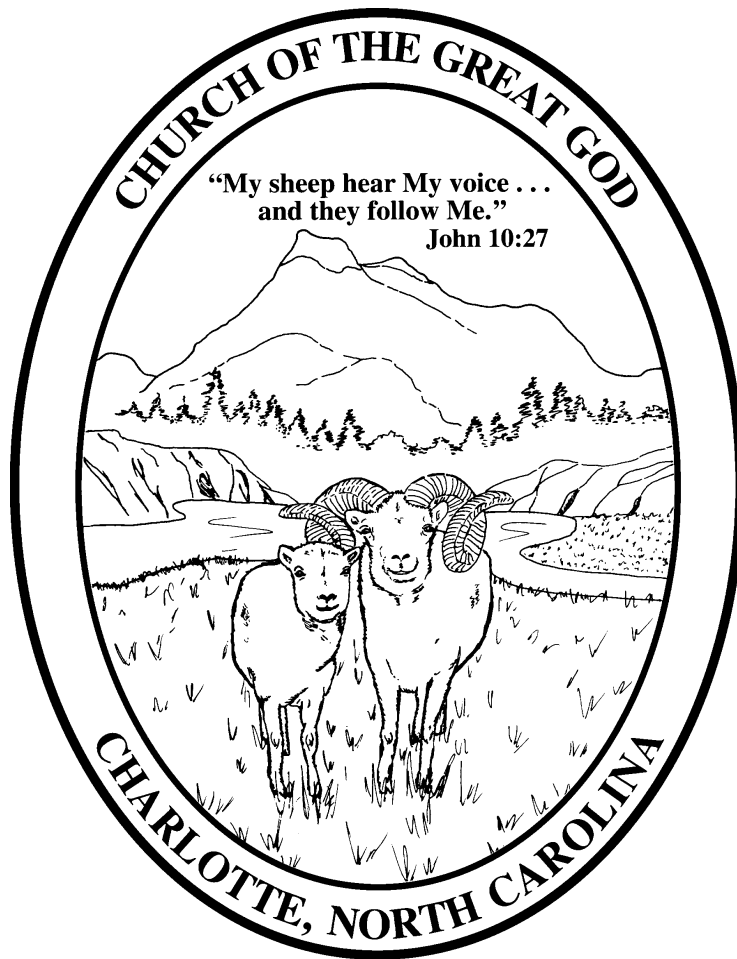


A close-up photograph of a person's hands applying mortar to a brick wall. The person is wearing a silver watch on their left wrist. The mortar is a thick, reddish-brown paste being spread onto a brick. The background shows more of the brick wall and some shadows.

Forerunner  
*Bible Study Series*

*The Basic Doctrines*

# The Basic Doctrines



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# Forerunner Bible Study Series

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# The Basic Doctrines

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## Introduction

In the past half century, the church of God has had a productive history of using the question-and-answer format in its Bible study materials. Not only does this method spur our curiosity about biblical teachings, but it also **MAKES US** dig into God's Word to find the answers to the great—and the mundane—questions of life. We are pleased to continue this tradition in the *Forerunner Bible Study Series*.

These concise lessons, though primarily basic material, can be helpful to both beginners and veterans of Christianity. Beginners can learn the fundamentals of doctrine, prophecy, and Christian living, while old-timers can quickly refresh their knowledge of these things. They can be a valuable resource.

The Bible studies will be more profitable if

you set aside a convenient block of undisturbed time in which to concentrate on them. Read the questions carefully, looking up—and even writing down—the verses that provide God's answers. You may wish to keep a notebook just for this purpose so your work will be accessible anytime you need to refer to it.

And do not forget the other tools of successful Bible study: prayer and meditation. Ask for God's help to open your mind to understand His teaching, and as He reveals it to you, think deeply about its meaning to you, your family, the nation, and to all mankind. This will help it become a vital part of you in your walk toward God's Kingdom.

We hope these studies of God's Word profit you and enlighten your life!

# Doctrine

The pagan religion of Rome was a series of rites rather than a body of doctrine. In effect, the emperor declared, “This you must do, but you can think as you please.” Roman worshippers believed they needed only to perform the proper ceremonies of religion, whether they understood them or not. As far as they were concerned, a hypocritical skeptic could be just as “religious” as a true believer as long as he offered sacrifice in the temples of the gods.

