DAN DUKE

Hebrews

SIX FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES

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*By **Dan Duke***

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1

Repentance from Dead Works

THE FIRST FOUNDATION

Hebrews 6:1-2 identifies six foundational principles:

"Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment."

The first foundation is often shortened to simply repentance. But that is not what the text says.

The writer does not say that the foundational doctrine is repentance in a general sense. He gives repentance a specific object:

Repentance from dead works.

Those additional words matter.

Certainly Scripture teaches repentance from sin. Jesus preached repentance. John the Baptist preached repentance. The apostles preached repentance. No serious reading of Scripture can minimize the necessity of turning from sin, unbelief, rebellion, and disobedience.

But Hebrews 6 is saying something more specific.

The first foundational principle is a change of mind, direction, and confidence concerning dead works.

If we remove the words "dead works," we may unintentionally change the doctrine.

The question therefore becomes:

What is a dead work?

What Is a Dead Work?

A dead work is a work that possesses no power to impart life.

It may be religious.
It may be sincere.
It may be disciplined.

It may involve sacrifice, effort, morality, ceremony, law keeping, or personal devotion.

But if it cannot produce the life of God, justify the sinner, cleanse the conscience, or reconcile a person to God, it is ultimately a dead work.

In its most fundamental sense, a dead work is anything I do in an attempt to accomplish for myself what only Jesus Christ can accomplish for me.

It is my attempt to save myself.
My attempt to justify myself.
My attempt to cleanse myself.
My attempt to make myself acceptable to God.
My attempt to establish righteousness by my own performance.

That work may appear honorable, but if I am trusting it to produce what can come only through Christ, it is dead.

The problem is not necessarily that the work itself is evil.

The problem is that there is no life in it.

A person may commit an obviously sinful act, and Scripture calls that sin.
But a person may also perform an outwardly righteous religious act and place his confidence in that act rather than in Christ.

Hebrews calls us to repent from such works.

The Context of Hebrews

This language becomes especially clear when we remember to whom Hebrews was written.

The entire book repeatedly contrasts the former covenantal order with the new and living way opened through Jesus Christ.

Under the former covenant there were priests, sacrifices, washings, ordinances, offerings, feast days, tabernacles, and repeated ceremonies.

These things were not originally sinful.

God Himself instituted them.

The problem was not that the Law was evil.

The problem was that the Law could never impart the life and perfection toward which it pointed.

Hebrews says plainly concerning the sacrifices:

"For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins." Hebrews 10:4

Those sacrifices could point toward redemption.

They could testify concerning redemption.

They could foreshadow redemption.

But they could not accomplish the final redemption of humanity.

Only Jesus could do that.

Therefore, once the substance had come, returning to the shadow as the basis of righteousness was not spiritual progress.

It was a movement backward.

It was trusting a form that could never impart life.

The Ministry of Death

Paul uses strong language concerning the Old Covenant in 2 Corinthians 3.

He contrasts the ministry of the Spirit with what he calls:

"the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones."

That is unusually direct language.

The Law was holy, just, and good, but it could identify sin without imparting the life necessary to overcome it.

It could command righteousness without creating righteousness in the human heart.
It could reveal the standard without transforming the person.

Paul therefore contrasts:

the letter that kills

with the Spirit who gives life.

This does not mean that everything appearing in the Old Testament is dead.

Abraham lived by faith.

David knew the presence of God.

Moses encountered God face to face.

The prophets spoke by the Spirit.
The Scriptures themselves are living testimony.
The issue is covenantal.

The former covenant could expose sin, regulate conduct, and point prophetically toward Christ, but it could not bring creation into the fullness of life accomplished through the New Covenant.

The life was always in God.
The Law pointed toward that life.

Jesus is that life.

Therefore, attempting to obtain life through that which could only point toward life is a dead work.

Dead Works Can Be Very Religious

This is important because most people probably imagine dead works as sinful deeds.

But Hebrews is addressing religious people.

That changes the emphasis considerably.

Dead works are not merely bad things people should stop doing.

Some dead works may look extremely good.

Paul himself provides perhaps the clearest example.

Before encountering Jesus, he was not an irreligious man.

He was extraordinarily religious.
He could say:

"Touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." - Philippians 3:6 He possessed pedigree, education, discipline, zeal, circumcision, covenantal identity, and religious achievement.

Yet after encountering Christ he said:

"What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ."

Paul did not merely repent of obvious sins.

He repented of his confidence in his religious accomplishments.

That is repentance from dead works.

The works in which Paul had once placed confidence could not give him life.

They could not justify him.
They could not establish him in righteousness before God.

He therefore abandoned confidence in them in order to be:

"found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ."

That is one of the clearest descriptions of repentance from dead works in the New Testament.

Paul changed his mind about what could make him righteous.

He changed the location of his confidence.
He moved from:

my righteousness

to:

His righteousness.

That is foundational Christianity.

Repentance Is a Change of Mind

The Greek word commonly translated repentance is metanoia.

At its center is the idea of a change of mind - a fundamental inward reorientation that produces a different direction.

Biblical repentance is therefore much deeper than feeling sorry.

It is not merely remorse.
It is not religious guilt.
It is not promising God that I will try harder.
It is not behavior modification.

True repentance changes what I believe.

And because my actions eventually reveal what I truly believe, genuine repentance ultimately produces a different manner of living.

Repentance from dead works therefore means that I change my mind concerning the ability of my works to produce righteousness and life.

I cease trusting myself as my own redeemer.

I abandon the illusion that sufficient religious effort can accomplish what only Christ can accomplish.

This explains why the first two foundations of Hebrews 6 belong together:

repentance from dead works

and faith toward God.

I turn from one confidence in order to place my confidence somewhere else.
I turn from dead works.
I turn toward God.

The movement is not merely from bad behavior to good behavior.

It is from self-confidence to God-confidence.

From self-righteousness to the righteousness of Christ.
From human effort as the source of life to God Himself as the source of life.

The Conscience Must Be Cleansed from Dead Works

Hebrews uses the expression "dead works" one other time, and that occurrence is extremely important.

Hebrews 9:14 says:

"How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"

This verse gives us another key to understanding Hebrews 6.

Notice that the blood of Christ does not merely cleanse the record.

It cleanses the conscience from dead works.

Why?

So that we may:

serve the living God.

This establishes a remarkable contrast:

dead works

versus the living God.

The answer to dead works is not inactivity.
The answer is living service flowing from a cleansed conscience.

Christianity is therefore not a message that works do not matter.

It is a message concerning the source of works.

Dead works originate in an attempt to produce life.

Living works proceed from life already received.

That distinction changes everything.

We Do Not Work for Life; We Work from Life

Religion continually tempts us to reverse the order of the gospel.

Religion says:

Perform, and perhaps God will accept you.

Improve yourself, and perhaps God will receive you.

Do enough, and perhaps you will become righteous.

Obey sufficiently, and perhaps you will qualify for life.

The gospel reverses the order.

In Christ, God gives life.

And because we have received life, we now live.

We do not obey in order to become sons.
We obey because we have been received as sons.
We do not serve in order to earn access.
We serve because access has been opened.
We do not perform in order to establish righteousness.
We bear the fruit of the righteousness we have received in Christ.

Ephesians 2 states the order beautifully:

"For by grace are ye saved through faith... not of works, lest any man should boast."

But Paul does not stop there.

Immediately afterward he says:

"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works."

Notice the order.

Not:

good works -> salvation

but:

salvation -> good works.

We are not saved by works.
We are saved unto good works.

The works have not disappeared.

Their source has changed.

Their purpose has changed.

Their relationship to salvation has changed.

Good works are the fruit of life.

Dead works are the attempt to manufacture life.

The Difference Between Dead Works and Good Works

A work cannot necessarily be classified as living or dead simply by observing the outward action.

Two people may perform exactly the same action for entirely different reasons.

Two people may give money.

One gives from gratitude and love.

Another gives because he believes his offering purchases divine favor.

The outward action is similar.
The inward foundation is entirely different.

Two people may fast.

One fasts because he desires undistracted communion with God.

Another fasts believing that the suffering itself obligates God to answer him.

Same action.

Different source.

Two people may read Scripture.

One reads because the Word is life and he desires to know Jesus.

Another reads primarily to accumulate religious merit or prove himself superior to others.

Same Bible.

Same activity.

Different life.

A work becomes dead when it is disconnected from the life of God and used as a substitute for dependence upon Him.

This is why the New Testament continually addresses motives, faith, love, and the heart.

God is not merely forming correct behavior.

He is creating a people whose lives proceed from union with Christ.

The Galatian Crisis

The churches of Galatia provide another powerful example.
The Galatians had received Christ by faith.

They had received the Spirit.

Yet afterward they were being persuaded that something else must be added to Christ in order to complete their standing before God.

Paul responds sharply:

"Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?" Galatians 3:3 That question reaches directly into the issue of dead works.

They had begun in the Spirit.

Life had already been given.

Yet they were being persuaded to return to fleshly performance as though human effort could complete what the Spirit had begun.

Paul refuses the premise.

Christ plus human religious achievement is not an improved gospel.

It is another gospel.

The moment I believe that Jesus has brought me only part of the way and that my religious performance must complete the work, I have begun returning toward dead works.

The issue is not merely circumcision.
The deeper issue is confidence.

Where is my confidence located?

In Christ?

Or in Christ plus something I must contribute in order to become acceptable?

Paul's answer is uncompromising:

"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love." - Galatians 5:6
The external religious distinction no longer determines standing before God.

Christ does.

The Flesh Cannot Perfect What the Spirit Began

This principle reaches far beyond first-century Judaism.

Christians can create new forms of dead works just as easily as people under the old religious order.

We can turn prayer into a dead work.

Giving into a dead work.

Church attendance into a dead work.

Bible reading into a dead work.

Fasting into a dead work.

Ministry into a dead work.

Even preaching can become a dead work.

Not because any of these things are inherently dead.

They become dead when we attempt to derive from the activity itself what can only come from communion with the living God.

A religious discipline does not contain life independently.

Jesus does.

The Scriptures testify of Him.

Prayer brings us into communion with Him.

Worship responds to Him.

Giving expresses His nature.

Service participates in His purpose.

But when the practice becomes separated from the Person, the form may remain while the life disappears.

That is one of religion's greatest dangers.

The structure can continue long after the life has departed.
The vocabulary can remain.

The songs can remain.
The sermons can remain.
The meetings can remain.
The organization can remain.
The reputation can remain.

And yet Jesus can say:

"Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." - Revelation 3:1
Activity is not necessarily evidence of life.

Life is evidence of life.

The Older Brother and Dead Works

Jesus' parable of the prodigal son contains another picture of this problem.

The younger son clearly sinned.

His rebellion was visible.

He left the father's house, wasted his inheritance, and eventually came to himself.

Most people easily identify his need for repentance.

But the older brother had a different problem.

He remained at home.
He worked.
He obeyed.
He served.

Yet when the father celebrated the restoration of the younger son, the older brother said:

"Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment..."

Then came the revealing complaint:

"...and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends."

He had been in the father's house while thinking like a servant attempting to earn reward.

The father answered:

"Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine."

That is a powerful picture.

The son was working for something that already belonged to him by relationship.

His labor had become separated from his identity.

He was functioning as though acceptance depended upon performance.

The younger brother needed repentance from obvious rebellion.
The older brother needed repentance from a different kind of dead work.

One was lost outside the house.

The other was lost in his understanding while standing inside it.

Dead works can exist very close to the Father.

