



Ministry of the Word

*Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> November 2018*

by Vincent Gannon

**Scripture:** Hebrews 6:1-3

**Subject:** Part 14 - Foundation Principles

*Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, <sup>2</sup> of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. <sup>3</sup> And this we will do if God permits.*

Previously, the self-professed Christians on the fringe were rebuked for their arrested growth; of which their spiritual immaturity and dullness of comprehension and discernment were symptomatic. They were exhorted to do something about it; to shake themselves out of their stupor, to leave their spiritual milk and grow up, lest the curse of God, instead of His blessing, should rest on them. In these verses we read this morning, the readers are being told that they should be ready to move on from foundation principles which we see in focus in verses 1 and 2. The question we need to ask ourselves this morning, is are we ready too? Do we actually know and understand these 6 principle that have been laid out to us.

Verse 1 instructs forward momentum, to move forward and not get stuck. It is a starting point not a finishing one. It is the door to progress and the spring board to achievement. The "elementary doctrines of Christ," or, literally, "the word or instruction of the beginning of

Christ," from which the readers are being exhorted to advance, can best be understood as referring to the first simple presentation of the gospel message. What this involves is well illustrated by the content of Peter's address to a Hebrew audience on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 verses 22 to 24 –

*Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know—<sup>23</sup> Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death;<sup>24</sup> whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it.*

The central drive of his proclamation was the presentation of Jesus as Messiah and Lord, in whom the Scriptures find their fulfilment, whose death was in accordance with the redemptive purpose of God, and who is now risen and exalted over all. This message evokes the response of repentance, faith, and baptism. For the three thousand persons who professed conversion on that occasion it was the starting-point of their Christian life but ahead of them stretched the road to spiritual maturity. In Acts 2 verse 42, we see additional information that from then on - *"they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers"*

That was just the beginning, the milk so to speak. Then the meat came. The more advanced instruction in Christian truth was conveyed by the rest of the epistles of the New Testament, as the repositories of the apostles' teachings. These teachings constituted an authentic school of theology. The Holy Spirit is pointing to the danger of neglecting these instructions. We also need to be careful of not neglecting them because when we no longer eat meat, we will become not just spiritual weak, but spiritual sick.

The six foundational components which we read in verses 1 and 2, are the fundamentals of the faith and resolve themselves naturally into three related pairs: (1) repentance and faith, (2) cleansing and laying on of hands, and (3) resurrection and judgment.

This morning, let us remind ourselves of these six foundational principles, so that we can be equipped to move forward towards God as well as ensure a healthy Christian growth as we mature.

## 1. REPENTANCE FROM DEAD WORKS

Repentance from dead works was the main theme of the preaching of John the Baptist, who stressed that the judgment of God was at hand, admonished the sanctimonious Pharisees and Sadducees to "*bear fruit that befits repentance*" and the tax collectors to exact no more than was legal and the soldiers to abstain from bullying and intimidation (Matthew 3:7, Luke 3:7). The call to repentance was clearly sounded also by Christ, who warned His hearers that if they did not repent they would all perish. It was a constant ingredient in the evangelistic exhortation of the apostles which we find throughout the Book of Acts.

Repentance is a summons from God, for personal, absolute and ultimate unconditional surrender to God as Sovereign. While it includes sorrow and regret for sin, it is more than that. In repenting, one makes a complete change of direction, 180° turn towards God. It is the first step on the road which leads the sinner back home to the Father. In this context, the Spirit of God is speaking of repentance from "dead works". So what are dead works?

Dead works are basically anything done by an unregenerate person which they hope will appease God. The effect of sin is deadly (Romans 6:23; 7:11) before repentance and faith. Man is described as being dead in his sins (Ephesians 2:1, 5; Colossians 2:13).

Calvin once said that every sin is a death work,

***"either because it works death or because it arises from the spiritual death of the soul."***

Within the body and teaching of the New Testament, there are two clear types of people, Jew and Gentile.

The dead works of a Gentile are mostly associated with decadence and idolatry (Galatians 5:19; Ephesians 4:17; Colossians 1:21). They are works of which the man who comes to repentance is ashamed of, as he now recognizes their barren and unprofitable nature.

