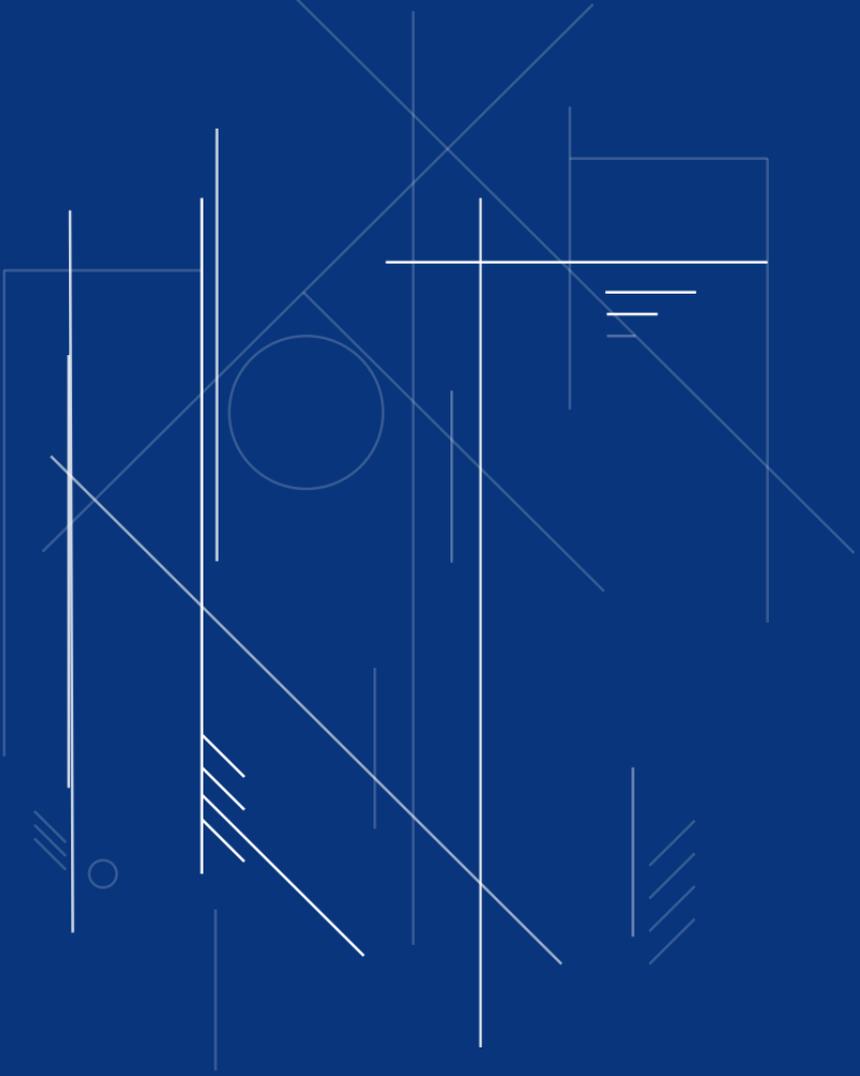


FOUNDATIONS



JOHN BEVERE

Foundations by John Bevere

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CHAPTER ONE

Foundations

The first and most important aspect of any permanent structure is its foundation. With the proper foundation, a building can stretch upward thousands of feet. It is the foundation that determines potential—or lack thereof.

Your life, in a sense, is God's building. You are a masterpiece, designed to display God's ways to your world (Ephesians 2:10). With this in mind, is it any wonder why Scripture often compares our lives to the construction of a building?

Together, we are His house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus Himself. We are carefully joined together in Him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord. (Ephesians 2:20–21 NLT)

You are God's building . . . Because of God's grace to me, I have laid the foundation like an expert builder. Now others are building on it. But whoever is building on this foundation must be very careful. (1 Corinthians 3:9–10 NLT)

But you, beloved, build yourselves up on [the foundation of] your most holy faith [continually progress, rise like an edifice higher and higher]. (Jude 20 AMPC)

On one occasion, while Lisa and I were dining with friends at their home, we noticed large cracks on their wall spanning from the floor to the ceiling. Curious, I asked about the obvious cracks. With frustration, this couple shared how the home's foundation was faulty, due to their builder cutting corners. Unfortunately, correcting the problem turned out to be an extremely expensive and time-consuming process. It was then that I became keenly aware of the importance of a strong foundation. Creating the foundation is certainly not the most glamorous part of the building process, but it is the most pivotal.

Italy's Leaning Tower of Pisa is one of the most remarkable architectural structures from Medieval Europe. Its construction began in 1173 and was designed as a circular bell tower that would stand 185 feet high. Constructed of white marble, it has eight stories, including the chamber for the bells. However, despite its beautiful Romanesque architecture, the reason tourists flock to see this building is its unintended tilt.

On any given day you will undoubtedly find groups of tourists posing for the same photo: hands outstretched toward the distinctly tilted bell tower as if they are holding it up by their own strength. It may now seem funny to tourists, but I'm sure the original architect wouldn't be as entertained.

Five years into construction, builders had completed the third of eight planned stories when the tower's foundation had begun to settle unevenly on the ground beneath it. The tower was foolishly built on a mixture of clay, sand, and shells. As a result, the tower had noticeably tilted. Unable to safely continue building, construction halted for almost a century. Construction eventually resumed and was completed in 1372. Over time—with extensive reconstruction—engineers managed to stabilize the tower, but that lean will never go away.

It's evident that without a solid foundation, no building can remain upright. It will only be a matter of time before the cracks and tilts begin to appear. The same applies to our life in Christ.

JESUS, OUR FOUNDATION

Therefore, this is what the sovereign LORD says: "Look! I am placing a foundation stone in Jerusalem, a firm and tested stone. It is a precious cornerstone that is safe to build on. Whoever believes need never be shaken." (Isaiah 28:16 NLT)

The foundation Isaiah speaks of is none other than Jesus Christ. As we've seen, the quality of a foundation is crucial to the stability and durability of a building. The foundation stone the Lord spoke of through Isaiah is a tested stone. To test something implies that measures were taken to check its quality and reliability, especially before it is put into widespread use or practice. Anything that is not tested cannot be trusted.

I travel multiple thousands of miles on airplanes every year. I have complete confidence boarding a plane because I am aware that before the plane was released for widespread use, it went through rigorous and exhaustive testing. From its earliest stages of design, these tests were done to ensure its quality, performance, and reliability to transport passengers safely to any given destination.

Jesus was tested in all points and never failed. The writer of Hebrews pointed out, "God, for whom and through whom everything was made, chose to bring many children into glory. And it was only right that He should make Jesus, through His suffering, a perfect leader, fit to bring them into their salvation"

(Hebrews 2:10 NLT). This is why Jesus is not only precious, but a safe foundation to build on.

Referring to Jesus, the apostle Peter confirmed Isaiah's prophecy, "You are coming to Christ, who is the living cornerstone of God's temple . . . And you are living stones that God is building into His spiritual temple . . . As the Scriptures say, 'I am placing a cornerstone in Jerusalem, chosen for great honor, and anyone who trusts in Him will never be disgraced'" (1 Peter 2:4–6 NLT). The apostle Paul agreed with both Isaiah and Peter. He wrote, "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one we already have—Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:11 NLT).

Jesus is our sure foundation.