The Great Religious Temptation

The great temptation of fallen humanity is not merely to rebel against God.

It is also to attempt to become righteous without depending completely upon Him.

Human beings want something they can measure.

Something they can perform.

Something they can compare.

Something they can control.

The gospel removes boasting because it places salvation entirely in Jesus Christ.

Paul asks:

"Where is boasting then? It is excluded."

Why?

Because grace destroys the illusion that I am my own source.

Grace does not mean that I become passive.

Grace means that everything begins with God.

Life begins with God.

Righteousness begins with God.

Salvation begins with God.

Faith responds to God.

Love responds to God.

Obedience responds to God.

Good works respond to God.

Christian life is response before it is achievement.

Cain and Abel

The principle can be seen very early in Scripture.

Cain and Abel both brought offerings.

Both were doing something religious.

Yet Hebrews says:

"By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain."

The issue was not simply that one brother brought something and the other did not.

Both approached God.

But Abel's offering was by faith.

That distinction is foundational.

Religious activity without faith can never become a substitute for relationship with God.

The foundational issue is not merely:

What am I doing?

It is:

From what source am I doing it, and in what am I trusting?

Faith makes room for God to be the source.

Dead works attempt to make man the source.

Repentance from Self-Salvation

Perhaps the simplest way to state the first foundation is this:

I must repent of every attempt to be my own savior.

That is deeper than abandoning a particular religious ceremony.

It reaches the inward instinct of fallen humanity.

I cannot redeem myself.
I cannot justify myself.
I cannot cleanse my own conscience.

I cannot generate eternal life.
I cannot produce sonship.
I cannot establish my own righteousness.
I cannot perfect myself by fleshly effort.

Jesus is not merely helping me save myself.

He is Savior.

The cross is not God's contribution added to mine.
The cross is God's decisive act of redemption.

Therefore, repentance from dead works means relinquishing every claim that something originating in me can replace, complete, or improve the finished work of Jesus Christ.

This Does Not Produce Lawlessness

Some may immediately object that such teaching diminishes obedience.

Paul faced the same accusation.

If righteousness is received by grace, does that mean behavior no longer matters?

Absolutely not.

Grace does not remove obedience.

Grace changes its source.

Jesus said:

"If ye love me, keep my commandments."

Love comes first.

Relationship comes first.

Life comes first.

Then obedience becomes the expression of that life.

Paul wrote:

"The love of Christ constraineth us."

There is a profound difference between being driven by fear in order to earn acceptance and being moved by love because acceptance has been received.

Both people may obey.

But one obeys as a slave trying to secure his standing.

The other obeys as a son expressing the Father's nature.

That distinction is not small.

It is the difference between death and life.

Living Works Flow from Union

Jesus described the principle in John 15:

"Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself... no more can ye, except ye abide in me."

The branch produces fruit.

Jesus expects fruit.

But the branch does not create its own life.

Its fruitfulness depends entirely upon union with the vine.

That may be one of the clearest pictures of repentance from dead works.

The branch must abandon any illusion of independent fruitfulness.

Jesus says:

"Without me ye can do nothing."

That does not mean human beings perform no activity.

It means nothing of eternal life can be produced independently of Him.

Living works therefore arise from abiding.

From communion.
From union.
From the Spirit.
From grace.
From Christ in us.

Paul expresses the same reality:

"I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." - 1 Corinthians 15:10 Paul worked extraordinarily hard.

Grace did not make him inactive.

But Paul understood the source.

"I laboured..."

Yet:

"not I..."

That is living work.

From Dead Works to Serving the Living God

Hebrews 9:14 brings the entire principle together:

The blood of Christ purges our conscience from dead works so that we may serve the living God.
The goal of repentance from dead works is not withdrawal from responsibility.

It is restoration to true service.

We stop attempting to work for life so that we can finally work from life.
We stop attempting to secure acceptance so that we can serve from acceptance.
We stop trying to manufacture righteousness so that righteousness can bear its fruit through us.
We stop attempting to become our own source so that the life of Jesus may become visible in us.

This is why repentance from dead works belongs at the foundation.

Until this matter is settled, everything built upon it is unstable.

A person who does not understand this may spend an entire Christian lifetime trying to earn what Jesus has already given.

He may pray from insecurity.

Serve from insecurity.

Give from insecurity.

Preach from insecurity.

Obey from insecurity.

Work from insecurity.

And then call the entire exhausting process Christianity.

But the foundation says otherwise.

Repent from dead works.

Change your mind about where life comes from.

Change your mind about what makes you righteous.

Change your mind about what gives you access to God.

Change your mind about what cleanses your conscience.

Change your mind about who saves you.

Jesus saves.

The Foundation Must Remain the Foundation

Hebrews says these principles belong to the foundation.

A foundation is not something we abandon because we have matured.

We stop repeatedly laying it, but everything built afterward continues to rest upon it.

Therefore, repentance from dead works is not merely the message we give unbelievers at the beginning of their conversion.

It remains essential to mature Christian life.

The temptation to return to self-effort does not disappear simply because someone has walked with God for many years.

In fact, religious maturity can sometimes provide more sophisticated forms of self-reliance.

We may begin trusting our experience.

Our revelation.
Our theology.
Our discipline.
Our ministry accomplishments.
Our reputation.
Our years of service.
Our spiritual gifts.
Our sacrifices.

But none of these is Jesus.

Paul had extraordinary spiritual credentials, yet he continued to say:

"That I may know him."

The mature believer does not outgrow dependence.

He grows deeper into it.

The First Foundation

The first foundation is therefore considerably more radical than the statement:

Repent of your sins.

That statement is true, but Hebrews says something more precise.

Repent from dead works.

Abandon confidence in everything incapable of imparting life.

Turn from every attempt to justify yourself.

Turn from every attempt to redeem yourself.

Turn from every attempt to cleanse yourself.

Turn from religious performance as a means of securing acceptance.

Turn from the flesh as the supposed means of completing what the Spirit began.

Turn from confidence in ceremony, pedigree, law, achievement, discipline, or religious reputation.

And turn toward the living God.

The first foundation prepares us for the second:

faith toward God.

I cannot truly rest my faith in God while continuing to place ultimate confidence in myself.

One confidence must give way to the other.

Repentance from dead works removes the false foundation.

Faith toward God establishes the true one.

The Christian life therefore begins with a profound surrender:

I am not my own savior.

Jesus is.

I do not produce the life of God.
I receive it.
I do not establish righteousness.
I receive righteousness in Christ.
I do not earn access.

Jesus opened the way.

I do not work in order to become alive.

Because I have been made alive in Him, I can now serve the living God.

That is not passivity.
That is New Covenant life.

And that is why the writer of Hebrews places repentance from dead works first.

Before the structure rises, the foundation must be settled.

Life cannot be earned.

Life must be received.

And once received, that life will bear fruit.

2

Faith Toward God

THE SECOND FOUNDATION

Hebrews 6:1-2 identifies six foundational principles:

"Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God , of the doctrine of baptisms , and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment." - Hebrews 6:1-2

The Second Foundation

Faith toward God is not an isolated doctrine placed randomly beside repentance from dead works. The first two foundations belong together. Repentance turns us away from a false source of confidence; faith turns us toward the true source.

Repentance from dead works changes the location of my confidence.

Faith toward God establishes where my confidence now rests.

The movement is not simply from bad behavior to good behavior. It is from self-reliance to God-reliance, from confidence in human merit to confidence in God, from attempting to produce life to receiving life from the One who is living.

Hebrews 6 does not merely say faith. It says faith toward God . The direction matters. Biblical faith has an object. It is not faith in faith, faith in our confession, faith in our ability to believe, or faith in a religious system. It is faith turned toward God Himself.

Faith Is Relational Before It Is Transactional

The New Testament does not present faith primarily as a technique for obtaining desired outcomes. Faith is first a relationship of trust. We believe God because of who He is. We entrust ourselves to Him because He is faithful.

"He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." - Hebrews 11:6

The verse begins with God Himself: He is. Before faith asks what God will do, faith rests in who God is. Faith is not first an instrument for acquiring things from God. It is the response of the heart to the revelation of God.

This is why Abraham becomes the great biblical example of faith. His faith was not confidence in favorable circumstances. In fact, the circumstances contradicted the promise. His faith was confidence in the One who had spoken.

"He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform." - Romans 4:20-21

The center of Abraham's faith was not his own believing. The center was God's ability and faithfulness. He was fully persuaded concerning God.

Faith Comes by Hearing God

"So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." - Romans 10:17

Faith does not originate in human determination. We do not manufacture faith by emotional intensity. Faith is awakened when God is heard.

The pattern throughout Scripture is revelation and response. God speaks; faith answers. God reveals Himself; faith trusts. God promises; faith rests in the character of the One who promised.

This protects us from presumption. Presumption decides what God must do and then calls its insistence faith. Biblical faith

begins by hearing. It does not force God into agreement with our desires; it brings us into agreement with what God has revealed.

Therefore one of the most important questions in the life of faith is not merely, "What do I want to believe?" but, "What has God said?" Faith toward God is always anchored in the truth of God.

Faith and the Faithfulness of God

Our faith rests upon His faithfulness. Human faith may fluctuate, but the character of God does not.

"God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord." - 1 Corinthians 1:9

"Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;)" - Hebrews 10:23

The writer of Hebrews does not tell us to hold fast because we are strong. He tells us to hold fast because He is faithful who promised. The strength of faith is not finally measured by the strength of the person believing, but by the reliability of the One in whom faith rests.

This is why faith can survive weakness. A trembling hand can receive a strong promise. The decisive issue is not the perfection of the hand; it is the trustworthiness of the One who speaks.

Faith Is More Than Mental Agreement

Biblical faith certainly includes believing truth, but it is more than intellectual assent. James reminds us that even demons can believe certain facts about God and tremble. Saving, living faith involves trust, reliance, and response.

The Hebrew idea behind trust repeatedly carries the sense of leaning upon, relying upon, or placing one's weight upon another.

Faith toward God means that the weight of my life is increasingly placed upon Him.

This is why faith produces obedience. Obedience does not purchase the promise; it reveals trust in the Promiser.

"By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went." - Hebrews 11:8

Abraham's movement did not create the promise. His movement revealed that he believed the One who made the promise.

Faith and Works: The Order Matters

Because the first foundation is repentance from dead works, we must be precise when we speak of works. The New Testament does not oppose faith to all action. It opposes faith to works used as a basis for self-justification.

Paul says that a person is justified by faith apart from works of the law. James says that faith without works is dead. There is no contradiction when the order is understood.

Dead works attempt to produce life. Living works proceed from life received by faith.

Paul rejects works as the ground of our acceptance. James rejects a so-called faith that produces no living response. Paul addresses the root of justification. James addresses the fruit of genuine faith.

"For by grace are ye saved through faith... not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works." - Ephesians 2:8-10

The order is decisive: grace, faith, new creation, good works. Works are not the root of life; they are its fruit.

Faith Toward God and Access

Faith toward God is inseparable from access. Hebrews repeatedly speaks of drawing near. The blood of Jesus has opened a new and living way, and faith responds by coming.

"Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus... Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith." - Hebrews 10:19,22

Notice the sequence. Access is accomplished through the blood. Faith does not open the way; Jesus opened the way. Faith receives what Jesus has opened and comes near.

This keeps faith Christ-centered. I do not believe strongly enough to create access. I believe because access has been established. Faith says yes to the finished work of Jesus.

