



Conducted by
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What is the general teaching of the scriptures concerning the “laying on of hands” and how was it that the elders (in 1 Tim. 4:14) could give Timothy a spiritual gift?

The Purposes of Laying on Hands

The practice of the laying on of hands is of old origin, and references to it are not confined to the New Testament. Indeed, early in history (Gen. 48:14) we read that Israel

blessed Manasseh and Ephraim, the sons of Joseph. The laying on of hands is thus mentioned in the scriptures as being the accompaniment to the extending of blessings. See also Matt. 19:15, where Jesus laid his hands on the children brought to him and blessed them.

The laying on of hands was also employed in the healing of sick people—Mark 6:5: “. . . he laid his hands upon a few sick folk and healed them”; Mark 16:18: “. . . they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover”; Acts 28:8: “. . . Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid hands on him and healed him.” (See also Mark 7:32; Mark 8:23; Luke 4:40; Luke 13:13 for other similar instances).

The laying on of hands also accompanied the consecration of men to the work and service of God, and the consecration, in some cases, of offerings to God. An instance of the latter is in Lev. 1:4: “And he [the offerer] shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be accepted for him to make an atonement for him.” In Lev. 4:15 the elders of the congregation were to lay their hands upon the head of the sacrificial bullock. (See also Lev. 16:21, where Aaron himself was to lay both hands upon the head of the sacrificial goat and confess over it the transgressions of Israel). There are likewise many examples of the laying on of hands accompanying the consecration of *men* to God's service, not only in the New Testament, but again also, in the Old.

In Numbers 8:10 we read that the children of Israel were to put their hands upon the Levites “. . . that they may execute the service of the Lord.” In Numbers 27:18 the Lord said unto Moses that he was to “take Joshua . . . a man in whom was the spirit, and lay his hand upon him . . . and give him a charge in their sight” (verse 19). Deut. 34:9 says in this connection, “And Joshua was full of the spirit of wisdom: for Moses had laid his hands upon him.” For the next instance we move to Acts 6:6, where we have described to us the appointing of the “seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom,” who were to serve the tables, “whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed they laid their hands upon them.” Acts 13:3 tells us that when the Holy Spirit sent forth Paul and Barnabas from Antioch they were sent to the accompaniment of fasting, prayer and the laying on of hands. Also in 1 Tim. 4:14 (the passage referred to in the question) we learn that Timothy was, apparently, appointed or consecrated to his evangelistic work by the laying on of the hands of the elders.

To Confer Spiritual Gifts

The practice of laying on hands was also employed when spiritual gifts were imparted through the apostles. The most telling example is probably in Acts 8:17, 18: “Then laid they [Peter and John] their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. And when Simon [the sorcerer] saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money.” In the 14th verse of this same chapter we read, “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 Spirit.” These verses, and the attending circumstances, indicate that the *apostles only* were able to transmit the Holy Spirit by the laying on of their hands. Philip preached the word of God and performed miracles in proof of his authority but he could not, obviously, confer the Holy Spirit upon those obedient to his preaching. The apostles alone could do this, and thus Peter and John are sent from Jerusalem to Samaria for this purpose. This shows that the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit were not conferred at the same time as baptism for the remission of sins. Another example of an apostle conferring the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands is in 2 Tim. 1:6: “Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God which is in thee by the putting on of my hands.” (See also Acts 19:6 re the Ephesus encounter).

This point, about the apostles alone being able to impart the Holy Spirit, introduces us to the second part of the question where 1 Tim. 4:14 is referred to and where it

seems, at first glance at least, that spiritual gifts could be bestowed by elders. The verse reads, "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 believe this verse can best be understood by first of all referring to 1 Tim. 1:18, 19: "This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, *according to the prophecies which went before on thee*, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck."

The gift which Timothy was to stir up was given him in accordance with prophecies, made previously to the giving of the gift. Timothy was selected for his ministering work by divine direction. It was prophesied what great things he would do for God in warring a good warfare. Those having the gift of prophecy prophesied that Timothy would do these great things and Paul is here (in verses 18 and 19) referring to these prophecies and is calling upon Timothy (or charging him) to stir up the gift given him and to do the things prophesied. These prophecies were made some time previously ("which went before on thee") and when we couple verses 18 and 19 with the verse in the question (1 Tim. 4:14) we see that the prophecies were made simultaneously with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery (or elders). The elders, however, were laying their hands on him to consecrate him to his work as an evangelist and not to impart the spiritual gift he possessed, because 2 Tim. 1:6 tells us quite emphatically how he received his spiritual gift ". . . stir up the gift of God *which is in thee by the putting on of my hands.*"

The "*neglect not the gift that is in thee*" of 1 Tim. 4:14 means the same as "*stir up the gift of God which is in thee*" of 2 Tim. 1:6, and refers to the same gift.

To Set Apart for God's Service

Taking all three verses together, therefore, it appears that Timothy was consecrated for his evangelistic duties by the laying on of the hands of the elders, and at or about that time those gifted with prophetic powers announced that he would do a good work for God and that he would war a good warfare. They also announced by prophecy that he would receive a spiritual gift. These prophecies were duly fulfilled, the latter being accomplished by the laying on of the apostle Paul's hands (2 Tim. 1:6).

I presume that just as at Antioch (Acts 13:1-3) when the Holy Spirit said to the prophets and teachers "separate me Barnabas and Saul" a similar revelation was given to those prophets who prophesied concerning Timothy—that he was to be set apart for his work, and just as the teachers and prophets fasted, prayed, laid hands on them and sent them away, so did the elders with Timothy.

Laying On Hands Today

The scriptures, then, show that in Bible times hands were laid on for:—

1. Conferring blessings;
2. Healing the sick;
3. Consecrating offerings to God;
4. Consecrating men to God's service;
5. Imparting the Holy Spirit.

The problem of laying on of hands today is *who* should lay hands on *whom* and *for what*? Obviously only the fourth of the group could possibly apply today—those laying on hands being elders and evangelists. On whom would they lay hands? On deacons, elders and evangelists. For what reason? To appoint them to their duties. All this is assuming, of course, that we have elders and evangelists today like unto those of New Testament times—perhaps a big assumption.

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