

Let Us Go on to Maturity

*The Elementary Principles
of the Christian Life
According to Hebrews 6*

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Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature.

--1 Cor. 14:20

Preface

The Church's mission is not to just get people saved. Its mission is to produce mature believers. Christ "gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love" (Eph. 4:11-16).

The Greek word for "perfect" (*teleios*) in verse 13 also means "mature." We are not supposed to remain children who are deceived by every doctrine that comes along, but we are supposed to grow up and become mature, as Christ is mature. That is the Church's mission.

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews tells his readers that they are immature. He says that they are babes who still need the milk of the word instead of solid food (Heb. 5:12-14). But his goal is to not leave them there. "Therefore," he says,

"leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection" (Heb. 6:1). The Greek word for "perfection" is again *teleios*. He means, "Let us go on to maturity."

The writer then lists the elementary principles of Christ in Heb. 6:1-2: repentance from dead works, faith toward God, the doctrine of baptisms, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. He says that these principles are the foundation of Christian living and that he should not have to lay this foundation again. His readers should already know what they are. However, it seems to me that many Christians today are not familiar with these six principles and so this book intends to lay that foundation for them by teaching what these elementary principles are. For the sake of context, we will start at Heb. 5:11 and go to Heb. 6:8.

It is my hope that this book will help believers along the way as they mature in Christ.

Chapter 1

Babes in Christ

Heb. 5:11-14

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says in Heb. 5:11 that he has much to say about Melchizedek, but it is difficult to explain to his readers since they have become dull of hearing. Dull, in the Greek, means "lazy." His readers have come to the place in which they no longer want to put forth the effort to understand what anyone might teach them. What follows from here through chapter 6 is a rebuke and a warning.

In verse 12, he says that his readers should be teachers by now. The office of teacher is one of the official positions in the Church listed in Eph. 4:11, which says that Christ gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers to the Church. That Christ gave only *some* teachers means that not everyone in the Church is called to be a teacher. Paul says the same thing in 1 Cor. 12:29, where he asks, "Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers?" The answer is obviously, "No." Not everyone is called to be a teacher. James, in fact, says that not everyone should want to be a teacher. "My brethren," he says, "let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment" (James 3:1). Therefore, when the writer of the Epistle says that his readers should be teachers, he does not mean that every one of them should take the office of teacher. He

means that every one of them should be able to rightly divide the word of truth and be able to share what they have learned informally with others.

But his readers are not in that place yet. Instead, they need someone to teach them again the first principles of the oracles of God. "Oracles" in Greek is *logion*, which means "a brief utterance." In the New Testament, it always refers to the brief words or utterances of God. The Greek word for "principles" (*stoicheion*) literally means "any first thing." It can refer to the chemical elements which make up every physical thing in the universe. It can also refer to the elementary principles of any art, science, or discipline. In this case, it refers to the elementary principles of Christian living. The writer, therefore, is saying that someone needs to teach his readers once again the elementary principles of Christian living as spoken by God.

The writer also says that his readers "have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe." Milk represents the elementary principles of Christian living. Every new Christian needs to start with the elementary principles of Christian living just as babies need to start with milk. There is nothing wrong with needing milk, as long as you are a baby. Peter says, "Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious" (1 Pet. 2:1-3). If you are saved, then you have tasted that the Lord is gracious since you were saved by his grace. As long as you are a babe in Christ, you should desire the pure milk of the word. But notice what Peter says newborn babes should be able to do. They should be able to lay aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking. If we have not put those aside, how mature are we really?

Just as babies should not remain babies and not need milk all of their lives, so, too, babes in Christ should not remain babes and need the milk of the word all of their lives. They should not need to be taught the elementary principles of Christian living over and over again. The writer of the Epistle rebukes his readers because they should be past this point by now. Paul rebukes the Corinthians for the same reason. "And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?" (1 Cor. 3:1-3). Paul says that the Corinthians were envious, something that Peter says even newborn babes should be able to lay aside. That the Corinthians were still envious and that strife and divisions existed within the church were proof that the Corinthians were still babes in Christ.

Because the Hebrew readers of this Epistle were still babes in Christ, they were "unskilled in the word of righteousness." "Unskilled" (*apeiros*) in the Greek means "without experience in." Paul told Timothy to "be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). This command applies to us as well. We, too, should be workers who do not need to be ashamed. We, too, should be able to rightly divide the word of truth. But the Hebrew readers of this Epistle did not know how to rightly divide the word of truth because they were still babes in Christ.

The goal, of course, is not to remain babes in Christ. Peter says that newborn babes should desire the milk of the word so that they may grow thereby. Eventually newborn babes must be weaned off of milk. So, too, eventually babes in Christ should be weaned off of the milk of the word and be fed solid

food, that is, they should be able to learn the more advanced principles of Christian living. The writer of the Epistle says that solid food "belongs to those who are of full age." The phrase, "of full age," is only one word in the Greek (*teleios*), which means "complete, perfect." It also means "mature," because those who are mature have completely grown up. The advanced principles of Christian living, therefore, are for mature Christians, just as solid food is for mature people.

The writer defines what he means by mature. The mature are "those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." Another word for "use" is "practice," and another word for "exercised" is "trained." The mature are those who through constant practice have trained their senses to discern both good and evil. As in any training, we will sometimes get it wrong. We will make mistakes. But if we learn from those mistakes, we will grow up and become mature.

The Bible tells us repeatedly that our goal should be to become mature. Yes, Jesus did say that we need to become like little children. "Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them [the disciples], and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven'" (Matt. 18:2-4). To enter the kingdom of heaven, we must humble ourselves, even as little children are humble. But once we are in, we must become mature. Jesus also said, "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). The word "perfect" also means "mature." To the Corinthians, Paul said, "Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature" (1 Cor. 14:20). To the Colossians, Paul said, "Him [Christ] we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that

we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus" (Col. 1:28). Again, the word "perfect" also means "mature."

Paul told the Ephesians that Christ "gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love" (Eph. 4:11-16). Again, the word "perfect" also means "mature." The purpose of the various ministries is to help us to grow up and become mature as Christ is mature. We will not be completely mature until we are completely like Christ. To be mature, however, means to be equipped for the work of ministry, to edify the body of Christ, to be united in the faith, to have the perfect knowledge of the Son of God, to not be deceived by false doctrine, to speak the truth in love, to do our share in causing the body to grow and edify itself in love. In short, to be mature, to be like Christ, means to serve others.

Immature people benefit themselves. Immature people make sure that their wants and needs are met. Immature people expect others to serve them, even if the others have to sacrifice themselves to meet the needs of the immature. Immature people come to church only if they see that it benefits them.

Mature people, however, benefit others. Mature people make sure that the wants and needs of others are met. Mature

people expect themselves to serve others, even if the mature have to sacrifice themselves to meet the needs of others. Mature people come to church so that they can benefit others. In other words, mature people serve others just as Christ does.

Therefore, to understand the advanced principles of Christian living we need to become mature. And to become skilled in the word of righteousness, to be able to rightly divide the word of truth, we need to become mature. To become mature, though, we need to train ourselves to discern both good and evil. To become mature, we need to lay aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking. To become mature, we need to stop causing strife and division within the Church. To become mature, we need to help the Church to grow up. To become mature, therefore, we need to learn how to serve others just as Christ does.

If you have been a Christian for some time now, you need to start asking yourself some questions. Are you still a babe in Christ? Do you need to be taught the elementary principles of Christian living again and again? Are you envious of other Christians? Do you practice malice or deceit or hypocrisy or evil speaking? Do you cause strife and division within the Church? Are you learning to serve others? Are you really becoming more like Christ? If not, then it is time for you to wean yourself off of the milk of the word and begin to partake of the solid food. It is time for you to become mature. It is time for you to grow up.

Chapter 2

Repentance from Dead Works

Heb. 6:1

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews does not want his readers to remain babes. That is why in 6:1 he says, "Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection." "Perfection" means "maturity." He wants his readers to go on to maturity. He does not want to discuss the elementary principles of Christ or lay again the foundation of the elementary principles of Christian living. They should already know what those principles are.

I will do the opposite. Over the next few chapters, I will discuss the elementary principles of Christ and lay again the foundation of the elementary principles of Christian living. I am doing this because, it seems to me, many, many Christians have not been taught these principles. Even if you have been taught, it is good for us to go over these principles anyway so that all of us can understand what these principles are.

The writer lists the elementary principles of Christian living in verses 1 and 2. He lists them in chronological order, that is, he lists them in the order in which you are likely to encounter them in your Christian life, from the time you became a Christian to the Day of Judgment.

