

Text: Heb 6.1b-2

Before we move to the most challenging verses of our passage, I want to pause and talk about the “Six Principles” I mentioned last week.

The principles are called by our author, “a foundation” already laid in the lives of his readers.

The literal meaning of “foundation” is:

1. the supporting base for a structure, *foundation*

This leads to a metaphorical meaning:

2. the basis for someth. taking place or coming into being, *foundation*, fig. extension of mng. 1¹

Let’s read Heb 6.1-3 once again.

I also mentioned previously that these six principles became emblematic of a division between Baptist groups in the early history of the church in America.

“The earliest identifiable Baptist churches of modern history were called *General* for their view of a general atonement. While that name has never been as prominent in America as in England, several Baptist groups in the United States have worn it. They have been called General Baptists, General Six-Principle Baptists, or just Six-Principle Baptists. The ‘six principles’ refer to the list of doctrinal beliefs and practices set out in Hebrews 6:1–2. Many of the early Calvinistic churches were called ‘Five-Principle’ because they omitted the fourth principle, laying hands upon all newly baptized converts.”²

Now, we can smile at this division, as it seems very petty. We should pause, first of all, and wonder if we are equally petty in some other area that we hold to just as tenaciously!

¹ Both definitions from Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

² Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage* (Nashville, Tenn: Broadman Press, 1987), 703.

Yet notice that the difference was actually deeper — the two groups differed over theology. The Six-Principle Baptists were “General Baptists” (or Arminians) and the Five-Principle Baptists were “Particular Baptists” (*i.e.*, Calvinists).

What they were really arguing about was foundational principles. What makes a man a Christian?

This question forms the basis of “elementary teaching about the Christ” (6.1) and the “elementary principles of the oracles of God” (5.12).

The author wants to press on from these basics, he assumes they are true of the Hebrews. It is the starting point.

Today we will pause at the starting point and think about what it means to be a Christian.

Proposition: Christianity has a basic starting point, an essential gate of entrance through which everyone must pass to make any progress towards God in this life and the next.

I. Mission of the Christian life (Mt 28.19-20)

Mt 28.19-20 “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

A. The Great Commission is our starting point: it gives Christians their Mission in the world

1. Obviously, one must be a Christian to be on a Christian mission
2. Yet we note that no one starts out as a Christian, the message must come to him
3. The twelve who first received it were chosen by the Lord and sent out into the world

B. The Mission in a nutshell

1. Make disciples of every nation (no distinctions)
2. Method:
 - a. Baptizing them (the sign of conversion)
 - b. Teaching them (instructing, catechizing, training)

Someone is sent with a message and the Christian life starts when that message is received

Rm 10.14-17 ¶ How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? ... ¹⁷ So faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

II. Foundation of Christian life (Heb 6.1b-2)

A. The ways these six principles are comprehended

1. Some say there are three pairs

- a. Repentance and faith
- b. Washings and laying on of hands
- c. Resurrection and judgement

There is merit in seeing it this way

2. Others see it divided this way:

- a. The beginning: Repentance and Faith
- b. The teaching about:
 - 1) Baptism (washings)
 - 2) Laying on of hands
 - 3) Resurrection
 - 4) Judgement

And there is merit in seeing it this way also

3. Some see this as so generic as to be true of Judaism as well as Christianity

- a. I think this is too fine a distinction
- b. It also ignores the context: he is talking about the beginning of Christian life
- c. Each of these things marks something of the beginning, so this is how we will look at them

B. The kindling of life in the inner man

1. Salvation occurs in the spirit (small “s”) where the Holy Spirit regenerates the heart

a. A couple of words to describe

- 1) “born again” (Jesus to Nicodemus)
- 2) “quicken” (KJV); “made alive” (NAU)

Ep 2.5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, **made us alive** together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

b. “The ref. is to people who were dead in their sins, but through union w. Christ have been made alive by God together w. him.”³

2. The Spirit quickens through an inner change of heart

a. Repentance from dead works

- 1) Here probably a direct reference to the Hebrews former dependance on Jewish ritual to gain approval with God
- 2) For anyone, it is a repentance from *anything* you think you have of value to offer to God

b. Faith toward God

- 1) You look to God, see the sacrifice of Jesus in your place, and believe
- 2) Jesus is the only source of salvation: you can’t earn it or deserve it

We won’t argue here about how this happens, it is the man’s heart that changes, it is the Spirit that quickens — it is both/and — an instantaneous action.

3. The first two principles focus on the inner change

Do you have the inner change?

³ Bauer, *BDAG*; Bauer.