Now that we've considered what the Scriptures—both Old and New Testament—have to say about Jesus as our foundation, let's examine what Jesus Himself said. In the sixteenth chapter of the gospel of Matthew, Jesus entered the region of Caesarea Philippi and asked His disciples, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" (verse 13).

Several disciples were quick to answer. The common response was, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets" (verse 14). Once the opinions of the crowd were shared, Jesus looked at them and asked them point-blank, "But who do you say that I am?" (verse 15).

I'm sure this question pierced their hearts and left them uncertain how to answer for themselves. The men who were so eager to air the opinions of others were now silenced. With this confrontation came the realization that they had no answer—except for the fact that they were living off the thoughts and opinions of others, rather than establishing in their own hearts who Jesus really was.

Simon, whom Jesus renamed Peter, was the only one of the disciples who could give a heartfelt answer. With boldness he professed, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (verse 16). With a smile and a sparkle in His eyes, Jesus responded, “Blessed are you . . . for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven” (Verse 17). One translation says, “My Father has supernaturally revealed this to you” (TPT).

The source of Peter’s revelation was God Himself, not the opinion of man. It came through direct revelation. This is what Jesus meant when He shared, “The only way people come to Me is by the Father who sent Me—He pulls on their hearts to embrace Me . . . It has been written by the prophets, ‘They will all be taught by God Himself.’ If you are really listening to the Father and learning directly from Him, you will come to Me” (John 6:44–45 TPT).

So we see clearly that the illuminated truth of Jesus must be solidified in our hearts: “And this truth of who I am will be the bedrock foundation of which I will build my church—my legislative assembly, and the power of death will not be able to overpower it!” (Matthew 16:18 TPT). The revelation of Jesus is the foundation the church will be grounded on. Without this truth firmly planted within us, we are easily swayed by the shifting currents of public opinion.

On a particular occasion, Jesus shared certain truths that confused and offended His followers, resulting in many forsaking Him. To those who remained, which included Peter, Jesus challenged, “Do you also want to go away?” (John 6:66–67) Peter—being anchored by revelation knowledge—responded, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (John 6:68–69).

Peter exemplified the stability that comes from revelation knowledge. When others departed from Jesus, he remained. He was convinced that Jesus was the Son of God; therefore, he could not be shaken. He was founded on the Rock—the rock of revelation.

TRUTH IS A ROCK

Everyone then who hears these words of Mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it. (Matthew 7:24–27 ESV)

A life built on the Word of God is like a house built on solid ground—it is built to last! Both the wise man and the foolish man heard the Lord’s teaching, but the wise man’s obedience to the Word that was heard is what made the difference. Likewise, when we build our life with obedience to God’s Word, it ensures stability.

The apostle James echoes Jesus, reminding us of the importance of both hearing and obeying the Word of God: “But don’t just listen to God’s Word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. For if you listen to the Word and don’t obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like” (James 1:22–24 NLT).

James compares the Word of God to a mirror. The purpose of a natural mirror is to reveal our external condition; while the mirror of God's Word reveals our internal condition. It reveals things about us that no natural mirror can. Keep in mind that a mirror only helps us if we act on what we see. For instance, if you see in the mirror that your hair is out of place or there is food in your teeth, your natural response should be to fix your hair and clean your teeth.

The same is true when we view the mirror of God's Word. The Word produces conviction and correction, instructing us in the ways of righteous living. Paul wrote, "All Scripture . . . is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16–17 NKJV). Similarly, the writer of Hebrews shared, "For the Word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (4:12).

Friend, I cannot emphasize this enough—the Word of God will only be helpful to us if we respond to it obediently. This means that we must make the necessary adjustments and bring our lives into alignment with God's ways. As our hearts become established and grounded on the revelation of Jesus, then we can continue to build on His foundation through obedience.

Builders must follow a specific blueprint designed by engineers, beginning with the foundation phase. Likewise, God—the Master Builder—has a specific blueprint and building design for our lives that can be found through studying His Word and yielding to His Spirit.

The foundational truths of God's Word that we must build our lives on are laid out in the book of Hebrews and confirmed throughout the New Testament. In chapter six we read:

Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment and this we will do if God permits. (Hebrews 6:1–3)

The six foundational doctrines we are to build upon are:

1. Repentance from dead works
2. Faith toward God
3. Baptisms
4. Laying on of hands
5. Resurrection of the dead
6. Eternal judgment

Each believer must be grounded and established in each of these foundational truths so that they may mature in Christ. Building without these foundation truths could be compared to an attempt to advance your education without the basic tools acquired in elementary school, such as the ability to read and write.

Unfortunately, many of us have neglected these elementary truths, resulting in stunted spiritual growth and most dangerously, a vulnerability to being led astray by error. This inspired outline of basic doctrine—if we unpack it in the order given—spans a sinner's initial entrance into the Christian life (repentance) and progresses to resurrection and final judgment.

Throughout this book, we'll examine each of these foundational truths, so that we may grow into the fullness of Christ.

Let's build wisely.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the most important phase of the construction of a building and why?
2. Why is seeing Jesus as your foundation so important to your spiritual growth?
3. In Matthew 7:24–27, Jesus taught on the wise and foolish builders. What was the difference between the wise builder and the unwise builder? Why is this important?

CHAPTER TWO

Repentance from Dead Works

Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection (maturity), not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works . . . (Hebrews 6:1)

According to the writer of Hebrews, repentance from dead works is the first foundation that the church is built on. Repentance levels and straightens the ground of our heart to prepare us for building according to God's design. There is no true or lasting faith in God without repentance.

There is a lot of confusion around the word "repentance," so let's start by defining it. Throughout the New Testament, the noun "repentance" (*metanoia*) and the verb "repent" (*metanoeo*) are found twenty-four and thirty-four times, respectively. The most common and accepted definition is "a change of mind." However, if we stop with this basic definition, we miss out on something bigger.

The *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* states that repentance is "literally a change of mind, not about individual plans, inten-

tions, or beliefs, but rather a change in the *whole personality* from a sinful course of action to God” (emphasis added). Notice the words *whole personality*. In using these words, scholars show that there is more to repentance than simply a change of mind. *The Lexham Theological Wordbook* examines this further by stating that repentance is “a process in which the individual reorients the mind and will—away from sin and toward God.”

Repentance involves the mind, will, and emotions, penetrating the depths of our hearts so that we are firmly persuaded from the core of our being. True repentance occurs when we realize our sinful condition. This revelation will, naturally, change the way we perceive ourselves and God, and it should also change how we live. Through repentance, we turn from self-governance to absolute submission to God.



Throughout the New Testament, our relationship to Jesus is compared to a marriage. The church is the bride; Jesus is the Bridegroom. And just like any good spouse, Jesus desires our full commitment and faithfulness.

Consider this scenario. One evening, Justin returns home from work and finds Angela, his wife, all made up and slipping into a beautiful outfit. He concludes she must have planned something special for them and offers to get dressed up as well. Angela, a bit confused, responds, “Oh honey, I’m going out with Tony tonight. We’re going to get dinner, catch a movie, and check into a hotel. I should be back by midmorning.”

“Who’s Tony?” Justin fires back.

“He’s my boyfriend from high school,” she replies.

“What?! You can’t go out with him!”

“Why not?”

“Because we are married; we are committed to each other. We don’t date other people!” he exclaims, stating what he assumes should be obvious.