The first principle on the list is "repentance from dead works." He lists this one first because this is what we should

have done when we became Christians. This should have been part of the gospel message which you heard before deciding to become a Christian. Mark tells us that as soon as Jesus returned from being tempted in the wilderness, he began "preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God." And what was that gospel? "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:14-15). The gospel Jesus preached was not just believe. It was repent and believe.

Jesus taught his disciples to preach the same gospel. In Mark 6:7-11, Jesus sends the disciples out to preach. Then verse 12 says, "So they went out and preached that people should repent." He sent them out to preach repentance. After Christ's resurrection, he gives the disciples a Bible lesson. Then he says to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:46-47). The disciples' mission was to preach the gospel of repentance.

This is precisely what they did. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter preached his first great sermon to the gathered crowd. When he was finished, the crowd asked, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). Peter's answer was not, "Say the sinner's prayer." His answer was not, "Ask Jesus into your heart." His answer was not, "Make Jesus the Lord of your life." Instead, his answer was, "Repent." The true gospel is the gospel of repentance because repentance should be the first step in the Christian's life.

The Greek word for "repentance" is *metanoia*, which means "a change of mind." This is all it meant to the secular Greek writers. One could change his mind, for example, about which clothes to wear or which food to eat. In New Testament usage, however, as Thayer's Greek lexicon puts it, the word

specifically means “the change of mind of those who have begun to abhor their errors and misdeeds, and have determined to enter upon a better course of life, so that it embraces both a recognition of sin and sorrow for it and hearty amendment, the tokens and effects of which are good deeds.” To repent means to look back over your life, abhor the sinful life you have been living and decide that it is time to make a change. It starts with a decision but it is a decision that results in action. That change comes when you put your faith in Jesus Christ and let Jesus transform you so that you can now begin to live a righteous lifestyle.

One of the Old Testament words for “repent” is *šûb*, which means “return.” The Bible pictures life as a journey down a path, with Satan and the lake of fire at one end and God and heaven at the other end. The sinful lifestyle is the life you lead when you are walking down the path towards Satan and away from God. Repentance is simply turning around and walking back to God. Again, repentance involves a decision (continuing this way was just not worth it) that results in an action (turning around and heading in the other direction).

There are some who teach that repentance is not necessary for salvation because they view repentance as a work and we are not saved by works. We are saved by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8), that is, we are saved by deciding to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. But is that decision also a work? Paul says that we are saved if we confess Jesus as Lord (Rom. 10:9-10), but to confess we have to move our mouths. Does that mean confession is a work? Or is it simply the action that is the result of our decision to believe? Repentance is a decision and is therefore not a work any more than belief or confession is a work. Repentance is the decision that it is time to change from living a sinful lifestyle to living a righteous lifestyle.

What the gospel says is that you cannot make that change yourself. You cannot by yourself transform yourself from that

old man who lived the sinful lifestyle to that new man who lives the righteous lifestyle. Only Jesus Christ can do that. That is why you must place your faith in him. That is why only his grace through faith can save you. But your repentance means that you have decided that you really want him to make that change in you. And when people see that change in you, when they see that you have gone from doing the sinful works to doing the righteous works, then they can see that you really have placed your faith in Jesus Christ.

This change also means that we will stop doing dead works. Dead works are works which we do by ourselves on our own strength for our own reasons. They are dead because we did them apart from God. They may appear to be spiritual works, to be good works, but they are not what God commanded us to do. In short, dead works are the sins which we commit. Repentance from dead works means that we turn from our works and start doing the works which God has given us to do. The rest that God has promised us is the rest in which we cease doing our works and start doing God's works, with his help.

Repenting from sin, however, does not mean that you will never sin again. As we all know, we sin on a regular basis. This means that repentance should also be a regular part of our Christian lives. As Christians, we are walking down the path toward God, but when we give in to temptation and sin, we turn around and start walking toward Satan again. We repent by confessing our sin and turning around again towards God. Repentance may involve emotion (that is, we may feel so bad about what we have done that we cry), but it does not have to include it. We know that repentance has occurred when we actually turn around. Hopefully, we are making progress on this path towards God. Many times, it seems like, for every three steps forward we take two steps back. But the net result is one step forward, which means we are making progress.

Because many Christians have not been correctly taught what repentance is, they often adopt one of two opposing views on repentance. I have attended churches which had altar calls every Sunday and almost every Sunday I would see the same people down at the altar crying and telling God that they are sorry for committing the same sins yet again and that they will try better this week, knowing in their hearts that they were never intending on actually fighting those sins; they were hoping that those sins would just go away.

Then there are people on the other extreme who know that repentance is not an emotional show but must come from the heart. They believe that if a person truly repents of a particular sin, then that person will never commit that sin again. If that person does commit that sin again, then that person's so-called repentance was just a farce.

As is usually the case, when people are deceived about a subject, they have not taken into account everything the Scriptures have to say about it. The first group has not taken into account Prov. 28:13, which says, "He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy." They think they are repenting of their sins when all they are really doing is confessing them. True repentance is the second part: forsaking sin. Again, repentance means "the change of mind of those who have begun to abhor their errors and misdeeds, and have determined to enter upon a better course of life, so that it embraces both a recognition of sin and sorrow for it and hearty amendment, the tokens and effects of which are good deeds." When a sinner repents, he decides to forsake his sinful lifestyle and to begin to live a righteous lifestyle. Sins simply do not "just go away." The sinner must make a decision to make them go away. That decision may involve emotion, but it does not have to do so. But it does require a change in one's mind and one's heart.

The second group errs when they think that a person who has repented will never commit that sin again. Jesus did say, "Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him" (Luke 17:3-4). Notice that Jesus never doubted the brother's repentance, even though he repented seven times in a day. Jesus recognizes that just because we have decided to never commit a sin again does not automatically mean that we will never commit it again. He recognizes that our decision to stop sinning means that we have just signed on to join a war.

Paul reminds us in Galatians that "the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish" (Gal. 5:17). Within your body there is a fight going on between the Holy Spirit and your flesh, and it is a fight to the death. You may have repented. You may have decided that you are no longer going to commit a particular sin. But your flesh is going to fight you every step of the way. That is why repentance is not an emotion. That is why repentance is a commitment. It is a commitment to fight that sin until it is completely gone.

Some people treat repentance like some people treat marriage. They stay married as long as the good emotions are there. But as soon as the bad emotions come in, they think the love is gone and this just isn't going to work anymore and they give up. They do not realize that good marriages work because the couples are committed to making them work. Sure, the good emotions are nice to have and make it easier to work, but the couples make the marriages work even when the good emotions are gone or when the bad emotions come around and tell them to quit. So, too, with repentance. Repentance is a commitment that says, "I am committed to my

relationship with my Lord Jesus Christ no matter what, which means I am also committed to eliminating this sin from this relationship no matter what." The emotions that make you feel like you are winning are nice to have and make the fighting easier, but your commitment makes you press on even when those emotions are not there or the bad emotions come around and tell you to quit.

Your flesh will rise up and tempt you to commit that sin. You will fight it but in your weak moments you will give in. You will then go before the Lord and confess your sin and ask for forgiveness. The Lord, of course, will forgive you. Then, when you least expect it, your flesh will tempt you again. This cycle may play itself out over and over again until you are sick of it. But stick to your commitment. Your flesh wants to keep sinning because it gets pleasure from it. As Heb. 11:24-25 tells us, "By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin." Your flesh gets pleasure from sinning, but it is only a temporary pleasure. And even though you confess your sin, the Lord will chastise you for sinning because your flesh must learn that not only does sin produce pleasure, it also produces an inordinate amount of displeasure. "Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Heb. 12:11). The Lord's chastening is not supposed to be joyful; it's supposed to be painful. When your flesh finally says, "The consequences are not worth doing this sin anymore," it will die, and that is the day when you will have finally won.

Before I became a Christian, I became addicted to a particular sin. I fought this sin for more years after I became a Christian than I did before I became a Christian. After fighting this for a few years, I became very frustrated and said to the

Lord, "Wouldn't I be a better witness for you if you would just deliver me from this right now?"

The Lord spoke very clearly to me about this. He said, "Who is the Lord here? You or me?" I said, "You are." "Am I the Lord over only certain parts of your life or over every part of your life?" "Over every part of my life." "Then I am the Lord of your sanctification, which means I decide in which order I will sanctify your sins and how I will sanctify your sins. Your job is to simply follow my lead."

That conversation took a load off of me. Until then, I had been frantically trying to perfect myself so that I could be a better witness to the world. The Lord knew that the Glory of his Name was at stake. But he also knew that he could clean me up better than I could. Yes, repentance is a commitment to put the old sinful lifestyle behind me and live the new righteous lifestyle, but it is more than that. It is the commitment to obey the Lord of my sanctification who will determine which sins we will fight and how we will fight it. If that meant fighting that particular sin for the rest of my life here on earth, then so be it.