For the religious Jew, it is the merely external and self-righteous compliance with the requirements of the law which gives rise to his dead works (Matthew 5:21 and 23). His sin is, if anything, worse than that of the idolater, for, though outwardly righteous in men's eyes, inwardly he is full of hypocrisy and iniquity (Matthew 23:28; Romans 2:28). The law, so far from justifying him, condemns him, because together with every other man, he is a law-

breaker who has in fact neglected the very essence of the law which is love (Matthew 5:43; Mark 12:28; Romans 13:10; Galatians 5:14; James 2:8), and as such he is subject to judgment and death (Romans 2:23.; 3:20, 23; Galatians 2:16; 2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 3:5).

Alienation from God, who is the source of all life, whether through the idol-worship and immorality of heathendom or through the self-centred religiosity and works-righteousness of Judaism, can result only in death and perdition (Romans 6:20; Philippians 3:18). This is why there is a necessity of repentance from dead works. Not all who do dead works are aware of their need for repentance never mind our next principle with is,

## 2. FAITH TOWARD GOD

What follows repentance is the act of faith in the atonement made available to us by the blood of Christ which purifies the conscience from dead works to serve the living God (Hebrew 9:14). This describes the positive act of trust and commitment. The two acts are inseparably complementary and, like the two faces of a coin, together form a unity. If repentance is turning away from the former life of dead works, faith is turning towards God for newness of life in Christ. We find Jesus beginning his ministry in Galilee with the declaration:

*"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the gospel"* (Mark 1:15);

And the sum of Paul's proclamation, wherever he went, to both Jew and Gentile, was

*"that they should repent and turn to God and perform deeds worthy of their repentance"* Acts 26:20

Indeed, faith in itself always presupposes repentance. Not to have faith in Christ means to die in one's sins (John 8:24), Absence of faith claims an absence of true repentance. The Philippian jailer, on asking what he must do to be saved was exhorted to have faith in the Lord Jesus (Acts 16:30.); For the reality of repentance was implicit in his question concerning salvation. Faith, because of its association of the denial of all self-adequacy and complete trust in God, is the hallmark of the people of God - Galatians 3:6:

*"just as Abraham "believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness."*

Christians therefore are also known as *believers*, that is, people who have faith, 1 Timothy 4:3 -

*"forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth."*

Why is "faith toward God" rather than "faith in Christ" included here among the fundamental doctrines? The answer is that the purpose of Christ's coming was to bring mankind back to that attitude of spontaneous trustfulness towards God. Our departure from this faith toward God led to our condition of fallenness and alienation. It is through the mediation of the Son that we are able to turn to the Father. John 14:6 tells us –

*Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."*

Faith in Christ is faith towards God. This involves the reversal of the ungodliness of sinful man which expresses itself. Paul observed in Romans 11 verses 18 to 21 that ungodliness is really the the suppression of the truth about God, the denial of His eternal and sovereign power, and the refusal to honour Him as God as well as refusal to give thanks to him for His goodness.

### 3. THE DOCTRINE OF BAPTISM

The Amplified puts it correct, "With teachings about purifying". The King James translation – doctrine of baptisms, is a misleading translation because the Greek word use here is *baptismos* which means washings, not *Baptizo*, which is use for the ordinance of baptism. It may have been that the King James translators assumed this passage was addressed to Christians, in which case "baptisms" might be have seemed appropriate. But here, in this text the use of *baptismos* rather than *baptizo* is another strong indication that the passage is not addressed to true believers.

In Jewish culture "washings" or "purifying" was for most, a daily occurrences and part of a religious ritual. It was also a ritual that was used on receiving the proselytes into the faith. Every Jewish home had a basin by the entrance for family and visitors to use for ceremonial cleansings, of which there were many. In **Judaism, ritual washing**, or ablution, takes two main forms.

A **tevilah** (בִּילְהֵט) is a full body immersion in a mikveh, and a **netilat yadayim** is the washing of the hands with a cup. References to ritual washing are found in the Old Testament and are elaborated in the Mishnah and Talmud. They have been codified in various codes of Jewish law and tradition, such as Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah* (12th century) and Joseph Karo's *Shulchan Aruch* (16th century). These customs are most commonly observed within Orthodox Judaism. In Conservative Judaism, the practices are normative with certain leniencies and exceptions. Ritual washing is not generally performed in Reform Judaism. Perhaps the prayer that is recited while doing this was considered so important that it made it a doctrine. "Blessed are you, HaShem our God, King of the universe, Who has sanctified us with His commandments, and has commanded us concerning the elevation of hands". Mind you this practice was a life saver to the Jewish people even though it was seen by them as religious and important not necessarily hygienic. De Hans book "None of these Disease" highlights this tremendously.