“Hold on, honey!” Angela replies. “You are my favorite. I love you more than any of my old boyfriends, but you really can’t expect me to not see them any longer. I’ve been close with some of them for years, I still love them, and I want to enjoy time with them. What’s wrong with that?”

Obviously, this scenario seems ridiculous. It’s hard to imagine someone not understanding that marriage means an exclusive relationship. Certainly none of us would marry someone like Angela, who expected to continue dating old boyfriends. Yet this is how many Christians treat their relationship with Jesus. When we fail to communicate the important aspect of Jesus’s Lordship and repentance from our old way of life, it produces a bride that is an adulteress; a bride who doesn’t understand the beauty of devoted intimacy.

When we genuinely repent, we walk away from living life according to our own terms and take a posture of complete submission and obedience to God’s authority. In essence we declare, “No longer will I embrace thoughts, beliefs, reasoning, or arguments that exalt themselves above God’s Word and wisdom.”

There is no turning to God without repentance. In fact, we cannot place our faith in Jesus Christ without first repenting from known disobedience to God. The necessity of repentance is emphasized throughout the New Testament. Repentance is never optional; it’s a prerequisite to the activation of God’s grace in our lives. And this is why the call to repentance is ultimately a gift of grace. A gift that sets us free from the smallness of ourselves so that we may live in the fullness of God.

But too often, repentance is misconstrued, and people shy away from using this beautiful word.

Let's consider how the apostles Paul and Peter presented the gospel:

I never shrank back from telling you what you needed to hear, either publicly or in your homes. I have had one message for Jews and Greeks alike—the *necessity of repenting* from sin and turning to God, and of having faith in our Lord Jesus. (Acts 20:20–21 NLT)

I obeyed that vision from heaven. I preached first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that *all must repent of their sins* and turn to God—and prove they have changed by the good things they do. (Acts 26:19–20 NLT)

God overlooked people's ignorance about these things in earlier times, but now He commands everyone everywhere to *repent of their sins* and turn to Him. (Acts 17:30 NLT)

Peter's first words on the day of Pentecost instructed eager seekers how to be saved. He boldly proclaimed:

“Each of you must *repent of your sins* and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins” (Acts 2:38).

Any teaching that doesn't include a call to repentance is misleading sinners and misrepresenting God—much like what we saw with our story of Angela. The contemporary mode of communicating the gospel is to first get seekers to believe and pray and then, eventually, introduce the idea of repentance from sin, which could occur weeks, months, or even years later. But is this strategy scriptural?



The Holy Spirit is the one who convicts people of their need of salvation. Jesus said, “And when He comes, He will convict the world of its sin, and of God’s righteousness, and of the coming judgment. The world’s sin is that it refuses to believe in Me. Righteousness is available because I go to the Father, and you will see Me no more. Judgment will come because the ruler of this world has already been judged” (John 16:8–11 NLT).

Our response to the Holy Spirit’s conviction determines whether or not we turn to God. Consider these two different responses to the conviction of the Holy Spirit. The first is after Peter shared the gospel on the day of Pentecost: “Now when they heard this, they were *cut to the heart*, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’” (Acts 2:37). Now compare that response with the response Stephen received after sharing the gospel: “When they heard these things they were *cut to the heart*, and they gnashed at him with their teeth” (Acts 7:54).

Conviction will result either in repentance (the first example) or a hardening of one’s heart (the second example). If repentance is the result, the one repenting is positioned to receive God’s mercy and grace, with the goodness of God leading them to repentance (Romans 2:4). Those who responded with, “What must we do?” were positioned to both hear the gospel—which included repentance—and embrace salvation.

Paul lends further insight into the beauty of repentance:

For godly sorrow produces repentance *leading* to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, *what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what*

fear, *what* vehement desire, *what* zeal, *what* vindication!
 In all *things* you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter. (2 Corinthians 7:10–11)

Paul clearly points out that godly sorrow produces a change of nature, a change marked by diligence, a clearing of oneself, indignation, reverential fear, vehement desire, zeal, and vindication. So we see that conviction creates godly sorrow and, if handled correctly, this sorrow will result in genuine repentance—the gateway to salvation.

If Jesus, John the Baptist, and the disciples announced the Good News with a call to repentance, shouldn't we do the same?



Repentance is not just a choice to walk away from sin but also a choice to turn toward God. For this to happen, you must give Jesus the lordship of your life. To embrace Jesus as “Lord” means you give Him complete ownership of your life. The moment you do this, God delivers you from the realm of darkness and transfers you into the light and glory of His kingdom.

If you want to receive salvation through Jesus Christ, pray these words:

God in Heaven, I acknowledge that I am a sinner and have fallen short of Your righteous standard. I deserve to be judged for eternity for my sin. Thank You for not leaving me in this state, for I believe that You sent Jesus Christ, Your only begotten Son, who was born of the virgin Mary, to die for me and carry my judgment to the Cross. I believe He was raised again on the third day and is now seated at Your right hand as my Lord and Savior. So on this day, I repent of my independence from You and give my life entirely to the Lordship of Jesus.

Jesus, I confess You as my Lord and Savior. Come into my life through Your Spirit and change me into a child of God. I renounce the things of darkness which I once held on to, and from this day forward I will no longer live for myself, but by Your grace, I will live for You.

Thank You, Lord. My life is now completely in Your hands and according to Your Word, I shall never be ashamed. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Congratulations! Welcome to the family of God. I encourage you to share your exciting news with another believer. It's also important that you join a Bible-believing local church and connect with others who can encourage you in your new faith.

You have just embarked on the most remarkable journey. May you grow in revelation, grace, and friendship with God every day!



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is repentance necessary?
2. What initiates repentance, and what should our response be?
3. What is the result of godly sorrow?
4. When repenting, what are you turning away from and what are you turning to?

CHAPTER THREE

Faith toward God

Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of . . . faith toward God. (Hebrews 6:1)

The gospel is, ultimately, the Good News of how God has redeemed and reconciled humanity to Himself through Jesus Christ. For this reason, Paul says in regard to the gospel:

For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes—the Jew first and also the Gentile. This Good News tells us how God makes us right in his sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. As the Scriptures say, “It is through faith that a righteous person has life.” (Romans 1:16–17 NLT)

The gospel reveals the way of salvation from sin and its consequences. Faith in the Good News of what Jesus has done releases God’s saving power into our lives. The actual gospel message, as stated in the Bible, consists of definite facts. Paul offered a great summary of the fundamental facts of the gospel:

Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which

you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that Word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. (1 Corinthians 15:1–4)

The basic facts of the gospel are:

1. Jesus Christ died for our sins (atonement).
2. Jesus Christ rose from the dead on the third day (resurrection).
3. If we believe in Jesus's death and resurrection, we will be made right with God and transformed into His image (righteousness).

Salvation is predicated on Jesus's death and resurrection. There is nothing we can do to be saved and made right with God apart from believing in the redemptive work Jesus did to reconcile us to God. Consider what Paul wrote about the finished work of Jesus:

For He made Him (Jesus) who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are. For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet God, in His grace, freely makes us right in His sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when He freed us from the penalty for our sins. We are made right with God when we

believe that Jesus sacrificed His life, so that we might find life. (Romans 3:22–25 NLT)

God saved you by His grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. (Ephesians 2:8–9 NLT)

Affirming all that Paul said, the apostle John recorded:

For this is how God loved the world: He gave His one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16 NLT)

Faith is a personal response to the gospel. It is not just mentally acknowledging what Jesus has accomplished for us; it is also believing with the heart. As we hear the gospel, it must be received with faith: “Therefore, we never stop thanking God that when you received His message from us, you didn't think of our words as mere human ideas. You accepted what we said as the very Word of God—which, of course, it is. And this Word continues to work in you who believe” (1 Thessalonian 2:13 NLT). Faith activates the power of God's Word, which also initiates the born-again experience.