Many years later, I woke up one morning and realized that I had not been tempted to commit that sin for at least two weeks. To this day, I do not know when that particular sin left me. I just know that the Lord one day quietly delivered me of it and it took me at least two weeks to realize it. Does my flesh sometimes tell me that it wants to do it again? Of course. But it no longer controls me. I now control it. The battle has been won.

That conversation with the Lord was also a reminder that I am not alone in this fight against sin. My flesh is fighting against me, but the Holy Spirit also fights against my flesh. And he who is in the world is fighting against me, but "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). And some day, if I keep fighting the good fight with the help

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of my Lord, I will stand before him with a new body that is completely free of sin, a body that my Lord bought for me when he died on the cross. From that day on, I will never have to fight sin again. I am so looking forward to that day.

Chapter 3

Faith Toward God

Heb. 6:1

Repentance, as we saw in the last chapter, is a lifelong commitment to fighting the sin in our lives until we win. However, we cannot do this on our own. We cannot make the transition from living a sinful lifestyle to living a righteous lifestyle by ourselves. We cannot transform ourselves from being sinners to being righteous saints. For that, we need Jesus Christ. This is why we must have the second principle on the list, faith toward God. We become righteous only by putting our faith in God and Jesus Christ.

Paul reminds us that we do not become righteous by keeping the Law. "But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe" (Rom. 3:21-22). This is why Paul said that his desire was to "be found in Him [Jesus Christ], not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith" (Phi. 3:9).

Why does putting faith in God and Jesus Christ make us righteous? What must we believe in order to obtain the righteousness of God?

Heb. 11:6 says, "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." This verse tells us that to please God, we must believe three things. The first is that we must believe that He is, that God exists. The second thing is that we must believe that *He* is, that this God exists. Atheism was not prevalent at the time the Epistle to the Hebrews was written. Virtually everybody believed in some sort of god. To please God, we must believe that *He* exists, that the real God exists.

To believe in God, we must know who he is. We must know his character. How do we get to know his character? Jesus said that he came to show us who the Father really is. In his prayer to his Father, Jesus said, "I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world" (John 17:6). "Name" here means "character." Jesus manifested, revealed, the character of God. He was able to do so because he has the same character. The Epistle to the Hebrews tells us that the "express image" of the Father has been stamped onto Jesus (Heb. 1:3), so that, as Jesus says to Philip, to see Jesus is to see the Father (John 14:9).

The character which Jesus has revealed to us is that God the Father is always good and he always tells the truth and he always does what is best for everybody. That is why we can always trust the character of God. And that is exactly what faith means. To believe in God is to trust in the character of God, to trust that he is always good, to trust that he always tells the truth, and to entrust him with our lives because we trust that he will do what is best for us.

This is the first way in which putting our faith in God and Jesus Christ makes us righteous, because if we trust God's character, then God counts that as righteousness. In Gen. 15:5-6, God takes Abram outside at night and says to him, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able

to number them.... So shall your descendants be." Then the Scriptures say, "And he [Abram] believed in the LORD, and He [God] accounted it to him for righteousness." Abram trusted that the Lord was telling him the truth, and God counted that trust as righteousness.

The third thing that Heb. 11:6 tells us is that to please God, we must believe that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him. If we diligently seek him, what is our reward?

Our reward is him. If we are truly seeking *him*, then he rewards us by giving himself to us. He enters into a relationship with us. Seeking him, then, means that we are searching for him so that we can have a relationship with him. We seek him so that we can become one with him.

This is precisely what faith does for us. Faith makes us one with God and Jesus Christ. The phrases, "faith in Christ" and "believe in Jesus" and similar phrases, appear many times throughout the New Testament. The Greek uses four prepositions in these phrases.

The first preposition is used in Heb. 6:1. The Greek preposition in the phrase, "faith toward God," is *epi*, and it does mean "toward." It denotes direction. It is used to mean that an object is moving toward something else. I would use this preposition if I were to say, for example, "I am walking toward my home." We also find this preposition in Rom. 4:5: "But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness." The English preposition, "on," in this verse translates *epi*, but the English could also use the word, "toward."

The most commonly used preposition is *eis*. This preposition has many different meanings, depending on context, but its primary meaning is "into." It also denotes direction. It is used to mean that an object is entering into something else. I would use this preposition if I were to say, "I am entering into my home." We find this preposition in, for example, John 14:1,

in which Jesus says to the disciples, "You believe in God, believe also in Me." More literally, Jesus says, "You believe into God, believe also into Me."

The third preposition is *en*, and it means "in." It denotes position. It is used to mean that an object is in something else. I would use this preposition if I were to say, "I am in my home." We find this preposition in, for example, Gal. 3:26: "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus."

Putting these three prepositions together, we see that faith causes us to move *toward* God and Jesus Christ, that faith then causes us to enter *into* God and Jesus Christ, and that faith then causes us to remain *in* God and Jesus Christ. This is how faith in God and Jesus Christ makes us righteous, because faith makes us one with God and Jesus Christ, and since God and Jesus Christ are righteous, we obtain their righteousness. This is why Paul can say in 1 Cor. 1:30, "But of Him [God] you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption." Becoming one with Jesus Christ enables us to live a righteous lifestyle, not because we are righteous, but because he is.

The fourth preposition is *ek*, and this one is a complicated one. It is sometimes translated as "in," but its primary meaning is "from, out of." It denotes direction, but it is the opposite direction from *eis*, "into." It is used to mean that an object has come from or out of something else that is its source or its point of origin. But it means more than that. It means that the object also has the characteristics of its source. If I were to use this preposition to say, "I have come from America," I would mean that I have come out of America, but I would also mean that I have the characteristics of America. I act like an American because I have the characteristics of America. People can tell I am an American because I have the characteristics of America.

We find this preposition in Rom. 3:26, where Paul says that God wanted "to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." The phrase "who has" translates the word *ek*. More literally, the Greek reads "God is the justifier of the one *from* faith in Jesus," as if faith in Jesus is a location or the source or the point of origin from which this person has come. Hence, the Greek means that God is the justifier of the person whose outstanding characteristic is his faith in Jesus. This person acts like he has faith in Jesus because that is his outstanding characteristic. People can tell that he has faith in Jesus because that is his outstanding characteristic. This is the kind of person whom God wants to justify.

Faith toward God, then, is one of the elementary principles of Christian living. To believe in God means to trust in the character of God, to trust that he is always good, to trust that he is always telling the truth, and to entrust our lives to him because we trust that he will do what is best for us. God counts that trust as righteousness. Faith also causes us to move *toward* God and Jesus Christ and then causes us to enter *into* God and Jesus Christ and then causes us to remain *in* God and Jesus Christ. This is how faith in God and Jesus Christ makes us righteous, because faith makes us one with God and Jesus Christ, and since God and Jesus Christ are righteous, we obtain their righteousness. Becoming one with Jesus Christ enables us to live a righteous lifestyle, not because we are righteous, but because he is.

Faith in Jesus should also be our outstanding characteristic because faith in Jesus is what makes us Christians. So go and do what Jesus told his disciples to do: "You believe into God, believe also into Me."

Chapter 4

The Doctrine of Baptisms: Water Baptism

Heb. 6:2

The next principle in the list of elementary principles of Christian living is the doctrine of baptisms. Notice that “baptisms” is plural. The Bible discusses several baptisms, including water baptism and the baptism in the Holy Spirit. We will discuss water baptism in this chapter. We will discuss the baptism in the Holy Spirit in the next chapter.

The Greek word for “baptisms” is *baptismos*, which literally means “a washing, a purification.” The writer of the Epistle will use this word again in Heb. 9:10, where he refers to the various washings required by the Law. For example, when a leper was cured, he had to go through an elaborate ceremony which included washing his clothes and himself “that he may be clean” (Lev. 14:8). The priests were required to wash their hands and feet at the bronze laver in front of the Tabernacle (Ex. 30:17-21). In Jesus’ time, the priests would bathe every morning before they started serving in the Temple. They would also wash their hands in the laver before offering a sacrifice.

Jesus also used the word *baptismos* when he said to the Pharisees and scribes, “For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men—the washing of pitchers

and cups, and many other such things you do" (Mark 7:8). Why would the washing of pitchers and cups be an example of laying aside the commandment of God? At a later time, Jesus said, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also" (Matt. 23:25-26).

The point that Jesus was making is that it is not enough to cleanse the outside so that you appear to be obeying God's commandments. Changing your outward appearance does not change your innermost being. The change must start on the inside, in the heart. Then your outward appearance, what you do, will match who you really are on the inside.