In that sense, faith is not an attempt to persuade God to become favorable toward me. Faith awakens to the favor revealed in Jesus Christ and approaches accordingly.

Faith Toward God Is Faith Through Jesus

Christian faith toward God is never an undefined spirituality. Jesus is the revelation of the Father and the way into the Father's presence.

"Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." - John 14:6

"Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God." - 1 Peter 1:21

Peter's language is especially important: by Him we believe in God. Jesus does not distract from faith toward God; He makes that faith possible and gives it its clearest content.

The Father is known in the Son. The character of God is revealed in Jesus. The cross reveals His love. The resurrection reveals His victory. The exaltation of Jesus reveals where history is headed.

Faith Is Present Confidence and Future Hope

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." - Hebrews 11:1

Faith lives in the present while embracing what is not yet visible. It gives present substance to future hope because it rests upon God's promise.

This does not mean faith denies present facts. Abraham did not pretend that his body was young. Biblical faith can look directly at contradiction and still give greater weight to God's word.

Faith therefore is not denial. It is proportion. It assigns decisive weight to God. Circumstances are real, but they are not ultimate. Feelings are real, but they are not Lord. The visible is real, but it does not exhaust reality.

This is one reason focus matters so deeply. What I continually behold tends to determine what grows large in my awareness. Faith does not ignore difficulty; it refuses to allow difficulty to become larger than God.

Faith Expresses Itself Through Love

"For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love." - Galatians 5:6

Faith that is genuinely turned toward God will increasingly take on the character of the God toward whom it is turned. Since God is love, mature faith cannot remain loveless.

This is crucial because spiritual confidence without love can become harsh, proud, or manipulative. The New Testament does not separate faith from the formation of Christlike character.

First Corinthians 13 is explicit that extraordinary faith capable of moving mountains, if separated from love, leaves the person as nothing. Therefore faith toward God is not merely power toward outcomes. It is trust that brings us into fellowship with God and gradually conforms us to His nature.

Faith, Doubt, and an Undivided Heart

The opposite of faith is not necessarily the presence of a question. Many people in Scripture asked honest questions while still moving toward God. The deeper danger is a divided trust - attempting to lean in opposite directions at once.

James describes the double-minded person as unstable. Jesus repeatedly called people from fear into trust. The issue is where the heart finally rests.

Faith can say, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." That prayer is not hypocrisy. It is a person bringing weakness toward Jesus rather than away from Him.

The foundation is not that I will never experience uncertainty. The foundation is that uncertainty does not become my god. I continue turning toward God.

Faith Must Become a Way of Life

"The just shall live by faith." - Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38 Faith is not merely the doorway by which we enter the Christian life. It is the atmosphere in which the righteous live. We begin by faith and we continue by faith.

This directly answers the Galatian error. We do not begin in the Spirit and then mature by the flesh. The mature believer does not

graduate from dependence upon God. Maturity deepens dependence.

Therefore the second foundation remains active throughout life. Every new responsibility, every transition, every loss, every promise, every act of obedience asks the same underlying question: where is my confidence?

The Second Foundation in Practice

Faith toward God means that I increasingly learn to place the weight of my life upon who God has revealed Himself to be in Jesus Christ.

It means I hear before I presume. I trust before I see. I obey because I trust. I approach because Jesus opened the way. I work from life rather than for life. I refuse to make circumstances, fear, religious performance, or my own understanding the final authority.

Repentance from dead works says: I am not my own source.

Faith toward God says: God is my source.

Faith does not make God faithful. Faith discovers that He already is. Faith does not create the finished work. Faith receives it. Faith does not manufacture access. Faith enters the access Jesus has opened.

This is why faith toward God belongs in the foundation. Everything that follows - baptisms, laying on of hands, resurrection, judgment - must be received and understood from this posture of trust in God.

Primary Scriptures for Further Study

Hebrews 6:1-2 - the first two foundations placed together

Hebrews 11:1-6 - the nature and necessity of faith

Romans 4:1-25 - Abraham fully persuaded concerning God

Romans 10:8-17 - faith coming by hearing

Hebrews 10:19-23 - access and full assurance of faith

1 Peter 1:18-21 - through Jesus our faith and hope are in God

Ephesians 2:8-10 - saved by grace through faith, created unto good works

James 2:14-26 - living faith revealed by works

Galatians 3:1-14 - beginning and continuing by faith

Galatians 5:6 - faith working through love

Mark 9:24 - believing while bringing weakness to Jesus

2 Corinthians 5:7 - walking by faith, not by sight

3

Doctrine of Baptisms

THE THIRD FOUNDATION

Hebrews 6:1-2 identifies six foundational principles:

"Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God , of the doctrine of baptisms , and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment." - Hebrews 6:1-2

The Third Foundation

Hebrews does not say "the doctrine of baptism" in the singular. It says the doctrine of baptisms - plural. That detail deserves to be allowed to stand.

The third foundation is not merely water baptism.

It is the doctrine of baptisms.

The Greek word is baptismon , a plural form. The same word family can refer to immersions, washings, or baptisms. In Hebrews itself, related language is used for ceremonial washings. This means we should not treat the plural carelessly.

At the same time, Hebrews 6 calls these matters "principles of the doctrine of Christ." In the New Testament, several distinct baptismal realities appear. A careful treatment should therefore do two things at once: recognize the Jewish background of ritual washings, and also recognize the fuller New Covenant revelation of baptism in relation to Jesus, the Spirit, the body of Christ, water, and even suffering.

The purpose of this chapter is not to force every use of the word into one category. It is to see the major baptismal realities of the New Testament and how they relate to one another.

What Does Baptize Mean?

The basic image of baptism is immersion - being placed into, overwhelmed by, or identified with something. The power of the image lies in transition. One does not merely stand beside the water; one is brought into it.

Baptism therefore speaks naturally of identification, participation, and transition from one sphere into another.

This is why the New Testament can use baptism language in different ways. Water can be the element. The Holy Spirit can be the One into whom or by whom a person is immersed. Christ can be the sphere of identification. Suffering can be described as a baptism because a person is engulfed in it.

The unifying idea is not the physical element itself. It is immersion and identification.

The Background: Washings Under the Former Order

Hebrews was written to people deeply familiar with Jewish ritual life. The Law contained numerous washings connected with purification, priestly service, bodily uncleanness, and ceremonial approach.

Hebrews 9:10 speaks of "meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation."

The word translated "washings" is from the same baptism word family. Therefore the plural "baptisms" in Hebrews 6 would naturally have resonated with readers who knew multiple ritual immersions and washings.

But Hebrews insists that the former order was provisional. Those washings could cleanse ceremonially, but they could not perfect

the conscience. They pointed beyond themselves toward the greater cleansing accomplished in Christ.

This is important: the doctrine of baptisms begins in continuity with biblical washing imagery, but it cannot end there. Jesus brings the reality toward which the shadows pointed.

John's Baptism: A Baptism of Repentance

John the Baptist appears at the threshold of the New Covenant announcing the kingdom and calling Israel to repentance.

"John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." - Mark 1:4

John's baptism was not merely another ceremonial washing. It carried prophetic urgency. It marked a turning of heart and a preparation for the One who was coming.

Yet John was explicit that his baptism was preparatory and incomplete in relation to Jesus.

"I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost." - Mark 1:8

That sentence already gives us more than one baptism: John baptizes in water; Jesus baptizes in the Holy Spirit.

Acts 19 confirms the distinction. Paul met disciples who knew only John's baptism. He explained that John had told the people to believe on the One coming after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. They were then baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, and afterward the Holy Spirit came upon them when Paul laid hands on them.

Baptized Into Christ

One of the deepest baptismal realities in the New Testament is our identification with Jesus Christ Himself.

"Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?" - Romans 6:3

Paul is describing more than an external ceremony. The force of the passage is union and identification. We are baptized into Christ, into His death, and therefore into the newness of life made possible by His resurrection.

"For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." - Galatians 3:27

To be baptized into Christ is to be brought into a new identity. The old controlling identity in Adam no longer has the final word. Christ becomes the defining sphere of the believer's life.

Water baptism powerfully declares this reality, but the reality itself is larger than the water. The believer is not merely baptized into a ritual. The believer is baptized into Christ.

Baptized Into One Body

"For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body... and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." - 1 Corinthians 12:13

This baptism is corporate. The Spirit brings believers into one body. Baptism therefore is not only about my private relationship with God; it announces the end of isolated identity.

Jew and Gentile, bond and free - the distinctions Paul names are real social distinctions, yet none can be used as the basis of spiritual superiority within Christ. The Spirit places all into one body.

This gives baptism ecclesial meaning. We are immersed into a people. The New Covenant creates a corporate body whose life is Christ and whose animating presence is the Spirit.

This is one reason baptism should never be reduced to an individual religious achievement. Its deepest logic contradicts boasting. No one baptizes himself into the body. We are received into a life larger than ourselves.

Water Baptism in the Name of Jesus

Water baptism is plainly present in the apostolic witness and should not be minimized. Jesus commanded the making of disciples and baptism. Acts repeatedly records people being baptized upon receiving the gospel.

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." - Matthew 28:19

"Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ..." - Acts 2:38

The apostolic language centers baptism in the Name and lordship of Jesus. Water baptism publicly identifies the believer with Jesus, His death, His burial, His resurrection, and His people.

It is not a human work that earns salvation. If treated as a meritorious mechanism by which we obligate God, even baptism itself could be converted into a dead work. But received in faith, it is a God-given act of obedience and identification.

The water does not replace Jesus. It testifies to Jesus. The ceremony does not produce the finished work of the cross. It declares participation in that finished work.

Buried and Raised With Him

"Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead... even so we also should walk in newness of life." - Romans 6:4

Water baptism gives visible form to a spiritual declaration: the old order has been judged in the death of Christ, and a new manner of life has begun in His resurrection.

Colossians uses similar language: "Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God" (Colossians 2:12). Notice the phrase through faith . Baptism and faith are not enemies. The outward act and the inward trust belong together.

The goal is not merely to have had an experience in water. The goal is to walk in newness of life. Baptism points forward into a transformed way of living.

Jesus the Baptizer in the Holy Spirit

All four Gospels preserve the testimony that Jesus is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit. This is not a minor charismatic specialty. It belongs to the earliest identification of Jesus' messianic ministry.

"Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost." - John 1:33

John baptized in water. Jesus would immerse people in the Holy Spirit.

Before His ascension, Jesus told the disciples to wait for the promise of the Father.

"For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence." - Acts 1:5

Pentecost is the obvious fulfillment in Acts 2. The disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave utterance.

The purpose was not merely personal exhilaration. Jesus connected the coming of the Spirit with power to bear witness. The Spirit immerses believers into the living activity and mission of God.

Baptism in the Spirit and Repeated Fillings

The book of Acts uses several expressions for the Spirit's activity: baptized with the Holy Spirit, filled with the Holy Spirit, the Spirit falling upon people, the Spirit being poured out, and people receiving the Holy Spirit.

We should not flatten every expression into an artificial formula. Luke is describing a living divine reality from several angles.

There can be an initial reception or baptismal encounter, but Acts also records believers being filled again. The same people filled in Acts 2 are filled afresh in Acts 4.

This suggests an important distinction: baptism language emphasizes immersion and initiation into the Spirit's realm; filling language emphasizes present empowerment and fullness. The New Testament does not invite us to argue over terminology while neglecting the reality.

The essential question is not whether I possess the correct vocabulary. The essential question is whether I am living in the reality of the Spirit Jesus gives.