Paul explains that salvation comes by believing with the heart and confessing with the mouth the truth of the gospel: “If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved” (Romans 10:9–10 NLT).

Faith in Christ is not without effect. Through faith, an internal transformation occurs. We become:

New Creations: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17); “No one born (begotten) of God [deliberately, knowingly, and habitually] practices sin, for God’s nature abides in him [His principle of life, the divine sperm, remains permanently within him]; and he cannot practice sinning because he is born (begotten) of God. By this it is made clear who take their nature from God and are His children and who take their nature from the devil and are his children: no one who does not practice righteousness [who does not conform to God’s will in purpose, thought, and action] is of God; neither is anyone who does not love his brother (his fellow believer in Christ)” (1 John 3:9–10 AMPC); “Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean. Your filth will be washed away, and you will no longer worship idols. And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart. And I will put My Spirit in you so that you will follow My decrees and be careful to obey My regulations” (Ezekiel 36:25–27 NLT).

Wise, Righteous, Sanctified, Redeemed, Sealed, and Indwelt with the Holy Spirit: “In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of His glory” (Ephesians 1:13–14 ESV); “You are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1 Corinthians 1:30).



“Without faith, it is impossible to please God. For he who comes to God must believe that He exists, and He rewards those who diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6).

Faith is an inner conviction that God exists and can be known in personal experience. It provides the point of contact between the temporal and the eternal.

Outside the sovereignty of God, the way you connect with your Creator, find salvation, and receive a covenant righteousness is through faith. Faith gives us access—from start to finish—to all that Jesus Christ has accomplished for us. This also includes access to God’s grace, which empowers us to build our lives by His strength and wisdom—not our own.

So, after examining what Scripture clearly says in regard to both repentance and faith, we can conclude that without repentance and faith, we cannot be reconciled to God. Paul encouraged us to “continue to advance in faith, assured of a firm foundation to grow upon. Never be shaken from the hope of the gospel you have believed in. And this is the glorious news I preach all over the world” (Colossians 1:23 TPT).

As we mature in faith, growing on the foundation of the gospel, a lifestyle that pleases God is produced—for without faith, it is impossible to please God.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the basic facts of the gospel, and what does it mean to have faith in the gospel?

2. According to Romans 10:9–10, how is salvation initiated?
3. What distinct changes does faith activate internally?

CHAPTER FOUR

Baptisms

Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of . . . baptisms. (Hebrews 6:1–2)

In the previous chapter, we examined how faith gives us access to all that salvation provides. This includes the privilege of belonging to God’s family and becoming members of His kingdom. The next foundational doctrine we are going to discuss is the idea of baptisms.

Notice the word “baptism” here is used in the plural, not the singular. It is “the doctrine of baptisms” (plural), not “the doctrine of baptism” (singular). Therefore, we can conclude that the writer of Hebrews is alluding to more than one type of baptism.

As we examine the different types of baptisms, it is important to keep in mind the word “baptism” is from the Greek word “baptizo,” which means, “to immerse, submerge, saturate; to make overwhelmed.” Participating in baptism is both a *total* and *transitional* experience—*total* in the sense that it involves the whole person and *transitional* in the sense that it marks a passing out of one place or stage into another.

Throughout the New Testament, there are five distinct types of baptisms mentioned:

The Baptism of John the Baptist. This is a baptism of repentance: “John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins” (Mark 1:4). This was not just a foreshadowing of New Covenant baptism; it was the beginning of New Covenant baptism, “For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John” (Matthew 11:13). John the Baptist’s message is considered “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ” (Mark 1:1).

Repentance is a transition of a person’s total being from sin into righteousness; a transition from self-governance to full submission to God.

Baptism into the Body of Christ. The moment you received Jesus Christ as your Lord, you became one with Him—the body and the head are one! “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit . . . Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually” (1 Corinthians 12:13, 27).

Therefore, baptism into the Body of Christ is a total transition from the kingdom of darkness and a full immersion into God’s kingdom of light: “For He has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of His dear Son, who purchased our freedom and forgave our sins” (Colossians 1:13–14 NLT).

This baptism is a baptism of belonging. Because you now belong to the family of God, you partake of the family benefits. These benefits include:

Adoption as sons and daughters into God’s family:

“God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what He wanted to do, and it gave Him great pleasure” (Ephesians 1:5 NLT).

Citizenship in God's heavenly kingdom: “Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” (Ephesians 2:19).

Healing and Provision. The redemptive work Jesus accomplished on the cross includes healing and provision—not just forgiveness of sins. Isaiah prophesied, “He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5). Peter affirmed, “He personally carried our sins in his body on the cross so that we can be dead to sin and live for what is right. By His wounds you are healed” (1 Peter 2:24 NLT).

All manner of Blessings: “Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing” (Ephesians 1:3)

An Eternal Inheritance: “Furthermore, because we are united with Christ, we have received an inheritance from God, for He chose us in advance, and He makes everything work out according to His plan” (Ephesians 1:11 NLT).

Water Baptism. Being baptized into Christ is the baptism that believers initially identify as relating to the death and resurrection of Jesus. When a believer is water baptized, they make a public and outward declaration of an inward transformation of heart that has first occurred through repentance and faith in the atoning work of Jesus Christ. Water baptism is announcing that we are not only turning from sin, but we are also dying to it. We are declaring that our old life and sinful nature are now dead. Conversely, we are also declaring that we are being resurrected into a new way of life in Christ. Getting lowered into

the waters of baptism is symbolic of being crucified and buried with Christ. Being lifted out of the water is symbolic of being resurrected with Christ. Therefore, water baptism represents the power of Jesus's death and resurrection. Regarding the significance of this baptism, Paul wrote:

Or have you forgotten that when we were joined with Christ Jesus in baptism, we joined Him in his death? For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives. (Romans 6:3–4 NLT)

When you came to Christ, you were “circumcised,” but not by a physical procedure. Christ performed a spiritual circumcision—the cutting away of your sinful nature. For you were buried with Christ when you were baptized. And with Him you were raised to new life because you trusted the mighty power of God, who raised Christ from the dead. (Colossians 2:11–12 NLT)

And baptism, which is a figure...does now also save you [from inward questionings and fears], not by the removing of outward body filth [bathing], but by [providing you with] the answer of a good and clear conscience (inward cleanness and peace) before God [because you are demonstrating what you believe to be yours] through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 3:21 AMP)

Water baptism is one of our first opportunities to honor and obey Jesus after becoming His. Before an individual can partake in water baptism, there are certain conditions that must be fulfilled. These conditions include the following actions:

Repent. On the day of Pentecost, Peter boldly announced, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name

of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:37–38). Repentance must precede baptism; for it is the first response God requires from anyone who desires to be saved.

Believe. As we saw in the previous chapter, faith in the gospel is required to activate its saving power. Jesus stated, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:15–16). Everywhere the gospel is proclaimed, those who desire to be saved are required to repent, believe, and be baptized.

