The doctrine of the laying-on-of-hands is of critical importance to the Church of God. It shows that God works and deals with mankind through fallible, imperfect human beings that He sets apart for His purpose. For some, this is a humbling experience, realizing they will have to cooperate with other human beings who are not perfect, but who for the purpose of God are used to guide them as “helpers of their joy” to salvation.

From the first five books of Moses to the book of Revelation, we will find the laying-on-of-hands ceremony being used by servants of God to ordain or commission others for a variety of God’s purposes.

Usually the ceremony centered around God’s servant praying aloud as he placed his hands on the recipient of his petitions. It was a formal request to God for a specific blessing, gift, or authority—as in ordination. Usually these ceremonies are short, but they are always filled with great meaning.

The Precious Name of Jesus

One of the greatest miracles which occurs in the name of Christ is the miracle of having one’s sins forgiven by and through faith in that name. This miracle was made possible by the propitiatory death of Jesus. Why should our sins be forgiven by the death of a man? The reason is that Christ was not just a mere man. He was both man and God. God the Father “created all things by Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 3:9). Therefore, His life is of more value than all human life. His substitutionary, or vicarious, death on the stake is sufficient to pay the penalty for all the sins of all human beings—past, present, and future.

“To Him [Jesus Christ] all the prophets witness that, through His name, whosoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins” (Acts 10:43).

“And he [Peter] commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord...” (verse 48). The apostles realized the power that believers have when using the precious “name of Jesus Christ of
Nazareth” (Acts 3:6,16; 4:7,10,12,18,30; 5:28,40; 19:13). They went out everywhere teaching, preaching, and baptizing in that name. Results were miraculous.

**Final Instructions**

In the book of James, the apostle showed that the children of this world, fighting and warring the way they do, meet with disaster, failing to receive help because they neglect to ask for God’s help. And when they do ask God, it is to fulfill their own personal wants and desires. If we ask selfishly, we ask amiss. We can only expect a negative answer to such a prayer.

Jesus set the right example when He said, “I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me” (John 5:30). The apostle Paul tells us we can “understand what the will of the Lord is” (Ephesians 5:17). We are to study the Word of God as Paul commanded Timothy (2 Timothy 2:15).

With the study of God’s Word and the guidance of His Holy Spirit, we can know the will of God even if there is no specific promise mentioned in the Bible. It is a matter of learning how to apply the principles of God’s revealed will to the situations that arise in our lives.

It is understandable that we cannot ask for something, or ask God’s blessing on something, that is contrary to His Word. With regular Bible study and setting our heart on the things above, we will come to know God’s will for our lives.

The point to remember, for the purpose of this lesson, is that we must seek to learn and know God’s will, as well as believe the truth of His Bible. “And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him” (1 John 5:1,15).

In the previous lessons, we have covered repentance, faith, and baptism. This fourth lesson will show us how through the ceremony of the laying-on-of-hands we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit of God, which is His character, His love, and His power, is the added strength we need to obey His spiritual law.

By now you should have found a quiet place to study and a private place to pray. If you have already prayed for God’s help with this lesson, and have your study tools before you, you are ready to begin Lesson 4, “Understanding the Laying-On-of-Hands.”

**Understanding the Laying-On-of-Hands**

Certain basics are essential for all believers. The most basic doctrines of Christianity are listed in the first two verses of the sixth chapter of Hebrews, beginning with repentance, faith, baptism, and this current lesson, the laying-on-of-hands.

**Old Testament Examples**

When the Lord God was bringing the children of Israel out of Egypt, He instructed Aaron and his successors to lay their hands on certain of the sacrificial animals. This was symbolic of transferring sin to the animal to be sacrificed (Leviticus 8:14–23; Numbers 8:10–14).

Another example is the event taking place on the Day of Atonement. “Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, confess over it all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, concerning all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and shall
send it away into the wilder-
ness by the hand of a suitable 
man” (Leviticus 16:21).

Obviously Aaron didn’t 
have magic hands; his were the 
same as any other Israelite’s. 
This physical ceremony com-
manded by God was to show 
the unconverted Israelites that 
their sins needed to be atoned 
for and ultimately placed on 
the head of the father of sin, 
Satan. Of course, this all had 
symbolic meaning since only 
Christ’s blood really atones for 
sin (Romans 5:11). The laying- 
on-of-hands in this example 
symbolized the placing of the 
sins of the Israelites upon the 
head of the animal.

Of course, today we are not 
involved in animal sacrifices. 
These examples are used only 
to show how God used the lay-
ing-on-of-hands anciently.

**Review**

1. The laying-on-of-hands is a 
basic doctrine.
2. When Aaron laid hands on 
an animal, it symbolized the 
transference of sin from the 
Israelites to the animal.
3. Only the blood of Christ 
really atones for sin.