Water and Spirit Are Distinct but Not Competitive

The New Testament can place water baptism and the reception of the Holy Spirit very close together, yet Acts also shows that the order is not mechanically fixed.

At Pentecost, repentance, water baptism, forgiveness, and the gift of the Spirit are proclaimed together. In Samaria, people believed and were baptized in water, but later received the Holy Spirit through the laying on of the apostles' hands. In the house of Cornelius, the Holy Spirit fell before water baptism, and Peter then commanded them to be baptized in water. In Ephesus, disciples were baptized in the name of Jesus and then received the Spirit through the laying on of hands.

The variation is instructive. God refuses to let us turn living realities into a rigid sequence that controls Him. Yet the realities themselves remain important.

Water baptism and Spirit baptism are not rivals. One visibly identifies the believer with Jesus and His people; the other immerses the believer in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. The apostolic church expected both the confession of Jesus and the active gift of the Spirit.

The Baptism of Suffering

Jesus also used baptism language metaphorically for suffering.

"Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" - Matthew 20:22

Again, the underlying image is immersion. Jesus would be engulfed in suffering and death. His disciples would also participate in the cost of following Him.

This is not usually what Christians mean when they list foundational baptisms, but the usage matters because it confirms that baptism language is broader than water alone.

The life of discipleship includes identification with Christ not only in resurrection power but also in His self-giving love, obedience, and willingness to suffer for righteousness.

What About "Baptism With Fire"?

John said that the Coming One would baptize "with the Holy Ghost, and with fire" (Matthew 3:11; Luke 3:16). This phrase has often been used positively for spiritual fervor, purification, or intensified experience.

However, the immediate context also contains judgment imagery: the axe at the root, the gathering of wheat, and the burning of chaff. Therefore "fire" should not automatically be treated as a separate pleasant spiritual experience.

At minimum, the phrase announces that the coming of Jesus and the Spirit brings divine crisis: purification, separation, and judgment. The same Messiah who gives the Spirit also confronts everything contrary to the kingdom of God.

This is a place where careful reading is more important than inherited slogans. We should welcome the fire of God as Scripture defines it, but we should not create a separate doctrine where the text may be speaking of the searching and judging effect of Messiah's coming.

One Baptism?

Paul says in Ephesians 4:5, "One Lord, one faith, one baptism." How can that be reconciled with Hebrews 6 speaking of "baptisms"?

The answer is found in the different purpose of the passages. Hebrews speaks of the doctrine of baptisms in the plural, recognizing multiple baptismal washings or realities. Ephesians emphasizes the unity of the church around one Lord, one faith, and one baptismal identity.

Paul is not denying every distinct use of baptism language. He is declaring that the body of Christ does not possess competing baptisms that create rival peoples. Ultimately every legitimate Christian baptismal reality finds its unity in Jesus Christ and the one body formed in Him.

Plurality of expression does not require fragmentation of identity.

Baptism and Conscience

Peter gives one of the most important cautions against a merely external understanding of water baptism.

"The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." - 1 Peter 3:21

Peter refuses to reduce baptism to washing dirt from the body. Its meaning is bound to conscience, God, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This resonates strongly with Hebrews, where the blood of Christ cleanses the conscience from dead works to serve the living God. The true issue is not external washing alone but an inward relation to God made possible through Christ.

External form without faith can become empty religion. Inward claim without obedience can become invisible spirituality with no embodied witness. Biblical baptism brings the inward and outward together.

The Doctrine of Baptisms and the New Covenant

The former covenant contained repeated washings. The New Covenant does not simply add more religious washings. It brings us into the reality to which cleansing imagery pointed.

We are washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God (1 Corinthians 6:11). Jesus washes His people. The Spirit immerses us into one body. Water baptism bears public witness. The conscience is cleansed. The old identity is buried. New life is embraced.

Therefore the doctrine of baptisms is ultimately Christ-centered. Every legitimate baptismal reality moves us away from confidence in external ceremony as an end in itself and toward participation in the life of Jesus.

Why This Is Foundational

The doctrine of baptisms belongs in the foundation because Christianity is not merely the addition of new information to an old identity. The gospel brings us into a new sphere of life.

Baptism announces transition: from John's preparation to Christ's fulfillment; from external washing to cleansed conscience; from Adamic identity to union with Christ; from isolation to one body; from mere natural ability into the life and power of the Holy Spirit; from oldness of life into newness of life.

Baptism is the language of being brought into something. The gospel does not merely improve the old life. It brings us into Christ.

This makes the third foundation a natural progression from the first two. I repent from dead works. I place faith toward God. Then I am brought into the baptismal realities of the New Covenant -

into Christ, into His body, into public identification through water, and into the life of the Holy Spirit.

A Necessary Warning: Do Not Turn Baptism Into a Dead Work

Any God-given practice can be misused if human confidence shifts from Jesus to the practice itself. Circumcision was God-given, yet Paul opposed confidence in circumcision as a basis of righteousness. The same warning applies to baptism.

If I believe that a ceremony has saving power independently of Jesus, I have placed confidence in the sign rather than the One signified. If I boast in the mode, formula, minister, location, or sequence as the basis of superiority, I have misunderstood the foundation.

The doctrine of baptisms should produce deeper identification with Christ, not deeper sectarian pride.

The water points to Jesus. The Spirit glorifies Jesus. The body belongs to Jesus. The Name is Jesus. The foundation is never the ceremony by itself. The foundation is the reality of God into which the ceremony bears witness.

The Third Foundation in Practice

To receive the doctrine of baptisms is to recognize that the Christian life is an immersed life. I have been brought into Christ. I belong to His body. I bear His Name. I identify with His death and resurrection. I receive the Holy Spirit whom Jesus gives. I no longer treat Christianity as an external religious attachment to my old independent self.

Water baptism should be honored. Spirit baptism should be expected rather than explained away. Corporate identification should be embraced. Union with Christ should remain central.

And every outward expression should remain rooted in faith toward God rather than confidence in ritual.

The doctrine is plural, but the center is one:

Jesus Christ.

Primary Scriptures for Further Study

Hebrews 6:1-2 - the doctrine of baptisms

Hebrews 9:8-14 - diverse washings and the cleansed conscience

Mark 1:4-8 - John's baptism and Jesus the Spirit-baptizer

Matthew 28:18-20 - baptism in disciple-making

Acts 2:37-41 - repentance, baptism, and the gift of the Spirit

Acts 8:12-17 - water baptism and subsequent reception of the Spirit

Acts 10:44-48 - the Spirit received before water baptism

Acts 19:1-7 - John's baptism, Jesus' Name, laying on of hands, and the Spirit

Romans 6:1-11 - baptized into Christ's death and raised to newness of life

Galatians 3:26-28 - baptized into Christ and clothed with Christ

1 Corinthians 12:12-13 - baptized by one Spirit into one body

Colossians 2:11-13 - buried and raised with Christ through faith

1 Peter 3:18-22 - baptism, conscience, and resurrection

Ephesians 4:1-6 - one body, one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism

Matthew 20:20-23 - baptism as an image of suffering

Matthew 3:7-12 - Holy Spirit and fire in context

4

The Laying on of Hands

Hebrews 6:1-2

"Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment." - Hebrews 6:1-2, KJV

The writer of Hebrews identifies six teachings as belonging to the foundation of Christian understanding. Among them is a doctrine that is often practiced casually, misunderstood, or almost ignored altogether: the laying on of hands.

Its inclusion in Hebrews 6 means that the laying on of hands was not regarded by the early church as an unusual charismatic practice reserved for exceptional occasions. It belonged to elementary Christian instruction.

That alone should arrest our attention. If the writer calls it foundational, then we should not treat it as incidental.

The laying on of hands appears throughout Scripture in several different contexts. Hands were laid upon people in blessing. Hands were laid upon sacrifices in identification. Hands were laid upon people for healing. Hands were laid upon believers in connection with receiving the Holy Spirit. Hands were laid upon individuals when they were commissioned or separated to particular assignments. Paul spoke openly of a spiritual gift being given through the laying on of hands.

The physical act itself is simple. The spiritual realities associated with it are not.

The doctrine of the laying on of hands reveals something fundamental about the nature of God's kingdom: God frequently chooses to minister through human vessels.

He could act independently of us. Yet again and again He chooses to touch one person through another.

The hand becomes a visible point of contact through which blessing, recognition, identification, healing, commissioning, or impartation is expressed.

The power is never in the human hand itself. The hand is the instrument. The source is God.

1. THE HAND AS AN INSTRUMENT

Throughout Scripture, hands represent action, authority, possession, work, blessing, and transmission.

The Bible frequently speaks of the hand of God, the right hand of God, the works of our hands, lifting holy hands, stretching forth the hand, and placing something into another person's hand.

The hand represents what a person does. Therefore when someone places a hand upon another person, there is naturally a sense of intentional contact.

The laying on of hands is not primarily a mystical gesture. It is an intentional act.

Someone is identifying with another person, blessing another person, recognizing another person, praying for another person, commissioning another person, or ministering something to another person.

The gesture gives physical expression to a spiritual action.

This is important because Christianity is not a disembodied spirituality. Jesus touched people. The apostles touched people. Believers gathered physically. Bread was broken. Water was used in baptism. Oil was used in prayer. Hands were laid upon people.

God regularly joins visible actions with invisible realities.

2. THE OLD TESTAMENT FOUNDATION

The laying on of hands did not originate in the book of Acts. Its roots appear throughout the Old Testament.

One of the clearest examples is Jacob blessing Ephraim and Manasseh.

Genesis 48:14: "And Israel stretched out his right hand, and laid it upon Ephraim's head..."

Jacob intentionally placed his hands upon Joseph's sons while blessing them. The hands did not create the blessing. They expressed and accompanied the blessing.

This establishes an important biblical pattern: the laying on of hands may accompany the speaking and impartation of blessing.

A second major Old Testament use involved identification.

Leviticus 1:4: "And he shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering..."

The worshiper identified himself with the sacrifice. The animal stood in relation to the person presenting it. Again, the hand expressed identification.

The most dramatic example appears on the Day of Atonement. Leviticus 16:21: "And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel..."

The gesture visibly expressed identification and transfer. This does not mean that every laying on of hands involves the transfer of sin. Clearly it does not. But it establishes a biblical principle: the laying on of hands can represent identification and the intentional conveyance of something from one party to another.

3. MOSES AND JOSHUA

One of the most important passages for understanding the laying on of hands concerns Moses and Joshua.

God said to Moses: "Take thee Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay thine hand upon him." - Numbers 27:18

Moses was then instructed: "And thou shalt put some of thine honour upon him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient." - Numbers 27:20

This is remarkable language. Joshua already possessed the Spirit. Yet Moses was instructed to place his hand upon him publicly and put some of his honor upon him.

The act involved recognition. It involved succession. It involved commissioning. It involved public authorization.

Deuteronomy later says: "And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom; for Moses had laid his hands upon him..." - Deuteronomy 34:9 Scripture directly connects Joshua's condition with Moses having laid hands upon him. We should not weaken what the text says.

Whatever mystery remains in the operation itself, Scripture presents the laying on of hands as more than ceremony. Something was recognized. Something was conferred. Something was publicly acknowledged.

Joshua was not manufacturing his own authority. Neither was Moses inventing Joshua's calling. God had chosen Joshua. Moses recognized what God had chosen.

Laying hands upon someone does not create a divine calling. It recognizes and participates with what God is doing.

4. JESUS LAID HANDS ON PEOPLE

The ministry of Jesus gives the practice even greater clarity.