Decide. A believer must make the decision to be baptized for themselves. Others cannot make that decision for them. The requirements to repent and believe indicate that the one making this decision is aware of what they are committing to. By doing this, one openly declares that they are dead to their old life and are publicly stating that they have given their life to Jesus and are committed to live by His grace.

So water baptism is a complete immersion into Christ—publicly declaring death to our old way of life and a commitment to God’s way of life: “My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20 NLT).

Holy Spirit Baptism. This is a separate experience from water baptism by which a believer is filled with the Holy Spirit, empowering them to represent Jesus effectively. Receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit is not a suggestion, option, or recommendation—it’s a command!

Jesus clearly instructed:

And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, “which,” He said, “you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” (Acts 1:4–5)

Jesus also revealed the purpose of this baptism, saying:

Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high. (Luke 24:49)

But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

With the baptism of the Holy Spirit comes power to live this new life Jesus has made available to us. Endued with this power from God, we are set free from the power of sin and equipped with supernatural gifts from the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12). God desires for all believers to be filled with His Spirit. Peter shared, “For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:39).



I came to know Jesus Christ as Savior through a fraternity brother at Purdue University in 1979. Once I turned from my own ways and confessed Jesus Christ as my Lord, I knew I was born into the kingdom of God. There was no question I was saved. However, my life was lacking something, and for several months, I couldn't figure out what it was. The Lord seemed dis-

tant, even though I knew I was His child. When I read the Bible, it was difficult to comprehend, and I was only getting a limited amount of understanding, even though I read it diligently. I also lacked the ability to walk a victorious life over temptation, especially with the peer pressure that came as a university student.

As time passed, I began to meet people who seemed to have a much closer walk with the Lord than I did. They talked of Him in a personal way. I was baffled. They seemed to have strength and insight into the Lord's ways that I didn't have. *What was the disconnect?* I wondered. Then as I studied my Bible, I realized there was an encounter with the Lord that I had not yet experienced—the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This experience was the turning point in my walk with God.

The baptism of the Holy Spirit cannot be earned or purchased; it must be received. The Scriptures reveal three simple steps that position us to receive this baptism:

Desire. Jesus revealed that the level of hunger and thirst you have for God will determine the level in which you shall be filled: “Blessed *are* those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled” (Matthew 5:6).

Ask. Jesus taught, “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!” (Luke 11:13).

Believe. Paul reminded the Galatian church, “This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?” (Galatians 3:2).

The baptism of the Holy Spirit is an experience in which you become filled to overflowing with God's Spirit—where His

presence overwhelms and saturates you until you're consumed with God Himself: "[That you may really come] to know [practically, through experience for yourselves] the love of Christ, which far surpasses mere knowledge [without experience]; that you may be filled [through all your being] unto all the fullness of God [may have the richest measure of the divine Presence, and become a body wholly filled and flooded with God Himself]!" (Ephesians 3:20 AMPC).

Please understand, the infilling of the Holy Spirit is not a one-time event, but a continual experience. Paul encouraged, "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but ever be filled and stimulated with the [Holy] Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18 AMPC). The Holy Spirit is central to our Christian experience.



BAPTISM OF FIRE

This baptism is directly related to the Holy Spirit baptism. John the Baptist said of Jesus, "I baptize you with water; but someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I'm not even worthy to be His slave and untie the straps of His sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (Luke 3:16 NLT).

The baptism of fire represents purification. As you are filled with the Holy Spirit, He begins a work of sanctification which produces refinement and maturity. The baptism of fire includes an element of suffering. Let me be clear that God is not behind the suffering. But He will use it to strengthen our faith and mature our understanding of His goodness and faithfulness (see the first chapter in the book of James).

The apostle Peter wrote:

So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you must endure many trials for a little while. These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world. (1 Peter 1:6–7 NLT)

Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. (1 Peter 4:12–13)

The baptism of fire is also referred to as “The Baptism of Suffering.” This is a unique baptism in which you are immersed into a season of refining for the purpose of preparation. The fulfillment of God's plan for your life will inevitably demand a total surrender of your whole being—spirit, soul, and body—into God's hands.

This baptism of suffering is mentioned in Mark 10:38. Jesus is approached by two disciples—James and John—who ask Him for the privilege to sit in a place of honor with Him at the right and left hand of His throne.

In response, Jesus said, “You don't know what you are asking! Are you able to drink from the bitter cup of suffering I am about to drink? Are you able to be baptized with *the baptism of suffering* I must be baptized with?”

“Oh yes,” both disciples replied, “we are able!”

Then Jesus told them, “You will indeed drink from My bitter cup and be baptized with My *baptism of suffering*. But I have

no right to say who will sit on my right or my left. God has prepared those places for the ones He has chosen” (Mark 10:39 NLT).

Unfortunately, many don’t understand the purpose of trials and suffering. To enlighten us, Paul wrote, “For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake” (Philippians 1:29).

Does this statement make you scratch your head a little when you consider that suffering has been granted to you? How can “granted” and “suffering” be in the same sentence? Could it be that you’ve held an incorrect view of suffering?

In any trials we face, God allows these hardships for a purpose—to produce character and capacity within us. God will permit a hardship today that will simulate the levels of pressure He knows we’re going to face tomorrow. God is using our present challenges to strengthen us for greater conquest in our future. That’s why a trial always feels greater than our present level of preparedness or responsibility. [Please note, I use the words “allows” and “permit” carefully, as God is not the author of temptations. James states, “Remember, when you are being tempted, do not say, ‘God is tempting me.’ God is never tempted to do wrong, and He never tempts anyone else” (James 1:13, NLT)].

Through any hardship or suffering, there is always promise. James tells us, “Consider it a sheer gift, friends, when tests and challenges come at you from all sides. You know that under pressure, your faith-life is forced into the open and shows its true colors. So don’t try to get out of anything prematurely. Let it do its work so you become mature and well-developed, not deficient in any way” (James 1:2–4 MSG).

When you experience suffering and throughout it you remain obedient to God, you will come out of it stronger, well-developed, and prepared for what God has planned next for you. James also informed us of what to expect on the other side of suffering, “Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him” (James 1:12).

The word “crown” conveys authority, and with authority comes power. Jesus entered a time of testing in the wilderness in order to be tempted by the devil. Because of His obedience and perseverance, He emerged with greater authority and power (see Luke 4:1, 14). Just as Jesus did, we too can emerge from suffering with greater authority and power.

My book *The Bait of Satan* has been a best-seller for over twenty-five years. It has set countless of people free from the deadly trap of offense. Over the years, my team and I have received an abundance of testimonies letting us know how this message has profoundly impacted their lives, marriages, and churches. However, before I ever wrote one word, I first went through a season of suffering in which I had to navigate a very painful betrayal. This season lasted several years, during which I learned to find freedom from offense and grow in obedience to God. As I came through that time of hardship successfully, I could speak and write on the subject of offense with conviction, authority, and power. The message was first shaped within me before it was spoken and written through me. Because I gained victory in that area, I could impart strength to others to do the same.

Let me reiterate: the sufferings of Christ we are permitted to experience are not about suffering from the things He has redeemed us from, such as sickness, disease, or poverty. The suffering that we experience is dying to self and the sinful nature

of the flesh. As Peter noted, “Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin” (1 Peter 4:1).

A baptism (immersion) of suffering is for the purpose of preparation, from which we will emerge with a new disposition needed to fulfill our destiny in Christ. Much as I experienced, the fire that initially purified us will now liberate others that we come in contact with.