It is these ceremonial washings that the readers are told to abandon and forget. Even the Old Testament predicted that one day its ceremonial cleansings would be replaced by a spiritual one that God Himself would give:

*"Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols" (Ezekiel 36:25).*

There were many ceremonial washings and yet the spiritual washing spoken about occurs once and for all. It is wonderful, effective, and eternal. As Paul put it to Titus in Titus Chapter 3 verse 5 - "**washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit**". It is being born again, regeneration of water and the spirit that Jesus told Nicodemus was necessary for entrance into the kingdom in John 3:5 –

*Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."*

The Jew went over-board with their ceremonial washing, but as we recount our believer's baptism, are we holding to it as tenaciously as we should? Do we remember what it means as a disciple of Jesus? Worth thinking about, isn't it?

The next principle on the list is:

#### 4. LAYING ON OF HANDS

This laying on of hands that this principle is addressing has nothing to do with the apostolic practices that we find for instances in Acts 6:6 –

*whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.*

Or 1 Timothy 4:14 – *Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership.*

Under the Old Covenant the person who brought a sacrifice had to put his hands on it, to symbolize his identification with it (Leviticus 1:4; 3:8, 13). Our identification with Jesus Christ does not come by putting our hands on Him or anyone, it's not physical, but it comes by the Spirit's baptizing us into union with Him by faith.

Here, the immature Jews is being told – *"Forget the teaching about laying hands on the Temple sacrifices," "Lay hold of Christ by putting your trust in Him."*

Many of man-made religions have a lot of symbolism attached to them, be it blessing themselves or laying hands on them for example, in confirmation and this can become a "method" on account of it been visible and tangible. But we are to walk by faith and the laying on of hands that we do now, we see in James 5 verse 14 –

*"Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord."*

And as we see in 1 Timothy 5:2, this is an identification process, so we need to be careful –

*"Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure."*

This leads us to the fifth principle -

## 5. RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

The Old Testament doctrine of resurrection is not completely clear or whole. We learn of life after death, rewards for the good, and punishment for the wicked, but there is not much more about resurrection than this. From Job, for instance, we learn that resurrection will be bodily, and not just spiritual in Job 19 -

*“And after my skin has been destroyed, yet will I see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes — I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!”* Job 19:25 – 27

Later in the Old Testament period, the concept of the resurrection became more developed among the Hebrew people because of further revelation in the books of the Wisdom Literature and the Prophets. David, for example, wrote in reference to God in Psalm 139:8-

*“If I make my bed in the depths (sheol) you are there.”*

There are several passages in the Psalms that give additional insight into life after death. One example is found in Psalm 16:9 –11, especially in verse 10, which reads: *“because you will not abandon me to the grave [sheol], nor will you let your Holy One see decay.”* This verse is a messianic prophecy and significant in light of the fact that it was quoted by Peter in Acts 2:25 – 28 in reference to the resurrection of Jesus.

There were many examples of God miraculously intervening in the natural process of death when he raised certain individuals from the dead such as the son of the widow of Zerephath (1 Kings 17:17 – 24), the son of the Shunammite woman (2 Kings 4:18 – 37), and the man thrown into Elisha’s grave (2 Kings 13:20 – 21). In miracles such as these, known as revitalization, a person returned to his or her previous life, however, these individuals eventually died again. Other events included Enoch and Elijah taken by God from this life into another without experiencing death, as we know it. Another example is in Isaiah 26:19, which reads:

*“But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy. Your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead.”*

Isaiah 53:10 – 12 is another prophecy that is often seen as relevant to the concept of the resurrection. As a part of the Suffering Servant passages in Isaiah, this part is applicable to

the resurrection of Jesus. The Old Testament passage which is most commonly interpreted to be a reference to the resurrection of the dead is found in Daniel 12:2 which reads:

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

These examples are why Jesus condemned the Sadducees for their denial of the resurrection which we read about in Matthew 22:32; Mark 12:27; Luke 20:38. By the time of Jesus there was some expectation of existence after death among the Jewish people. In the New Testament, of course, resurrection is one of the major and most detailed doctrines spoken off. It is a study in and of itself. It was one of the important elements the theme of apostolic gospel, for Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15 verses 12 to 14 –

*Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? <sup>23</sup>But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. <sup>24</sup>And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty.*

This doctrine comes to fullness in the very Person of Jesus Christ, who said, *"I am the resurrection and the life"* (John 11:25). The resurrection body is described in considerable detail in 1 Corinthians 15. In 1 John 3:2 we are told, *"We shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is"*. Considering this, why should anyone be content with trying to understand the resurrection from the limited and vague teachings of the Old Testament?

