:

“But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men”
Matthew 15:9.

And again, speaking of the necessity of heeding and doing all He commanded, He says that:

“...He that...climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber” John 10:1.

It reasonably follows then, that if the laying on of hands was a part of the plan we are to teach there will be sufficient scripture to support that position, so we will adjust ourselves to the task of doing just that thing.

In the first place, however, it may be well to discuss this idea of a “baptism of the Holy Spirit.” Jesus says:

“...Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” John 3:5.

The process then seems to resolve itself into something like this. We

have had faith in God. We have repented of our sins. We have been baptized in water for the remission of our sins. Now we desire to be born of the spirit. What for? Well, John the Baptist says:

“I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire...” Matthew 3:11.

Added to this, we have this from the Master Himself:

“And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you” John 14:16-17.

We grant that the Bible teaches that the Holy Ghost is that power that “lighteneth every man that cometh into the world,” and it is that Spirit that “enticeth and inviteth to do good,” but

from the above text it is clear that through obedience to the gospel, by being baptized in water for the remission of our sins, we MAY have the Holy Ghost as an ABIDING COMFORTER. It is here where the imposition of hands by the ministry of Christ is necessary for this power to be received.

Then we are again told that,

“...No man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost” I Corinthians 12:3.

Then again we are told,

“In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise” Ephesians 1:13.

Its purpose is given as follows:

“These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you

all things, and bring all things
to your remembrance, whatso-
ever I have said unto you”
John 14:25-26.

This seems to make the plan, so far
as man’s development in this life is
concerned, complete. By the baptisms
of water and the Spirit he is equipped
to meet life and its problems with full
assurance. The only thing that need
hinder a full rounding out of his life in
Christ Jesus will be his own weakness,
and his proneness to wander from the
path, because there is no guarantee
that God will take from him his agency
and make him be good against his will.
Paul says:

“Wherefore let him that
thinketh he standeth take heed
lest he fall” I Corinthians
10:12;

and also wherein he recognizes the
weakness of the human in these
words:

“But I keep under my body,
and bring it into subjection:
lest that by any means, when I
have preached to others, I my-
self should be a castaway” I
Corinthians 9:27.

So while we, having the baptisms of
the water and the Spirit which is in-

deed one complete “New Birth,” and
we are now prepared to “walk in new-
ness of life,” we must continue to
“abide” in the doctrine of Christ, and
not “transgress,” because we are told,

“Whosoever transgresseth,
and abideth not in the doctrine
of Christ, hath not God. He
that abideth in the doctrine of
Christ, he hath both the Father
and the Son” II John, 9th
verse.

Hence, we must not become im-
bued with the thought that because we
now have ALL of the gifts of God for
man in our hands, and we can by this
wonderful measuring stick make a
proper evaluation of the good and the
bad, as it meets us in life, and we can
learn to choose the good and pass by
the evil; that we CANNOT sin, as
some today teach, because we can,
and there isn’t a bit of scripture that
says otherwise; and in order to attempt
to find such, we are merely “wresting
the scriptures” to our own hurt. We
know there are scriptures that say, “ye
are not your own,” “ye are bought with
a price.” These are made to say that
we have lost our agency, which very
idea in itself would put us above God,
because He exercises agency, and we
are to be like Him.

There is perhaps no more intriguing topic in the whole New Testament than this that deals with the Holy Ghost and its operation. We could write indefinitely, but in this paper we wish to consider briefly the title of this tract, and its connection with this subject.

THE LAYING ON OF HANDS AND THE HOLY GHOST

In the 8th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles we read a wonderful story of a large group of people being converted to Christ. A certain Evangelist named Philip, we are told, went down to the city of Samaria and “preached Christ unto them.” It also says that because of this there was “great joy in that city.” It further says that when the people believed the things Philip preached, “concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized both men and women.” This is interesting because it shows what followed the preaching of “Christ,” in that day.

However, here is something else in this same story:

“Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto

them Peter and John: Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost:... Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost. And when Simon (one of the converts, B. C. F.) saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost” Acts 8:14-15, 17-19.

