

FOUNDATIONS
OF THE
CHRISTIAN
LIFE

Thomas C. Dant
C. Wayne Pratt

*A fresh
look at
Hebrews 6*

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CONTENTS

Introduction	1
1 Repentance from Dead Works	5
2 Faith Toward God.....	17
3 Baptism in Water	25
4 Baptism in the Holy Spirit.....	31
5 Laying on of Hands	43
6 Resurrection of the Dead	51
7 Eternal Judgment.....	61
Conclusion.....	71

INTRODUCTION

Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits.

— *Hebrews 6:1-3 (NKJV)*

IN THE OPENING CHAPTERS OF THE BOOK OF HEBREWS, the writer introduces us to the great salvation that Jesus Christ brought to mankind, tasting death for everyone on the cross, and destroying him who had the power of death—the devil. Jesus, the Great High Priest who took away our sins—the Son of God who is far superior to angels, Moses, prophets, and priests—He is the source of eternal salvation and the central focus of every believer.

Hebrews 5:12 talks about *elementary truths* or *first principles of God's word* that are like the milk a baby Christian (new believer) needs in order to grow and mature in Christ. These are orderly, beginning steps that are essential for every new follower of the Lord Jesus. Then, in Hebrews 6:1-2, these elementary principles are referred to as *foundations*—the building blocks necessary for a successful and fruitful Christian life.

The Bible compares each one of our lives to a building. Jesus further explained that some people build their houses by digging deep and laying a foundation on solid rock, while others build on sinking sand (Luke 6:46-49; Matthew 7:24-27). The house with the foundation can withstand all the floods, storms and trials that life hurls at it, but

FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

the house without a foundation will surely fall. Jesus taught that the house built on the rock represents a wise man that *hears His words and puts them into practice*. The house built on sand speaks of a foolish man who also heard His words, but *did not put them into practice*.

The most important part of any building is the foundation—it bears all of the weight of the structure. And when the foundation is laid correctly, it ensures that the rest of the building will be straight and square. The apostle Paul made it clear that Jesus Christ *is* our Foundation, and there is no other—He is the Rock of our salvation (1 Corinthians 3:9-11). Because of that, we must be absolutely certain that Christ is the solid rock on which we stand, and to build our lives very carefully upon the word of God. Let us not forget that these principles we will be studying are called the “principles of *Christ*.”

If we want a stable Christian life, we must learn to build it upon the word of God. The writer of Hebrews lists seven foundational teachings or principles of Christ that are like the ABC’s we learned in elementary school—these are the building blocks upon which all future learning and growth depend:

1. Repentance from dead works
2. Faith toward God
3. Baptism in water
4. Baptism in the Holy Spirit
5. Laying on of hands
6. Resurrection of the dead
7. Eternal judgment

INTRODUCTION

We will learn that each one of these principles requires action on our part—we must *do* something. Like the wise man, we must hear God’s words and then *put them into practice*. It will not be enough to learn some truths and fill our heads with knowledge. As God graciously *works in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure*, we also need to *work out our salvation with fear and trembling* (Philippians 2:12-13). Ephesians 2:8-9 makes it very clear that salvation is not by works, but by grace alone. However, the next verse (Ephesians 2:10) makes it equally clear that when God’s grace truly works in us, it causes us to *do good works*. Paul told the Corinthians that *God is able to make all grace abound to us, so that in all things at all times, having all that we need, we can abound in every good work* (2 Corinthians 9:8).

From start to finish, the Christian life is all by the grace of God. When the final headstone of Zerubbabel’s temple was laid, they shouted “Grace, grace to it!” (Zechariah 4:6-7 - NAS). In other words, as each of these foundational truths is laid in our lives, we acknowledge it was the grace of God.

For instance, we will learn that repentance demands action on our part—we *must* change. But God first grants us repentance. Without faith we cannot be saved or receive anything from God—we *must* believe. But God first gives each one of us the gift of faith. And so with each foundation step, God’s grace causes us to respond with actions and reactions as we put His word into practice.

In the next seven chapters of *Foundations of the Christian Life*, we will briefly examine each of these seven elementary principles and how to practically implement them into our Christian lives. It is not our purpose to write a comprehensive theological textbook on the subject (there are already quite a few available from the booksellers); rather, we have deliberately tried to keep things

FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

simple and concise so that this book may be useful both for the seasoned veteran believer as well as the new disciple.

As the writer of Hebrews stresses, our ultimate goal, once we have laid these elementary foundations of Christ in our lives, is to leave or let go of them and *press on to maturity* (NAS). We must go to preschool and kindergarten to learn the basics, but eventually we must move on to the first, second, and third grades, etc. *The Message* Bible translates our text quite aptly:

So come on, let's leave the preschool finger-painting exercises on Christ and get on with the grand work of art. Grow up in Christ. The basic foundational truths are in place: turning your back on "salvation by self-help" and turning in trust toward God; baptismal instructions; laying on of hands; resurrection of the dead; eternal judgment. God helping us, we'll stay true to all that. But there's so much more. Let's get on with it!

— *Hebrews 6:1-3*

There's so much more. So, let's get on with it!

REPENTANCE FROM DEAD WORKS

Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. “The time has come,” He said. “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!”

– Mark 1:14-15

In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now He commands all people everywhere to repent.

– Acts 17:30

REPENTANCE WAS THE FIRST THING Jesus ever preached. It is something God commands all people everywhere to do. It must be important. On the Day of Pentecost, when the people asked Peter what they should do, it was the first word of his response: “Repent” (Acts 2:38). All of heaven rejoices and celebrates when one sinner repents (Luke 15:7, 10, 22-24). God must really like it!

If this first basic principle is missed, none of the other foundations will ever be effective. For that reason, we will be putting extra emphasis on this first step of our Christian experience. In this chapter, we will examine what true repentance is, where it comes from, and what actions it produces.

Definition of Repentance

Repentance literally means a *change of mind* – to reconsider or think differently. It is an awareness of the ugliness and horror of sin,

FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

which produces a heartfelt, godly sorrow for sin. The Bible teaches that it is this sorrow that *brings repentance that leads to salvation* (2 Corinthians 7:10). This change in thinking leads to a renouncing and forsaking of sin. Here's the abridged definition of repentance: STOP SINNING!

The key word to remember here is *change*... there is a profound change in the way one thinks, which *must* change the way he acts. The Christian life is often identified by terms like transformation, conversion, and new birth, all indicating some sort of radical change. If there is no change, it is doubtful that true repentance has occurred.

John the Baptist had the all-important task of preparing the way for the Lord Jesus Christ. He came preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, indicating that the only way to come to Jesus is through repentance. John's calling was to make the crooked roads straight and the rough ways smooth so that all mankind could see God's salvation (Luke 3:3-6).

John made it very clear that true repentance is not just a feeling or a different way of thinking; it must produce fruit—visible, tangible actions and behavior:

John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire." "What should we do then?" the crowd asked. John answered, "The

REPENTANCE FROM DEAD WORKS

man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same." Tax collectors also came to be baptized. "Teacher," they asked, "what should we do?" "Don't collect any more than you are required to," he told them. Then some soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?" He replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely--be content with your pay."

– Luke 3:7-14

The proof of repentance is in the actions. Notice how the crowd, the tax collectors, and the soldiers all asked John the same question: "What should we *do*?" They understood that they needed to stop being selfish, greedy and dishonest; they now needed to be compassionate, thoughtful of others, truthful and upright.

It is important to point out here that John the Baptist came preaching a baptism of repentance *for the forgiveness of sins*. The goal of repentance is forgiveness. Repentance and forgiveness go hand in hand (Luke 24:47; Acts 2:38; 5:31). The guilt, shame and godly sorrow that the convicted sinner feels as a result of true repentance is removed through the gift of forgiveness (more about this in Chapter 3, *Faith Toward God* on p.17).

The Need for Repentance

Okay, so who needs to repent... bad people like murderers, tax cheats, and prostitutes? What about good (or at least not-so-bad) people like me? The Scriptures say that we are no better than the worst drug pusher, serial killer or child molester! We are all sinners—*there is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who*

FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one (Romans 3:9-12).

Ouch!!! No one is good, no one is righteous, not even one! All have sinned. This explains why God commands *all people everywhere* to repent! Sin, like the plague of death, has infected all of mankind with devastating and far-reaching consequences.

After healing the crippled man at the pool of Bethesda, Jesus gave him a stern warning of repentance: *“See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.”* (John 5:14)

STOP SINNING OR SOMETHING WORSE MAY HAPPEN TO YOU. Sobering words! Sin has consequences—very bad ones! It can bring all kinds of trouble, sorrow, sickness, and regret. But more importantly, sin produces death; not just physical death, but separation from God and ultimately what the Bible calls the “second death,” which is eternal torment and punishment in the Lake of Fire forever (Revelation 20:13-15). Sin entered the world through our first parents, Adam and Eve, when they disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden. Their sin brought death... *death came to all men, because all sinned* (Romans 5:12).