Mark 6:5: "And he could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them."

Luke 4:40: "And he laid his hands on every one of them, and healed them."

Jesus did not require physical contact in order to heal. He healed people at a distance. He spoke words and people were healed. Therefore the laying on of hands was not a mechanical necessity. Yet He frequently chose to use it.

Why? Because touch communicates nearness. It communicates personal involvement. It becomes a point of contact between the minister and the recipient.

In the ministry of Jesus, hands were not merely instruments of power. They were instruments of compassion.

He touched the leper. He touched the blind. He took children into His arms. He laid hands upon the sick.

The laying on of hands therefore reveals something about the heart of God as well as the power of God. God does not merely minister from a distance. In Jesus, God came near.

5. JESUS EXPECTED HIS FOLLOWERS TO DO THE SAME

Mark 16:18 records: "They shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover."

Whatever questions may surround the textual history of the ending of Mark, the practice itself is overwhelmingly confirmed elsewhere in the New Testament. The early believers did exactly this. They laid hands upon people and prayed.

The principle is simple: God's people become available instruments through whom Jesus continues to minister.

The believer is not the healer. Jesus is. The hand does not contain independent power. But the believer may place a hand upon another person in faith and obedience, expecting God to minister.

This protects us from two opposite errors. The first error is superstition. We must never imagine that there is automatic spiritual power in human touch. The second error is unbelief. We must not reduce the laying on of hands to a meaningless religious gesture when Scripture repeatedly associates it with real spiritual activity.

6. THE LAYING ON OF HANDS AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

Acts gives several striking examples in which the laying on of hands is associated with believers receiving the Holy Spirit.

Acts 8:17: "Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost."

Acts 19:6: "And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied."

Again, the power did not originate in the apostles. Peter made this unmistakably clear throughout Acts. But God chose to minister through human contact.

These passages show that receiving from God may involve another believer. That is an important truth.

Scripture presents something larger than an isolated 'God and me' spirituality. We are members one of another. Grace moves through the body. Encouragement moves through the body.

Teaching moves through the body. Healing may move through the body. Spiritual gifts operate through the body. Impartation may take place through the body.

God is the source. But people are frequently the vessels.

7. IMPARTATION

Paul's words to Timothy are among the strongest New Testament texts concerning spiritual impartation.

1 Timothy 4:14: "Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery."

2 Timothy 1:6: "Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands."

These passages cannot reasonably be reduced to symbolic recognition alone. Paul connects Timothy's gift with prophecy and the laying on of hands.

The language is direct. Paul believed something had genuinely been imparted.

This does not mean Paul was the source of the gift. He calls it 'the gift of God.' God was the source. Paul was involved in the means.

A person cannot give what God is not giving. A minister cannot manufacture a gift. No one can distribute divine callings according to personal preference. Yet Scripture clearly allows for something from God to be communicated through another believer.

Impartation is not one person becoming the source of another person's spiritual life. It is God using one member of the body to communicate grace to another.

8. PAUL EXPECTED IMPARTATION

Romans 1:11 is especially significant: "For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established."

Paul expected to impart something. He did not say, 'I want merely to teach you.' Teaching certainly mattered. But Paul expected something more than information. He anticipated spiritual strengthening through personal presence and interaction.

The next verse immediately guards against any one-directional superiority: "That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me." - Romans 1:12

This is beautiful. Paul expected to impart. Paul also expected to receive. There was mutuality.

True impartation does not create spiritual celebrities and dependent followers. It strengthens the body. It recognizes that Christ distributes grace through His members.

9. COMMISSIONING AND SEPARATION

Acts 13 provides another important example. At Antioch, prophets and teachers were ministering to the Lord and fasting. The Holy Spirit said: "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them."

Notice the order. God had already called them. The church did not invent the assignment. The leaders did not decide what Saul and Barnabas ought to become. The Holy Spirit had already spoken.

Then: "And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away." - Acts 13:3

The laying on of hands confirmed and commissioned what the Holy Spirit had already initiated.

This gives us a safe pattern: Revelation precedes recognition. Calling precedes commissioning. God chooses before men acknowledge.

Human leaders should never use the laying on of hands to manufacture ministries. They should recognize the activity of God. This also protects people from spiritual manipulation.

No one becomes an apostle, prophet, pastor, teacher, or evangelist simply because another person lays hands upon him. Christ gives ministries to His church. The laying on of hands may publicly acknowledge what Christ has already given.

10. ORDINATION IS RECOGNITION, NOT CREATION

The church has often used the word ordination. That term can be useful if properly understood. But ordination is dangerous when people imagine that an institution creates someone's ministry.

No organization creates a calling. No denomination creates a gift. No certificate creates an anointing. No ceremony creates spiritual authority.

God calls. Christ gives. The Spirit equips. The body recognizes.

The laying on of hands can therefore serve as an act of recognition and agreement. Those laying hands upon a person are essentially saying: 'We recognize the grace of God upon you. We agree with what God is doing. We bless you in the assignment He has given you.'

That is very different from saying: 'We are giving you authority that originates with us.'

The first posture produces servants. The second can produce religious hierarchy.

11. THE SELECTION OF SERVANTS

Acts 6 gives another example. When seven men were selected to oversee a practical distribution within the Jerusalem church, the apostles "prayed, and laid their hands on them." - Acts 6:6

The men had already been identified as possessing certain qualities. They were "of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom."

The laying on of hands did not compensate for lack of character. Hands should never be used to substitute for character.

A person is not made mature by having hands laid upon him. A person is not made faithful through ceremony. A person is not made qualified merely because someone recognizes him publicly.

The men of Acts 6 possessed proven character before they were publicly commissioned.

Gift must never replace character. Anointing must never replace maturity. Impartation must never be used to excuse irresponsibility.

12. "LAY HANDS SUDDENLY ON NO MAN"

Paul gives Timothy an important warning: "Lay hands suddenly on no man..." - 1 Timothy 5:22

This single verse demonstrates that the laying on of hands involves responsibility. Why would Paul warn Timothy not to do it hastily if it meant nothing?

Recognition carries weight. Commissioning carries weight. Public affirmation carries weight.

Leaders may participate in another person's ministry by publicly endorsing that person. Therefore discernment is necessary.

The church must not confuse enthusiasm with maturity, charisma with character, talent with calling, or popularity with divine approval.

The laying on of hands should never become casual authorization.

13. SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY MUST NEVER BECOME CONTROL

Because the laying on of hands may involve recognition, commissioning, and impartation, it can be abused.

Some have treated impartation as if spiritual life belongs to elite personalities who distribute it to lesser believers. That is not the New Testament.

Jesus remains the Head. The Holy Spirit remains the giver. Every believer has direct access to God through Jesus Christ. No minister becomes another person's mediator.

There is "one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." - 1 Timothy 2:5

Therefore true laying on of hands never replaces personal access to Christ. It should strengthen that access.

It should never bind a person to the minister. It should strengthen the person in Christ.

If someone leaves an impartation meeting more dependent upon the personality who ministered than upon Jesus, something has gone wrong. The safest ministry always points beyond itself.

14. THE BODY MINISTERS TO THE BODY

The doctrine of laying on of hands reveals something profound about the church. We need one another.

That statement must be balanced carefully. We do not need another person as mediator between ourselves and God. But we do need the body of Christ.

Paul writes: "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular." - 1 Corinthians 12:27 A hand is not the whole body. Neither is an eye. Neither is a foot. Every member receives life from the Head, but that life is expressed through the entire body.

Therefore God regularly ministers to one member through another. One teaches. Another encourages. Another gives. Another leads. Another heals. Another prophesies. Another helps. Another intercedes. Another lays hands upon someone and prays.

This is not spiritual dependence. It is spiritual interdependence.

15. THE PRIESTHOOD DIMENSION

There is also a priestly dimension to the laying on of hands.

A priest stands before God on behalf of others and before others as a representative of God's mercy and blessing.

Under the New Covenant, every believer has direct access to God through Christ. Yet believers also minister to one another.

The laying on of hands becomes one visible expression of priestly service.

We are not standing between someone and God. We are standing beside them before God. That difference is enormous.

We do not become mediators. We become ministers. Jesus alone is the High Priest. We minister from His priesthood.

Therefore when we lay hands upon someone, our posture should never be: 'I possess something you cannot receive without me.' Our posture should be: 'Jesus is present. I am joining my faith with yours and making myself available as His servant.'

That posture keeps ministry clean.

16. THE HAND DOES NOT REPLACE FAITH

The laying on of hands is not a technique. There is no biblical formula in which physical contact automatically produces spiritual results.

Simon the sorcerer misunderstood this in Acts 8. He saw the apostles laying hands upon people and attempted to obtain that ability through money. Peter sharply rebuked him.

Simon saw the external action. He missed the spiritual reality.

This remains a danger. People can imitate a gesture without possessing the heart, faith, calling, or authority represented by it.

The kingdom cannot be reduced to technique.

The laying on of hands must remain rooted in faith, obedience, love, discernment, humility, and dependence upon the Holy Spirit.

17. THE POWER OF AGREEMENT

There is another dimension worth recognizing. When believers lay hands upon someone in prayer, the action can become an expression of agreement.

Jesus said: "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them..." - Matthew 18:19

The laying on of hands gives physical expression to shared faith.

One believer is saying to another: 'I am standing with you. I agree with God's purpose for you. I join my faith with yours. I bless what God is doing. I am not observing your need from a distance. I am entering into prayer with you.'

There is something profoundly relational in that.

18. BLESSING SHOULD NOT BE UNDERESTIMATED

We should also recover the importance of blessing.

Jesus laid His hands upon children. Matthew 19:15 says: "And he laid his hands on them..."

Mark gives an even fuller picture: "And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them." - Mark 10:16

There is no healing mentioned. No commissioning. No ministry office. Jesus simply blessed them.

That alone is significant.

There are moments when laying hands upon another person and blessing them is entirely appropriate. Parents may bless children. Elders may bless younger believers. Believers may pray blessing over one another.

Not every spiritual act must be dramatic. Blessing is powerful because it speaks God's intention over another person.

19. IMPARTATION DOES NOT MEAN COPYING ANOTHER PERSON

Biblical impartation does not mean becoming like the person who lays hands upon you. Paul did not need another Timothy. Jesus does not produce spiritual clones.

Grace strengthens identity. True impartation helps awaken what God intends within the recipient.

It does not reproduce another person's personality, mannerisms, preaching style, vocabulary, or ministry culture.

A healthy spiritual father does not create copies of himself. He helps sons and daughters become faithful to the grace God has placed in them.

The goal is not imitation of personality. The goal is maturity in Christ.

20. YOU CANNOT IMPART WHAT YOU DO NOT CARRY

There is also a practical principle. A person cannot meaningfully impart what has never been formed in him.

We may pray for anything God desires to give. But impartation in Scripture often flows through someone who genuinely carries something.

Moses carried governmental wisdom. Joshua received. Paul carried apostolic grace. Timothy received. The apostles carried an experiential reality of the Spirit. Others received through their ministry.

This does not make the vessel the source. But vessels matter.

Paul could say: "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ." - 1 Corinthians 11:1

There was something in Paul worth receiving. Therefore spiritual formation matters. What we carry affects what we release.

A bitter person will struggle to impart peace. A controlling person may transmit control. A fearful person may reproduce fear. A person deeply formed in the love of Christ can minister from love.

This is why character and impartation can never be separated safely.