Oh, says someone, I know lots of people who have received the Holy Ghost without the laying on of hands. Perhaps so, but we are also told in the Bible that there are “many spirits gone out into the world and that we shall try the spirits.” So since the laying on of hands is indicated in the preaching of the apostles as a result of their commission from Christ as being THE RULE whereby this gift may be obtained, I would prefer not to take any chances with a substitute, or by “trying” to get it in some other way, than that given of Christ. I don't want to be classed as a “thief and a robber” for “trying” to climb up some other way.

However, we are not all through with scriptural texts on this question. Over in the 19th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles we find another story similar to the one about Philip and the Apostles Peter and John at Samaria. This time it is the Apostle Paul who is doing missionary work. He came to Ephesus and there he found certain disciples, and he asks the question,

“...Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John’s baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied” Acts 19:2-6.

In this story there are some very interesting sidelights. First, how came these people to be baptized, as they supposed, by “John’s baptism?” Who was it that had done the work? Did he have authority to baptize? If he did, why did Paul baptize them again? Was this a re-baptism? Or had they merely gone through the form, and a “new birth” had failed to materialize? This last statement we believe gives the clue to the whole thing. If they had been baptized by proper authority, they WOULD HAVE received the birth of the water and the Spirit, and there would have been none of the questions asked by Paul. So since they hadn’t even “heard whether there be any Holy Ghost” they had never been really baptized at all, because a mere going into the water and coming out again does not necessarily constitute a birth of the water, and immediately raises the question of authority.

It is easy to solve this by reading a story of the 18th chapter which just precedes the above story. Here we learn that a certain Jew of Alexandria in Egypt had heard of the work of John the Baptist, and believed it, for we are told that he knew “only the baptism of John.” This man then TOOK IT UPON HIMSELF to go and do some preaching and baptizing, and so, of

course, there were no results; so Paul did NOT rebaptize these converts of Apollos, this Alexandrian Jew; he simply BAPTIZED them, and then two disciples who DID understand the whole thing properly took this man Apollos and “expounded unto him the way of the Lord more perfectly.” See Acts 18:24-26.

We feel that this is sufficient scripture to establish the truth of the position we are taking. We will introduce a few statements from the Bible commentators.

Tertullian, A. D. 200: “After baptism, the hands are imposed by blessing, and calling and inviting the Holy Spirit, who willingly descends from the Father on the bodies that are cleansed and blessed” *De Bapt.* Chapter 6.

Further on, upon this, in chapter 8, he says:

“It is the fleshy or outward act of baptism that we are dipped in water; the spiritual effect that we are freed from our sins. Then follows laying on of the hands, the dispenser inviting the Spirit of God by prayer, and being cleansed by

the baptismal water, we are disposed for the Holy Spirit under the hands of the angel of the church” *De Bapt.* Chapter 8.

Mosheim:

“After baptism they by prayer and the laying on of hands were solemnly recommended to the mercy of God, and dedicated to his service” *First Century*, part 2, chapter 4, verse 13.

Matthew Henry’s *Commentary*:

“Paul solemnly prayed to God to give them those gifts signified by the laying on of his hands upon them, which was a gesture used in blessing by the patriarchs, especially in conveying the great trust of promise as in Genesis 43:14. The Spirit being the great promise of the New Testament, the apostles conveyed it by the imposition of hands” Vol. 3, page 858.

Cyprian, a writer of the third century, says:

“Our practice is that those who have been baptized in the

church should be presented... that by prayer and the imposition of hands they may receive the Holy Ghost” Epistle 73.

Mosheim and Gahan, church historians, say that the laying on of hands for confirmation and reception of the Holy Ghost was practiced in the third century (Gahan’s *Church History*, page 93).

Others testifying along this same line are Martin Luther, Chrysostom, Augustine, and Eusebius Pamphillius.