This is why the first principle listed in Hebrews 6 is called “repentance from dead works” (or “acts that lead to death” in the NIV). All sin produces death, so in order to escape death, we must renounce and forsake all sin.

Godly repentance makes the sinner aware of his desperate condition, understanding the urgency to *flee from the coming wrath*. He suddenly realizes the road he is on is a road to destruction; he must make an immediate U-turn to avoid driving off the cliff and plunging to his death.

REPENTANCE FROM DEAD WORKS

God Must Grant Repentance

But there is a far more serious problem: the fallen sinner, in and of himself, is incapable of repenting. Romans 3 states that no one understands or seeks God, no one fears God; no one can change his ways and repent. *What? God commands us to do something we can't do? That's not fair!*

Here's where the glorious sunshine of God's grace comes bursting through into our hopeless darkness: God *grants* repentance. When the Jews in the early Church heard that Gentiles were also receiving Christ and being saved, they rejoiced and *praised God, saying, "So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life"* (Acts 11:18). And Paul later encouraged young Timothy not to quarrel with sinners who were opposing him, but to gently instruct them *in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will* (2 Timothy 2:24-26). We have to hope that God grants repentance to the sinner. It's our only hope, and it's the sinner's only hope!

One of the ways in which God grants the sinner a repentant heart is through the work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said that one very important ministry of the Spirit is to bring conviction of sin. In other words, He *convinces* a person that they are a sinner (John 16:8). When David was confronted by Nathan the prophet for his sins of adultery and murder (after almost a year of cover-up and trying to keep his sins a secret), conviction finally came as he exclaimed, *"I have sinned against the Lord"* 2 Samuel 12:13).

Another way in which God grants repentance is through His grace and love. In some mysterious way, God graciously softens and opens the sinner's heart (Acts 16:14), changes his mind, and

FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

enables him to turn to Christ. Paul explains that it is the *kindness and goodness of God that leads us to repentance* (Romans 2:4). It is the *grace of God that brings salvation to all men which also teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age* (Titus 2:11-12). Jesus made it very clear that it is impossible for anyone to come to Him unless the Father first *draws* and *enables* him (John 6:44, 64-65). If we have to be enabled to do something, the implication is clear—we are not capable by ourselves. The sinner’s fallen condition is so desperate that he cannot help himself without God’s grace.

The Fruits of Repentance

John the Baptist had urged the people to *produce fruit in keeping with repentance*. Paul preached that people *should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds* (Acts 26:20). There are telltale signs or evidences of true repentance. What are they? What does real repentance look like? Here is a summary of the fruits of repentance we will examine:

1. Godly sorrow and conviction for sin
2. Confession of sin
3. Forsaking and renouncing sin
4. Restitution for sin
5. Burden to rescue others from sin

As we have already discussed, one of the first signs of true repentance is a remorse for our life of sin—we are truly sorry

REPENTANCE FROM DEAD WORKS

before God for our actions. The Holy Spirit brings conviction into our hearts and we know we were wrong. David exemplifies this in a powerful way in his psalm of repentance, composed after he had fallen into adultery with Bathsheba and had her husband murdered:

For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned and done what is evil in Your sight, so that You are proved right when You speak and justified when You judge. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

– *Psalm 51:3-5*

The Bible teaches that the sinner lives in spiritual darkness, and an important aspect of repentance is coming out of that darkness into the light. Ever since Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden, we've been hiding from God behind our various *fig leaves*—lying, covering up, hypocrisy, and pretension. Jesus said that even though Light has come into the world, *men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. They hate the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed.* But those who want to live by the truth come into the light, where everything is exposed (John 3:19-21).

Light exposes. Nothing remains hidden there. Secret sins are revealed. That is why Jesus said that many prefer to stay in the darkness because they know their deeds are evil; if they come into the light, their evil will be exposed. But when God works true repentance into the sinner's heart, he is willing to have his shameful deeds exposed so that he can come clean before a holy God. He desires a clean conscience at any cost. He who tries to

FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

conceal his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy (Proverbs 28:13).

This often involves confession of sin. The people who came to John the Baptist at the River Jordan for his baptism of repentance did so *confessing their sins* (Matthew 3:6). It's not that God doesn't already know everything we've done—confession is for *our* good. It gives us a clean conscience. We are finally willing to stop lying, hiding, pretending and covering up, and come into God's light:

God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with Him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make Him out to be a liar and His word has no place in our lives.

– 1 John 1:5-10

When we study the foundation of faith toward God, we will appreciate the importance of a good conscience and how it is necessary in order for us to maintain a believing heart. Faith can only be held in a pure conscience; those who fail to keep a clean conscience end up shipwrecking their faith (1 Timothy 1:19; 3:9).

Once confession of sin has been made, there also needs to be a renouncing and forsaking of those sins. Sin is any violation of God's law and character; it is anything that displeases Him. Here

REPENTANCE FROM DEAD WORKS

are just a few of those things that we must forsake if we want to be a part of God's kingdom: sexual immorality, idolatry, adultery, male prostitution, homosexuality, stealing, swindling, theft, greed, drunkenness, and slander (1 Corinthians 6:9-11); impurity, orgies, debauchery, witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, envy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions and factions (Galatians 5:19-21); wickedness, evil, depravity, murder, strife, deceit, malice, gossip, God-hating, insolence, arrogance, boasting, inventing ways of doing evil, disobedience to parents, senselessness, faithlessness, heartlessness, ruthlessness; though knowing God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them (Romans 1:28-32).

In the book of Acts, Luke gives the account of an amazing demonstration of true repentance that took place during a revival that broke out in the city of Ephesus. Ephesus had a reputation for being a center of sorcery and magical practice, but when the Ephesians heard the good news of Christ, they confessed their sins and renounced their witchcraft publicly:

Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds. A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas [\$10,000]. In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.

– *Acts 19:18-20*

In the Old Testament, God taught the children of Israel another very important aspect of true repentance: restitution. Whenever an Israelite sinned against someone else, perhaps by stealing from

FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

them or damaging their property, in addition to confessing their sin, they were required to pay back restitution. In certain cases, the payment was four times the amount stolen or damaged, as in the case of Zacchaeus. When Jesus came to his house, Zacchaeus said to the Lord, *“Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount”* (Luke 19:8-9).

Restitution signifies that even though God has forgiven all of our past sins, a deeper healing takes place when we make amends for our past sins and mistakes. This may not always be possible, but as far as we are able, we should ask forgiveness from those we have wronged or offended, return stolen items to their rightful owners (or pay restitution for their value), etc.

One final piece of evidence that true repentance is operating in the penitent sinner’s heart is a burden to rescue others who are still trapped in the snare of sin. Assured of God’s forgiveness for his great sin, and having pleaded with Him to create in him a pure heart and renew a steadfast spirit within him, David declared: *“Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners will turn back to You”* (Psalm 51:10-13).

Once David experienced the mercy and grace of God in his own situation, his attention was automatically drawn to other sinners facing the same plight. He wanted to teach them about God’s ways and help them repent and turn to God as he had done. When we experience true repentance, we understand the horrors of sin, and a deep compassion and burden for the lost wells up inside of us.

The sum total of all this is what the Bible calls *conversion*. When we repent, we are converted, our sins are blotted out, and times of refreshing come from the presence of the Lord (Acts 3:19). It is a

REPENTANCE FROM DEAD WORKS

complete, radical change so dramatic that the Bible says we become a *new creation*:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

– 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NKJV)

If any of the fruits of repentance that we have listed in this section—godly sorrow and conviction for sin, confession, forsaking and renouncing sin, restitution, and a burden to rescue others from sin—are lacking in a person’s life, it is doubtful that individual has experienced true New Testament repentance. These fruits come as a complete package.

Lifelong Repentance

Repentance is our first step toward God. It is called an *elementary principle*. But we never stop remembering and using the principles we first learned in elementary school. We continue to use the alphabet, numbers, etc. for the rest of our lives. So it is with repentance and every other basic principle listed in Hebrews 6:1-2.

In the final book of the Bible, Revelation, Jesus sends messages to seven churches (in Chapters 2 and 3). Interestingly, He urges five out of the seven churches to repent! Repentance is something we never stop practicing. It is a lifelong experience.

FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

FAITH TOWARD GOD

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen... But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

– *Hebrews 11:1, 6 (NKJV)*

THE SECOND FOUNDATION listed in Hebrews 6:1-2 is *faith toward God*. Although faith is treated separately from repentance, in reality, repentance and faith are like two sides of the same coin. Repentance is a movement *away from* one thing (we turn *from* darkness and sin), thus causing us to turn *toward* something else (we turn *toward* the light and God). They are essentially *one* motion.

