

# The Basics

## Hebrews 6:1-3

*Halifax: 4 December 2022*

### **Introduction:**

Today, we will continue our sermon series through the book of Hebrews.

- Last week, we finished chapter 5, verses 10-14.

It was a very challenging passage.

- We saw that the author (ultimately the Holy Spirit), who was on a roll proclaiming to us the glories of Christ, stopped short...
- He stopped because he realised that many of the hearers of this letter were not mature enough in their faith to receive the things he was getting ready to tell them.
  - He accused them of having become “dull of hearing”—more literally, “lazy in the ears.”
  - It was not a problem of the natural intelligence, for they had started out well, but it was that they had *become* dull of hearing.
  - Perhaps part of this was because they were clever enough to recognise that if they came to understand more about Christ, it would require a more decisive break with their Jewish rituals and customs and bring even more alienation from their people.
    - They did not want to know the truth because then they would be responsible for it.
    - They forgot that they were responsible for being lazy in the ears... by now they should have been mature and able to lead others... but instead, they were still like babes who could only handle milk.
      - They were like high school students who were still learning their ABCs—unable to enjoy great books.
- Of course, I emphasised that, while this epistle was written to the original recipients, it was intended for the admonition of the entire church, like all of Scripture.
  - The scriptures are given for our comfort and edification.
  - I challenged you about your maturity.
    - Are you where you should be by this time?
    - Have you been dull of hearing? Perhaps you have been that way for a long time.
    - Have you been less than eager to learn of Christ in order that you might grow in your walk with Him?

The Holy Spirit doesn't stop with that.

- In chapter 6, He continues to urge us to go on to perfection—to maturity.
  - This leads to a solemn warning that we will not get to until next week.
  - This week, we will look at how He sets before us the glorious foundation that we have and urges us to start building on it.

Listen now as I read today's text to you.

- This is the holy Word of God.
- May He bless you as you hear it.

I will begin at Hebrews 6:1 and read to verse 3.

**Hebrews 6:1-3: Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary *principles* of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, <sup>2</sup> of**

**the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. <sup>3</sup> And this we will do if God permits.**

Thanks be to God for His precious word and for the transforming power of His Holy Spirit who enables us to receive it and do it.

**I. The author begins by telling the Hebrews (and us) that it is time for us to move on from the foundation to the building itself.**

- This, of course, is a generalisation—no doubt they had some among them that were mature—but generalisations are true as generalisations and they are helpful.
- So again, **the author tells us (the reader) that it is time for us to move on from the foundation to the building itself.**

A. This is rather striking because he just told us that we were not ready to move on.

1. Look at the relationship with what was said at the end of chapter 5 and what is said here.

- Chapter 6 begins with the word *Therefore*.
  - Since he just told us that we were not ready to move on but were still in need of instruction in the basics, you would expect him to say something like,
    - “Therefore, we are not going to talk about the glorious things of Christ, but I am going to continue to instruct you in the basics.”
  - But instead, he says, “leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation...”

2. He is not going to baby them. He is determined to push them.

- There is no point in going over and over the basics.
  - If they are not willing to move forward, they will simply be left behind.
- The very dullness that they were exhibiting was the kind of dullness that needed to be challenged by beholding the excellences of Christ.
  - They were avoiding this and it would only exacerbate their laziness to keep on going over the foundation with them.

B. What would going over the basics again look like?

1. For these Hebrews, it would involve defending the fact that Jesus really is the Messiah. Convincing them that He was the one.

a. As Jews, they already had all the basic elements that are listed here. They had them in a pre-Christian way—

- Look at the list.
  - Repentance from dead works and faith toward God.
    - That was the message they had as Jews. Their prophets called them to repent of their sins and trust in God to save them. They set forth the promise of the salvation that would come through the Messiah.