21. THE RECIPIENT ALSO HAS RESPONSIBILITY

Timothy received something through the laying on of hands. Yet Paul later told him: "Neglect not the gift..." and "Stir up the gift of God..."

Receiving is not the end. Stewardship follows impartation.

This is crucial. People sometimes seek repeated laying on of hands while neglecting what God has already given them.

They want another impartation. Another meeting. Another prayer. Another touch.

But Paul did not tell Timothy to find someone else to lay hands upon him again. He said: stir up what is already in you.

Impartation creates responsibility. Grace received must become grace stewarded.

22. IMPARTATION AND STEWARDSHIP

This principle fits directly within the broader movement from priesthood into kingship.

The priest comes near. The king stewards what has been entrusted.

Impartation therefore raises a question: What will you do with what you have received?

A gift is not merely an experience. A calling is not merely an identity. An anointing is not merely a sensation.

Everything God gives eventually becomes stewardship.

If healing grace has been given, serve. If teaching grace has been given, teach. If mercy has been given, show mercy. If leadership has been entrusted, lead faithfully. If revelation has been received, live responsibly beneath its weight.

The laying on of hands may mark a moment. Stewardship determines what becomes of that moment.

23. WHY IS THIS A FIRST PRINCIPLE?

We can now return to the central question. Why does Hebrews include the laying on of hands among foundational doctrines?

Perhaps because this doctrine teaches several realities that every believer must understand early:

God works through people.

We are members of one body.

Spiritual things can be received through relationship and ministry.

God calls people into specific assignments.

The body recognizes what God has appointed.

Grace received creates responsibility.

Spiritual authority must remain under the lordship of Jesus.

These are not advanced truths. They are foundational truths.

A believer who does not understand them may become either radically independent or dangerously dependent. Both extremes are unhealthy.

The New Testament believer lives in direct relationship with Jesus while remaining deeply joined to His body.

24. ACCESS AND IMPARTATION

This doctrine also belongs naturally within the truth of access.

We have access to God directly through Jesus. That access does not isolate us from one another. It enables us to serve one another.

Because I have access, I can pray for you. Because you have access, you can pray for me.

Because Christ lives in His body, one member may become an instrument through which another member is strengthened.

The laying on of hands therefore does not compete with direct access. It is one of the consequences of direct access.

We come from the Presence carrying something of the Presence. Then we minister to others. That is priesthood. We receive from Him. Then we release what we have received.

25. "SUCH AS I HAVE GIVE I THEE"

Peter's words at the Beautiful Gate capture this principle powerfully: "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee..." - Acts 3:6

Peter understood that something had been entrusted to him. He did not claim to be the source. Immediately afterward he denied that the miracle occurred through his own power or holiness.

But neither did he pretend he had nothing to give.

This balance is essential.

False humility says: 'I have nothing.' Pride says: 'What I have originates in me.' Kingdom humility says: 'What I have came from Him, but what He has entrusted to me is available to serve you.'

That is the spirit of impartation.

26. THE MINISTRY OF IMPARTATION

There is therefore a legitimate ministry of impartation.

It should not be sensationalized. It should not be commercialized. It should not be used to create personality cults. It should not replace discipleship. It should not bypass character.

But neither should it be denied. Scripture is too explicit.

Moses laid hands upon Joshua. Jesus laid hands upon the sick. The apostles laid hands upon believers. The Holy Spirit was received in connection with laying on of hands. Barnabas and Saul were commissioned through prayer and laying on of hands. Timothy received a gift through laying on of hands.

The pattern is clear. God uses people. And one of the ways He visibly expresses that truth is through the laying on of hands.

27. A SAFE DEFINITION

We might define the doctrine this way:

The laying on of hands is a biblical act in which one believer intentionally identifies with, blesses, prays for, commissions, recognizes, or ministers to another person as an instrument of the grace and purpose of God.

The act itself has no independent power. Its meaning comes from God, faith, relationship, and the purpose for which it is done.

In Scripture it may accompany blessing, healing, receiving the Holy Spirit, impartation, commissioning, identification, recognition of ministry, and corporate agreement in prayer.

28. THE CENTRAL SAFEGUARD

One safeguard must govern everything: Jesus remains the source.

No human hand replaces His hand. No minister replaces His ministry. No impartation replaces His presence. No spiritual father replaces the Father. No apostle replaces Christ. No elder replaces the Holy Spirit. No ceremony replaces obedience.

The laying on of hands is safe only when the person laying hands and the person receiving ministry are both looking beyond the human instrument to Jesus.

29. THE CENTRAL PRIVILEGE

And yet we should not allow fear of abuse to cause us to neglect what Scripture gives us.

It is an extraordinary privilege that Jesus allows His people to participate in His ministry.

We can put a hand upon someone who is hurting and pray. We can bless a child. We can recognize a calling. We can stand with someone being sent into ministry. We can pray for healing. We can minister the Holy Spirit. We can impart what God has entrusted to us.

We can say, in effect: 'What Jesus has placed in me is available to serve you.'

This is not personal greatness. It is stewardship.

30. FROM ACCESS TO EXPRESSION

The laying on of hands illustrates a principle that runs through the entire Christian life: What comes to us through access is intended eventually to find expression.

We enter His Presence. We receive. We are changed. We carry something away from the encounter. Then someone else is touched because we were there.

This is the movement of priesthood. We go toward God on behalf of people. Then we go toward people carrying something of God.

Not as mediators. Not as owners. Not as spiritual celebrities. As servants. As priests. As sons. As stewards.

31. A FINAL PICTURE

Perhaps the laying on of hands can be understood through one very simple picture.

A believer stands before another person. He places his hand upon them.

And silently, that action says:

I am with you.

I believe God is at work in you.

I agree with His purpose for your life.

What He has entrusted to me is available to serve you.

I recognize that you belong to Him.

I bless you in the Name of Jesus.

The hand is human. The grace is divine. The vessel is temporary. The source is eternal. And everything ultimately returns to Jesus.

CONCLUSION

The laying on of hands belongs among the first principles because it teaches us how the life of Christ moves through His body.

It teaches us that grace is received directly from God, yet frequently ministered through people.

It teaches us that calling originates with God but may be recognized by others.

It teaches us that healing comes from Jesus but may flow through human hands.

It teaches us that gifts are given by God but may be imparted through relationship.

It teaches us that blessing should be spoken and expressed.

It teaches us that what we receive must be stewarded.

And it teaches us that the Christian life was never intended to be lived in isolation.

The hand itself is not holy because of the flesh that forms it. It becomes useful because it belongs to someone surrendered to Jesus.

Perhaps that is the heart of the doctrine: Jesus still lays His hands upon people through the hands of His body.

And whenever we minister, bless, heal, commission, recognize, or impart, we must remember:

The hand is ours. The grace is His. The glory belongs entirely to Jesus.

The Resurrection from the Dead

A FIRST PRINCIPLE OF THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST

Hebrews 6:1-2

"Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection... of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment." Hebrews 6:1-2

Purpose of this study

The resurrection from the dead is not an advanced doctrine reserved for specialists. Hebrews places it among the elementary foundations of Christian teaching. It is one of the truths upon which everything else is built. The aim here is therefore not to examine every order, rank, timing, or distinction connected with resurrection, but to establish the fundamental biblical doctrine clearly and securely.

The basic confession is simple: death does not have the final word. Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead, and because He lives, the dead will be raised. The believer's hope is not merely continued existence after death, but resurrection - the raising and transformation of the person by the power of God.

Foundational statement

The Christian hope is bodily resurrection. Jesus is the risen Lord, the firstfruits and pattern of what is to come. There will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust. Those who belong to Christ will ultimately be raised and transformed into conformity with His glorious life and likeness.

1. RESURRECTION IS A FOUNDATION, NOT A SIDE ISSUE

Hebrews 6 calls "resurrection of the dead" a first principle. That means it belongs in the foundation of Christian understanding. If resurrection is removed, the gospel itself is altered. Paul makes this unmistakably clear in 1 Corinthians 15.

"And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain." 1 Corinthians 15:14

Christian faith does not rest merely on the teachings of a dead teacher. It rests upon the living Jesus, crucified and raised. The resurrection vindicates His identity, declares His victory over death, and establishes the future hope of those who belong to Him.

2. WHAT RESURRECTION MEANS

Resurrection is more than survival after death. Scripture does speak of conscious existence beyond physical death, but the doctrine of resurrection concerns something further: the dead are raised. Resurrection is God's act of bringing the person out of death into embodied life again.

This is why resurrection should not be reduced to the idea that the soul simply continues to exist. The biblical hope looks toward a future act of God in which death itself is overcome.

Resurrection is also more than resuscitation. Lazarus was restored to mortal life and later died again. Jesus was raised into a life over which death no longer has dominion.

"Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him." Romans 6:9

That distinction is essential. Biblical resurrection, in its full New Covenant hope, is not merely returning to the old condition. It is entrance into a form of life that death cannot finally conquer.

3. JESUS IS THE CENTER OF THE DOCTRINE

We do not begin the doctrine of resurrection with ourselves. We begin with Jesus. His resurrection is both the historical center of the gospel and the guarantee of the resurrection to come.

"But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept." 1 Corinthians 15:20

The word firstfruits is important. Firstfruits are the beginning of a harvest, not the entire harvest. The resurrection of Jesus is therefore not an isolated miracle. It is the first expression of a greater harvest that follows.

"For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming." 1 Corinthians 15:22-23 Christ's resurrection establishes the pattern: He is first, and those who are His follow.

4. THE RESURRECTION IS BODILY

The New Testament does not present resurrection as an escape from the body. It presents the body itself as included in redemption. The body that is sown in weakness and mortality is raised by the power of God.

"It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power." 1 Corinthians 15:42-43

Paul does not teach that the resurrected body is simply the present body repaired. He describes continuity and

transformation. It is genuinely you, yet raised into a condition suited to the age to come.

"Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body." Philippians 3:21

The word "change" is crucial. Resurrection includes transformation. What is mortal does not remain mortal. What is corruptible does not remain corruptible.

"For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." 1 Corinthians 15:53

The hope of resurrection therefore reaches all the way into our physical mortality. Salvation is not complete while death still holds the body. The final victory includes the defeat of death itself.

"The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." 1 Corinthians 15:26

5. WE SHALL BEAR THE IMAGE OF THE HEAVENLY

The believer's resurrection hope is not merely that we will live again. Scripture says that we will be conformed to Christ. The purpose of God moves toward a people bearing the likeness of His Son.

"And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." 1 Corinthians 15:49

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." 1 John 3:2

This does not mean that believers become Jesus in identity or deity. It means that His risen humanity is the pattern of our

destiny. We are being conformed to the image of the Son, and resurrection brings that purpose into its bodily fulfillment.

"For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son." Romans 8:29

The foundational hope can therefore be stated this way: the God who raised Jesus from the dead will not abandon His people to death. He will raise them and bring His redemptive purpose in them to completion.

6. THERE WILL BE A RESURRECTION OF BOTH THE JUST AND THE UNJUST

The doctrine is larger than the resurrection of believers alone. Scripture explicitly teaches a resurrection of both the just and the unjust.

"And have hope toward God... that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust." Acts 24:15

Jesus taught the same truth:

"The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." John 5:28-29

This establishes a fundamental point: resurrection is universal in scope, but not identical in outcome. The just and the unjust are both raised, yet Scripture distinguishes their destinations and judgment.

For this foundational study, it is enough to establish the fact. The detailed relationship between resurrection, judgment, order, timing, and reward belongs to deeper study.