This can be seen clearly in Christ's commission to the apostle Paul, when He told him that He was sending him to the Jews and the Gentiles to *open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins* (Acts 26:17-18). Repentance and faith were often preached side by side by the Lord and His apostles (Mark 1:15; Acts 20:21).

Definition of Faith

So what exactly is faith? Various terms are used to define faith. It is a conviction, persuasion, confidence or assurance that something is true or real; it also conveys the idea of believing, trusting, or relying upon something or someone; Webster's

FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

dictionary defines faith as an unquestioning belief that requires no proof or evidence. Hebrews 11:1 (NIV) gives the simplest and clearest definition: Faith is *being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see*.

How can we be sure of something we can't see? Herein lies the mystery of faith—it is supernatural. It cannot be understood or explained with the natural mind because it comes from God. It is a deep-seated assurance that is contrary to human wisdom or understanding. That is why the Bible urges us to trust in the Lord with all our heart and *lean not on our own understanding* (Proverbs 3:5).

Contrary to the old adage, seeing is *not* believing when it comes to faith. Paul told the Corinthian believers that *we walk by faith, not by sight* (2 Corinthians 5:7 - NKJV). So-called “Doubting Thomas” believed only after seeing, but Jesus said that it is better to believe without seeing (John 20:29). (We should point out here that, according to Mark 16:11-14, *all* of Jesus' disciples were doubters!) Real faith enables us to love Him and believe in Him now even though we haven't seen Him (1 Peter 1:8-9).

Because it is so difficult to define or explain faith, the entire eleventh chapter of Hebrews shows what faith looks like by giving examples of how it worked in peoples' lives. Perhaps that gives us an important clue into understanding what real faith is—it is living! Faith, like repentance produces action. James says that if a person's “faith” doesn't produce works, then it is dead (James 2:14-26).

The Bible uses one man in particular to demonstrate faith... Abraham. In Romans 4, Paul explains how Abraham was justified (made righteous) before God, not by circumcision or any other religious act, but simply by believing. He is called the *father of all who believe* and every believer is encouraged to follow his example

FAITH TOWARD GOD

and *walk in the footsteps of his faith* (vv.11-12). There are two vital aspects to Abraham's faith mentioned in v.17: He "believed in the God who *gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.*"

Wow! The God Abraham believed in could raise the dead and call into being things that did not exist! That's amazing, but not really... for two reasons. First, in the beginning, God created everything *ex nihilo* ("out of nothing"). He created billions of galaxies, septillions of stars, and everything else in this vast universe simply by His word. He spoke and there was light, He called and everything came into being! Second, our Christian faith rests solely on the fact that God raised Jesus from the dead: Paul put it rather bluntly: *If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins* (1 Corinthians 15:17). So, like Abraham, the God we believe in gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not! That's the faith of Abraham.

When Abraham was 75 years old, God told him that he was to become the father of nations. But 25 years later, he and Sarah were still childless, and physically beyond the age of childbearing. Against all hope and natural reasoning, Abraham kept believing, and at the age of 100, he became the proud father of Isaac, the child of promise:

Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead--since he was about a hundred years old--and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God

FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

had power to do what He had promised. This is why
“it was credited to him as righteousness.”

– Romans 4:18-22

Faith is a way of life—we live and walk and move by it every day. It marks the beginning of our Christian journey, and carries us right through to the end: it is *from first to last*. Paul taught that in the gospel a *righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith”* (Romans 1:16-17).

The Need for Faith

We could list hundreds of Scriptures emphasizing the importance of this thing called *faith*: we need it to be saved, without it we cannot receive anything from God, etc. etc. But this one verse would be sufficient:

But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

– Hebrews 11:6 (NKJV)

Impossible! Without faith if it *impossible* to please God. If we want to come to God, we *must believe*. Jesus declared that the only way to become a child of God and receive eternal life was through believing in Him (John 1:12). God loves the world and gave His one and only Son, but it is only those that *believe* in Him that *shall not perish but have eternal life* (John 3:16).

FAITH TOWARD GOD

The message of the gospel is called the *word of faith*, and salvation comes when a person believes in their heart that God raised Jesus from the dead:

But what does it say? “The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,” that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

– *Romans 10:8-10*

Here we see something else that is extremely important concerning faith: it is not an intellectual belief or assent in the mind; it is in the *heart*.

Faith is a Gift of God

Just as we saw in the case of repentance, once again we find ourselves here with a very serious problem—we have no faith! In and of ourselves, we are incapable of flicking on a switch in order to start believing. Real faith can only come from God. He commands us to repent, then He graciously grants us repentance. He tells us we must believe, and by His grace, He offers us the gift of faith:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast.

– *Ephesians 2:8-9*

FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

We are saved through faith and faith alone, but that faith is *not from ourselves – it is the gift of God*. If we had anything to do with it, we might have something to brag about. But God deliberately gave it to us as a free gift so that *no one can boast*. All we can do is praise and thank God for His amazing grace!

God deals a measure of faith to each person (Romans 12:3). Specifically, *faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God* (Romans 10:17). Our heart is convinced that God's word is true; therefore, we can trust and believe whatever it says.

The Miracle of Justification and New Birth

In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again..." You should not be surprised at My saying, "You must be born again."

– *John 3:3, 7*

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead... For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

– *1 Peter 1:3, 23*

When a sinner truly repents from sin and turns to Christ in sincere faith, he receives the wonderful gift of forgiveness of sins. Peter preached that repentance and baptism are *for the forgiveness of your sins* (Acts 2:38) and that *God exalted Jesus to His own right hand as*

FAITH TOWARD GOD

Prince and Savior to give repentance and forgiveness of sins (Acts 5:31). Paul writes extensively in the book of Romans on the great truth of justification by faith: that by faith and God's grace, the sinner is freely justified—made righteous before a holy God—not by his own works, but by believing in Jesus Christ:

Therefore no one will be declared righteous in His sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in His blood. He did this to demonstrate His justice, because in His forbearance He had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—He did it to demonstrate His justice at the present time, so as to be just and the One who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.

— *Romans 3:20-28*

Having been *justified through faith*, the believer is reconciled with God. We have peace with God. We, who were once *God's enemies* and at war with Him, are *saved from God's wrath* and *reconciled to Him through the death of His Son*. *While we were still*

FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:1, 6-10). Through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, the ungodly sinner is made righteous. What a miracle!

This is more miraculous that the birth of a new baby—it's the miracle of *new birth*, sometimes called *regeneration*. The born-again believer becomes a new creation, with a new heart and a new nature—God's divine nature. He no longer wants to continue living in sin. And even when he sins, he quickly repents and turns to Christ for forgiveness. He may not be *sinless*, but he begins to *sin less and less*! John writes *that no one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God* (1 John 3:9-10).

Faith from First to Last

Faith, just like repentance, is an *elementary principle*. But we never stop using faith throughout our Christian life. From *first to last*, the righteous live and walk by faith (Romans 1:17). We keep growing in faith more and more (2 Thessalonians 1:3), fixing our eyes on Jesus Christ, the author and finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2), holding onto it until our last breath (2 Timothy 4:7).

BAPTISM IN WATER

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

– *Matthew 28:18-20*

THE THIRD FOUNDATION LISTED IN HEBREWS 6:1-2 is *baptisms*. Notice that the word is plural. The New Testament speaks clearly about two different baptisms: water baptism and baptism in the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:16). We will examine water baptism in this chapter and the baptism in the Holy Spirit in Chapter 4, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit* on p.31.

As already seen in Chapter 1, *Repentance from Dead Works*, John the Baptist was sent by God to prepare the way for Christ with a baptism of repentance (Matthew 3:1-6). John’s baptizing in the River Jordan was not his own clever idea—it was a divine revelation of God’s purpose from heaven (Matthew 21:23-27; Luke 7:29-30).

Definition of Baptism

The original word which is translated *baptism* throughout the New Testament means *to make fully wet or immerse*. Whenever water baptism is seen in the New Testament, the person *went down into*

FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

the water and... came up out of the water (Mark 1:10; Acts 8:38-39). Thus, baptism is a complete immersion into the water, never a mere sprinkling (as is sometimes practiced in certain religions).

Purpose and Importance of Water Baptism

We could write at great length about the spiritual purpose and significance of water baptism, but the Bible makes it very simple: Jesus Christ was baptized! Yes, the perfect Lamb of God who knew no sin and came into the world to take away our sins – He was baptized by John in the River Jordan:

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?" Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented. As soon as Jesus was baptized, He went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on Him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is My Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased."