- Like Abraham, the godly believed God and it was accounted to them for righteousness. They were saved by faith just like we are, and, as we recently saw in chapter 3 & 4, those who did not believe were not able to enter into God's promised rest because of their unbelief.
  - They also had instructions about baptisms and the laying on of hands, and the faithful believed in the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.
    - They lived in the light of this hope.
- b. But now that Jesus the Messiah had come, the acceptance of Him as the Messiah was the foundation of their Christian profession.
- Their testimony of repentance and faith was in turning from their sin, as it was now revealed in Christ, to Him as having come to take away their sins.
    - As Jesus said, they believed in God, they were now to believe also in Him—as having come to save them according to God's promise.
    - Anyone who was wavering about whether Jesus was actually the Messiah was still working on the foundation.
      - Did they still need more testimony? more scriptural proof from the Old Testament? This should have been clear by now.
    - Yes, the basic principles were the same, only radically different.
      - It was right for Abraham and Moses and David and the prophets of the Old Covenant to be waiting for Christ,
        - But now that He had been revealed, those who had real faith and real repentance accepted their Messiah.
2. What about us—we who are not Jews?
- a. For us, it was initially a matter of us coming to receive these basic rudiments now that they are revealed in Christ—rudiments that we had not received,
- being cut off from God's people and strangers to the covenants of promise—without hope and without God in the world.
  - For us, it meant turning from our sins and embracing the good news that Jesus had come to save sinners by His death on the cross.
    - It was to look to God for salvation in Him—and to be baptised and to hope in the resurrection and believe in the judgment to come by Christ.
- b. If we are still not beyond the foundation, it means that we are refusing to be persuaded that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.
- It means that we are still not sure whether He is the true God and eternal life.
  - Whether there really is a resurrection of the dead and judgment to come.
  - If this be the case, we are not ready to go on because the foundation is still not securely in place for us. We need to be saved.
    - This is what is at the bottom of many professing Christians' dullness. When you get down to it, they really don't believe basics of the gospel.
- The author of Hebrews is not going to accommodate this. He is moving on.

C. Consider how absurd it is to keep on working at the foundation.

1. What good is a foundation with no building on it?
  - The whole purpose of a foundation is to support a building.
  - The truth is, a foundation is not really a foundation at all until it has a building on it.
2. The church as a whole is the house of God, a temple where He dwells, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets.
  - It is made up of living stones—redeemed people who are made alive through faith in Christ.
  - Each congregation can also be looked at as a temple that grows as a place where God dwells, where He is worshipped and heard, where He is served and testimony of Him is given to the world.
  - But not only that—it also pertains to us on an individual level.
    - Each of us as an individual is a temple for God, built upon Jesus Christ, growing up to perfection or maturity—
3. The exhortation here is the one we keep seeing in Hebrews.
  - Here, the words are, “Let us go on to perfection.”
    - The word perfection has the root *telos*, and speaks of the completion of the goal—of maturity—of becoming what God wants us to be.
    - This calls for diligence, it calls for eagerness to learn of Christ and His glory, for a desire to serve Him and to glorify Him with our lives.
      - We are not to keep dabbling at the foundation—we are to get on to better things—the glorious things of Christ.

TRANS> But although the author is moving on, he does set forth to us what the foundation consists in.

- If the foundation is not in place, if we are still wavering about the foundation, we cannot go on to better things.
- So let’s take a closer look at what the foundation is made of.
  - It may be that there are also some who hear this sermon who are only new to these things—and for those of us who are mature, it is always encouraging to examine the foundation on which we stand.

## **II. So here is the glorious foundation upon which we are to build—the foundation that we must have if we are to go on in Christ.**

A. First, repentance from dead works.

1. Repentance speaks of a change of mind—a change of mind that is so complete that it brings about a complete change of life.
  - Before we believe, our mind is set on earthly things.
  - We are not oriented toward God, toward obeying Him, thanking Him, worshipping Him, trusting Him.
    - He is not at the centre of our lives where He belongs.
  - The Bible refers to this as being dead in our trespasses and sins.

- Everything we do—even kindness to others—is a dead work because it is not oriented toward God. We are not living for Him.
  - And such living results in death—
  - Our works are dead works in both of these ways—they are done by us as dead in sin and they bring about death.
2. The change of mind is a change where we turn from these dead works to God.
- Our mind is changed about what we ought to be living for and we are ashamed of all that we have done.
    - This change of mind is so complete that we change the way we live.
    - We not only see that we ought to live for God, but we actually begin to live for Him.
3. Now that Christ has come, no repentance is complete apart from Him.
- Abraham and the Old Testament believers had repentance unto salvation, but once Christ came, a much fuller repentance was called for.
    - Repentance was enhanced.
    - How so?
  - Because in Christ we see sin on a level that was impossible for us to see before.
    - In Christ, we see all our sins laid on Him—and we see the mighty Son of God sunk under the curse by our sins—brought into the pit of death.
  - God had set forth sin to the Jews with the sacrifices of old.
    - Your sin was symbolically transferred to the animal and it was killed in your place—showing that sin brings about death. It was vivid.
      - And this was done repeatedly to keep it before the worshippers.
    - Added to this was the inapproachability of God even in the ritual temple where none dare enter except for the priest who was authorised.
      - Those who attempted to do so suffered grave consequences—such as fire consuming them or breaking out with leprosy.
      - The thunder and lightening on Mt. Sinai helped to show how unacceptable His people were to God because of their sin.
        - All of this was adequate for the Old Testament saint’s repentance.
        - After Christ was revealed, this level was not acceptable.
    - After He came, repentance reached a whole new level.
      - Anyone in Israel who rejected the Messiah demonstrated by that that they were rejecting God—in Christ, God was more fully revealed and they refused to believe.
      - Their profession before was only superficial, else they would have received the greater revelation with gladness.
    - And now that this greater revelation about sin and salvation had come, it was the time for the nations to be called to repentance.
      - Now they could understand how much they needed God’s salvation.