The same is true of water baptism. It was never intended to be done so that you can convince others that you are a Christian, even though you really are not. It is intended to be an outward sign of what has already happened to you internally. This is why "the doctrine of baptisms" follows "repentance from dead works" and "faith toward God" in the list of elementary principles. Tertullian was a leader in the Early Church. This is what he says about baptism: "That baptismal washing is a sealing of faith, which faith is begun and is commended by the faith of repentance. We are not washed in order that we may cease sinning, but *because we have* ceased, since in heart we have been bathed already."

The word *baptismos* is derived from the Greek word *baptizo*, which means "to baptize, to immerse," and this word in turn is derived from the Greek word *bapto*, which means "to dip." The difference in meaning between these last two words is illustrated in a recipe for making pickled vegetables which was written by a Greek poet and physician named Nicander. To make a pickle, the vegetable must first be dipped (*bapto*) into boiling water, then immersed (*baptizo*) into vinegar. Dip-

ping the vegetable into boiling water cleansed the outside of the vegetable, but that is only a temporary effect. Immersing it, baptizing it, in the vinegar, however, produced a permanent change. The same is true of baptism. It is an outward sign that you have been permanently changed inwardly.

The Scriptures repeatedly refer to the baptism which John the Baptist performed as a baptism of repentance (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3; Acts 13:24; Acts 19:4). That is, people were not baptized by John so that they could repent; rather, they were baptized as a sign that they had already repented.

The Scriptures also say that John's baptism was for the remission of sins. The Greek word for "remission," *aphesis*, means "letting go of sins, as if they had never been committed." Those who repented and were baptized by John were forgiven their sins.

Once the new covenant was established, John's baptism was no longer necessary. Even so, Christian baptism is also a baptism of repentance, that is, it is an outward sign that the person being baptized has already repented and put his or her faith in Jesus Christ. On the Day of Pentecost, when the crowd asked Peter what they should do, he said, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38).

But Christian baptism symbolizes more than that. When Paul was arrested in Jerusalem by the Romans, he was allowed to speak to the Jewish crowd. He told them about the day he met Jesus on the road to Damascus, how he had been blinded, and how Ananias healed him. He also said that Ananias told him, "Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16). Baptism symbolizes not only that you have been forgiven of sins, but that those sins have also been washed away. The sacrifices and the washings in the Law only covered over sin. The sacrifice of Jesus, how-

ever, eliminated sin. Sin, therefore, should no longer be a regular part of the Christian's life.

Paul tells us that Christian baptism also symbolizes our union with Christ. As Paul points out in Rom. 6:1-14, going under the water symbolizes our dying with Christ and coming back up out of the water symbolizes our resurrection with Christ. According to James 2:26, "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." Death occurs when the spirit separates itself from the body. The body will come alive again at the resurrection when the spirit unites itself with the body. Generally speaking, therefore, separation is death whereas union is life. When we put our faith in Christ and became one with him, our old man, the body of sin, was crucified with him and our new man, the one that is free from sin, was resurrected with him. That means that we have been separated from that old man, who sinned, and are now united with the new man, who obeys God. Because of this, we are to reckon ourselves "to be dead indeed to sin [that is, separated from sin], but alive to God [that is, united with God] in Christ Jesus our Lord" (v. 11). Baptism, then, outwardly symbolizes what has already happened internally. It symbolizes that the person who is being baptized has separated himself or herself from sin and is now united with God and walking in the newness of life. It is a reminder that the Christian should now live a sinless and holy life.

Since we are saved from sin and baptism symbolizes our separation from sin, baptism also symbolizes our salvation. This does not mean that a person must be baptized to be saved. Jesus said to the thief on the cross, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). But there was no way that the thief could be baptized in water before he died. Paul said in 1 Cor. 1:17, "For Christ did not send me to baptize." He also told the Corinthians, "I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest any-

one should say that I had baptized in my own name. Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other" (1 Cor. 1:14-16). If baptism were necessary for salvation, Paul would have baptized everyone.

This leads us to the difficult passage in 1 Pet. 3:20-21. Peter notes that Noah and his family "were saved through water." The flood water killed everyone else, but it buoyed up Noah and his family, saving them from destruction. Of course, the water alone did not save them. They also needed the ark, which God had told Noah to build. So God saved them through the water by using the ark. The flood, therefore, is a type, a picture of how God saves people from destruction.

Peter then says, "There is an antitype which now saves us—baptism." He seems to be saying that baptism saves us. However, just as the flood water alone did not save Noah and his family, so too, baptism alone does not save us but it is "baptism through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." Furthermore, he defines what he means by "baptism." It is "not the removal of the filth of the flesh," that is, it is not the outward change that qualifies as baptism. Rather, it is "the answer of a good conscience toward God." The Greek word for "answer," *eperotema*, actually means "an enquiry, a question." It refers to the questions that were asked of those who wished to be baptized. If the person could correctly answer the questions in good conscience, then he or she was baptized. In other words, the person being baptized was already saved because he or she had already repented and put his or her faith in Jesus Christ. Baptism, therefore, is simply proof that the person being baptized was already saved.

Even though baptism is not necessary for salvation, Christians are expected to be baptized. After his resurrection, Jesus told his disciples, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19). The crowd who heard

Peter preach on the Day of Pentecost were baptized that day (Acts 2:41). Paul was baptized as soon as he received his sight again (Acts 9:18). While Peter was preaching to Cornelius and those in his house, the Holy Spirit fell upon the listeners and caused them to speak with tongues, which was proof that they had also been saved. So Peter commanded the listeners to be baptized that very day (Acts 10:44-48). There are exceptions to the rule, of course, the thief on the cross being one of them, but the norm is for every Christian to be baptized.

There are two reasons for this. First, as we already learned, baptism symbolizes our salvation. Baptism allows the Christian to visualize outwardly what has happened to him or her internally, to visualize physically what has happened to him or her spiritually.

Second, baptism gives the Christian the opportunity to publicly testify that he or she is now a Christian. Churches in the first three centuries met in homes, which means that they did not have baptismals, like some modern churches do. Nor did they baptize people in a bathtub in the home. They baptized wherever there was a body of water, such as a lake or a river. This means that the baptism could be seen by the public. Witnesses, both saved and unsaved, could see and hear the person being baptized answer questions about the faith and could see and hear the person give his or her testimony. As Tertullian says, "When entering the water, we make profession of the Christian faith in the words of its rule; we bear public testimony that we have renounced the devil, his pomp, and his angels." Marriages are held in front of witnesses so that those witnesses can verify that the couple is indeed married. Baptisms are held in front of witnesses so that those witnesses can verify that the person is indeed a Christian.

Baptism by immersion also seems to have been the normal practice of the Early Church. Immersion is the best way to symbolize that we have been buried with Christ and rose again

with Christ. But the leaders of the Early Church also recognized that immersion was not always possible. The *Didache*, which was written anonymously between 80 and 140 AD, gives these instructions for baptisms: "Concerning baptism, baptize in this manner: Having first said all these things, baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, in living water. But if you have no living water, baptize into other water; and if you cannot baptize in cold water, baptize in warm. But if you have neither, pour out water three times upon the person's head in the name of Father and Son and Holy Spirit." That every Christian should be baptized was important to the Early Church. How the person was baptized, however, was not as important.

Therefore, every Christian who has repented from dead works and has placed his or her faith in Jesus Christ should be baptized. Baptism is not necessary for salvation, but it symbolizes that the person is saved. It also gives the person being baptized the opportunity to publicly share his or her testimony and it also gives the witnesses the opportunity to verify that the person has indeed become a Christian.

Baptism also symbolizes our union with Christ. Baptism symbolizes that, because we are now one with Christ by faith, we were crucified with him on the cross, buried with him, and then rose again with him. The old man, that body of sin, died, meaning that we are now separated from sin. We are now to reckon ourselves as dead to (that is, separated from) sin and alive to (that is, united with) God in Christ Jesus.

If you have not been baptized yet, you should consider doing so as a public testimony that you are now a Christian. If you have been baptized, then look back on your baptism as a reminder that you should now live a sinless and holy life.

Chapter 5

The Doctrine of Baptisms: The Baptism in the Holy Spirit

Heb. 6:2

The Scriptures refer to the baptism in the Holy Spirit several times: Joel 2:28-29; Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:28-34; Acts 1:4-8; 2:1-4; 2:14-18; 8:14-17; 10:44-48; 11:15-17; 19:1-7. These passages help us to answer some questions about the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

1. What is the baptism in the Holy Spirit?

Our English word, *baptism*, comes directly from the Greek noun, *baptisma*, which in turn comes from the Greek verb, *baptizo*, which means "to baptize, to immerse." It is used to describe the immersion of cloth into a dye. The cloth is in the dye and the dye is soaked into the cloth, that is, the dye is in the cloth and the cloth is surrounded by the dye. It is also used to describe sunken ships. The ships are in the water and the water fills the ships, that is, the water is in the ships and the ships are surrounded by the water.