– *Matthew 3:13-17*

If Christ Himself took baptism, and then commanded His disciples to baptize, that should be enough to convince any true disciple who wants to follow Jesus Christ of his need for water baptism! Like the Ethiopian eunuch, our only question should be: *Look, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?* (Acts 8:36).

Baptism is our first step of obedience to God. On the Day of Pentecost, conviction of sin fell on Peter's audience as they

BAPTISM IN WATER

listened to him preach the good news of Jesus Christ. They were *cut to the heart* and asked, “*What shall we do?*” Peter replied without any hesitation, *Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit* (Acts 2:37-38). Repent and be baptized. What a simple thing to do: be baptized. Get dunked in some water? That’s not hard to do! And yet, many will fight tooth and nail, arguing, “Why do I have to be baptized?”

Here’s why: Disobedience was our whole problem in the first place (Romans 5:19)! We learned in the last chapter that if we have truly repented and trusted in Christ, a miracle has taken place—we were born again. We became new creations in Christ. We are now disciples of Jesus Christ. We don’t want to sin and live in disobedience any more. So here is our first baby step of obedience: Baptism! Jesus told His disciples that *he who believes and is baptized will be saved* (Mark 16:15-16). Clearly, repentance and faith must precede baptism.

Water baptism of new converts was always the practice in the Early Church, as seen in the book of Acts (Acts 2:38-39, 41; 8:12; 10:44-48; 16:29-33; 19:1-6). Even though the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius had first received the baptism in the Holy Spirit with speaking in tongues, nevertheless, Peter *commanded them* to be baptized (Acts 10:48). It is important to note that the primary purpose of baptism was *not to be a public testimony*—the Ethiopian was all alone with Philip in the desert when he was baptized (Acts 8:35-39), and the Philippian jailer and his family had a private baptism with Paul and Silas the very night they were saved (Acts 16:33)! Baptism simply demonstrated the new disciple’s willingness to obey and follow Christ.

Water baptism, in addition to being a test of our obedience, has a much deeper purpose. In the book of Romans, Paul explains

FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

how Adam's fall made us all sinners, and in baptism, our inherited sin nature (Ephesians 2:1-3) or *old self* is buried with Christ (Romans 6:1-7). Through this death and burial to sin, the believer is *freed from sin!* The *body of sin is done away with* and henceforth, we are *no longer slaves to sin*. Hallelujah! After baptism, the believer is raised up to walk in newness of life. We are then given these encouraging words: *Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus... not letting sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires... For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.*

Notice the importance once again of the grace of God: God offers a supernatural grace through water baptism to live a new life, a victorious life, above the mastery and control of sin. Having *received God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness, we reign in life through Jesus Christ* (Romans 5:17). Water baptism is an integral part of our salvation.

As emphasized earlier in this chapter, water baptism is for *believers*. Those who *believe* and *are baptized* will be saved (Mark 16:16). As he did in his letter to the Romans, Paul also encouraged the Colossian Christians that they had been buried with Christ in water baptism, in which they had also been *raised up with Him through faith in the working of God*, who raised Him from the dead (Colossians 2:12). In baptism, there needs to be a faith in the working ("operation" - KJV) of God—the same resurrection power of the Holy Spirit that raised Christ from the dead.

Peter adds that baptism is not merely a washing that removes the dirt from our flesh; it is *an appeal to God for a good conscience* (1 Peter 3:20-21). This explains why the people came *confessing their sins* when they were baptized by John; they were cleansing their conscience before God (Matthew 3:6).

BAPTISM IN WATER

Mode of Water Baptism

The way in which New Testament baptism was administered, whether by John the Baptist, or by Christ's disciples, was really very simple... it required water... lots of it! We are told that John was baptizing at a place called Aenon *because there was plenty of water* there (John 3:23). If baptism were by sprinkling, this Scripture would make no sense. But we have already seen that by definition, *baptism is by complete immersion* in water. Water, whether it is in a river, pond, ocean or swimming pool, must be fairly deep in order for a person's body to be completely dunked under that water.

The second thing we can observe about all of the baptisms mentioned in the book of Acts is that they took place *immediately* after the people repented and believed (often the same day). There were no six-week "New Believer's Baptism Classes" or required "Discipleship Instructions" before new followers of Christ were baptized (Acts 2:41; 8:12, 38; 9:17-18; 10:48; 16:15, 33; 19:5)! The dead must be buried quickly before the corpse begins to stink!

A third thing we learn about how baptism should be administered comes from Christ's Great Commission: Go and make disciples of all nations, *baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit* (Matthew 28:19). Some take issue with the fact that in the Early Church, they baptized new believers *in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ* (Acts 8:16; 10:48; 19:5). There really is no controversy—baptism in the name of Jesus simply means they were baptizing by His authority and according to the way He had commanded them to baptize: *in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*.

Finally, it was the apostles, evangelists, and ordained elders in the Early Church that performed water baptisms. To this day,

FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

most churches and ministries recognize water baptism as one of the ordinances or sacraments (along with the Lord's Supper) to be administered only by ordained ministers.

BAPTISM IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

On one occasion, while He was eating with them, He gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift My Father promised, which you have heard Me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

– Acts 1:4-5

THE FOURTH AND VERY IMPORTANT FOUNDATION in our study is another baptism—the baptism in the Holy Spirit. This experience, though predicted by many Old Testament prophets, came only after Christ’s death, burial, resurrection, and exaltation back to the right hand of the Father (John 7:37-39; Acts 2:32-33). It first came on the Day of Pentecost, 50 days after Christ’s crucifixion.

The baptism in the Holy Spirit was necessary for the birth of the Church. Without it, the Christian life is impossible. The central importance of this fundamental experience perhaps explains why there is so much misunderstanding and confusion in the Church today. It is our hope and prayer that we can bring clarity and understanding about the baptism in the Holy Spirit, rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15 – NKJV).

Definition of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit

As already studied in Chapter 3, *Baptism in Water*, baptism means to *immerse or fully dip into something*. Thus, when the believer is

FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

baptized with the Holy Spirit, he is fully saturated or *soaked* in the Holy Spirit.

In the New Testament, the baptism in the Holy Spirit is called both the *gift* and the *promise* of the Father (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-5). A variety of other expressions are used in Scripture to refer to this glorious experience: *filled with the Holy Spirit* (Acts 2:4); *receive the gift of the Holy Spirit* (Acts 2:38); *the Holy Spirit came on them* (Acts 10:44; 19:6); *God poured out His Spirit* (Acts 2:17-18); *streams of living water will flow from within* (John 7:37-39); *the Father will give you another Counselor to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth* (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7).

Peter outlined the normal order of events in the life of a new Christian in Acts 2:38: (1) Repent (2) Be baptized (3) Receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. But the exception to this general rule can be seen in the case of the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius: they were first baptized in the Holy Spirit, and then baptized in water (Acts 10:44-48). Thus, the order in which they occur is not critical, but both baptisms are essential.

Purpose and Importance of Holy Spirit Baptism

There are far too many Scriptures to list here that speak about the importance of the Holy Spirit in the life of a disciple of Jesus. Here are just a few: He comes to empower us to be Christ's witnesses (Acts 1:8), to be our Counselor, Teacher, and Guide (John 14:26), and to reveal Christ to us (John 15:26; 16:13-15). The Holy Spirit comes to dwell in each individual believer, making him a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19-20); He baptizes each believer into the Body of Christ, the Church (1 Corinthians 12:13), sanctifying and building together all of the members of that Body into one Holy Temple and a Bride for the Lord Jesus Christ

BAPTISM IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

(Ephesians 2:20-22). The Holy Spirit gives gifts—supernatural manifestations of His wisdom and power—to every believer (1 Corinthians 12:7-11), anointing each one to minister as a priest unto God (1 Peter 2:5, 9).

We must point out an obvious truth here that is often overlooked in discussions about the Holy Spirit: God is triune—He is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit:

For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one.

— 1 John 5:7 (NKJV)

Therefore, Christ and the Holy Spirit are two different persons. At conversion, the sinner receives Christ and is born again through the word of God. At that point, he receives the Spirit of Christ. As we will see later in the section titled *An Experience Separate and Distinct from Conversion* on p.37, receiving the Holy Spirit is a totally different experience in which the believer receives a separate and distinct person, the Holy Spirit. Paul makes a clear distinction between the Spirit of Christ and the Holy Spirit in the following passage:

You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit, who lives in you.

— Romans 8:9-11

FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Paul makes it clear that anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Christ. In other words, he is not saved; he has not yet received Christ into his heart for the forgiveness of sins. However, Paul is not saying that anyone who has not yet received the Holy Spirit is unsaved. This Scripture only makes sense when a distinction is made between the Spirit of Christ and the Holy Spirit.

