

Customs and Commands – 3

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Because a practice was done in the NT, even by an apostle, is not sufficient to establish it as a rigid pattern. For example, there is consistent reference to disciples meeting in upper rooms (Lk 22:12; Ac 1:13; 20:8). I know of no one who would insist that this constitutes binding authority. Why not?

Because the *purpose* for which a thing is done must be considered. If a passage indicated that there was spiritual significance to such a meeting place; i.e., that the closer to heaven you are (assuming that it is *up there* somewhere) the better it is, then we would have authority to build as tall a worship facility as possible.

Upper rooms were merely architectural features of homes which allowed for more comfortable gathering. Guest rooms and lounges were located above the din of the street and the household chores which took place on the lower floors.

Laying on of Hands

This practice had a variety of applications in the Bible. It was done in reference to offering sacrifices (Lv 16:21), ordaining Levites (Num 8:10), appointing Joshua as Moses' successor (Num 27:18; 34:9), imparting blessings (Gn 48:14) and in passing judgment (Lv 24:14).

The apostles laid hands upon the servants selected by the Jerusalem church (Ac 6:6). Peter and John transferred spiritual gifts to the Samaritans by touch and prayer (Ac 8:17-19) as did Paul to the Ephesians (Ac 19:6).

Paul warned Timothy not to neglect the gift within him by "*the laying on of the hands of the presbytery*" (1 Tim 4:14), and he reminded him to "*stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands*" (2 Tim 1:6). Many of these references suggest a miraculous element in the laying on of hands, but other instances have no such connotation: Ac 13:3; 1 Tim 5:22; Mk 10:16.

Again, we have a practice which predates the NT and the activities of the church. Is there evidence which suggests that the laying on of hands to indicate a blessing or confer a responsibility is a perpetual command? We would obviously omit the laying on of hands for the impartation of spiritual gifts. But what of selecting and sending an evangelist on a particular mission on behalf of the church?

In the absence of clarifying statements, no more can be said about the laying on of hands than it was a customary practice incidental to the main action taking place. There is no "ordination" process outlined in the NT for validating preachers or other special church servants. But it is necessary for men to be recognized in an "official" capacity as authorized agents of the church. In those instances, churches may do whatever is culturally acceptable to make such appointments. They are not bound to the laying on of hands by specific authority.

How one "officially" becomes a Christian is not in doubt because the process is clearly explained and the significance is stated. Not so the laying on of hands.