

What is the “imposition of hands” and “impartation” all about?

“Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And God permitting, we will do so.”

(Heb 6:1-3)

By exhorting us to “leave” these principles, the writer of Hebrews is not encouraging us to discard them, but rather to build upon them. We must “leave” them as a builder leaves the foundation in erecting the superstructure. One of these six foundational doctrines is the laying on of hands. In the laying on of hands there is an actual impartation that occurs. The one imposing his hands on another brings a spiritual impartation thereby to the one who has hands laid upon him. It affects not only the physical, but soul and spirit as well.

1) Impartation in the Old Testament

a) To impart sin to a sacrificial offering

(Ex 29:10; Lev 1:4; 3:2, 8, 13; 4:15; 5:5-6; 16:21; Nu 8:12)

In the Levitical system, the sacrificial offering had hands laid upon it before it was put to death. In the act of laying on of hands there was a transfer to the offering of sin and the obligation to suffer for that sin. The victim stood in the offerer’s place, and thus having sin now imparted to it, must be dealt with accordingly as guilty and responsible for that sin.

b) To impart wisdom and honor

Nu 27:18-23 describes the ordination of Joshua by Moses
Dt 34:9 makes it clear that Moses directly imparted wisdom and honor to Joshua at this time

c) Impartation in anointing (1 Sam 16:13; 1 Kgs 19:16)

The Hebrew people believed there was an impartation to the one anointed with oil. They believed the anointing act was not only a symbolic gesture but an actual impartation of endowment of the life

of God. The Hebrew word for “anointing” meant “to smear with the hand.” The idea behind “anointing” was that of applying oil in the act of hands laid on the person anointed.

2) Impartation in the New Testament

a) To minister healing (Mk 16:18; Lk 4:40; 13:13; Ac 28:8)

The ministry of healing through the laying on of hands is much more than a therapeutic touch which transfers physical energy. It is a supernatural impartation of the life of God.

b) To minister signs and wonders (Ac 5:12; 14:3; 19:11)

c) To minister the Baptism in the Holy Spirit

(Ac 8:18; 9:17; 19:6)

However, there are two recorded instances in the book of Acts where believers received the baptism in the Holy Spirit without the imposition of hands. While the imposition of hands appears to be the normative way this is received, God can, and often does, choose to move beyond the normative. The early church regularly exercised the imposition of hands. Tertullian was the earliest church father to describe the details. See “*On Baptism*,” VIII, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol III, p. 672. St. Cyprian, a contemporary of Tertullian, also testified to the imposition of hands in reception of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. So also does St. Jerome and St. Augustine.

d) To impart spiritual gifts

Rom 1:11 Paul was aware that he was able through the Holy Spirit to impart spiritual gifts through the prophetic word and imposition of hands

1 Tim 4:14 prophetic word and imposition of hands (by a group) in the life of St. Timothy

2 Tim 1:6

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