This means that when you are baptized in the Holy Spirit, the Spirit is not only in you but also around you. The Holy Spirit is in you and you are in the Holy Spirit.

We also learned in the last chapter that when a vegetable is baptized by immersing it in vinegar, it produces a permanent change. The same is true of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. It is a permanent baptism. You don't have to be baptized again and again. It also produces a permanent change in you. We will see what that change is when we get to question 7.

2. Who is baptized in the Holy Spirit?

Every believer can be baptized in the Holy Spirit. In Acts 19, Paul asks the disciples if they had received the Holy Spirit, which means that he expected every believer to be baptized in the Holy Spirit.

3. When does the believer become baptized in the Holy Spirit?

A believer can be baptized in the Holy Spirit at the time he or she becomes a believer (which is what happened to Cornelius and his household), but usually a believer is baptized in the Holy Spirit some time after he or she becomes a believer.

Every believer has the Holy Spirit in him or her (Rom. 8:9-11; John 7:37-39). But not every believer has been baptized in the Holy Spirit. The baptism in the Holy Spirit is a work separate from salvation.

After his resurrection, Jesus breathed on the disciples and told them to receive the Holy Spirit (John 20:22). This, I believe, is when the disciples were born again, when the Holy Spirit began to dwell in them. But just before his ascension, Jesus told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they were baptized in the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit would empower them to be his witnesses (Acts 1:4-8). This baptism occurred on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). So the disciples were baptized in the Holy Spirit *after* they became believers.

Philip preached the gospel to the Samaritans (Acts 8:5-13) and many became believers. The apostles then came and laid hands on the believers so that they could receive the Holy Spirit (8:14-17). So these Samaritans were also baptized in the Holy Spirit *after* they became believers.

In Acts 19:1-7, Paul meets some disciples (that is, believers) in Ephesus who have not yet been baptized in the Holy Spirit. They had been baptized in John's baptism, so Paul baptizes them in water in the name of the Lord Jesus, then lays hands on them. The Holy Spirit comes upon them and they begin to use some of the gifts of the Spirit. So these disciples were also baptized in the Holy Spirit *after* they became believers.

The baptism in the Holy Spirit, therefore, is a work separate from salvation. It is possible to be saved without being baptized in the Holy Spirit.

4. Where is the believer baptized in the Holy Spirit?

The believer can be baptized in the Holy Spirit anywhere. It does not have to happen in a formal church setting. The disciples were baptized in the upper room. Cornelius and his household were baptized in his house. There is no set location in which a believer must be baptized in the Holy Spirit.

5. How is the believer baptized in the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit fell upon the disciples in Acts 2 and upon Cornelius and his household in Acts 10. But in Acts 8 and Acts 19, the Holy Spirit was given through the laying on of hands. This was probably the usual way of baptizing believers in the Holy Spirit.

6. How do we know that we have been baptized in the Holy Spirit?

When the Holy Spirit fell upon the disciples in Acts 2, they spoke in tongues. Peter says in Acts 11 that the same thing happened to Cornelius and his household when they were baptized in the Holy Spirit. The Pentecostal position is that speaking in tongues is the only sign that a believer has been baptized in the Holy Spirit.

As we saw earlier, Paul expected every believer to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. But he also says in 1 Cor. 12:29-30, "Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?" The answer to all of these questions is obviously no. If all believers have been baptized in the Holy Spirit, but not all of them speak in tongues, then speaking in tongues cannot be the only sign that a believer has been baptized in the Holy Spirit. The prophet Joel did not say anything about speaking in tongues. Rather, he said that when the Spirit was poured out, people would begin to prophesy, dream dreams, and see visions. When the disciples in Acts 19 received the Holy Spirit, they spoke in tongues and prophesied. Luke does not make it clear if all of them did both or if some spoke in tongues while the others prophesied. Either way, the disciples were able to use both gifts, not just speak in tongues, when they were baptized in the Holy Spirit.

The charismatic position, therefore, is that the use of any of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is a sign that the believer has been baptized in the Holy Spirit.

7. Why does the believer need to be baptized in the Holy Spirit?

First of all, Jesus said that the baptism in the Holy Spirit would empower the disciples to be witnesses (Acts 1:4-8). I know that many evangelists and missionaries who have led many people to the Lord have not been baptized in the Holy Spirit, but I wonder if they would have been even more effective if they had been baptized.

Second, the people in the Scriptures who were baptized in the Holy Spirit immediately began to use the gifts of the Spirit. Paul tells us in 1 Cor. 12:7 that the gifts were given for the profit of all, that is, the purpose of the gifts is to edify the Church (1 Cor. 14:1-5).

A believer, therefore, should want to be baptized in the Holy Spirit so he or she can be a better witness and be able to use the gifts to help edify the Church.

The baptism in the Holy Spirit, therefore, is available to every believer and in fact, every believer is expected to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. This baptism is a separate work from salvation and usually occurs after salvation. The believer can be baptized anywhere at any time, and usually the baptism is given by the laying on of hands. The sign that the believer has been baptized in the Holy Spirit is the use of any of the gifts of the Spirit. The purpose of the gifts is to edify, build up, the Church.

If you have been baptized in the Holy Spirit, I encourage you to seek the Lord and ask him to use the gifts through you. If you have not been baptized in the Holy Spirit, I encourage you to seek the Lord and ask him to baptize you in the Holy Spirit. That way you can be a more effective witness and you can help to edify the Church.

Chapter 6

Laying on of Hands

Heb. 6:2

The next principle on the list is the laying on of hands. The Greek word for "laying on" is *epithesis*, which is a noun, and it does mean "a laying on." It appears only four times in the New Testament and it is used only of the laying on of hands. It is derived from the Greek word *epitithemi*, which is a verb, and it means "to put, to lay."

Looking at the verses in which these two words appear, we learn that the laying on of hands was used to impart something spiritual to the recipient. Nothing physical is passed to the recipient from the one who is laying his or her hands on the recipient. The laying on of hands is just a way to visibly show that something spiritual is being imparted.

The Scriptures show that the laying on of hands was done in four instances. First, it was done to impart a spiritual blessing. We see this in Gen. 48:1-20, in which Jacob lays his hands on Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, and blesses them. In Matt. 19:13-15, children are brought to Jesus so that he could put his hands on them and pray for them. Paul tells Timothy in 1 Tim. 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." Paul mentions this again in 2 Tim. 1:6: "Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in

you through the laying on of my hands." Paul does not specify what this gift was, but it was spiritually imparted to Timothy when the elders and Paul laid hands on him.

Second, the laying on of hands was done to impart healing. Through the laying on of hands, the spiritual power which produces physical healing passes from the healer to the one who is sick. There are many examples of this in the Scriptures. Luke records, "When the sun was setting, all those who had any that were sick with various diseases brought them to Him [Jesus]; and He laid His hands on every one of them and healed them" (Luke 4:40). In Luke 13:10-13, Jesus laid his hands on a woman who had had an infirmity for eighteen years and was bent over. She was able to straighten up immediately. On the island of Malta, there was a prominent citizen named Publius, whose father was sick. Paul laid hands on him and he was healed (Acts 28:7-8). The laying on of hands was not the only way the sick were healed, which means that the healer must be led by the Holy Spirit as to when to lay hands on the sick and when not to do so.

Third, as we learned in the last chapter, the laying on of hands was done to baptize believers in the Holy Spirit. After Philip preached the gospel to the Samaritans, the apostles laid hands on the believers and they were baptized in the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-17). Paul laid his hands on some disciples and they were baptized in the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:1-7). Again, this was not the only way believers were baptized in the Holy Spirit. The Spirit sometimes just fell on people. But the laying on of hands does seem to be the usual way it was done. Even so, the one who wants to lay hands on people so that they can be baptized in the Holy Spirit needs to be led by the Holy Spirit as to when this should be done.

Fourth, the laying on of hands was done to commission men for the ministry. The Lord told Moses to commission Joshua as his successor by laying his hands on him in front of

the whole congregation. Moses did so (Num. 27:15-23). The Scriptures say that, after Moses' death, "Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him" (Deut. 34:9). Shortly after the Church began, a dispute arose because some of the widows were not getting their share of the food. The apostles said that they did not have the time to oversee the distribution of food, so they told the congregation to put forward seven men who could perform this task. The congregation did so, and the apostles laid hands on them to commission them for this work. These men became the first deacons of the Church (Acts 6:1-6). The church in Antioch laid hands on Paul and Barnabas and then sent them on their first missionary journey (Acts 13:1-3). Because the men who are commissioned for the ministry had to be qualified and trustworthy men, Paul told Timothy, "Do not lay hands on anyone hastily" (1 Tim. 5:22). The offices of the Church should not be given to just any man. Men should be tested first, as Paul says specifically about deacons (1 Tim. 3:10).