Conversely, it is vital that true Christians believe and behave in accordance with God’s doctrine. Jesus states unconditionally, “[T]rue worshippers will worship the

Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:23-24). What we believe in our minds and feel in our hearts, we will perform in our actions. When based on truth, Christianity follows this principle. As John writes, “My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him” (I John 3:18-19). Jesus Christ’s way of life requires genuine obedience to God’s doctrines, the subject of this Bible Study.

1. What are the fundamental doctrines of Christ? Hebrews 6:1-2.

**COMMENT:** The seven doctrines listed in Hebrews 6 are not all the doctrines of the church, but represent a basic understanding of God’s truth early in the process of conversion. These fundamental doctrines are going on to perfection, repentance from dead works, faith toward God, baptisms, laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. The first, “go[ing] on to perfection,” means pressing on to or striving for spiritual maturity. It is not enough for a Christian to maintain a basic level of understanding—He must grow toward perfection, completion, or maturity in the doctrines of Christ. Part of this process we call “overcoming sin.”

2. What happens if we do not grow in understanding and application of the elementary principles? Hebrews 5:12-14; I Corinthians 3:1-3; Psalm 111:10; Ephesians 4:14-16; James 1:21-22.

**COMMENT:** When a Christian does not apply himself to God’s way of life, he continually needs to relearn the basic principles of the knowledge of God—the milk of the Word—rather than the more “solid” spiritual food. One who can digest only the basic doctrines is immature in the Word of righteousness. He can acquire a deeper understanding of godly wisdom only by active use or practice of God’s standard of righteousness. The physical effort is called works. Just as faith without works is dead, so also are hearers only of the Word of God. Those who hear only and do nothing are deceived, but those who hear and live God’s way of life are blessed. One of these blessings is discernment. In turn, this enables the maturing Christian to discern both good and evil.

3. Why are the basic doctrines called “the elementary principles of Christ”? Hebrews 5:9; 12:2; Revelation 1:8; 21:6; 22:13.

**COMMENT:** Jesus Christ, as the author and finisher of our faith, begins and ends every Christian’s eternal salvation. It is self-evident, however, that, when work-

ing with humans, God must begin with the most fundamental truths. Every Christian, then, starts out as a spiritual infant, a babe in Christ—not as a full grown, mature Christian. Just as human parents commence their young children’s education with the ABCs, God teaches us the elementary truths of Christ’s gospel. Thus, these seven doctrines are the foundation upon which the deeper, more complicated theology of a mature Christian rests.

4. How important is doctrine to a Christian? I Timothy 4:6-7; 6:3; II Timothy 1:13; 4:3; Titus 1:9; 2:1; Jude 3.

**COMMENT:** Paul’s repeated emphasis on sound doctrine implies that the body of teaching in the church is more than just a gospel *about* Christ. It is the gospel *of* Christ—what He taught and lived in His own life, and what He expects us to follow as well. His doctrine is “the pattern of sound words,” the body of truth, once for all delivered to the saints. God inspired the writers of the New Testament to warn us that His church must have a solid foundation in the truth of Christ to defend and contend for the faith because of the constant bombardment of false doctrines.

Just as counterfeit money is recognized by studying the real thing, so we can recognize false doctrine by becoming well acquainted with the true doctrine of Christ. For this reason, God warns us not to learn the ways of the Gentiles (Jeremiah 10:2), which are full of counterfeits of God’s doctrines. Every major religion of the world has claimed that its “founder” had unique insight into the eternal truths of life. Nevertheless, true Christian doctrine claims far more: Jesus Himself tells us that *He is the truth*, not just a teacher of truth (John 14:6).

More important than exposing false teaching, true doctrine is the teaching that will guide us to salvation (Romans 1:16-17). The truth reveals how to live in a way that will please God and instill in us the fundamental traits of His very character. Only by His doctrine can a person hope to find and remain on the path to the Kingdom of God!



# Repentance

“Repent!”—a word long shouted by hellfire-and-brimstone preachers—is tailored to “scare the hell” *out* of people and put the fear of God *in* people. In God’s church, we might half-jokingly use it to inform others of a bad attitude and the need to change. It can become a catch-all phrase that loses its God-emphasized meaning in our lives,

yet the Bible frequently uses “repent” and similar words. On that basis, true godly repentance is of primary importance.

We often ask people, “When were you baptized?” but it is quite rare to ask, “When did you repent?” Yet repentance and baptism are linked biblically and inseparable. How does one repent?