**Scriptures to Read, 
Remember, and Recite:** 
*Hebrews 6:1,2; Leviticus 
8:14–23; Numbers 8:10–14; 
Leviticus 16:21; Romans 5:11*

**To Confer Blessings**

In the Book of Genesis, we 
see the ceremony of Israel’s 
(Jacob’s) blessing on his two 
grandsons, Ephraim and 
Manasseh. “Then Israel 
stretched out his right hand 
and laid it on Ephraim’s head, 
who was the younger, and his 
left hand on Manasseh’s head, 
guiding his hands knowingly, 
for Manasseh was the first-
born” (Genesis 48:14).
Joseph, the boys’ father, 
objected to Jacob’s putting his 
right hand on the second born, 
but Jacob refused to change 
the position of his hands: “I 
know, my son, I know. He also 
shall become a people, and he 
also shall be great; but truly 
his younger brother shall be 
greater than he, and his 
descendants shall become a 
multitude of nations” (verse 
19).

Logic would tell us that the 
hands of Jacob did not make 
Ephraim and Manasseh 
become the great peoples they 
eventually became. The fact 
is, the power of the Lord God 
performed that. God used the 
physical symbols of Jacob’s 
right and left hands to be a 
visible sign of the blessings 
He was to grant those two 
boys and their descendants.

**Review**

1. Blessings were passed on 
from fathers to sons by the 
laying-on-of-hands ceremony.
2. The power of God brings 
forth the blessings.
3. The physical symbol of 
Jacob’s hands was the visi-
able sign of the blessings 
given.

**Scriptures to Read, 
Remember, and Recite:** 
*Genesis 48:14,19.*

**An Example of Christ**

Note the example of Jesus 
Himself when He picked little 
children up in His arms. “Then 
little children were brought to 
Him that He might put His 
hands on them and pray....And 
He laid His hands on them and 
departed from there” (Matthew 
19:13,15). By performing this 
simple act, He set an example 
for His church today to see to it 
that the little children receive 
God’s blessing. He used the 
laying-on-of-hands as a symbol 
of authority to ask for a bless-
ing on the children.

**Review**

1. Jesus was not too busy for
little children.
2. Of such is the Kingdom of God.
3. This simple act of blessing children sets an example for the church to follow.
4. The laying-on-of-hands is a symbol of authority used to ask for special blessings.

Scriptures to Read, Remember, and Recite:
Matthew 19:13,15

New Testament Examples
There are a number of New Testament examples of people being ordained to an office by the laying-on-of-hands. One of the first is in the book of Acts where seven men were set before the apostles, who prayed and laid hands on them, ordaining them to the office of deacon (Acts 6:5,6).

Another example is found in Acts where Barnabas and Saul were prayed over and had hands laid on them for a special work they were to do (Acts 13:1–3).

Review
1. Many are ordained to certain offices in the church by the laying-on-of-hands.
2. Barnabas and Paul (Saul) were ordained for a certain work by the elders and apostles.

Scriptures to Read, Remember, and Recite:
Acts 6:5,6; 13:1–3

The Giving of Authority
It is God who made the decision that His church utilize the laying-on-of-hands as a physical symbol of the authority that God placed in His church and with His true ministers.

Young Timothy didn’t decide on his own one day to proclaim himself a minister of God. He would have had to recognize the authority in God’s church and in the apostle Paul. He was placed in the ministry by the laying on of Paul’s hands (2 Timothy 1:6). Paul had the authority to place Timothy in the ministry because he had received that authority from God by the laying-on-of-hands of the elders and apostles before him. Therefore, the authority goes back to the twelve apostles, who were called, chosen, and ordained by Jesus Christ Himself.

Review
1. You cannot be a minister of Christ by just saying you are one.
2. It was God who established the authority of the laying-on-of-hands in the church.
3. Paul was able to lay hands on Timothy and ordain him to the ministry because he also had received the laying-on-of-hands.
4. All authority comes to the Church of God from Jesus Christ and the apostles.

Scriptures to Read, Remember, and Recite:
2 Timothy 1:6

Examples of Healing
Christ set the example in healing. “When the sun was setting, all those who had any that were sick with various diseases brought them to Him; and He laid His hands on every one of them and healed them” (Luke 4:40).

The apostle Paul also laid his hands on Publius’ father to heal him. “And it happened that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and dysentery. Paul went in to him and prayed, and he laid his hands on him and healed him” (Acts 28:8).

To the sick God gives this command: “Is anyone among you sick? 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” (James 5:14). Oil is a symbol of God’s Holy Spirit. No minister’s hands are special or holy. No olive oil has any mystical powers. It is God Himself who heals through His Holy Spirit. However, when He tells the sick to call for the elders of the church, He establishes the authority for His miraculous healing to be done through His ministry in the church.

When we do go to the elders of the church and ask to be anointed for healing, we should not sit back and do nothing, waiting for God to heal. God expects us to do our part to aid the healing process. Also, God knows what is best for us. So in the meantime we should get the best medical help we can afford. Doing this actually shows faith in God our Healer because we are trusting in Him for our welfare and at the same time doing our part.