TRANS> The second foundational element of true saving faith is closely related to repentance from dead works.

B. The second foundational element is *faith in God*.

1. This was also transformed for the Jew through the coming of Christ.
  - I already explained how before there was faith that God would save His people and provide a sacrifice to take away their sin.
    - They trusted God with faith that was sufficient for salvation through the shadows and promises...
  - But when Christ came, God's provision for our sins was magnified.
    - It was now seen that His very own Son, God the Son, was sent to actually be the sacrifice for our sins.
    - To any sincere believer of the Old Testament, this brought great rejoicing as soon as they heard and understood the gospel!
      - Faith in God became more—much more than it had ever been before.
      - There was no going back once it was seen that God's Son was the sacrifice to take away our sins.
2. This glorious message, “believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved” was to be proclaimed in all the world.
  - Anyone who believes, who trusts in Christ crucified as God's provision for salvation for sin, will be saved—from both the penalty and the power of sin.
  - This is the key element in the foundation of our faith.
    - Without faith in Jesus Christ as He is now revealed, no one can be saved. No one can grow to maturity who does not have this foundation.
    - Not life, but certain death awaits those who reject Him.

C. The third foundational element is *the doctrine of baptisms*.

1. This, being addressed to the Hebrews, speaks of the whole array of baptisms that they had in the ceremonial rituals that God had given them.
  - It seemed that everything had to be washed because of defilement by sin.
  - This instruction was helpful for them to buttress the teaching that sin made them unacceptable to God and that God had appointed washing or cleansing so that they could be His people.
    - He would wash them from their defilement.
2. But when Christ came, all of these baptisms converged into one.
  - It was foundational teaching for the Hebrew believer that now the cleansing that God promised was by Jesus Christ.
    - He was the one who was anointed with the Holy Spirit and it was by the power of His Spirit that there was new birth—
      - The Holy Spirit is the one who writes God's law in our hearts so that we repent and turn to God through Christ.
      - And when we turn to Christ, the Spirit so unites us to Him that we are cleansed by His sacrifice from all defilement.

- Now that Jesus had come, the only baptism they needed was the one baptism in the name of Jesus Christ—in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
  - This was basic instruction for the Hebrews.
- 3. It was also basic instruction for the Gentiles—in a slightly different way.
  - In their pagan rituals, they often had various washings and purifications, but now they too were to look for cleansing through Christ in the new birth.
  - He would wash away their sins so that they could repent and believe and receive the blessing for forgiveness through faith in Him and new life by His grace before God forever.
  - Baptism set all this forth as the sacrament of initiation into their life with God in His church.

D. Next, the *laying on of hands* is mentioned.

1. This is especially mentioned because of its relevance to the Jews.
  - It was associated with the giving of the Holy Spirit for service to God.
    - They were familiar with their kings being anointed by the Spirit of God so that they received gifts enabling them to serve in their office.
    - We are told how Saul was anointed and was immediately changed and became a different man. We are told how he went and prophesied so that people said, “Is Saul among the prophets?”
  - Their priests and their prophets were likewise said to be anointed, and ultimately Christ was to come, His very name—Messiah or Christ—meaning “the anointed one.”
    - They understood this to be symbolic of the conveyance of the Spirit and His gifts for service.
    - The prophets had declared that God’s Spirit would be poured out when the Messiah came.
      - Joel 2:28 says: “My Spirit will be poured out on all flesh.”
2. Therefore, when Jesus came, the Holy Spirit was poured out.
  - Not only was He given to purify the heart as signified by baptism, but there was also a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit to give gifts of ministry.
    - In the New Testament, this was symbolised by the laying on of hands.
    - Sometimes, the Holy Spirit was poured out without the laying on of hands, but the Jews understood by the laying on of hands the unique promise of the New Testament to anoint God’s people for service.
  - Two things were very significant in this teaching for them:
    - First, that all believers are gifted to serve. This was initially demonstrated by sign gifts that were much needed before the Scriptures were complete.
    - Second, it showed them that in the New Covenant there were new offices that replaced the offices in the Old Testament...
      - The offices of deacon and bishop or elder.
  - In this way, the Jews learned that now that Christ had come, there were new offices associated with the gospel,
    - And every member was empowered by the Spirit to serve.