1. What does “repentance” mean? Exodus 13:17; Jeremiah 4:28; Matthew 21:29.

**COMMENT:** In these three instances, the KJV uses “repent” to show the changing of the mind about a matter, its simplest meaning apart from spiritual implications. The NKJV uses “change their minds,” “relent” and “regretted” in place of the more archaic “repent.”

2. What is initial repentance and why is it tied so closely to baptism? Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:15; Acts 2:38-47; Acts 8:27-40.

**COMMENT:** Christ links repentance with the Kingdom of God and believing the gospel. Once one hears the true gospel and believes it, he begins to change the way he thinks. Peter ties repentance with forgiveness of past sins and God’s giving of His Spirit. Once the Ethiopian eunuch heard Philip’s explanation of the Bible, he changed his thinking (repented) and was baptized. Initial repentance includes recognition, acceptance and belief of the true gospel and making changes in one’s life to conform to the new way.

3. What part does emotion play in repentance? Psalm 51; Jude 23; II Corinthians 7:10.

**COMMENT:** When David saw the enormity of his sin, he realized he had hurt God and His purpose. His sorrow, chagrin and remorse reached deeply into his heart, mind and entire being. Our opposition to God should create a similar deep emotional response in us, for we have all played major roles in our Savior’s death. He died for *our* sins. Emotional sorrow alone is not the answer, however. Paul says godly sorrow produces repentance (change) toward salvation, while worldly sorrow is like saying, “I’m sorry I got caught. I’ll be more careful next time I sin.”

4. Of what does one repent? Job 42:6; Romans 7:14-18; Ezekiel 14:6.

**COMMENT:** Job finally recognizes that he had met the enemy—himself! He does not say, “I abhor my sins” but “I abhor myself,” recognizing that the problem was not just specific sins—what he *was* caused him to fall short of God’s righteousness. As explained in Romans 7, we repent *not only* of what we have done but what we *are* that caused us to do what we did!

5. Is repentance a one-time accomplishment or a continuing process? Matthew 3:8; Galatians 5:16-25.

**COMMENT:** “Bear[ing] fruits worthy of repentance” implies a process. Just as a tree does not produce fruit

overnight, a Christian does not fully repent overnight. It is a lifelong process of making changes, and over time we will produce the fruit of the Spirit more consistently than the works of the flesh.

6. Do other words mean essentially the same as repentance? Isaiah 6:10; Psalm 51:13; Matthew 13:15; 18:3; Acts 3:19; Romans 12:1-3.

**COMMENT:** In simple terms, *convert* also means “to change,” as in ice to water or dollars to pesos. Theologically, it means changing from sinner to saint, filthy to holy, worldly to godly. In Acts 3:19, Peter uses “repent” and “convert” together. Both entail a recognition of self and sin and beating a hasty path to righteousness. Paul explains the repentance, conversion and salvation process by contrasting two terms. We must not be *conformed* to the world (“similar to, identical to, in agreement with or compliant”), but *transformed* (“changed in composition or structure, character or condition, converted”). Repentance means changing one’s whole life!

7. How deep is this change to be? II Corinthians 10:5; Philippians 2:5.

**COMMENT:** We are to come to have the very mind of Jesus Christ, bringing absolutely every thought into captivity or control. This is the highest form of mind control—where God expects us to control our own minds.

8. Are there penalties if we fail to repent? Luke 9:62; 13:5; 14:25-33; Revelation 2:5, 16, 22; 3:3, 19.

**COMMENT:** Our salvation hinges on a lifetime of repentance from dead works and overcoming in faith. Thus, we are counseled before baptism to be sure we have counted the cost before we take on the awesome opportunity of eternal life. Once we take hold of the plow, we cannot turn back.

9. Are there rewards for repentance? II Corinthians 7:10; Acts 3:19; 2:38; James 5:19; Psalm 51:13.

**COMMENT:** Through repentance we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, the forgiveness of sin, and the grace and acceptance of God as joint-heirs with Christ. With it comes faith and hope that we will one day rule with Christ for eternity. We not only benefit, but we can also help others turn from their way. Repentance is arduous, but the rewards are beyond human experience and comprehension! Perhaps it is as formidable as the hellfire-and-brimstone preachers contend, but through Jesus Christ, it is positive and quite possible. “Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand!”