It is obvious just from this partial list that the baptism in the Holy Spirit is absolutely necessary for the spiritual life and growth of every believer in Christ. Jesus taught that we must be born again to *see* the kingdom of God (John 3:3), but in order to *enter* the kingdom, we must be born of water (water baptism) and born of the Spirit (John 3:5). It is only through the baptism in the Holy Spirit that we can enter the kingdom of God (Matthew 12:28; Romans 14:17).

Just before Jesus ascended back to His Father, He told His disciples to go to Jerusalem and wait for the promised Holy Spirit. He had already commissioned them to go into all the world and preach the gospel, but they weren't ready for their mission yet. They needed power. Jesus told them, *I am going to send you what My Father has promised; but stay ["sit down"] in the city until you have been clothed ["endued"] with power from on high*" (Luke 24:49).

The Church began, not when Christ came, died or rose again, but when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Day of Pentecost. No Holy Spirit, no church! That's how important the baptism in the Holy Spirit is.

BAPTISM IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

Evidences of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

– Acts 2:1-4

The first sign or evidence that the promised Holy Spirit had come was unmistakable: they *all began to speak in other tongues* as the Spirit enabled them. Jesus had already prepared them with these words: *These signs will accompany those who believe: In My name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues* (Mark 16:17).

This was the first sign at Cornelius' house as well: *While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God* (Acts 10:44-46). The Jewish believers who witnessed this first outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Gentiles knew that they (the Gentiles) had received the same gift of the Holy Spirit that they (the Jews) had received on the Day of Pentecost. How did they know? *Because they heard them speaking in tongues!*

When Paul baptized a group of disciples at Ephesus, he placed his hands on them and *the Holy Spirit came on them*. What was the

FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

initial evidence that they had been baptized in the Holy Spirit? *They spoke in tongues and prophesied* (Acts 19:6).

In 1 Corinthians chapters 12-14, Paul goes into great depth about speaking in tongues and its importance in the Church. He explains how speaking in tongues is one of the *manifestations of the Holy Spirit* (1 Corinthians 12:7-11), and that when someone speaks in a tongue, *he does not speak to men but to God... no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit... and edifies himself* (1 Corinthians 14:2, 4); he prays, sings, and praises God with the spirit, though neither he nor others in the church can understand what he is saying (1 Corinthians 14:13-16). In Romans 8:26, Paul explains how the Holy Spirit helps us pray, interceding for us *with groans that words cannot express*.

Paul wanted every one of them to speak in tongues, and assumed that when the whole church came together, *everyone* would speak in tongues (1 Corinthians 14:5, 23). In 1 Corinthians 14:21, Paul quotes an obscure passage from the prophet Isaiah in which speaking in unknown tongues was predicted centuries before Pentecost: *Indeed, He will speak to this people through stammering lips and a foreign tongue* (Isaiah 28:11- NAS).

There are *different kinds of tongues*. There is the special gift of tongues which is given to some and requires the gift of interpretation (1 Corinthians 12:10, 30). These are different from the tongues spoken on the Day of Pentecost. The tongues spoken at Pentecost did not need to be interpreted—they were native languages known and understood by the Jews who were visiting Jerusalem from foreign countries.

But the speaking in tongues that Paul says every believer has is different still. These tongues are not a public gift that needs to be interpreted, nor are they known human languages; they are for private communion with God and personal edification. As

BAPTISM IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

already seen, when someone speaks in this type of tongue, he does not speak to men but to God; no one understands him for he prays, sings and utters mysteries to God with his spirit. The sole purpose of this type of tongues is for the believer to talk to God and edify himself (1 Corinthians 14:2, 4, 14-16).

An Experience Separate and Distinct from Conversion

When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

– Acts 8:14-19

There is a popular false teaching that is widespread in the Christian Church today that goes something like this: *As soon as a person puts their faith in Christ, they are automatically filled with the Holy Spirit; there is no need for a separate experience of being baptized in the Holy Spirit – the Holy Spirit came to dwell in them the moment they received Christ. They got the full package at conversion.*

Sounds reasonable, but is it biblically accurate? To answer that question, we need look no further than the account given above from Acts 8:14-19. Philip the evangelist had gone down to Samaria

FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

and preached Christ there. The Samaritans gladly accepted the word of God, and many believed in Christ. Large numbers received healing and deliverance from evil spirits and were baptized in water. The whole city was full of great joy; they were experiencing a real revival.

When news of the revival reached the apostles in Jerusalem, they immediately sent Peter and John down to Samaria. Why? The Scriptures could not be any clearer: They went to pray for them *that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus*. These Samaritans were saved, healed, delivered, water baptized believers in Jesus Christ, BUT THEY HAD NOT YET RECEIVED THE HOLY SPIRIT!!! They still lacked one very important experience in their journey of faith—they needed to receive the Holy Spirit.

When Peter and John placed their hands on them, they received the Holy Spirit, not when Philip preached Christ to them or baptized them! This experience was totally separate and distinct from their conversion and baptism.

And when Simon *saw that the Spirit was given* at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he tried to buy the gift so that he could have the same ability. What did Simon see? We are not told. But it had to have been something very obvious—some sort of outward sign or evidence that when Peter and John laid hands on the people, the Holy Spirit immediately came upon them. Some have tried to suggest that Simon saw *joy* come upon the people when they received the Holy Spirit. But they *already had great joy* before Peter and John ever arrived in Samaria! In light of all the instances that we have already mentioned from the book of Acts where the Holy Spirit was given, isn't it quite reasonable to infer that Simon saw the same initial sign or evidence of speaking in tongues?

BAPTISM IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

Regardless of what Simon saw, one thing is certain: the baptism in the Holy Spirit is an experience altogether separate and distinct from conversion or water baptism.

How to Receive the Baptism in the Holy Spirit

Here are five steps to help a person receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit:

1. *Understand* – The Holy Spirit is a Person! It must be clearly understood that the baptism in the Holy Spirit is much more than a nice blessing or a mere one-time, emotional experience! The believer actually receives the third Person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit entering within the believer in order to bring him into a deeper fellowship and communion with the Father and with the Son (John 14:16-20). The baptism in the Holy Spirit is too expensive to buy! Man could never do enough to be worthy to receive this gift of God's grace, so Jesus purchased it for him when He gave Himself on the cross for the sins of the whole world! (Galatians 3:11-14). The Holy Spirit is promised by the Father to all of His children (Acts 1:4; 2:38-39).
2. *Believe* – It is God's will for every child of God to receive the Holy Spirit, because He knows how necessary an experience it is. Without the Holy Spirit working within man in this new dimension and relationship, God's ultimate purpose can never be worked out to its fullest extent. The very reason that a child of God obeys the Lord in water baptism is so that he can be *buried* and *risen* with Christ. God gives the Holy Spirit to all those who obey Him (Acts 5:32). God already poured out His Spirit 2,000

FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

years ago. He does not need to send Him again. When Peter and John went to Samaria to pray for baptized believers, instead of praying for God to *send* the Holy Spirit, they prayed for them that they might *receive* the Holy Spirit.

3. *Ask* - One must ask with a conscience that is clear both before God and man (1 John 3:20-22). One must ask, trusting in God's faithfulness. It is His will, He has promised it, and He is faithful (1 John 5:14-15). One must ask with determination! (Luke 11:9-13).
4. *Receive* - We receive the Holy Spirit as an act of faith: *Open wide your mouth wide and I will fill it!* (Psalm 81:10). *God gives the Spirit without limit* (John 3:34). There is abundance for everyone! Receiving the Holy Spirit is as easy as drinking! The child of God should come to Christ (He is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit) and drink. Jesus said, *If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink* (John 7:37; 1 Corinthians 12:13).
5. *Speak* - The tongue (and the whole body) must be given to the Holy Spirit. He wants to make it His dwelling place! James points out that the tongue is the first member that must be tamed (James 3:2-8). Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks (Luke 6:45). Speaking in tongues is not something that is accomplished by thinking up words, etc. The Holy Spirit gives the words or utterance to speak, while the understanding remains unfruitful. Nevertheless, it will be the believer's mouth, tongue, and voice that do the speaking, so he must speak boldly!

NOTE: Some make the mistake of waiting until a power takes absolute control of their tongue, forcing them to speak. Others

BAPTISM IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

attempt to repeat certain phrases or sounds, hoping that they will turn into tongues. None of these ideas are correct! The Holy Spirit gives utterance, that is to say, He bypasses the intellect of man and gives a whole new vocabulary of words in a language unknown to the believer. The believer must, with child-like simplicity and boldness, speak out these words as the Holy Spirit gives them.

FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

LAYING ON OF HANDS

The foundation of ... the laying on of hands.

– *Hebrews 6:1-2*

WHEN WE EXAMINE THE FOUNDATIONS of Christ listed in Hebrews 6:1-2, everyone would probably agree that the ones we have studied thus far—repentance, faith and baptism—are clearly elementary, basic rudiments of the Christian faith. That is fairly obvious.