One central theme is congruent throughout the different types of baptisms—full immersion. This means that you’re all in—nothing held back! You’re fully committed to this new way of life.

It’s a beautiful exchange between you and God—your life for His.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is water baptism significant? What does it represent?
2. What is the result of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and why is it important in the life of a believer?
3. When we are baptized into the Body of Christ, what are the benefits of belonging to the family of God?
4. Having an understanding of the Baptism of Suffering, why is this baptism important to you?

CHAPTER FIVE

Laying On of Hands

Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of . . . laying on of hands . . . (Hebrews 6:1–2)

To understand the doctrine of “laying on of hands,” we must first understand the kingdom principle regarding authority. Scripture clearly informs us that all authority is from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God (Romans 13:1). Let me say it another way—when you meet God, you meet authority, because He and His authority are inseparable.

Show me a person who has no regard for authority and I will show you someone who doesn’t know God. Show me someone who has a deep respect for authority and I will show you someone who either knows God or is close to finding Him. This creates conflict in so many because they have had mean, cruel, harsh, and even dishonest authorities. To this I’d say, please reexamine Romans 13:1 and notice Paul didn’t write that all authority is godly. The authority may be from God, but the behavior is not. God’s ability to work through legitimate authority—despite its many imperfections—is another testament to the wonder of His sovereignty.

Authority is, ultimately, the way of life in God's kingdom. By submitting to it, we come under His divine covering and protection and within this context, blessing and power are transferred.

I realize that this foundational doctrine can seem obscure, but with further examination, you'll understand its significance. The laying on of hands is an act by which a legitimate authority places hands upon another person with a definite spiritual purpose. This act is accompanied by prayer, a prophetic utterance, or both, and it signifies impartation and identification.

The practice of laying on of hands occurs throughout the Bible—in both the Old and New Testaments—and can be found in diverse circumstances. This act was so important to our spiritual fathers that Paul warned that it should not be practiced carelessly: “Do not lay hands on anyone hastily . . .” (1 Timothy 5:22).

There are several specific purposes for the laying on of hands seen throughout Scripture. In this chapter, we will briefly examine each of them.

IMPARTING BLESSING

Then Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it upon Ephraim's head, who was the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh's head, guiding his hands knowingly, for Manasseh was the firstborn. (Genesis 48:14)

Blessing is imparted through the laying on of hands. The core definition of “blessing” means to empower someone to prosper. This empowerment is critical to our spiritual growth. In the account above, Israel blesses Joseph's sons, Manasseh and

Ephraim, by placing his hands on them. He deliberately places his right hand on Ephraim. Traditionally, the firstborn would inherit the greater blessing; however, Israel guided his hands knowingly, as he was led by the Holy Spirit. This indicated that there is not only significance in the laying on of hands but also the way in which it is done. Blessing is passed down and transmitted generationally through the laying on of hands.

APPOINTING LEADERSHIP

Moses appointed Joshua to succeed him. At Joshua's ordination, he was appointed by the laying on of hands with witnesses present. This also included a transference of spiritual authority: "And the Lord said to Moses: 'Take Joshua the son of Nun with you, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him; set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation, and inaugurate him in their sight. And you shall give some of your authority to him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient' . . . So Moses did as the Lord commanded him. He took Joshua and set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation. And he laid his hands on him and inaugurated him, just as the Lord commanded by the hand of Moses" (Numbers 27:18–20, 22–23).

In the New Testament, we see leaders appointed to handle the practical affairs of the early church—in one specific case, it was the administering of meals to the widows. Once they were carefully selected, the apostles laid their hands on them, empowering them for kingdom service: "Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business . . . And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and

Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them” (Acts 6:3, 5–6). The apostles were diligent to seek out people who had a good reputation and were filled with the Holy Spirit. This careful positioning of new ministry team leaders was significant to the growth and reach of the gospel.

THE BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Although individuals can be baptized with the Holy Spirit without the laying on of hands, there are many accounts of believers being filled with the Spirit after the laying on of hands: “Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the Word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit” (Acts 8:14–17).

IMPARTATION OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

In the Old Testament, through the laying on of hands, we see an account of Moses imparting the wisdom within himself into Joshua: “Now Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him; so the children of Israel heeded him, and did as the Lord had commanded Moses” (Deuteronomy 34:9).

We also see an example of this in the New Testament with Paul and Timothy. Paul warned Timothy: “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” (1 Timothy 4:14). Paul, through the laying on of hands, imparted a spiritual gift into Timothy which established and empowered him for ministry. Seeing his gift being neglected, Paul wrote to him, “Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands” (2 Timothy 1:6).

Throughout church history, a common practice when empowering and establishing new believers was the laying on of hands. For this reason, Paul wrote, “For I long to see, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established” (Romans 1:11).

COMMISSIONING OF MINISTERS

When Paul and Barnabas were sent out on their first missionary journey, the leaders at the church in Antioch came together to fast and pray. As they sought the Lord together, the Holy Spirit clearly indicated that these two men were to be separated for a specific task destined for them: “As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul (Paul) for the work to which I have called them.’ Then, having fasted and prayed, and *laid hands on them*, they sent them away” (Acts 13:3).

Lisa and I have had a similar experience to Barnabas and Saul. During the late 1980s, while I was a youth pastor, the Spirit of God revealed to me that change was coming: “You will be removed from being youth pastor,” He said, “and I will send you to churches and cities from the east coast to the west coast of America; from the Canadian border to the Mexican border; to Alaska and Hawaii . . .”

But it didn't happen the next day or even that week! Many months passed after I'd received the word that change was to occur. Then one day my pastor walked into a meeting and said that the Lord had shown him that one of his pastors (there were eleven of us on the team) would be traveling full-time soon and would no longer serve on our church's staff. "John Bevere, that man is you," he said. A short time later in January 1990, the pastor laid hands on Lisa and me, and we have been traveling full-time ever since! It's safe to say that we have seen much more fruit manifested by waiting on God's timing than if we had launched ourselves when we thought we were ready.

HEALING THE SICK

The healing power of God can be transmitted by believers through the laying on of hands. This was modeled by Jesus, who would heal the sick and cast out demons through laying on of hands: "All those who had any sick with various diseases brought them to Him; and He laid His hands on every one of them and healed them. And demons also came out of many" (Luke 4:40–41).

Before ascending to heaven, Jesus commissioned believers to continue His work by preaching the gospel and destroying the works of the devil: "And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name . . . they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover" (Mark 16:17–18).

As we lay hands on others, we provide a point of contact for heaven to invade earth.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Where did authority originate, and why is it important?
2. Explain what Scripture means by the laying on of hands.
3. List the six benefits of the ministry of laying on of hands.

CHAPTER SIX

Resurrection of the Dead

Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of . . . resurrection of the dead . . .
(Hebrews 6:1–2)

The resurrection is the great hope of the believer. Paul wrote that attaining resurrection was his goal—the heavenly prize. He had his eye on the final phase of the building process—final salvation. He wrote, “If, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me” (Philippians 3:11–12).

You are the focal point of God’s love. That is why He will return for you and bring you to Himself forever. Jesus desires for us to be with Him throughout eternity—so much so, that he’s prepared and reserved a place for us, so that where He is, we can be also. He assured, “In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again

and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:2–3). With a promise like this, it’s no wonder the Spirit and the bride say “Come!” (Revelation 22:17 NLT).