3. The Gentiles likewise were shown to be recipients of the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands.
    - This was a huge thing because it showed the Gentiles were also partakers of the Holy Spirit who was now poured out on all who believe.
      - They too were called to serve in offices.
    - This was basic instruction for the Jews and the Gentiles.
- E. The fifth foundational principle is *the resurrection from the dead*.
1. Most of the Jews believed in the resurrection of the dead—they certainly should have.
    - The Sadducees did not—they were like modernist, neo-orthodox, and liberal Christians today who also deny the resurrection.
      - Resurrection means that there is life after death.
      - It means that the notion of the Greeks that the body is undesirable and a prison house to the soul is a false notion. God made us material beings.
      - Resurrection also means that we will never lose our identity as we would if we went from one body to another or were absorbed into one great spirit.
    - The Jews believed all of this already.
  2. But when Christ came, the doctrine was wonderfully advanced.
    - Not only because the Gentiles now come and believe in the resurrection like the Jews do, but also because the Jews believe it in a much fuller, richer way in Christ than they ever could have before.
    - Now, when we and they come to Christ, we have Him as our head—the head of the church—resurrected from the dead to immortality, securing the promise of immortality for all of us who are redeemed by Him.
    - Believing that God raised Him from the dead is to believe that God accepted His sacrifice for our sins—and so raised Him up.
      - That means that all of us who believe are accepted in Him because He was accepted. His resurrection is our assurance that we will be raised up like Him to immortality.
  3. And besides all of that, the Scripture teaches that when we believe, we are raised with Him from death in sin to live for God.
    - We learn that though we are now oriented toward Him (as we saw before) by the new birth in the Spirit—and given new desires to obey God—
      - we are also empowered by the living Christ to actually live for God, to walk in newness of life by His grace.
    - Yes, the Jews believed in the resurrection before Jesus came, but now that He has come, they do not believe as they should unless they believe that God raised Jesus from the dead and enter into new life through union with Him.
- F. The last basic principle of our faith is belief in eternal judgment.
1. Here again, the Jews had always believed that God was a righteous judge and that all people would be judged by Him.
    - All will be brought under review in that day.
    - The righteous will be rewarded and accepted, but the wicked will be condemned.
    - And the duration of this reward or this punishment will be forever.

2. This doctrine of eternal judgment was much more fully revealed by Christ than ever before.
  - Now, God has revealed that all judgment is to be done by His Son who became flesh and dwelt among us.
  - This makes the reality of the coming judgment much more vivid and tangible.
3. Furthermore, the fact that the Son of God had to be crucified to bear our sins makes it clear that our sin is no light or trivial matter.
  - It demonstrates the goodness and severity of God...
    - His goodness in that He has provided for our forgiveness by bearing the penalty for us.
    - His severity by showing us that He, the Son of God, was the only one who could bear our sins.

TRANS> So you see how God has revealed these elementary principles through His Son.

- This is the foundation that He has laid for us in Christ Jesus.
- It is upon this glorious foundation that we are to build our lives to maturity.

### **III. The author of Hebrews is ready to build on this foundation and to lead the Hebrews (and us) to maturity.**

- The human author, indeed, but also the Spirit who spoke through him and who is always ready in every age to lead those in Christ to perfection.
- In verse 3, He says, **“And this we will do if God permits.”**
  - This we will do—we will go on to perfection.

#### A. The writer has made it clear.

- He is not going to keep on laying the foundation—
  - If anyone has not settled upon Christ as the object of his faith and his hope, then that is what he needs to do.
- But he is moving on to lead us into a greater fullness in Christ.
  - “This we will do,” he says.
  - He is ready to bring them along.
  - The Holy Spirit is ready to bring you along—showing you more and more about Christ.

#### B. But none of this can be done without the Lord.

1. You see how he adds the phrase, “If God will permit.”
  - No one can grow up to maturity without God’s blessing.
  - That is what our whole religion is about.
    - We do not look to ourselves to do the saving.
    - We look to God.
      - Without Him, we can do nothing.
2. But there is good news here.
  - If you are resting in Christ in the basic principles that we saw... and you want to go on and grow into full maturity...
    - He will help you.
    - He is eager to help you.
    - And He will not fail.

3. The human author, in writing this, did not know who was truly standing upon Christ as his sure foundation.
  - He did not know whose faith was formed and who would therefore be able to go on to perfection—to wholeness and maturity, and who would turn back.
    - But he knew that any success he had would be from the LORD.
  - I do not know which of you is established upon this sure foundation of Christ.
    - I cannot see your heart.
    - But if God will permit, there will be those among us who are truly in Christ and who will go on to perfection.
      - We will find more and more delight in the glories of Christ even as we continue on in the book of Hebrews.