But the laying on of hands? What's that got to do with my Christian life? At first glance, this principle doesn't seem to belong in the list. But on closer examination of the Scriptures, we will be convinced of its importance in the life and growth of every believer. In this chapter, we will consider four main functions or purposes for the laying on of hands in the life of the follower of Jesus:

1. Ordination or commissioning of church ministers
2. Impartation of the baptism and gifts of the Holy Spirit
3. Healing the sick
4. Bestowal of blessing

The key to understanding the laying on of hands is *contact*. Physical contact is made between one person and another through the hands. And even though that contact is *physical*, there is a *spiritual* impartation that takes place. That is what makes the laying of hands so powerful and important. God has established

FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

this practice as a vital means of transferring power, anointing, authority, healing and blessing from one member to another in the Body of Christ. This can be seen in the Old Testament also, when the priests *laid both hands* on the animal sacrifices in order to *put all the Israelite's sins* onto the animal (Leviticus 16:21-22). Something spiritual (in this case, the sins of the people) was being transferred by physical contact.

Ordination or Commissioning of Church Ministries

They presented these men [the first deacons] to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

– Acts 6:6

The apostles were given authority by Christ, who possessed all authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 10:1; 28:18); authority can only be given by someone who *has* authority (John 19:10-11). Ultimately, all authority comes from God (Romans 13:1).

God instituted that His government over the Early Church would be transferred through the laying on of the hands of the apostles. Ministerial leadership positions are not something that a person assumes or takes upon himself—they are conferred by those in authority on persons that God has called (Hebrews 5:4). So, as the Early Church grew, the apostles couldn't do all of the work themselves—they needed to delegate responsibility and authority. This was done through the laying on of hands. *The Seven*, as they are later called (Acts 21:8), were the first deacons in the Early Church. These were men (and later women as well) who were recognized as servants in the church (1 Timothy 3:8-13); they needed to be appointed or ordained by the laying on of hands.

LAYING ON OF HANDS

Later on, as the Church continued to grow and expand, the need for elders arose. We would call them pastors today (the term *elder* is synonymous with the terms *shepherds* or *pastors*, *bishops* or *overseers*). These were mature and proven men of God who were entrusted with the care and spiritual oversight of the local church (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). As in the case of deacons, the first elders were ordained by the apostles:

And when they [apostles Paul and Barnabas] had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.

— Acts 14:23 (KJV)

Although there is no specific mention of the apostles laying hands on the elders that they were being ordained, it is implied in the original word translated *ordained* here. Interestingly, the word literally means *to reach the hand*. Evidently, the common understanding in the Early Church was that ordination of both deacons and elders was by the laying on of hands of the Church leaders.

And those elders, like Timothy and Titus, who had been ordained through the laying on of hands (1 Timothy 4:14), were then charged with the responsibility of ordaining other elders (1 Timothy 3:1-7; 5:17-22; Titus 1:5). This was such a powerful and solemn responsibility that the apostles prayed and fasted before ordaining an elder; Paul warned Timothy not to do it hastily (1 Timothy 5:22).

When Paul and Barnabas were called to their first major apostolic mission, the Antioch church commissioned them through the laying on of hands (Acts 13:3). This was the church's

FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

way of sending them off with their blessing and commending them to the grace of God (Acts 14:26; 15:40).

Impartation of the Baptism and Gifts of the Holy Spirit

Then Peter and John placed their hands on them [Samaritans], and they received the Holy Spirit.

– Acts 8:17

When Paul placed his hands on them [Ephesian disciples], the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.

– Acts 19:6

Believers in the Early Church received the Holy Spirit in a variety of ways: sometimes the Holy Spirit fell on them as they prayed (Acts 2:4; 4:31); at Cornelius' house, the Gentiles were baptized in the Holy Spirit while Peter was preaching! But from the book of Acts, it seems that it was a regular practice for ministers to lay hands on people wanting to be filled with the Holy Spirit. That is how the apostle Paul received the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:17).

Another purpose for the laying on of hands in the Early Church was for the impartation of spiritual gifts. This was clearly the case with young Timothy, who had received a gift through the laying on of hands by Paul and other elders (1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6). Perhaps this took place at his ordination as an elder.

LAYING ON OF HANDS

Healing of the Sick

When the sun was setting, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying His hands on each one, He healed them. Moreover, demons came out of many people, shouting, "You are the Son of God!" But He rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew He was the Christ.

– *Luke 4:40-41*

There are numerous instances in the New Testament where Jesus laid His hands on the sick for their healing and deliverance from evil spirits (Mark 5:23; 6:5; 8:23-25; Luke 4:40; 13:13). He even taught that this was one of the signs that would follow every true believer: *They will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well* (Mark 16:18).

This practice was continued by His disciples. As already seen, Ananias laid his hands on Saul of Tarsus (Paul) to receive the Holy Spirit; but this was also done to heal his blindness (Acts 9:12, 17). Paul would later lay hands on the sick for healing as well (Acts 28:8-9). The same principle can be seen in the use of cloths that had touched Paul and were then taken to the sick for their healing and deliverance from evil spirits (Acts 19:11-12). Paul laid hands on the cloths, and, once again, through indirect or second-hand (sorry for the pun!) *contact*, the healing power and anointing of the Holy Spirit were transferred. Amazing! No wonder Luke calls these *extraordinary miracles*.

This reminds us of the woman with the issue of blood who was healed simply by touching the hem of Christ's garment. Her faith

FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

was: *If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.* As she touched Him (contact was made), Jesus felt power go out from Him, so He asked, *“Who touched My clothes?”* (Mark 5:24-34).

In the Church, God has established the means of healing for those that are sick:

Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven.

— *James 5:14-15*

They are to call for the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil. Although the laying on of hands is not specifically mentioned in this passage, it is implied in the phrase *pray over him*. And anointing with oil is yet another means of physical contact through which God’s spiritual power of healing can be transferred.

Bestowal of Blessing

People were bringing little children to Jesus to have Him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, He was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will

LAYING ON OF HANDS

never enter it.” And He took the children in His arms, put His hands on them and blessed them.

– *Mark 10:13-16*

These were probably infants or very young children, since the text tells us that they had to be *brought* to Jesus, and He then took them in His arms (see also Matthew 19:13-15). They weren’t sick or demon-possessed; their parents simply wanted Jesus to bless them, and He did.

So, this important principle of Christ – the laying on of hands – establishes a means by which power, authority, anointing, healing, and blessing can be conferred or transferred from one believer to another. And who doesn’t need power, authority, anointing, healing, and blessing? Wow! Perhaps it is becoming clearer to us now why the laying on of hands is included in the list of basic, fundamental principles of Christ!

FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith... But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a Man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when He comes, those who belong to Him.

– 1 Corinthians 15:13-14, 20-23

WHEN GOD MADE MAN IN HIS IMAGE, He intended for him to eat from the Tree of Life in Paradise and live forever. But Adam was warned not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil; if he did, he would *surely die* (Genesis 1:26-27; 2:9, 16-17).

Well, we all know the rest of the story. Adam and Eve disobeyed God, disregarded His warning, and ate the forbidden fruit. They died. First, they died spiritually; they were cut off from the presence of the Lord. This happened immediately after their disobedience. And ultimately, they died physically (many years later). Sin had entered the world through one man, and death through his sin; consequently, the curses of sin and death were passed on to all men (Romans 5:12). Because of Adam, all became sinners, and all came under the bondage of death (Hebrews 2:15).

FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

It is important for us to first understand the origin of death if we are to grasp the great truth of resurrection. Death is man's dreaded enemy, but it is merely the *result* of a far more insidious adversary—sin. As we already saw in Chapter 1, *Repentance from Dead Works*, the first step in a sinner's salvation is an awareness of the horror of sin and its devastating consequences. This leads to a renouncing and turning away from that sin. But it also helps us understand *why* Christ had to suffer and die on the cross—He died for our sins (1 Corinthians 15:3).

Importance of Christ's Resurrection

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead! He is risen! He is alive forevermore and holds the keys of death and hell! The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the central tenet of the Christian faith. EVERYTHING hinges on the fact that He arose victorious over sin, hell, and death. His triumph over the grave proved that He had paid the penalty for sin and secured our salvation (Romans 4:25).

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul's great resurrection chapter, the apostle stresses that if Christ didn't rise from the dead, our faith is useless—we are still in our sins, and those who have already died are lost. *But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead!* After His resurrection, He appeared to His apostles over a period of forty days, giving them *many convincing proofs that He was alive* (Acts 1:3). Ultimately, He was seen by over 500 eyewitnesses (1 Corinthians 15:6). There is better historical documentation and proof of the resurrection of Jesus Christ than any other event in human history!