# Faith Toward God

We have studied all but one of the subjects the apostle Paul mentions in Hebrews 6:1-2 as the fundamental doctrines of Christ: “faith toward God.” Paul makes the point here that Christians should not stall on the basic principles learned at the beginning of conversion. We are to move forward to perfection or spiritual maturity and completeness.

How does “faith toward God” apply? Do we not constantly and continually need faith? Does Paul intend that we somehow move *beyond* faith in our quest for maturity? Is there a difference between “faith toward God” in our initial conversion and a more mature faith that eventually supercedes it?

1. Is faith toward God something people are born with or learn? Mark 7:7; John 4:22; II Timothy 3:5.

**COMMENT:** Many profess faith in God but do not even know Him! Their worship is vain, not knowing who they worship and learning the doctrines of man, not God. A belief imparted by parents or other authority figures that God exists is not sufficient to establish contact with Him. For example, the Pharisees, familiar with the God of the Old Testament and believing they were in good standing with Him, received Christ’s rebuke that their faith was in vain. This is true of most people today who think they “know the Lord” and profess faith toward Him.

2. How do we find the *real* God and begin to have true faith? John 6:44; Deuteronomy 29:3-4; Romans 11:25-32; 10:12-15; I John 5:19-20.

**COMMENT:** Man cannot “find” God; *only* God can initiate a calling. The world, including most of physical Israel, is consigned to unbelief until later in God’s plan, yet most modern Israelites would say they know God or believe in Him. Romans 10:12-15 describes how God generally introduces people to Himself, though they may suppose they initiated contact with Him by “calling on the name of the Lord.” Men must hear of Him through a preacher—and one whom God has sent, not one that is self-proclaimed.

3. How can we know if a preacher and his message are of God? How can we have genuine faith in a God proclaimed by a preacher? Romans 10:17; John 4:24; II John 9-10.

**COMMENT:** Faith comes by hearing the Word of God, the Bible. Unless the words spoken conform to it, they are merely doctrines of men and do not reflect the true God, for those that worship Him must worship in spirit and *truth*. This requires searching the Scripture as the Bereans did to verify if the preacher’s words are true (Acts 17:11). One cannot know the true God unless one knows the *truth of* God.

4. How do we express faith toward God? How do we know our trust in Him is soundly based? I John 3:22; Ephesians 2:8-10; James 2:17-26.

**COMMENT:** Obedience and keeping the law are prerequisites to true, living faith. Without obedience, faith is dead, worthless. By these few scriptures alone, we know that anyone who says the law is done away has not yet made contact with the true God and has no basis for faith toward Him!

5. What are some examples of this process in action? Acts 2:41-42; 8:27-38.

**COMMENT:** God sent true ministers to the people, who believed His words from their mouths and obeyed the true doctrines. Seeing God’s promises, they adopted the way of life that leads to their fulfillment. By their daily actions, walking in the footsteps of the apostles and Jesus Christ, they expressed living faith toward God, were baptized and received the earnest of His Spirit toward salvation.

6. Is faith toward God all that He requires? Are we “once saved, always saved”? Is our faith sufficient? Luke 18:7-8; 16:10-11; 19:17; James 1:6-8; 2:18-20, 26.

**COMMENT:** Since Christ questions whether even the elect will have the kind of faith He requires, it should be obvious we must grow in faith. Our initial faith toward God has to expand from a tender trust to full-blown conviction. Though we begin by being faithful in little things, we begin to develop the absolute trust required to submit our lives to our Sovereign and Provider without question, equivocation or wavering.

7. What if we do not have this kind of faith? Hebrews 10:31-39.

**COMMENT:** Paul admonishes us to look back to our calling and initial faith toward God, including the early trials we faced. They should remind us that God indeed fulfills His promises to us. Meanwhile, we must not draw back from the course we have set (Luke 9:62), but live by faith.

8. Do we have examples of this kind of mature faith to follow? Hebrews 11:2, 39; Luke 21:15-18; Matthew 10:28; Hebrews 5:14.

**COMMENT:** At our calling we were excited about having found God and His truth. We may have even thought we were ready to face the lion’s den, crucifixion, the fiery furnace or boiling oil. In retrospect, however, our failure to follow all God’s instructions, our weakness in trials, our impotence in tests of faith are mute testimony that our zealous, early faith, though encouraging, was not the kind Christ is looking for in His elect. He seeks mature faith as we see in these Christians of Hebrews 11. They were faithful in little and followed through when *everything* was on the line. This is the mature, living, unwavering faith required for salvation that allows us to please Him.