With hope of the resurrection, we need not fear death. This hope positions us to live ready for the Lord’s return. The first-century church lived with the expectation that Jesus could return at any given moment—knowing that He will return like a thief in the night. This hope was by no means an escapism mentality; rather, it filled them with a sense of urgency to occupy their sphere of influence with kingdom purpose.

The resurrection will give us entrance into the eternal realm where we will forever be with the Lord. Therefore, it’s imperative we gain understanding of what awaits us.

There will be two resurrections: The resurrection of the just (for followers of Christ) and the resurrection of the unjust (for those who choose their own way). The difference is that the unbeliever will have a corrupted spirit, soul, and body forever; while the believer will have an undefiled and glorified spirit, soul, and body forever. In reference to these two types of resurrection, Jesus shared:

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 . . . Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation. (John 5:25, 28–29)

To comprehend the full scope of the salvation process, we must understand man’s triune nature of spirit, soul, and body: “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and

may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1Thessalonians 5:23). At the moment of salvation, our spirit is instantly saved and made right before God. Our soul (mind, will, emotions) is being saved through a process of renewal; while our bodies are yet to be saved as we await resurrection, which will consummate our salvation experience. In the meantime, our bodies can have a foretaste of resurrection life through God’s power, miracles, and gifts of healing (1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 8:11).

During Paul’s day, there was much debate concerning the teaching on resurrection. For many, it was a foreign concept which was unique to the gospel message. Due to his strong stance on the matter, Paul experienced much conflict and trouble. However, this did not cause Paul to become silent but rather indignant—even putting his own life at risk. He boldly asserted:

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? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching *is* empty and your faith *is* also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise. For if *the* dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith *is* futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. But now Christ is risen from the dead and has become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man *came* death, by Man also *came* the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be

made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the first fruits, afterward those *who are* Christ's at His coming. (1 Corinthians 15:12–23)

As we discussed earlier in the chapter on faith, one of the most important facts of the gospel is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus was raised from the dead. Removing the resurrection from our gospel message forfeits its potency and our faith becomes futile. That is why Paul refused to allow the gospel to be compromised—not permitting that the teaching on the resurrection be eliminated or neglected.

Jesus was the first man to receive a resurrection body. Because Jesus was resurrected, it guarantees it will happen to us. He is our hope! The assurance of our bodily resurrection is given through the indwelling Holy Spirit Who is the “seal of our redemption” (Ephesians 1:13–14). Paul boldly wrote, “And Christ lives within you, so even though your body will die because of sin, the Spirit gives you life because you have been made right with God. The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, He will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you” (Romans 8:10–11 NLT).

This is wonderful news. The Spirit of God whets our appetite by giving us a taste of what's ahead. He puts heaven in our hearts so that we'll never settle for less. Paul informed us that we should encourage each other with this hope:

But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the Word of the Lord, that we who are alive *and* remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who

are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words. (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18)

The Bible clearly tells us that when Jesus returns for the church—His bride—we shall be changed! Our bodies will be transformed in an instant. To help us understand the resurrection, Paul used the analogy of a seed of corn sown in the ground. Evidently, something different than what was sown emerges from the soil—something much more glorious.

The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being.” The last Adam *became* a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. The first man *was* of the earth, *made* of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. As *was* the *man* of dust, so also *are* those *who are made* of dust; and as *is* the heavenly *Man*, so also *are* those *who are* heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the *man* of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly *Man*. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the

last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” (1 Corinthians 15:42–54)

In this passage, Paul notes four distinct changes that will occur when our natural bodies are transformed.

Corruption to Incorruption. The new body will not know death or decay. It will remain eternally healthy and strong. Death will have no power over this new body. Well-meaning believers frequently ask, “Why do Christians still experience sickness, disease, and death?” The answer is complex; but one thing is true—our bodies are not yet saved. Until we receive our final salvation, our bodies are still subject to death. However, as already stated, until we receive our final salvation, God has provided gifts of His Spirit that provide healings and miracles. A day is coming in which God will wipe away every tear. We will no longer know pain and suffering as we do now.

Dishonor to Glory. Our new bodies will be glorified—they will no longer be dishonored through sickness, disease, injuries, and infirmities. These resurrection bodies will be splendid—functioning at peak performance. The prophet Daniel foretold, “Many of those who sleep in the dust . . . shall awake . . . Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever” (Daniel 12:2–3).

Weakness to Power. Resurrection bodies will not need to sleep, rest, or recover. We will not know fatigue but will be full of life and energy. There will also be supernatural abilities unknown to mortal men. Paul informed, “But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for Him to return as our Savior. He will take our weak mortal bodies and change them into glorious bodies like His own, using the same power with which He will bring everything under His control” (Philippians 3:20–21 NLT).

Natural to Spiritual. The substance of this new body will differ from flesh. It is designed for eternity; yet it has the capabilities to function in both the spirit realm and the natural realm. From the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus, we see that this resurrected body is not bound by gravity (Acts 1, Revelation 11), it can pass through walls (John 20:19, 26), it can be touched—not like vapor or a “ghost” (John 20:27), it can eat physical food (Luke 24:41–43), and it can be both visible and invisible (Luke 24:31).

These changes are but a glimpse of what the Lord has planned for us. With great expectation, Paul expressed, “And we believers also groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering. We, too, wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as His adopted children, including the new bodies He has promised us” (Romans 8:23 NLT).

We groan internally, waiting for that final salvation—the resurrection. Paul explained this yearning perfectly: “While we live in these earthly bodies, we groan and sigh, but it’s not that we want to die and get rid of these bodies that clothe us. Rather, we

want to put on our new bodies so that these dying bodies will be swallowed up by life” (2 Corinthians 4:5 NLT). C.S. Lewis also offered a wonderful explanation for this internal dissatisfaction: “If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.”

Jesus is coming back and will receive us to Himself. As believers, we are destined for a glorious future! Allow this hope to anchor your heart.

So do not throw away this confident trust in the Lord. Remember the great reward it brings you! Patient endurance is what you need now, so that you will continue to do God’s Will. Then you will receive all that he has promised. “For in just a little while, the Coming One will come and not delay. And my righteous ones will live by faith. But I will take no pleasure in anyone who turns away.” But we are not like those who turn away from God to their own destruction. We are the faithful ones, whose souls will be saved. (Hebrews 10:35–39 NLT)



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the three phases of our salvation experience? Briefly explain each of them.
2. What are the four distinct changes that will occur to our bodies at resurrection?
3. Why is the resurrection the hope of every believer?
4. Until we receive our final salvation—the redemption of our bodies—what has God made available so we may experience victory over death?

CHAPTER SEVEN

Eternal Judgment

Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of . . . eternal judgment. (Hebrews 6:1–2)

How terrible would it be to enter eternity and realize everything you thought you knew about it was wrong? Movies and media have filled our minds with the erroneous idea that heaven simply consists of baby angels playing violins while they float around on clouds. Some of us haven't given eternity much thought, concluding there is no life after death. Even more disturbing is the misguided belief that all roads lead to heaven.

These misconceptions—along with many other incorrect views of heaven—are far from the truth. The Bible has a lot to say about heaven, eternity, and judgment. According to the Scriptures, there are two main judgments that will be carried out. The distinctive feature that marks each of these judgments is the type of seat upon which the Judge will sit.