7. RESURRECTION AND JUDGMENT BELONG TOGETHER

Hebrews 6 places "resurrection of the dead" immediately before "eternal judgment." That sequence is significant. Resurrection brings humanity before the completion of God's righteous purposes. Death does not erase accountability.

"Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead." Acts 17:31

The resurrection of Jesus is therefore not only comfort for believers; it is also God's assurance that history is moving toward righteous judgment under the authority of the risen Christ.

8. THE RESURRECTION IS CONNECTED TO THE RETURN OF JESUS

The New Testament repeatedly connects the resurrection of those who belong to Christ with His appearing and coming.

"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout... and the dead in Christ shall rise first." 1 Thessalonians 4:16

Paul uses this truth pastorally. He does not present resurrection as abstract theology. He gives it to grieving believers as hope. The Christian does not sorrow as one who has no hope because death is temporary before the power of the risen Christ.

"Wherefore comfort one another with these words." 1 Thessalonians 4:18

Resurrection is therefore a doctrine of comfort, expectation, and courage. What death appears to take permanently, Jesus claims as subject to His authority.

9. THE SAME SPIRIT WHO RAISED JESUS DWELLS IN BELIEVERS

The resurrection is not presented as an unrelated future event. The same Holy Spirit who raised Jesus is already at work in those who belong to Him.

"But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you." Romans 8:11

There is profound continuity here: the Spirit presently dwelling in the believer is the Spirit of resurrection. Present spiritual life and future bodily resurrection belong to the same redemptive work of God.

That does not mean believers have already experienced the final resurrection. It means the life of the coming resurrection has already entered us through the Spirit as a pledge of what God will complete.

10. RESURRECTION TRANSFORMS THE CHRISTIAN VIEW OF DEATH

Because of resurrection, death remains an enemy, but it is a defeated enemy. Christians do not need to pretend that death is good. Scripture calls it "the last enemy." Yet resurrection means that death is not ultimate.

"O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" 1 Corinthians 15:55

This changes how the believer lives. If death is not final, then faithfulness is never wasted. Love is not wasted. Obedience is not wasted. Sacrifice is not wasted. What is done in the Lord has meaning beyond the limits of mortal life.

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." 1 Corinthians 15:58

Notice Paul's "therefore." The practical conclusion to the great resurrection chapter is steadfastness. Resurrection produces durable faithfulness.

11. RESURRECTION IS NOT MERELY A FUTURE FACT - IT SHAPES PRESENT LIFE

Although the bodily resurrection remains future, believers are already called to live from the power and pattern of Christ's risen life.

"Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." Romans 6:4

Future resurrection and present newness of life must not be confused, but they are related. The One who will raise us then has already called us to walk in His life now.

So the doctrine of resurrection is not merely, "One day I will be raised." It also declares, "The risen Jesus is Lord over my life now." His resurrection establishes a new creation reality into which the believer has already been brought spiritually, while awaiting its full bodily manifestation.

12. THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS IS THE GUARANTEE OF OUR HOPE

The believer's confidence is not based upon optimism about human destiny. It rests upon something God has already done: He raised Jesus from the dead.

"Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus." 2 Corinthians 4:14

The logic of New Testament hope is consistent: because Jesus was raised, those who belong to Him will be raised. The future rests upon the accomplished resurrection of Christ.

This is why Paul can call Christ "the firstborn from the dead" (Colossians 1:18) and "the first begotten of the dead" (Revelation 1:5). He occupies the place of supremacy and beginning. Resurrection life begins in Him and flows from Him.

13. THERE ARE BIBLICAL INDICATIONS OF DISTINCTIONS - BUT THEY ARE NOT THE FOUNDATION

Scripture contains language that points to distinctions within the broader doctrine of resurrection: "every man in his own order" (1 Corinthians 15:23), a "better resurrection" (Hebrews 11:35), the "first resurrection" (Revelation 20:5-6), and Paul's distinctive language in Philippians 3:11 concerning attaining unto the resurrection from among the dead.

Those passages deserve careful study. They may involve questions of order, participation, reward, reign, timing, and glorification. But those questions come after the foundation has been laid.

The first principle should remain clear before the deeper architecture is explored:

- Jesus truly rose from the dead.
- His resurrection is the firstfruits and guarantee of what follows.
- The dead will be raised.
- There will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust.

- Those who belong to Christ will be raised and transformed.
- The believer will bear the image of the heavenly and be conformed to Christ's glorious life.
- Resurrection leads into the completion of God's righteous purposes, including judgment.

Once these truths are established, the student can safely examine the distinctions without losing the foundation.

14. WHAT THE RESURRECTION DECLARES ABOUT JESUS

The doctrine of resurrection is finally a doctrine about Jesus Himself. It declares that:

- Jesus has conquered death.
- Jesus is Lord over the living and the dead.
- Jesus is the firstfruits of the coming harvest.
- Jesus is the pattern of resurrected humanity.
- Jesus will call the dead forth.
- Jesus will bring God's redemptive purpose to completion.

Paul therefore centers Christian proclamation on the risen Christ. The message is not merely that Jesus once lived, taught, and died. The gospel declares that He is alive.

15. WHAT THE RESURRECTION DECLARES ABOUT THE BELIEVER

For the believer, resurrection means:

- My present mortal condition is not my final condition.
- Death does not terminate God's purpose for me.

- My body is included in redemption.
- I will not remain in corruption.
- I will be raised by the power of God.
- I will bear the image of the heavenly.
- I will be conformed to the likeness of Christ in the completion of God's purpose.
- Therefore I can live faithfully now, knowing that my labor in the Lord is not in vain.

16. WHY THIS IS A "FIRST PRINCIPLE"

Without resurrection, Christianity collapses into moral instruction, religious memory, or spiritual philosophy. Resurrection announces that God intends to complete redemption in actual human beings and in His creation. What He began in Christ, He will bring to fulfillment.

The doctrine establishes several fundamental convictions:

- God is the God of life. Death cannot finally frustrate His purpose.
- Creation matters. Redemption does not end with escape from the material world.
- The body matters. God will redeem and transform what mortality has touched.
- History has a goal. The risen Christ is moving all things toward completion.
- Our identity in Christ has a future manifestation. What we are becoming spiritually will ultimately be expressed in resurrection glory.

17. A SIMPLE CONFESSION OF THE DOCTRINE

I believe that Jesus Christ was raised bodily from the dead. I believe His resurrection is the firstfruits and guarantee of the resurrection to come. I believe there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust. I believe that those who belong to Christ will be raised, transformed, and conformed to His glorious likeness. I believe death is an enemy, but not the victor. Jesus is Lord over death, and His resurrection life will have the final word.

18. KEY SCRIPTURES FOR FURTHER STUDY

Hebrews 6:1-2 - Resurrection of the dead as a foundational principle.

John 5:28-29 - The resurrection of life and the resurrection of judgment.

Acts 24:15 - A resurrection of both the just and the unjust.

Romans 6:4-9 - Christ raised from death; believers called to walk in newness of life.

Romans 8:11 - The Spirit who raised Jesus will quicken our mortal bodies.

1 Corinthians 15:12-58 - The fullest New Testament chapter on resurrection.

2 Corinthians 4:14 - The God who raised Jesus will raise us also.

Philippians 3:20-21 - Our bodies transformed like His glorious body.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 - The dead in Christ shall rise.

1 John 3:2 - When He appears, we shall be like Him.

Revelation 1:5 - Jesus, the first begotten of the dead.

CONCLUSION

The resurrection from the dead belongs in the foundation because it tells us where the gospel is going. The cross deals with sin; the resurrection declares the victory of life. Jesus did not merely survive death spiritually. He rose. And His resurrection is the beginning of a harvest.

For those who belong to Him, the final expectation is not disembodied existence, but resurrection - mortality swallowed up by life, corruption clothed with incorruption, and the believer conformed to the image of the risen Son.

We may later explore orders, distinctions, rewards, the first resurrection, and other dimensions of this doctrine. But before any of those questions, the foundation must stand firm:

Jesus is risen. The dead will be raised. Death will not have the final word.

"Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Corinthians 15:57

Eternal Judgment

THE SIXTH FOUNDATION OF HEBREWS 6

First Draft for Study and Development

The Ques tion

Hebrews 6:1-2 lists six principles that the writer calls foundational: repentance from dead works, faith toward God, the doctrine of baptisms, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. The first five are often discussed at length. The sixth is frequently assumed rather than examined. The words are familiar, but familiarity is not the same thing as understanding.

The phrase itself is simple: eternal judgment. Yet those two words immediately raise a larger question. What exactly is the judgment that is eternal? Is the writer describing an endless process of punishment? Is he describing a final judicial decision? Is the emphasis on the duration of punishment, or on the permanence and authority of God's verdict? And if it is God's ultimate verdict, where does Scripture reveal the content of that verdict?

I am not obligated to preserve a conventional reading simply because it is conventional. My obligation is to the text and to the God revealed in Jesus Christ. I have weighed the language, the context, and the broader witness of Scripture. I remain open to correction, but I am not required to remain undecided. I believe the sixth foundation deserves to be examined as the eternal judicial decision of God concerning the finished work of Jesus Christ and the ultimate destiny of His creation.

How I Arrive at a Posi tion

One of the questions I frequently ask those who disagree with me is simple: How have you arrived at your position? If the answer is, 'That is what I was taught,' or, 'I have always believed that,' I do not regard that as sufficient evidence. Those statements may explain how a belief was inherited, but they do not establish whether it is true.

Tradition may be valuable. Teachers may be trustworthy. Historic interpretations may deserve careful attention. But none of them can replace examination. Every serious theological conclusion should be willing to face the text, the language, the context, related passages, and the broader witness of Scripture.

Paul wrote of 'comparing spiritual things with spiritual' (1 Corinthians 2:13). That principle matters here. Hebrews names the foundation, but Hebrews 6:2 does not give a complete exposition of its content. If the meaning of God's eternal judgment is to be understood, Scripture itself must supply the larger witness.

What Does "Judgment" Mean?

The Greek word translated 'judgment' in Hebrews 6:2 is krima. The King James Version renders it 'judgment,' and that is a good English word. But krima can carry the sense of a judicial decision, verdict, sentence, or ruling. It does not require the idea of an endless act of judging. A judge hears a matter and renders a decision. The decision may be final even though the act of deciding is not endlessly repeated.

That distinction is important. Modern religious thinking often hears the word judgment and immediately thinks punishment. But judgment is larger than punishment. Judgment is a determination concerning what is right, what is wrong, what must stand, what must fall, and what the final order will be. Punishment can be an element within judgment, but punishment is not a complete definition of judgment.

Therefore I am willing to hear the phrase 'eternal judgment' as 'God's eternal judicial verdict' or 'God's irreversible judicial decision.' The question then becomes: What has God eternally decided? What is His final verdict concerning creation, sin, death, reconciliation, and the work of His Son?

The Redemp tive Nature of God

I believe God's nature, plan, and purpose are ultimately redemptive.

That does not mean judgment is unreal, sin is insignificant, or rebellion has no consequence. It means that none of these can be understood as greater than or contrary to the purpose of God revealed in Jesus Christ. His judgments are consistent with His nature, and His nature is not divided against itself.

If God is revealed in Christ, then redemption is not merely one activity among many; it discloses His heart and purpose toward creation. The cross is not an interruption in God's plan but its clearest revelation. In Christ, we see that God confronts sin not as an end in itself, but in order to overcome everything that destroys communion with Him and one another.