This is why the apostles and believers in the Early Church boldly testified to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus everywhere

RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

they went, risking and, in some cases, losing their lives for the sake of Christ (Acts 2:23-24; 3:13-15; 4:10, 33).

The First and Second Resurrection

Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.

– *Daniel 12:2*

Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear His voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.

– *John 5:28-29*

And I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.

– *Acts 24:15*

The words of the Old Testament prophets, Christ, and His apostles, are all in agreement that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. *All* will be raised from their graves. The big question is, “*What happens to them after they are resurrected?*” And another important question that we will address here is: “*Is everyone resurrected at the same time?*”

In the Bible, judgment always follows immediately after resurrection. Just as we saw with *Repentance from Dead Works and Faith Toward God*, the *Resurrection of the Dead* and *Eternal Judgment*

FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

are also like two sides of the same coin. One follows in sequence after the other. The righteous are raised to everlasting life, the wicked to eternal damnation. [For more on this, refer to Chapter 7, *Eternal Judgment* on p.61.]

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul explains that there are various stages or orders in the resurrection; different groups are raised at different times:

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order [“turn” - NIV]: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power.

– 1 Corinthians 15:22-24 (NKJV)

Christ was the first to rise from the dead. He is the firstfruits. After Him, all will be made alive, but each one in his own *order* (literally, *series* or *succession*). NOTE: Although Lazarus and several others were raised from death back to life (1 Kings 17:22; Matthew 9:25; John 11:44), they did not experience resurrection. We prefer to use the term *resuscitation* for their experience. In resuscitation, the dead body is revived as a mortal body, subject to all of its weaknesses, eventually dying once again. In resurrection, the body is transformed into a glorious, immortal body which will never again experience death [for more on this, refer to p.59]. Christ’s resurrected body was not a spirit—it was a human body with flesh and bones; his disciples could touch him and see him, and he was able to eat food (Luke 24:36-43). However, Jesus could appear and disappear, passing through locked doors (John 20:19; Luke 24:31). His resurrection body was a glorious body. He no

RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

longer needed his earthly garments—they were left in the tomb; He was now clothed with eternal glory (2 Corinthians 5:2-4).

On the island of Patmos, the apostle John was given a revelation concerning the order of events that will take place in the resurrection of the dead: there is a first and second resurrection, which are separated by a thousand years:

I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.

— *Revelation 20:4-6*

Those who take part in the first resurrection are *blessed and holy*. They are priests of God and reign with Christ for a thousand years during the Millennial Kingdom, a golden age of peace and prosperity. The second death (eternal damnation in the Lake of Fire) has no power over them. This group includes the saints of the Church Age who will reign with Christ as His Bride. John also saw a company of martyrs, who had refused to take the mark of the beast. These are clearly tribulation saints who died for their faith. Both companies will reign with Christ.

FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Those who are resurrected a thousand years later (after the Millennium), must face the Great White Throne Judgment; anyone whose name is not found written in the Book of Life is then thrown into the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:11-15). That is the second death. [See *The Great White Throne Judgment* on p.65 of Chapter 7.]

The first resurrection is not a single event. It takes places in stages. It describes the resurrection of the righteous at various times. It includes the resurrection of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:23), the resurrection of those who are Christ's when He raptures His Bride (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18), the resurrection of tribulation saints (Revelation 7:9-17; 20:4), and the resurrection of the two witnesses whose bodies will lie in the streets of Jerusalem (Revelation 11:11).

The Believer's Blessed Hope of Eternal Life

Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?"

– *John 11:23-26*

If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.

– *1 Corinthians 15:19 (KJV)*

RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

King Solomon made the very painful discovery that if your hopes and dreams are *in this life only*, you are of all men most miserable. With all of his wealth, wisdom, power, and pleasure, he found that *everything under the sun is meaningless, a chasing after the wind* (Ecclesiastes 1:14). He finally understood why. It is because God has *set eternity in the hearts of men* (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

As mentioned at the start of this chapter, God made man in His image with an eternal purpose—he was to live forever. Man has three parts: spirit, soul and body (1 Thessalonians 5:23). When he dies, his body returns to the dust from where it came (Genesis 3:19); but his spirit and soul are eternal. We all know that. We've known it since we were small children when we began to wonder about heaven and hell, life after death, etc. We know it because God set eternity in our hearts. It is stamped on our very being.

We will all live forever, or more accurately, we will all *exist* forever. We will all spend eternity... *somewhere*. That's why Jesus came—to show us that by believing in Him, we could have eternal life and know where we are going to spend eternity (John 14:1-6).

As believers, our hope in Christ is not only for this life—it is for the life to come. We know that death is not the end; it is merely a temporary *sleep*, as we wait for the resurrection of our bodies. Paul taught the Christian believers to have this hope of resurrection, both for themselves and for their loved ones who had gone on before them. He explained that Jesus will come again for His Church in an event commonly known as the *Rapture*. In the Rapture, Christ will come down from heaven (bringing with Him the souls of all the believers who have already passed from this life); the dead in Christ (the bodies of believers who already died) will rise first, and then those believers who are still living at that

FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

time will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air:

Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.

– *1 Thessalonians 4:13-18*

Both the dead in Christ (those asleep) and those of us who are still alive will be resurrected in an instant. Admittedly, this is a great mystery:

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

– *1 Corinthians 15:51-52*

RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul goes on to explain in considerable detail the miraculous transformation that will take place in our bodies through the resurrection:

The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body... For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"

– 1 Corinthians 15:42-44, 53-55

Our resurrection bodies will be imperishable, glorious, powerful, spiritual, and immortal! The sting of death will be removed forever. Hallelujah! What a glorious hope. Meanwhile, as long as we are earthbound and still in these frail mortal bodies, *we wait for the blessed hope – the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ* (Titus 2:13).

The hope of resurrection and eternal life is like a helmet that protects our mind (1 Thessalonians 5:8) and an anchor for our soul in the stormy seas of life (Hebrews 6:19). Because Jesus is the resurrection and the life, we know that even if we die, we will live again. He will raise us up in the resurrection at the last day, and we will live with Him forever. God, who cannot lie, promised us this eternal life before the beginning of time (Titus 1:2).

FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

ETERNAL JUDGMENT

In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now He commands all people everywhere to repent. For He has set a Day when He will judge the world with justice by the Man He has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising Him from the dead.

– *Acts 17:30-31*

FROM THE FIRST BOOK OF THE BIBLE TO THE LAST, God is revealed as the Judge of all men. And the Scriptures make frequent reference to a coming Day of Judgment when all will be judged according to what they have done.

Eternal judgment should not be confused with other lesser judgments that God has executed in the past on various individuals or nations, nor should it be confused with the judgments that He will rain down on the earth during the Great Tribulation or at the end of the Millennium (Revelation 6-19; 20:1-10).

Eternal judgment takes place only after resurrection. This is why it was pointed out in Chapter 6, *Resurrection of the Dead* (which begins on p.51) that resurrection and eternal judgment are like two sides of the same coin – one leads directly to the other. As we saw in Chapter 6, the dead are raised in stages. As each group is resurrected, they are judged immediately thereafter. Every person has two appointments: death and judgment (Hebrews 9:27), the only exception being those who are fortunate to be taken alive in the Rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Some are

FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

raised to inherit eternal life and heavenly glory, while others are raised to everlasting condemnation and torment.

Each person will be judged individually and give an account for everything they did in their life—their deeds, words, motives, and even their secrets and hidden things (Romans 2:6, 16; Matthew 12:36-37; 1 Corinthians 4:5). God *has entrusted all judgment to Christ because He is the Son of Man* (John 5:22-27). In other words, man will be judged by one of his peers—the *Man Christ Jesus* (1 Timothy 2:5); man will be without excuse, for the One judging them lived a sinless life in His human body and died for their sins in that same human body, securing the means for their eternal salvation. All judgment will be just, fair and righteous.

Just as there are two main stages in the resurrection of the dead which are separated by a thousand years [see *The First and Second Resurrection* on p.53 of Chapter 6], there are also two stages in eternal judgment:

1. The Judgment Seat of Christ
2. The Great White Throne Judgment

The Judgment Seat of Christ

Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling... We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So we make it our goal to please Him,

ETERNAL JUDGMENT

whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

– 2 Corinthians 5:1-2, 8-10

The Judgment Seat of Christ takes place before the Millennium and is for Christians only. This is a judgment for rewards, not for condemnation. Remember that all those who participate in the first resurrection have no fear of damnation in the Lake of Fire – *the second death has no power over them* (Revelation 20:6, 14; 21:8). The Christian *judges himself* and is *disciplined by the Lord* now so that he will *not come under judgment and be condemned with the world* (1 Corinthians 11:28-32). The works and conduct of each Christian will be evaluated in order to determine their rewards only.