**Review**

1. Christ set the example by laying His hands on the sick and healing them.
2. Paul, following the example of Jesus, laid his hands on Publius’ father and healed him.
3. God gave the command that we should go to the elders of the church when we’re sick.

4. The elders of the church will pray for us, anoint us, and lay hands upon us for healing.

**Scriptures to Read, Remember, and Recite:**

Luke 4:40; Acts 28:8; James 5:14

**Receiving the Holy Spirit**

The apostle Paul, even though Jesus Christ Himself struck him down, received the Holy Spirit only when Ananias laid hands on him.

“And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit’” (Acts 9:17).

Immediately Paul received the Holy Spirit and then was baptized. Normally, baptism comes first, and then the receiving of the Holy Spirit by the laying-on-of-hands. In Paul’s case it was reversed; but this is the exception, not the rule.

Several years after Paul’s conversion, he visited Ephesus and found people who had been baptized into John the Baptist’s baptism. They had never heard about the Holy Spirit. Paul taught them more thoroughly the truth about repentance and baptism, and when they heard these things they were again baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Paul laid hands on them and they then received the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:1–6).

Peter and John were sent to Samaria because word came to the apostles at Jerusalem that they had received God’s truth and had been baptized. However, they had not received the Holy Spirit. So when Peter and John laid their hands on them, they immediately received the Spirit!

Watching all this happen was Simon the sorcerer. He wanted the power of the Holy Spirit, and offered Peter money for it. Read for yourself what Peter told Simon (Acts 8:14–25).

If you have truly repented of breaking God’s holy and righteous laws, you too should be baptized and experience the laying-on-of-hands to receive God’s Holy Spirit.

After these rituals, God gives the Holy Spirit of power,
which will convict your heart and mind, and help you make decisions for your life that will be pleasing to God. God’s Spirit will help individuals to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ Jesus, overcoming self and becoming more like Jesus every day, for the remainder of your life.

**Review**

1. Even the apostle Paul had to have another human being lay hands on him so he could receive the Holy Spirit.
2. Paul received the Spirit and then was baptized, reversing the normal order. This is an exception, not the rule.
3. Those who had been baptized into John the Baptist’s baptism needed to be rebaptized before having hands laid on them to receive the Holy Spirit.
4. Those of Samaria had been baptized but had not received the Spirit because hands had not been laid on them.
5. Simon the sorcerer found out you cannot buy the power of the Holy Spirit.
6. God gives His Holy Spirit to those who believe, have a repentant heart, are baptized, and receive the laying-on-of-hands of His servants.

**Scriptures to Read, Remember, and Recite:**

Acts 9:17; 19:1–6; 8:14–25

**Conclusion**

The laying-on-of-hands ceremony is quite relevant to this society, and to you and me!

God is alive, and, through His chosen agents and ministers, is actively dealing with mankind today. Yes, God still deals with imperfect people, through a physical group of human beings, the church, doing His work. May God bless you to understand! ☀

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**Study Notes:**
1. The laying-on-of-hands was used to symbolically transfer sin to the sacrificial animal.

2. Sins do not need to be atoned for. We just say we are sorry.

3. Atonement can only be accomplished through Christ’s blood.

4. Jacob blessed his grandsons without God’s approval.

5. Jacob must have been a fortune-teller.

6. Jesus told His disciples to keep the little children away.

7. Jesus laid His hands on the little children and blessed them.

8. The kingdom will be made up of those with the humility of little children.

9. We should follow Jesus’ example in the church and bless infant children.

10. The laying-on-of-hands is not necessary for ordination.

11. We don’t really have to follow the apostles’ example in ordination.

12. The laying-on-of-hands is a nice ceremony but not necessary.
13. Elders use the laying-on-of-hands to pass on authority.

14. The authority for the laying-on-of-hands comes from the apostles and Christ.

15. Christ never set an example for healing.

16. Paul followed the example of Jesus when he laid hands on Publius.

17. The Bible never said we should go to the elders of the church.

18. The elders will pray for us and anoint us with oil for healing.

19. The apostle Paul didn’t need to have hands laid on him.

20. If you had been baptized by John the Baptist, that is all you would have needed.

21. There were those who said they had never heard of the Holy Spirit.

22. Simon the sorcerer wanted to be able to lay hands on people so they could receive the Holy Spirit because he was a good man.

23. God will bless anything as long as we ask Him to.

24. We should not bother God when we get sick.

25. Anyone can be a minister of Jesus Christ if he or she wants to.

26. Baptism is essential if we expect to receive salvation.

27. The laying-on-of-hands is a basic doctrine of the church.

28. We can receive the Holy Spirit all by ourselves, and then be baptized.

29. We don’t need to pray before we study God’s Word.

30. God gives His Holy Spirit to everybody, even if we don’t repent.

Answers to True or False Questions:
Score Yourself: Miss 0–3 = Excellent; Miss 4–6 = Good; Miss 7–9 = Fair

All Scripture quotations taken from the New King James Version except as noted. Text: Loren Chamberlain.