The last two reasons for the laying on of hands is probably why this is listed as an elementary principle of Christian living. If, as we learned in the last chapter, every Christian is expected to be baptized in the Holy Spirit and that is usually done through the laying on of hands, and if men are commissioned to take one of the offices of the Church through the laying on of hands, then every Christian should know this principle.

If we lay hands on people properly, we, too, can impart spiritual things to other people. We can impart a blessing or a gift or healing or the baptism in the Holy Spirit. We can also commission tested and qualified men for the ministry. But again, this should be done only as the Holy Spirit leads us to do so.

Chapter 7

The Resurrection of the Dead

Heb. 6:2

Paul tells us in 1 Cor. 15:12-19 why we must believe in the resurrection of the dead. If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ was not resurrected from the dead, and if Christ was not resurrected from the dead, then Christianity is false. Our faith is futile and we will perish in our sins after all. But Christ has been resurrected from the dead, and we will be also.

Christ was resurrected from the dead with a physical body. He was not resurrected as only a spirit, as the Jehovah's Witnesses teach. Jesus once said to the Jews, "'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' Then the Jews said, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?' But He was speaking of the temple of His body. Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said" (John 2:19-21). Because Christ was resurrected from the dead with a physical body, we will be also. In fact, Paul says that our resurrected bodies will be just like Jesus' resurrected body. "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body,

The Resurrection of the Dead

according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself" (Phil. 3:20-21).

Several years ago, I happened to bring up this subject in a home group. A woman who had been a Christian for many years was surprised to learn that we will have physical bodies in heaven. She thought that we would live forever in heaven as spirits. As we shall see, we do live as spirits in heaven when we die, but only until our bodies are resurrected. Another misconception, a rather common one, is that we become angels when we die. Jesus said that we will be like angels in the sense that we will not marry in heaven (Matt. 22:30). That does not mean that we will be like the angels in every other way.

When God made Adam, he made him with three major parts: the spirit, the soul, and the body. "And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being" (Gen. 2:7). The Hebrew word for "being" (*nephesh*) is also the Hebrew word for "soul." God used the dust to make Adam's body, God blew the breath of life, that is, the spirit, into him, and Adam became a living soul.

The three parts were designed by God to work in a certain order:

This is how it is supposed to work:



At that point in time, Adam was free from sin. But Adam and Eve chose to sin. Their perfect nature became a sinful nature and they passed that sinful nature onto us. Our sinful nature has reversed the order of the three major parts:

But sin has reversed this:



Our sins also separated us from God. "But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear" (Is. 59:2).

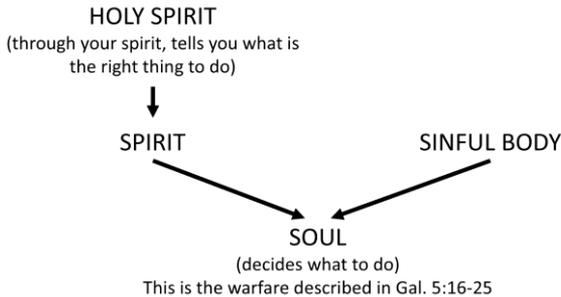
As we learned earlier, separation is death whereas union is life. We gain eternal life when we unite ourselves with God and Jesus Christ through faith because God is eternal life (Deut. 30:19-20) and this life is in Jesus Christ (1 John 5:11-12). However, before we became Christians, our sins separated us from God. This is why the Scriptures say that we were dead in our trespasses: "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead [separated from God] in trespasses, made us alive [united with God] together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:4-6).

God does not want to redeem just our spirits. He wants to redeem all three parts. The process of redemption (salvation)

The Resurrection of the Dead

begins when we put our faith in Christ and become one with him. At that moment, our spirits are born again and are saved from sin. This is why some Scriptures speak of salvation as a past event. Our spirits are now united with God in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

When a person is born again, the spirit is made alive again:



While we are here on this earth, our minds (which are a part of our souls) are being renewed. “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:2). Our souls are being redeemed (saved) while we live on this earth.

But our bodies have not yet been redeemed (saved). Sin still remains in our bodies. As Paul says in Rom. 7:18, “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells.” That is why, “with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin” (Rom 7:25).

A day is coming in which our bodies will be redeemed. “Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why

does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance" (Rom. 8:23-25).

Our bodies will be redeemed when Christ comes back and resurrects us with bodies that are free from sin. That is why Hebrews 9:28 says that Christ will come back a second time for salvation, for then the process of saving us from sin will be complete. Then, and only then, will we be completely free from sin.

James 2:26 says that the body without the spirit is dead, that is, we die when our spirits separate from our bodies. This does not mean that our spirits cease to exist. As Paul says in 2 Cor. 5:6-8, "So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord." When we, the believers in Christ, die, our spirits go to be with the Lord.

Nor does our soul go to sleep when we die, as the Seventh Day Adventists teach. This doctrine, known as soul sleep, says that when we die, our souls go to be with the Lord but we are not conscious of being in the Lord's presence because our souls are asleep. Our souls will be awakened when our bodies are resurrected. But this doctrine is based on a misunderstanding of what the Bible means when it says that the dead have fallen asleep. For example, in the passage from 1 Cor. 15 which we just read, specifically verse 18, the Bible says that if Christ was not resurrected from the dead, "then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished." But the Bible is referring to our bodies, not our souls. When the body dies, it looks like it has fallen asleep. Furthermore, there are passages in the Bible which show that the souls of the dead are fully awake. For example, in Matt. 17:1-8, Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up on a high mountain, where he is transfig-

ured. "His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light." Then Moses and Elijah, both of whom died long before this event occurred, appear to them and talk with Jesus. These men, though dead, were obviously fully awake.

When we die, therefore, our spirits go to be with the Lord and we are fully conscious of being in the Lord's presence. We will remain there until the Lord brings us back to this earth to be re-united with our bodies. This is described in 1 Thess. 4:13-18.

Our dead bodies will come alive again once they are re-united with our spirits. But the bodies we receive at our resurrection will not be the same as the bodies which we inhabit now, for these bodies are sinful bodies. The bodies we will receive at our resurrection will be free from sin, just as Jesus' body is and just as Adam's body was when God created him. In 1 Cor. 15:35-49, Paul describes the resurrected body as a spiritual body. By this, he does not mean that we are resurrected as spirits. Notice that the examples which he gives, the flesh of men, the flesh of animals, the sun, the moon, and the stars, all have physical bodies. Our resurrected bodies will be physical bodies but he calls them spiritual bodies because our spirits will once again control our bodies instead of our bodies controlling our spirits and because our bodies will be just like the body of Jesus.

Paul goes on to say, "Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption" (1 Cor. 15:50). The Jehovah's Witnesses teach that this verse proves that those who are resurrected with physical bodies cannot inherit the kingdom of God, that is, they cannot get into heaven. Only those who are pure spirits can get in. However, as I said, our resurrected bodies will be just like Jesus' resurrected body. In Luke 24:36-39, Jesus appears to the disciples after his resurrection, but the disciples thought they were seeing a spirit. So Jesus says

to them, "Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have." Jesus said his resurrected body consisted of flesh and bones, not flesh and blood. His blood was shed on the cross. His resurrected body does not have blood. Neither will our resurrected bodies. Lev. 17:11 says, "The life of the flesh is in the blood." But the life of our resurrected bodies will not be in our blood, for Christ is now our life (Col. 3:3-4). Our resurrected bodies will consist of flesh and bones, not flesh and blood, which means that we, in our physical resurrected bodies, will inherit the kingdom.

What I have said so far applies only to those believers who die before the Lord returns. Those believers who are alive when the Lord returns will experience death, but only for "the twinkling of an eye," for in that moment their sinful bodies will be replaced with sin-free bodies, their corruptible bodies will be replaced with incorruptible bodies (1 Cor. 15:51-54). Then they, along with the resurrected believers, will be caught up into the air to be with the Lord.

Unbelievers will also be resurrected one day. Jesus said in John 5:28-29, "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice [that is, the voice of Jesus] and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation." The unbelievers will not receive sin-free and incorruptible bodies, but will be given back their sinful and corruptible bodies and instead of spending eternity in heaven with the Lord, they will spend eternity in the lake of fire.