These two judgment seats include:

The Great White Throne. Those to be judged here will be all the remaining dead who will be resurrected at the close of the millennium. These are those who did not embrace God's salvation and consequently were not caught up with Jesus at His return for His church.

The Judgment Seat of Christ. This is where Christ's own followers and servants will be judged—not for condemnation, but for reward.

To understand the judgment of believers, let's look at what Paul wrote regarding this day:

Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. (2 Corinthians 5:9–10)

Numerous Christians are unaware that they will give an account of their life. Believers will be judged. Decisions will be made. Many Christians believe that all future judgment is eradicated by their salvation. Indeed, Jesus's blood cleanses us from the sins that would have kept us from the kingdom; however, it does not exempt us from the judgment of how we conducted ourselves as believers, whether good or bad.

When considering the believer's judgment, we must understand how it differs from the unbeliever's judgment. The believer's judgment will occur long before the Great White Throne Judgment. The timing is not made clear in Scripture. However, we do know that it will take place sometime after the church is caught away in the clouds (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18) and before the thousand-year reign of Christ commences. So, there are approximately a thousand years separating the two major judgments.

The Judgment Seat of Christ is literally the divine tribunal of God. Scripture declares that the Father has committed all judgment to the Son (John 5:22). Jesus Christ is not only our Savior; He's also our Judge and will soon judge His own household. The simplest way to define the original word for judgment is *a decision resulting from an investigation—a decision for or against.*

For a believer, how we respond to the gospel determines *where* we'll spend eternity—heaven or hell, but the way we live as a believer determines *how* we'll spend eternity. To remove any confusion around this judgment, let's briefly consider certain parameters relating to the believer's judgment.

There will be no condemnation. True believers in Christ will never have to face judgment of which the outcome will be final condemnation. In fact, a true believer in Christ will never need to be judged for sins they have committed because Jesus has already paid the price for them.

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. (Romans 8:1)

He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (John 3:18)

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

There will be eternal rewards or losses. Scripture reveals that the eternal rewards and positions given to believers will not only differ but will span a wide range. They will vary from seeing everything lost and burned up all the way to reigning beside

Christ for all eternity. For this reason, the apostle John exhorted:

Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward. (2 John 8)

Again, rewards will vary, ranging from full-, partial-, and no-reward scenarios. Many of us flinch when we hear the terms “lost” and “burned up” in relation to our lives. We find it hard to believe that this could ever happen in heaven. Again, this is because of our misconception about heaven and eternity. Yet, this is made crystal clear to us in Scripture. Paul wrote:

For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, *you are* God’s building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation *with* gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 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. If anyone’s work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. (1 Corinthians 3:9–15)

Returning to our analogy of a building, we determine how we build our lives, and we have two options for how we build. One is to gravitate toward the temporal—that which appeases the fallen nature (wood, grass, straw). The other is to live in line with our born-again spirit’s desire—following the eternal Word of God (gold, silver, precious stones). How we choose to build or live our lives will determine what happens when the fire of

God's presence examines our work. Not only will our works be examined, our thoughts, motives, and intentions will be exposed as well.

The major areas Jesus will examine are:

Did you fulfill your calling? Everyone has a divine calling on their lives. We all serve important roles in advancing God's kingdom. At the Judgment Seat of Christ, we will give an account of the purpose, calling, and gifts that God entrusted to us. Paul wrote, "For God's gifts and his call can never be withdrawn" (Romans 11:29 NLT). It's important for us to know that, in regard to our calling, we won't be judged according to what we did but according to what we were called to do. Some called into ministry have gone into business. Some have gone into ministry who were called into business, to raise children, government, and education—the list continues extensively. In regard to our own calling, we are all accountable to God. Discover your calling and then live it to the fullest.

How did you steward what was entrusted to you? Jesus explained the concept of stewardship through His parable of the Talents, in which He likened the kingdom of heaven to a man traveling to a far country (symbolic of Jesus) and entrusted his servants with talents. To one he gave five, to another two, and to another he gave one, respectively. When he returned from his trip, he called his servants to himself and asked for an account of the talents entrusted to them. The first two multiplied their talents and were rewarded; while the last buried his talent and suffered loss. The master was not pleased with him (see Mathew 25:14–29). Not every believer receives the same level of gifts or calling, but we each receive a certain measure of stewardship from the Lord. Each one will give

an account in proportion to what they were given. God has called you to multiply what He has placed in your hands. What will you offer Him when He returns?

What was your personal influence on others? We will give an account of the way we treated others. Our acts of kindness to those around us can have a profound impact on the eternal rewards stored up for us. How we treat others is greatly determined by how we view them—which is evident in how we relate to family, neighbors, coworkers, and people like waiters, bellmen, or other service people. Other than how we treat people, the greatest influence we can have on an individual is to lead them to Jesus: “He who is wise captures human lives [for God, as a fisher of men—he gathers and receives them for eternity]” (Proverbs 11:30 AMP).

RUN YOUR RACE

If you knew that you had one day to determine where and how you would live for the next million years, would it change the way you lived in that one day? I’m sure you would live that day with intentionality.

This is similar to the opportunity we have as believers to make the most of our time on earth.

Like sands through the hourglass, our days are fleeting. Every year, month, week, day, and hour matter. In comparison to eternity, life is short. Moses understood that the way we live on earth will echo throughout eternity; therefore, he prayed, “Teach us to make the most of our time . . . and make our efforts successful. Yes, make our efforts successful” (Psalm 90:12, 17 NLT).

Living with an eternal perspective will greatly maximize our efforts and time on earth. We will make decisions differently and endure things we would not necessarily endure if we didn't have an eternal perspective.

The apostle Paul understood the importance of stewarding our time on earth well. As he approached the final days of his life, he expressed, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing” (2 Timothy 4:7–8).

Your life on earth matters. Keep your eyes on the prize—fight, run your race, keep the faith! Make your life count, not only for now, but also for eternity.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Fill in the gaps. How we respond to the cross determines _____ we'll spend eternity; however, the way in which we live as a believer determines _____ we'll spend eternity.
2. What is the difference between the Great White Throne Judgment and the Judgment seat of Christ?
3. Considering eternity, why is our time on earth important? List the areas a believer will be judged on.
4. How does living with an eternal perspective affect the way you live?

A FINAL WORD FROM JOHN

Congratulations! Welcome to the family of God. You have just embarked on the most remarkable journey. This is only the beginning. The writer of Hebrews encouraged:

Therefore let us go on and get past the elementary stage in the teachings and doctrine of Christ (the Messiah), advancing steadily toward the completeness and perfection that belong to spiritual maturity. (Hebrews 6:1 AMPC)

You are a child of God and like any good father, God wants you to grow up. The moment you're born again, a spiritual growth process begins. Please understand, spiritual maturity is not a destination but a gradual, progressive process of development. The apostle Paul assured, "I'm fully convinced that the One who began this glorious work in you will faithfully continue the process of maturing you and will put His finishing touches to it until the unveiling of our Lord Jesus Christ!" (Philippians 1:6 TPT). Until Jesus returns, you're a work in progress!

When a person is born again, the new spiritual nature produced within that person immediately requires spiritual nourishment to promote growth. God's word provides the necessary nourishment our souls need and desire.

Spiritual growth is not automatic—it requires intentionality to grow and develop. I encourage you to share your exciting news with another believer. It's also important that you join a Bible-believing local church and connect with others who can encourage you in your new faith.

Sincerely,

John Bevere