C. The expression of life with the outer man

1. We talked a bit about this previously: “washings” ... what is it?

a. Some refer it exclusively to Jewish practices

b. Others think not... (me, for instance)

2. Notice that it is “teachings of washings”

“the word probably implies the teaching which enables Christian catechumens to discriminate between Jewish washings and Christian baptism.”⁴

a. The Jewish washings are only a shadow of what was to come: they aren’t the beginning of Christian life

b. Christian baptism is a statement: my inner man has changed

3. And laying on of hands (the most curious of the six... what is this?)

a. Examples of laying on of hands in the NT

1) Jesus blessing the children (Mt 19.13)

2) Jesus healing by laying on hands (Mk 7.32)

3) At the choice of the seven deacons (Ac 6.6)

4) At the bestowal of the Holy Spirit

a) In Samaria (Ac 8.17f.)

b) To John’s disciples (Ac 19.6)

5) To separate Barnabas and Saul for their missionary work (Ac 13.3)

6) To ordain men to the ministry (1Tim 4.14, 5.22; 2 Tim 1.6)

We still do at least this last one

b. Laying on of hands is an inaugural rite: it signifies the beginning of something

Both baptism and laying on of hands are external actions picturing the inner change

⁴ F. W. Farrar, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews, With Notes and Introduction.*, Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1893), 80.

- D. The forward hope of the converted man
1. No one thinks salvation is “for this life only”
 2. There is a hope of resurrection

^{1 Pt 3.18} For Christ also died for sins once for all, *the* just for *the* unjust, **so that He might bring us to God**, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit;

3. We also do not fear the judgement to come

^{1 Jn 4.17} By this, love is perfected with us, **so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment**; because as He is, so also are we in this world.

The six principles are at the beginning of Christian faith, they are the foundation on which the writer will build

III. Progress in Christian life (Heb 6.3)

- A. And this we will do (Heb 6.3)
1. The writer means to progress
 2. We mean to progress in our own walk
- B. Time constrains, but we could point to other passages
1. The things we are to add (or supply) to our initial faith (2 Pt 1.5-12)
 2. The things on which we are to dwell, whatever is right, is honorable, is pure, etc (Phil 4.8)
 3. The fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5.22ff.)

Conclusion:

Proposition: Christianity has a basic starting point, an essential gate of entrance through which everyone must pass to make any progress towards God in this life and the next.

Some years ago we read *Pilgrim's Progress* as a church project. There is a stirring passage where the main character, Christian, with his friend, Hopeful, encounters a fellow named Ignorance.

{307} And I slept, and dreamed again, and saw the same two Pilgrims going down the mountains along the highway towards the city. Now, a little below these mountains, on the left hand, lieth the country of Conceit; from which country there comes into the way in which the Pilgrims walked, a little crooked lane. Here, therefore, they met with a very brisk lad, that came out of that country; and his name was Ignorance. So Christian asked him from what parts he came, and whither he was going.

{308} **IGNOR.** Sir, I was born in the country that lieth off there a little on the left hand, and I am going to the Celestial City.

CHR. But how do you think to get in at the gate? for you may find some difficulty there.

IGNOR. As other people do, said he.

CHR. But what have you to show at that gate, that may cause that the gate should be opened to you?

IGNOR. I know my Lord's will, and I have been a good liver; I pay every man his own; I pray, fast, pay tithes, and give alms, and have left my country for whither I am going.

{309} **CHR.** But thou camest not in at the wicket-gate that is at the head of this way; thou camest in hither through that same crooked lane, and therefore, I fear, however thou mayest think of thyself, when the reckoning day shall come, thou wilt have laid to thy charge that thou art a thief and a robber, instead of getting admittance into the city.

IGNOR. Gentlemen, ye be utter strangers to me, I know you not; be content and follow the religion of your country, and I will follow the religion of mine. I hope all will be well. And as for the gate that you talk of, all the world knows that that is a great way off of our country. I cannot think that any man in all our parts doth so much as know the way to it, nor need they matter whether they do or no, since we have, as you see, a fine, pleasant green lane, that comes down from our country, the next way into the way.

{310} When **Christian** saw that the man was “wise in his own conceit”, he said to Hopeful, whisperingly, “There is more hope of a fool than of him.” [Prov. 26:12] And said, moreover, “When he that is a fool walketh by the way, his wisdom faileth him, and he saith to every one that he is a fool.” [Eccl. 10:3] What, shall we talk further with him, or out-go him at present, and so leave him to think of what he hath heard already, and then stop again for him afterwards, and see if by degrees we can do any good to him? Then said **Hopeful**—

Let Ignorance a little while now muse
On what is said, and let him not refuse
Good counsel to embrace, lest he remain
Still ignorant of what’s the chiefest gain.
God saith, those that no understanding have,
Although he made them, them he will not save.⁵

Proposition: Christianity has a basic starting point, an essential gate of entrance through which everyone must pass to make any progress towards God in this life and the next.

⁵ John Bunyan, “The Pilgrim’s Progress from This World to That Which Is to Come,” <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/131/131-h/131-h.htm>, accessed October 28, 2023, <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/131/pg131-images.html.utf8>.