This brings us to the next item in the list of elementary principles for Christian living, which is eternal judgment. But that is a subject for the next chapter.

Chapter 8

Eternal Judgment

Heb. 6:2

There are several passages in the Scriptures that teach on the subject of eternal judgment. Let us begin with Matt. 25:31-46. In this parable, Jesus says that after he comes back to earth with his holy angels, he will pass judgment on everyone. He makes two important points in this parable. The first is, only two fates await everybody. The second is, Jesus will decide what everyone's fate will be.

The sheep will inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world, whereas the goats will depart into the everlasting fire, or as Jesus says at the end of the parable, the goats "will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." Those are the two fates that await everybody. People will either spend eternity in the kingdom of God or they will spend eternity in the everlasting fire.

However, there is a teaching spreading through several churches that says that eventually everyone will be given eternal life. This teaching says that the everlasting punishment for the unrighteous in verse 46 is not really everlasting. According to this teaching, God's love is so powerful that it will eventually win everyone over, so that even those who are sent to hell will eventually repent and become believers, at which point God

will let them into the kingdom. They say that the Greek word for "everlasting," which is *aionios*, is derived from the Greek word, *aion*, from which we get our word, "eon." An eon is a long period of time, perhaps thousands or even millions of years, but it does have an end to it. So, too, the "everlasting" punishment of the unrighteous may last a long time, but it will come to an end.

The problem is that the word *aionios* is also used in verse 46 to describe eternal life. So, if the punishment of the unrighteous eventually comes to an end, the eternal life of the righteous will also eventually come to an end. That is absurd. *Aionios* actually means a long period of time *without* an end. Hence, it means "forever, everlasting, eternal." The eternal life of the righteous will never end. And the punishment of the unrighteous will also never end.

Notice the word "for" in verses 35 and 42. "For" in those verses means "because." On the one hand, the sheep inherit the kingdom *because* they gave food to Jesus when he was hungry and drink when he was thirsty, etc. In other words, they inherit the kingdom because of their good works. On the other hand, the goats are sent into the everlasting fire *because* they did not do any of those things. Jesus is not saying that salvation is based on works. The Scriptures teach us that we are not saved by our good works but by God's grace through faith. And Jesus says several times (for example, in John 3:16), that those who believe in him have eternal life. What Jesus is saying in the parable is that the faith that saves you also produces good works. The good works of the sheep, therefore, are proof that the sheep have put their faith in Jesus. The lack of good works by the goats, however, is proof that they have not put their faith in Jesus. This is why they are sent to the everlasting fire, where they will suffer forever.

Notice also that Jesus says that whenever the sheep did any of these things to the least of Jesus' brothers, they did it

to him. And when the goats did not do any of these things to the least of Jesus' brothers, they did not do it to him. Every Christian is united by faith to Jesus Christ. So, whatever we do to our brothers and sisters in the Lord, whether good or bad, we do to Jesus. This truth should give us all the more reason why we should love one another.

Jesus makes the same two important points in John 5:24-30: only two fates await everybody and Jesus will decide what everybody's fate will be. Notice that Jesus starts the passage by saying that those who believe in God have everlasting life, but later says that those who have done good will go forth to the resurrection of life. Again, he is saying that the faith that saves you also produces good works. If your faith does not produce good works, then your faith has not saved you, either.

Jesus also says that those who believe in God will not come into judgment. The Greek word for "judgment" is *krisis*, from which we get our word, "crisis." It does mean "judgment" but it can also mean "condemnation," which is how it is translated in verse 29. The evil will go forth to the resurrection of condemnation. In one sense, judgment has already been passed on the believer, for the believer will not come into condemnation but has already passed from death to life.

This passage in John 5 makes it sound like the believers and the unbelievers will rise from the dead at the same time. However, according to the book of Revelation, there will be two resurrections. The first will take place just before the millennium, when Jesus comes back to earth to set up his millennial kingdom (Rev. 20:4-6). This resurrection is for the believers, who will reign with Christ through the millennium. Over these, the second death has no power because, as Jesus said in John 5:24, the believers have already passed from death to life.

The second resurrection will occur after the millennium (Rev. 20:11-15). This resurrection is for the unbelievers. Once

they are resurrected, everyone will stand before God on Judgment Day. This judgment is also known as the Great White Throne Judgment because God sits on a great white throne when he judges the people. Everyone will be judged according to their works. For the believers, their works will demonstrate that they have put their faith in Christ, so they will inherit the kingdom. However, for the unbelievers, their works will not be enough to save them, so they will be cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

The works of the believer will not determine the believer's salvation, but they will determine the believer's rewards. Every believer will stand before Christ, who will decide which reward will go to each believer. This is described in 2 Cor. 5:9-11. The Greek word for "judgment seat" is *bema*, which is why this is often referred to as the Bema Seat Judgment. In the Roman and Greek cultures of the first century, the *bema* was the seat upon which the judge sat during a trial and from which he rendered his decision. Christ will sit on a *bema* when he judges the believers to determine what their rewards will be.

How will Christ determine who gets which reward? Paul tells us in 1 Cor. 3:5-17. Many well-intentioned teachers take verses 16 and 17 out of context and think the temple of God is the body of the individual Christian. Hence, we are not supposed to drink coffee or soda or smoke cigars or cigarettes because those things harm the body and thereby defiles the temple of God. But this is not what Paul means at all. "You" in this passage is plural, while "temple" is singular. The Corinthians, together, are the temple of God, that is, the Church is the temple of God.

Going back to verse 5, Paul says that he and Apollos are "ministers through whom you believed." He then draws an image from agriculture: "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase." Paul preached the gospel to the Corinthi-

ans, Apollos helped them to grow by teaching them, but God is the one who actually caused all of this to happen.

Paul then changes his metaphor in verse 9: "For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building." He transitions from agriculture to architecture. The Corinthians are God's building, which, as we discover in verse 16, is the temple of God. He says that the foundation of this building is Jesus Christ. Since every believer is a part of this temple, every believer helps to construct this building. Some will do so with gold, silver, and precious stones, while others will do so with wood, hay, and straw.

On Judgment Day, "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." The fire will purify the gold, silver, and precious stones, but will burn up the wood, hay, and straw. This is why Paul goes on to say, "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."

Our rewards are based on how well we build up the Church. If we build well, we will build with gold, silver, and precious stones, which will endure the fire. If we do not build well, we will build with wood, hay, and straw, which will be burned. We will suffer loss but we will still be saved. Again, our works do not determine our salvation, but they do determine our rewards. However, instead of building up the Church, if someone tries to defile (literally, destroy) the Church, which is the temple of God, God will destroy that person. That person will not be saved.

In context, therefore, Paul is not saying that the body is the temple of God and that God will destroy anyone who destroys his or her own body. He is contrasting building up the Church with destroying the Church.

Every believer is expected to help build up the Church. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews tells us why we should gather together: "And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching" (Heb. 10:24-25). The Greek word translated as "stir up" actually means "provoke." We are to provoke one another to love and good works. "Exhort" literally means "to call to one's side, to summon." The purpose of calling someone to your side is to speak to that person. That speech may rebuke, entreat, console, encourage, or instruct that person. We are also called to strengthen one another. The point is that we are to help one another to live this Christian life. None of us are expected to do this alone. We have to do this together. This means that when we gather together, we do so, not so much to benefit ourselves, but to benefit others.

Imagine one hundred people gathering at a church with the attitude which says, "I won't bless anyone until someone blesses me." Who gets blessed? No one, because everyone is waiting for someone else to make the first move. Now imagine those same hundred people gathering at a church with the attitude which says, "I don't care if I get blessed. I will be a blessing to everyone else." Now who gets blessed? Everyone does. What is more, everyone is blessed 99 times.

Or imagine a group of hungry people gathered around a banquet table that is loaded with meats, cheese, fruit, vegetables, bread, and wine, more than they can possibly eat or drink. But the forks are attached to their arms and are so long that they extend to the other side of the table. The people can use the forks to get to the food all right, but they cannot get it into their mouths because the forks are too long. So they starve. This is a picture of the immature who are focused on

meeting their own needs but are ultimately unsatisfied. This is also why this is a picture of hell.

Now picture another group of hungry people around the same banquet table with the same forks. Instead of trying to feed themselves, they use the forks to feed the people opposite of them. That is a picture of the mature who are focused on meeting the needs of others and are ultimately satisfied themselves. This is also why this is a picture of heaven.

Immature people benefit themselves. Immature people make sure that their wants and needs are met. Immature people expect others to serve them, even if the others have to sacrifice themselves to meet the needs of the immature. Immature people come to church only if they see that it benefits them. If they try to build up the Church at all, they do so with wood, hay, and straw.