However, before we leave this part of the subject we would like to notice a little more in detail the matter of authority to minister in any of these ordinances of the gospel. We have noted that Paul refused to recognize the authority of Apollos to baptize. We will discuss this matter along the lines of what constitutes proper AUTHORITY; Paul says:

“And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron” Hebrews 5:4.

John the Baptist also says:

“For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the

Spirit by measure unto him”
John 3:34.

This should give us a very good clue as to who are the ones exercising proper authority. It is he that “speaketh the words of God.” Can a man, even though a minister, be sent of God who will tell you that ANY of the ordinances of the gospel taught by Christ or His apostles are of no value, but are mere carnal ordinances? And there are in the world today approximately fifteen hundred so-called Christian sects, each one telling a different story. ALL may be wrong, but it is evident that ONLY ONE can be right, because, “he that is sent of God speaketh the words of God.” Who will contend that God is then the author of this religious confusion? Added to this, such a position would charge God with being more lax than man, because man is very insistent on the matter of authority in his affairs. For instance, this country is made up of citizenry from all of the countries of the world. How do they become citizens of this country? Why, by becoming naturalized, as we call it. They must go before the PROPER AUTHORITY, someone AUTHORIZED by our government to induct them according to the rule. It would be ridiculous for any one to take the position

that just anyone who felt an urge to preach would thus be clothed with authority to go out and pretend to represent God and officiate in the ordinances of His Gospel.

No wonder Jesus issued the warning:

“But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men”
Matthew 15:9.

Or where He prophesies about His coming and the end of the world:

“For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many” Matthew 24:5.

The only logical conclusion to be drawn from this is that every man, regardless of his church affiliation, who comes to us in the name of Christ, telling us that Jesus is the Christ, yet telling us that we can be saved by ANY OTHER MEANS than the simple plan of salvation as given by Christ Himself, with all of its ordinances, is a deceiver. That man certainly has no authority to officiate in the ordinances of the gospel. Is it any wonder that God promised to restore the gospel in the latter days by sending an angel with it. He knew that at the time of His

second coming there would be such religious confusion as we see everywhere about us today. In the time of Christ and the apostles there were marvelous spiritual gifts (as promised by Christ in His last commission to His apostles) enjoyed in the Church of Christ. Nine such gifts given by the Holy Ghost are mentioned in the 12th chapter of I Corinthians. They are Faith, Wisdom, Knowledge, Miracles, Healings, Tongues, Prophecy, Interpretation of Tongues, and Discerning of Spirits; and it says that all of these came by the Holy Ghost, and according to the rule, that was received through the Laying on of Hands by those who had authority.

Other uses for the Laying on of Hands:

Blessing of Children.
Healing of the Sick.
Ordaining of the ministry.

First, The Blessing of Children:

“Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put his hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of

heaven. And he laid his hands on them, and departed thence”
Matthew 19:13-15.

In this we see that Jesus did not sprinkle water on them and call it baptism as it is done today by some of these unauthorized ministers; and in this position we are supported again by the commentators:

Poole’s Continuator:

“We must take heed that we do not found infant baptism upon the example of Christ in his text, for it is certain He did not baptize these children. Mark also saith ‘He took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them and blessed them’”
Annotation on the place, in Matthew 19:14.

Bishop Taylor:

“From the action of Christ’s blessing children, to infer they are to be baptized, proves nothing so much, as that there is a want of better arguments; Christ blessed infants, and so dismissed them, but baptized them not; therefore, infants are not to be baptized:” *Liberty of Prophecy*, page 230.

Healing of the Sick:

“Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up...” James 5:14-15.

Now while the “laying on of hands” is not specifically mentioned in this text, we learn that it was the rule from other texts:

“And he could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them” Mark 6:5.

Also:

“And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux: to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him” Acts 28:8.

Ordination to the Ministry:

“Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius

of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away” Acts 13:1-3.

Again:

“Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery” I Timothy 4:14.

Thus we see that the principle of the laying on of hands is as vital to full obedience to the gospel as is that of any other of the principles of the doctrine of Christ. ALL MUST be given their proper prominence, else we will surely suffer the consequences of having ignored the law of Christ.