Now the final principle that we read about in verse 2 of Hebrews Chapter 6 is,

## 6. ETERNAL JUDGMENT

Eternal judgement, again, is another big subject. The Old Testament speaks plainly about it. What I mean by that is very well put in Ecclesiastes chapter 12 verse 14:

*"God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil"*

Punishment would come to the wicked and blessing to the good. Again in the New Testament, however, we are told a great deal about eternal judgment. Much more than many people like to hear. We know what is going to happen to believers.

*"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus"*

(Romans 8:1).

As believers, we will have to stand before the Lord and have our work judged instead of our sin - 1 Corinthians 3:12-15:

*Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,<sup>23</sup> each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is.<sup>24</sup> If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward.<sup>25</sup> If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.*

We also know about the judgment that unbelievers will have to face as described in Matthew 25:31-46 and they will have to face the judgment of the great white throne (Revelation 20:11-15). We know that Jesus Christ will judge all, peoples from all the nations and even the fallen angels - John 5:21-29:

*For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will.<sup>22</sup> For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son,<sup>23</sup> that all should honour the Son just as they honour the Father. He who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent Him.<sup>24</sup> "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.<sup>25</sup> Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live.<sup>26</sup> For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself,<sup>27</sup> and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man.<sup>28</sup> Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice<sup>29</sup> and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.*

We know this and much more about judgment from the New Testament.

Now that we have laid out these 6 principles from the Old Testament as well as the New, we can see the point of Hebrews 6:1-2. No wonder that the Spirit of God instructed them that they should let go completely of the immature, elementary shadows and symbols of the Old Covenant and take hold of the mature and perfect reality of the New. Are we listening?

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The Holy Spirit is calling for them to leave the ABC's of repentance from dead works for the New Testament teaching of repentance toward God and a new life in Christ. He is encouraging them to leave the ABC's of faith toward God for faith in the Person of Jesus Christ. He is instructing them to leave the ABC's of ceremonial washings for the cleansing of the soul by the Word and the Holy Spirit. He is telling them to leave the ABCs of laying hands on the sacrifice for laying hold of the Lamb of God by faith. What's more, He is commanding them to leave the ABC's of the resurrection of the dead for the full and glorious resurrection unto life. Finally, He is calling them to leave the ABC's of eternal judgment for the full truth of judgment and rewards as revealed in the New Covenant.

These six doctrines were the basics of Judaism that were to be laid aside in favour of the better things that come in Christ. The Old Testament is incomplete even though It is true. It is of God. It was a necessary part of His revelation and of His plan of salvation for man. But it is only partial revelation, not sufficient. Judaism is nullified. It is no longer a valid expression of worship or of obedience to God. It must be abandoned.

Are we listening to what the Holy Spirit is saying?

**Let us now look at verse three - *And this we shall do, if God permits.* (6:3)**

Interpreting this verse is difficult, despite its brevity and simplicity. Some interpreters believe this verse is an editorial reference of the writer to himself, saying, "I will go on and teach you what you need to know if God permits me." While other scholars believe that the writer is simply offering to identify himself with those to whom he writes, and is saying, "You will go on to maturity if God permits."

I believe that both interpretations are correct. They are not mutually exclusive and are consistent with the rest of Hebrews. The margin of some Bible inserts the phrase "Let us do". There is without doubt an identification with those whom the writer is addressing. He wants to teach the perfect way of salvation and that the disciple goes on to spiritual maturity in Christ. However, the progress must be moved and led by the Holy Spirit if they are to be effective and fruitful. Everything revolves around the permission of God. We need to be divinely enabled by God. This is confirmed in Scriptures such as 2 Corinthians 3 verse 5 -

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*"Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God"*

And also in John 6 verse 44 -

*"No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him"*

By teacher and seeker alike, God's sovereignty should be recognized. What can we take away from all of what you have just heard? Are our foundations solid, biblically? Are we given to liberalism or relativity in our belief or maybe religiosity instead of Christianity? Are we at risk to ecumenicalism's creeping in or total indifference? Brothers and sisters, we need to know the principle foundations of our faith, especially in these days as doctrines are either getting watered down or muddy. We need to be clear thinkers as well as careful doers.

I believe we can consider ourselves very blessed in relation to the Foundation that has been placed by faith into our souls by the Holy Spirit and the Word of God.

*Amen.*