Mature people benefit others. Mature people make sure that the wants and needs of others are met. Mature people expect themselves to serve others, even if the mature have to sacrifice themselves to meet the needs of others. Mature people come to church so that they can benefit others. In doing so, they build up the Church with gold, silver, and precious stones.

Therefore, a day is coming in which everyone will have to stand before God and give an account for what he or she has done in this lifetime. The unbelievers will be judged according to their works, which will not be good enough to save them, so they will spend eternity suffering in the lake of fire. The believers will inherit the kingdom and live forever in heaven with God and Jesus Christ, not because of their works, but because they put their faith in Jesus Christ. However, their works demonstrate that they have put their faith in Jesus Christ.

The believers will also be rewarded for their good works. Their rewards are based on how well they built up the Church. Therefore, when we gather with the saints in a formal service

or we interact with another believer, we should do so, not with the intent of benefiting ourselves, but with the intent of benefiting others. We should meet the needs of our brothers and sisters in the Lord. We should feed them when they are hungry, give them something to drink when they are thirsty, take them into our homes when they need shelter, clothe them when they are naked, and visit them when they are sick or in prison. Instead of expecting to be blessed, we should be a blessing. We should provoke to love and good works those who are lacking in those things, we should rebuke those who need rebuking, we should encourage those who need encouraging, and we should strengthen those who need strengthening. And we should always remember that whatever we do to one another, whether good or bad, we also do to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Chapter 9

Let Us Go on to Maturity

Heb. 6:1-8

For the last few chapters, we have been looking at the list of elementary principles of Christian living. These six principles are meant to be only the foundation upon which the believer builds his or her Christian life. They are supposed to be principles which a Christian learns when he or she is a new believer. The Christian is supposed to learn more than just these principles and is supposed to progress in his or her Christian life. As the writer of this Epistle says in verse one, "Let us go on to perfection." The Greek word for perfection also means "maturity." A baby is supposed to grow up and become a mature adult. A baby is not supposed to remain a baby. So, too, the Christian is not supposed to remain a baby who needs only the milk of the Word. The Christian is supposed to grow up and become a mature Christian who needs solid food. We are supposed to become as perfect and mature as Christ is. We are supposed to be perfectly obedient to our heavenly Father as Christ was perfectly obedient to his Father. We are supposed to love one another as Christ loved us. And we are supposed to sacrifice ourselves for Christ and for others as Christ sacrificed himself for us.

As the writer says in verse three, "And this we will do if God permits." We cannot go on to maturity unless God permits us

to do so, but our desire should always be to become mature as Christ is mature.

In verses 4-8, the writer issues a warning to his readers about what will happen to them if they decide to walk away from Christ. In short, he says that once a Christian falls away from Christ, it is impossible for that person to repent and come back to Christ because that would be the same as crucifying Christ all over again.

There are some who argue that the writer is not giving this warning to real Christians because he does not describe real Christians here. If he were describing real Christians, he would have called them "believers" or "brothers." Instead, the writer describes the persons as "those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come." This sounds like persons who were interested in Christianity and perhaps dabbled in it for a while, but never became real Christians. It is impossible for these people to become real Christians once they walk away from Christianity.

However, the Greek word for "enlightened" is *photizo*, which means "to give light," either literally or figuratively. The writer uses this word again in Heb. 10:32 to describe the readers of this Epistle: "But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated (*photizo*), you endured a great struggle with sufferings." Elsewhere, such as Heb. 3:1, the writer refers to his readers as "brothers." So, his Christian brothers are the ones who have been illuminated or enlightened with the truth.

The writer also says that these people have "tasted the heavenly gift." The Greek word for "tasted," *geuomai*, means "to eat," again either literally or figuratively. The writer used this word back in Heb. 2:9, where he says that Jesus "was made a little lower than the angels," that he "might taste death for everyone." Jesus did not just nibble at death. He did not just

dabble in death. He took it completely into himself. So, too, these persons took the heavenly gift into themselves.

The writer does not specify to which heavenly gift he refers, but the Greek word for "gift," *dorea*, is used several times throughout the New Testament. In Acts 2:38, Peter says to the crowd, "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." In Rom. 5:17, Paul describes righteousness as a gift given by Christ. In Eph. 4:7, Paul says, "But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift." So, whatever gift the writer of this Epistle had in mind, whether it is the gift of grace or the gift of righteousness or the gift of the Holy Spirit, it is a gift that is given only to real Christians.

These persons have also "become partakers of the Holy Spirit." "Partaker," in the Greek, is *metochos*, which means "a partner, one who shares in." These persons have become those who share the Holy Spirit. By this, the writer could mean that the Holy Spirit indwells these people, or he means that they have been baptized in the Holy Spirit. Either way, these persons are real Christians.

The writer also says that these persons "have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come." These persons have taken these things into themselves. They know the truth and experienced the power of God. Again, these persons are real Christians.

Finally, if these persons are not real Christians, then why would they be crucifying Christ again if they decide to become Christians after all? Christ died to atone for the sins of the whole world, but his death is effective only for those who actually put their faith in Christ. The blood of Christ washes away the sins of only those who are real Christians. Should those real Christians fall away and return to the sinful lifestyle, they cannot come back because Christ's blood would have to wash

away their sins again, which would be the same as crucifying Christ again. Those who dabble in Christianity but are not real Christians can still become real Christians because sinners can crucify Christ just once. Only real Christians can try to crucify Christ twice, but God will never give them the opportunity to do so.

The writer says that it is impossible for real Christians to come back to Christ if they fall away from him. The Greek word for "impossible," *adynatos*, literally means "no strength." It is the same word the writer uses in Heb. 6:18 when he says that it is impossible for God to lie. Should real Christians fall away from Christ, there is no strength available to them to repent and come back, even if they wanted to do so.

"Fall away" is the Greek word, *parapipto*, and it does mean "to fall away." It is used only here in the New Testament, but it is used several times in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, where it usually translates the Hebrew word for "unfaithfulness." For example, the Hebrew text of Ezek. 18:24 says, "But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and does according to all the abominations that the wicked man does, shall he live? All the righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; because of the unfaithfulness of which he is guilty and the sin which he has committed, because of them he shall die." The Septuagint used the word *parapipto* to translate the word "unfaithfulness." To fall away, then, means "to become unfaithful to God." We enter into a relationship with God the Father and with Jesus Christ through faith. We lose that relationship when we turn to unbelief and become unfaithful to God and Jesus Christ. Once we lose that relationship, we cannot get it back.

To illustrate his point, the writer compares two types of earth. The first type of earth grows herbs that are "useful for those by whom it is cultivated" and "receives blessing from

God." The Christian who receives blessing from God is the one who produces good things, who bears good fruit. However, the Christian who falls away is like the second type of earth, which produces thorns and briers, that is, it produces only bad things, and is rejected. "Rejected" is the Greek word *adokimos*, which means "not standing the test, not approved." It is used of metals and coins, which are rejected because they were tested and found to be not genuine metals or coins. This type of earth is also "near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned." The only thing you can do with thorns and briers is burn them. On Judgment Day, God will test these people who used to be real Christians and find that they are no longer genuine Christians and reject them. The only fate that will await them is to be burned forever in the lake of fire.

Notice that this warning starts in verse 4 with the word "for," which, in this instance, means "because." We should go on to perfection and maturity *because* it is impossible for the real Christians who have fallen away to repent and come back. The implication is that it is easier for immature Christians to fall away than it is for mature Christians to do so. Immature Christians encounter trials and suffering and persecution and in their selfish immaturity, decide that it is too much to endure and fall away from Christ. They do not realize that the trials and suffering and persecution are intended to help them to become perfect and mature, to become like Christ. As James says, "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing" (James 1:2-4). Again, the Greek word for perfect also means mature. "Count" here means "think." We are supposed to change how we think about trials. We are to have the mindset that says that trials are joyful events because they will perfect and mature us.

That it is easier for immature Christians to fall away gives us all the more reason why we should go on to perfection and maturity. This is not to say that mature Christians will not fall away. We should never assume that we have reached the point at which we cannot fall away. But the more mature we become, the less likely we are to fall away.

We must remember that the Epistle to the Hebrews was written to Jewish believers who were considering abandoning Christ and going back to Judaism because they were being persecuted for their faith. The writer of the Epistle is telling these believers that they have three options. They can remain immature believers or they can fall away from Christ. Or they go on to perfection and maturity, which is the best option.

The same three options are set before us as well. We have encountered and will encounter trials and suffering and persecution. At those times, we can remain immature Christians who complain about the trials. Or we can get out of those trials by falling away from Christ. But then we will burn forever in the lake of fire. Or we can count it all joy and go on to perfection and maturity and become like Christ. The choice is ours.

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