The apostle Paul spoke of a *Day* in which the work of each saved person will be examined and judged by God's consuming fire (note that their salvation is not what is in question, only their rewards):

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames. Don't you know that you

FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?

– 1 Corinthians 3:11-16

A number of the parables that Jesus taught speak about His servants being called before their Master to give Him an account in order to receive their recompense and rewards. *All will stand before the Judgment Seat, every knee will bow, and each of us will give an account of himself to God* (Romans 14:10-12). When Jesus returns for His Bride in the Rapture, He brings rewards with Him, showing that in a moment and the twinkling of an eye (1 Corinthians 15:52), this judgment takes place in the air and the bodies of the saints are transformed:

Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with Me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done.

– Revelation 22:12

For the believer who has served the Lord with integrity and lived a Christian life full of good works, the Judgment Seat of Christ is not a fearful thing. He looks forward to his vindication and reward. He knows that *God will give to each person according to what he has done; to those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, He will give eternal life* (Romans 2:6-7). Paul anxiously awaited his judgment which he knew would come at the *appointed time... when the Lord comes*:

I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in

ETERNAL JUDGMENT

darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts.
At that time each will receive his praise from God.

– 1 Corinthians 4:3-5

There are many different rewards for the righteous (Matthew 5:12; 16:27; 1 Corinthians 3:8). It is beyond the scope of this book to examine all of them in depth. Here is a partial list:

1. Eternal life in heaven; John saw heaven as consisting of three distinct places: *New Earth*, *New Heaven* and *New Jerusalem* (Revelation 21:1-2); the New Jerusalem is also called the *Paradise of God* (Revelation 2:7) and the *Lamb's Wife*, the *Bride of Christ* (Revelation 21:9-10; there is no more death, night, crying, curse or pain there – *His servants see His face and reign forever and ever there* (Revelation 22:1-5))
2. Crowns (1 Corinthians 9:25; Revelation 3:11), including the *crown of righteousness* (2 Timothy 4:8), the *crown of life* (James 1:12; Revelation 2:10), and the *crown of glory* (1 Peter 5:4)
3. Thrones and positions of authority in the Kingdom of God (Matthew 19:28)

The Great White Throne Judgment

Then I saw a Great White Throne and Him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from His presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the Book

FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

of Life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the Lake of Fire. The Lake of Fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the Book of Life, he was thrown into the Lake of Fire.

– *Revelation 20:11-15*

This is the final judgment of mankind which takes place immediately after the second resurrection, a thousand years after the first resurrection and the Millennium. One can sense that something awesome and dreadful is about to take place, for even the Earth and sky try to run away and hide! For those who never repented of their sins and received God's forgiveness purchased for them by the blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, they are about to receive their wages from God... death... the second death!

If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God... How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, "It is Mine to avenge; I will repay," and

ETERNAL JUDGMENT

again, “The Lord will judge His people.” It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

– *Hebrews 10:26-31*

The dead stand before the throne speechless. There is no indication that they ever speak. Books are opened which contain records of all their deeds. Each one is judged strictly on the basis of *what they had done*. Each one stands alone—there are no friends or family to defend them. And then the most important book of all is opened, the Book of Life. This book contains the names of any saved people who were not included in the first resurrection. They inherit everlasting life. The rest, *all those whose names are not found written in the Book of Life*, are judged and condemned to the Lake of Fire forever.

This and only this is the single factor that determines man’s eternal destiny: *Is their name written in the Book of Life?* In other words, did they pass from death to life by receiving Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior? They may once have been murderers, thieves, adulterers, homosexuals, prostitutes or drunkards, but if they had trusted in Christ, they *were washed, sanctified, justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ* (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). Therefore, the eternal question for each one, in Pilate’s words, is simply this: *What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?* (Matthew 27:22).

If anyone’s name was not found written in the Book of Life, he was thrown into the Lake of Fire. We normally call it hell, but more accurately, the Scriptures call this terrible place the Lake of Fire. Jesus spoke more about it than He did heaven! Here is a summary about this frightening place and what awaits the unrepentant sinners there:

1. Torment, agony, punishment and God’s wrath forever—there is no rest (Luke 16:23-28; Revelation 14:10-11)

FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

2. Darkness, weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30)
3. Unquenchable fire, maggots and worms cover their bodies (Mark 9:43-48; Isaiah 14:11)
4. The devil, the beast (antichrist) and the false prophet, along with all the fallen angels, are there awaiting their arrival (Revelation 19:20; 20:10; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6); NOTE: Jesus taught that hell was prepared for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41); it was never God's intention for man to be there, for He is *not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance* (2 Peter 3:9).
5. The damned are conscious and have memory—they will suffer mental anguish and eternal regret (Luke 16:25-28)
6. To make their torment even worse, the condemned can see the saints rejoicing in the presence of God and His holy angels in Paradise afar off, but they cannot cross over (Luke 16:23-26; Rev 14:10)
7. This is the second death; they already knew the awful sting of the first death; but this second death is much more dreadful; it is the death of the soul, eternal separation from God

God has clearly warned that this is *what is going to happen to the ungodly*. He is patient, longsuffering, compassionate and merciful, but those who are thrown into the Lake of Fire had their chances to repent and accept God's gracious gift of forgiveness and salvation, but because of their *stubbornness and unrepentant heart, they stored up wrath against themselves for the day of God's wrath* (Romans 2:5). They have no one to blame but themselves; by their

ETERNAL JUDGMENT

own choices, they disqualified themselves from eternal life (Acts 13:46). When this Day arrives, there will be no more mercy, no second chances, no Purgatory, as the Roman Catholic religion falsely teaches—only punishment and destruction for those who rejected His love and truth:

For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment; if He did not spare the ancient world when He brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others; if He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; and if He rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)—if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.

—2 Peter 2:4-9

Knowing that there is a heaven to gain and a hell to shun motivates the Christian believer to live a holy and upright life, seeking the Lord and fixing his eyes on Jesus Christ, the author and finisher of his faith. He looks forward to the Heavenly Jerusalem, setting his affection on things above, not on the things of the earth, eagerly longing for Christ's soon return:

By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the Day of Judgment

FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

and destruction of ungodly men. But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the Day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the Day of God and speed its coming. That Day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with His promise we are looking forward to a New Heaven and a New Earth, the home of righteousness.

– 2 Peter 3:7-13

The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life. He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

– Revelation 22:17, 20

CONCLUSION

Concerning Him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. And this we will do, if God permits.

– *Hebrews 5:11-6:3 (NAS)*

CONGRATULATIONS! YOU HAVE COMPLETED the course on the seven foundational teachings of Christ. Well, at least you've finished reading about them! Now you have a lot of work to do. Remember, these truths become firm foundations in your Christian life, not by *hearing* about them, but by *putting them into practice*.

FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

In the verses leading up to Hebrews 6:1-3 (cited above), the writer of Hebrews indicates that he had much more to teach these believers, but they simply weren't ready yet. They were *dull of hearing* (*slow to learn* - NIV). Something was stunting their growth as Christians. He told them that *by this time you ought to be teachers*, signifying that considerable *time* had passed since their conversion—they were not baby Christians. But in reality, they *were* still *infants* spiritually, needing the milk of God's word; they were not mature enough for the solid food of God's word.

God has solid food. God has much more to teach us beyond the seven elementary principles that we have briefly examined in *Foundations of the Christian Life*. The call now is to go on to *maturity*; solid food is for the *mature*, who through *practice* have trained their spiritual senses to discern good and evil. There's that word again that Jesus used when He spoke about the wise man who built his house on the rock: *practice*.

It is imperative that we put the seven basic foundations of Hebrews 6:1-3 into practice in our Christian lives. Without them, we will never grow as Christians. But it is equally imperative that, once we have done that, we keep growing, advancing, digging deeper; we can then *press on to maturity*. We need to grow up in Christ, no longer remaining infants, but becoming mature, attaining the whole measure of the fullness of Christ:

It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the Body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of

Conclusion

Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him who is the Head, that is, Christ.

– *Ephesians 4:11-15*

Putting these verses together with Hebrews 5:11-14, we can summarize the attributes of a mature Christian:

1. They are quick to learn and listen; they have ears to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches (Revelation 2:7, 11, etc.)
2. They have discernment and know the sound teachings of Scripture—they cannot be deceived by the winds of popular yet false teachings that blow through the Christian Church; as true disciples, they continue in His word all their life (John 8:31), allowing the Holy Spirit to guide them into all truth (John 16:13)
3. They have been equipped for works of service; they are actively involved in ministry, teaching and discipling others
4. They have a deep revelation knowledge of Christ and are becoming more like Him in faith, love, unity and character

So, let's get going, and let's get growing. AMEN.