This gives judgment its proper place. Because God is holy and loving, He must oppose sin; because He is redemptive, His opposition to sin serves the restoration of creation rather than contradicting it. Judgment is therefore not evidence of a purpose opposed to redemption, but the means by which God exposes, defeats, and finally removes all that resists His life-giving purpose.

Therefore, when I approach the subject of eternal judgment, I do so with this conviction: whatever God's final judicial verdict is, it must be consistent with the God revealed in Jesus Christ - the God who reconciles, restores, makes all things new, destroys death, and ultimately becomes all in all.

Judgment must ultimately serve God's redemptive purpose, not compete with it.

The Finished Work of Jesus

The center of this question is not human failure but the finished work of Jesus Christ. The New Testament does not present the cross as a provisional experiment. It presents it as the decisive act of God.

Jesus declared, 'It is finished' (John 19:30). Hebrews repeatedly emphasizes the once-for-all character of His o?ering. He entered once into the holy place, 'having obtained eternal redemption for us' (Hebrews 9:12). By one o?ering He 'hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified' (Hebrews 10:14). The language is decisive. Something has been accomplished that does not need to be repeated.

This is particularly important inside Hebrews itself. The same book that speaks of eternal judgment also speaks of eternal redemption (Hebrews 9:12) and eternal inheritance (Hebrews 9:15). Eternal redemption does not mean Christ must continue dying forever. Redemption was accomplished, and its validity stands. Eternal inheritance does not mean an endless act of inheriting. The inheritance belongs to an enduring order. In the same way, eternal judgment may describe a verdict whose authority and result are permanent.

I therefore ask whether the sixth foundation may be understood in relation to the finality of the cross: God's judicial declaration that what Jesus accomplished stands eternally. The verdict is not awaiting the approval of sin, death, the devil, human rebellion, religious tradition, or any opposing power. God has rendered His decision in His Son.

Reconcilia tion: What Has God Decided?

Colossians 1:19-20 is one of the clearest statements of the divine purpose: 'For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself... whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.'

The scope of the statement deserves to be allowed to stand. The blood of the cross is connected with the reconciliation of all things. Paul does not say some things. He does not limit the sentence to one nation, one generation, or one class of people. He deliberately uses comprehensive language: all things, whether in earth or in heaven.

Second Corinthians 5:19 speaks with similar force: 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.' Again, reconciliation is grounded in what God did in Christ. The apostolic appeal that follows - 'be ye reconciled to God' - does not diminish the accomplished act. It calls human beings to awaken to and participate in what God has done.

This distinction is important to my thesis. Scripture can speak of something as accomplished in Christ while its manifestation and conscious participation unfold in time. God's verdict can be settled before every creature has fully entered the experience of that verdict. The objective work can be finished while the creation is still being brought into its revealed fulfillment.

All Things Gathered in Christ

Ephesians 1:9-10 speaks of 'the mystery of his will' and then identifies the goal: 'That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth.' This is not a peripheral idea.

Paul calls it the mystery of God's will and His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself.

The language is again comprehensive. God's purpose is not merely to rescue individuals from creation; it is to gather all things into Christ. The direction of the biblical story is not fragmentation without end but the final headship of Christ over all things.

If this is the revealed purpose of God, then eternal judgment cannot ultimately establish a rival eternal order in which sin, alienation, and death are preserved forever as permanent contradictions to God's purpose. God's judgment must establish what His purpose has declared.

The Restora tion of All Things

Peter spoke in Acts 3:21 of 'the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.' The Greek word commonly associated with this phrase, apokatastasis, carries the idea of restoration or reconstitution. Whatever range one assigns to the passage, Peter clearly places restoration within the prophetic horizon of God's purpose.

Revelation ends with the One seated upon the throne saying, 'Behold, I make all things new' (Revelation 21:5). The statement is not, 'I make some new things.' The emphasis is the renewal of what creation has become under the power of death and corruption.

Restoration does not mean pretending that nothing happened. Biblical restoration passes through judgment. What is false is exposed. What is corrupt is consumed. What is crooked is made straight. What belongs to death is destroyed. Restoration is not sentimental tolerance of evil; it is God's victory over evil.

The Destruc tion of the Last Enemy

First Corinthians 15:20-28 may be the most important passage for understanding the direction of God's final purpose. Paul begins with resurrection and moves toward the consummation. Christ reigns until He has put all enemies under His feet. Then Paul makes a staggering statement: 'The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.'

Death is not preserved eternally as a monument to human failure. Death is destroyed. Christ reigns until the enemies are subjected. The reign has a goal. The goal is not merely domination; it is the removal of every competing power until the Son delivers the kingdom to the Father and 'God may be all in all.'

Those words deserve their full weight. God all in all is not God partly in all, nor God all in some. It is Paul's description of the consummation after resurrection, reign, subjection, and the destruction of death.

This passage strongly shapes my understanding of eternal judgment. God's final verdict cannot be less than the outcome Paul describes. Whatever processes of judgment are necessary, the destination is the defeat of every enemy, the destruction of death, the completed reign of Christ, and God all in all.

Mercy and Judgment Are Not Enemies

Romans 11:32 says, 'For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all.' Paul then erupts in worship: 'O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!' (Romans 11:33).

It is striking that Paul speaks of God's judgments immediately after declaring the purpose of mercy. In his mind, judgment and mercy are not rival attributes fighting for control of God. God's

judgments belong to the wisdom by which His purpose is accomplished.

Isaiah 26:9 gives another important perspective: 'when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.' Judgment there teaches righteousness. First Corinthians 11:32 says that when believers are judged, they are chastened by the Lord 'that we should not be condemned with the world.'

correctively, and redemptively.

This does not require that every judgment operate identically. Scripture presents judgments of di?erent kinds. But it does prevent me from assuming that punishment is the only possible content or purpose of divine judgment.

The Carnal Mind and the Meaning of Judgment

The natural mind tends to hear judgment in categories of guilt, accusation, retaliation, and punishment. Those categories are not entirely false, but they are incomplete. They can become a lens through which we force every judgment text into the same shape.

The spiritual question is larger: What has God determined to make right? Divine judgment is God's action to establish truth, righteousness, order, and His purpose. The Judge of all the earth must do right, but His righteousness cannot be separated from the character revealed in Jesus.

The carnal mind may ask first, Who must be punished? The spiritual mind is free to ask, What has God determined to make right? That question does not remove accountability. It places accountability inside the larger purpose of God.

Again, judgment is not merely retribution; it can function instructively,

My Thesis Concerning Eternal Judgment

I therefore propose that the sixth foundation of Hebrews 6 may be understood as God's final and irreversible judicial verdict concerning the finished work of Jesus Christ and the destiny of creation in Him.

The verdict is that the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ stands eternally. Through the blood of His cross, reconciliation has been accomplished in the divine purpose. What was alienated is destined for reconciliation. What was fractured is destined to be gathered in Christ. What was corrupted is destined for restoration. Every enemy will be subjected, death itself will be destroyed, and God will be all in all.

In this sense, eternal judgment is not primarily a statement that God will continue judging forever. It is the declaration that God's judgment is final. His judicial decision cannot be overturned. The cross will not fail. The purpose of the Father will not be permanently frustrated. Sin will not establish an everlasting kingdom alongside God. Death will not remain an eternal rival. Alienation will not have the last word.

Jesus will have the last word.

The eternal verdict is that what the Father purposed in Christ will stand. It is done. It is finished. It will never again be successfully challenged.

Someone may ask: If all things are reconciled, why does the world remain in such obvious disorder? The New Testament regularly holds accomplished reality and future manifestation together.

Christ has already defeated death, yet people still die. He has been given all authority, yet Hebrews itself says, 'we see not yet all things put under him' (Hebrews 2:8). Believers are already seated with Christ in heavenly places, yet we continue to walk

through history. The kingdom has come, yet we still pray, 'Thy kingdom come.'

Therefore the statement that reconciliation is accomplished in Christ does not require us to pretend that its full manifestation is already visible. God's verdict is settled; history is being brought into agreement with that verdict. The cross determines the end before the end is universally seen.

Already Accomplished, Yet Not Fully Revealed

This is why the word eternal is so significant. God's decision is not temporary. It will not be revised. Creation is not moving toward an uncertain conclusion. It is moving toward the fulfillment of the purpose God has already established in His Son.

What This View Does Not Mean

This interpretation does not mean that sin is harmless. If anything, it makes God's opposition to sin more absolute. Sin cannot remain. Death cannot remain. Corruption cannot remain. Everything contrary to the nature and purpose of God must finally be dealt with.

Nor does it mean that choices are meaningless or that judgment is unnecessary. Scripture repeatedly warns of consequences, accountability, loss, chastening, exclusion, fire, and judgment. Those warnings must be allowed to speak. But none of them should be interpreted in a way that finally makes evil more permanent than redemption or death more enduring than the life of God.

I am not attempting here to answer every question concerning the ages, Gehenna, the lake of fire, the second death, or the exact nature and duration of every judgment. Those subjects deserve their own careful treatment. My purpose is narrower: to ask what

the sixth foundation itself may ultimately be pointing toward when Scripture interprets Scripture.

A Posi tion Held With an Open Hand

I have weighed the text, the language, the immediate context, and the broader witness of Scripture. I recognize that this interpretation di?ers from the conventional reading, but I do not believe faithfulness requires me to preserve a traditional conclusion when the biblical evidence appears to point beyond it.

My position is that the 'eternal judgment' of Hebrews 6:2 may be understood as God's final and irreversible judicial verdict concerning the finished work of Jesus Christ. Through His once-for-all sacrifice, the Father's purpose has been secured: all things are reconciled in Christ, every contradiction to His will is ultimately overcome, death itself is abolished, and God becomes all in all.

I hold this conclusion with conviction, but with an open hand. If Scripture corrects me, I must yield to Scripture. But having weighed the evidence, I believe this interpretation deserves to be stated plainly and examined seriously.

The question is not whether my position is conventional. The question is whether it is faithful to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and to the testimony of Scripture.

The Sixth Founda tion

The six foundations of Hebrews 6 are not random teachings. They form a movement: repentance, faith, baptisms, laying on of hands, resurrection, and finally eternal judgment. The sequence ends not with human opinion but with God's verdict.

I believe that verdict is larger than we have often allowed ourselves to imagine.

God's eternal judgment is His irreversible decision that His purpose in Jesus Christ will prevail. The sacrifice of the Son is sufficient. Reconciliation is established in Him. Creation will not remain eternally divided against its Creator. Every contradiction will finally be answered by the triumph of Christ. Death will be destroyed. All things will be gathered in Him. God will be all in all.

That is not a denial of judgment. It is the ultimate meaning of judgment: God decides what will finally stand.

And His decision is eternal.

Primary Scriptures for Further Study

- Hebrews 6:1-2 - the six foundational principles
- Hebrews 9:12, 15; 10:10-14 - eternal redemption, eternal inheritance, and the once-for-all o?ering
- John 19:30 - "It is finished"
- Colossians 1:19-20 - reconciliation of all things through the blood of the cross
- 2 Corinthians 5:18-20 - God in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself
- Ephesians 1:9-10 - all things gathered together in Christ
- Acts 3:21 - restitution of all things

- Romans 5:18-19 - Adam and Christ in parallel
- Romans 11:32-36 - mercy upon all and the unsearchable judgments of God
- 1 Corinthians 15:20-28 - every enemy subjected, death destroyed, God all in all
- Isaiah 26:9 - judgments that teach righteousness
- Revelation 21:5 - "Behold, I make all things new"