Have we reached the point where we do not fear those who can destroy the body, but He who can destroy both body and soul? Do we practice this living faith in our daily walk? The just—those who are righteous—shall live by faith, and in doing so, will inherit the Kingdom of God!

# Water Baptism

“The doctrine of baptisms” is a foundational belief of the church of God (Hebrews 6:1-2). In fact, historians who have traced the progress of the true church use baptismal references as a significant part of their search criteria. Yet, though it was clearly practiced in the New Testament, churches today are in total confusion about baptism. Some do not practice it at all. Some sprinkle water on the new member, some pour, some immerse. Some baptize children, and some even baptize for the dead!

Further, many do not understand the reasons for and significance of baptism. Although it is a physical ceremony, the lessons and effects of baptism are spiritual. By it, we demonstrate to God our sincere decision and determination to live His way of life and show our belief in and acceptance of His Son’s work on our behalf. By it, God purges us of our sin and then gives us the power by His Spirit to live righteously before Him. Baptism is a springboard that enables His children to “go on to perfection.”

**1.** Is baptism commanded by God’s Word? Acts 2:36-38; Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16.

**COMMENT:** Clearly, baptism is a commanded ordinance for those who would be saved. Though it is strictly a physical ritual, our participation in it shows the sincerity of our repentance, our belief of His Word, our desire to obey God and our acceptance of what Jesus Christ did on our behalf. It is such an important beginning to our Christian lives that Jesus says that “unless one is born of water [baptism] and the Spirit [by a laying on of hands (Hebrews 6:2; Acts 8:17)], he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5).

**2.** Was Jesus baptized? Matthew 3:13-17.

**COMMENT:** Though without sin, Jesus went through the rite of baptism “to fulfill all righteousness.” He did everything a truly righteous man should do, so we could learn from Him. As our perfect example in all things (see I John 2:6; I Peter 2:21), He was baptized to show us the steps we must take to reach the same destination He did—the Kingdom of God.

**3.** Is baptism a sprinkling, a pouring, or an immersion in water? John 3:23; Matthew 3:16; Acts 8:38.

**COMMENT:** These verses conclusively prove that the original method of baptism was by immersion. John needed an abundance of water to cover his followers completely. Jesus’ example shows that He “came up . . . from the water” because He had been *in* it. Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch “went down into the water.” In addition, “baptize,” from the Greek *baptizo*, means “to immerse,” “plunge into,” or “put into.” Two entirely different Greek words refer to pouring (*cheo*) or sprinkling (*rantizo*).

**4.** What are the conditions that must be met before one is baptized? Acts 2:38; Mark 1:15; Acts 8:12.

**COMMENT:** From these three verses, we understand the two prerequisites for baptism: **repentance and belief of the gospel of the Kingdom of God**. The people of Acts 2 showed by their reaction that they believed what Peter had preached (verse 37), and thus they needed only to repent of their sins and their human nature before they were baptized (verse 41). One need not be a Bible scholar or be living perfectly to be baptized. These things are part of *growing* in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ *after* baptism (II Peter 3:18).

**5.** When should one be baptized? Luke 14:28-33; Acts 8:12.

**COMMENT:** In these verses of Luke 14, Jesus explains the principle of “counting the cost.” The candidate for baptism

must be able to discern the terms of God’s offer for salvation before making such a monumental decision. He must be mature enough to understand what God desires of him, to repent, and to believe the gospel. A new believer should be baptized as soon as possible after he has come to this point in his calling (Acts 8:35-38; 9:17-18). The apostles’ example in Acts 8:12 shows that they baptized only adults who had met the qualifications of baptism. Thus, this would rule out children and—obviously—the dead (I Corinthians 15:29; Paul is ridiculing the practice).

**6.** Does baptism symbolize one’s belief and acceptance of Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection? Colossians 2:12-13; Romans 6:2-6.

**COMMENT:** Symbolically, our baptism imitates what our Savior did for us, and by our participation in it, we show our desire to be united—at one—with Him in both His death and resurrection (Romans 6:5). Once baptized, we can say with Paul: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

**7.** Is water baptism also symbolic of being cleansed of sin and living a new life? Same verses.

**COMMENT:** Being put into the water represents the death of the “old man” with his sinful way of life. Being completely covered by water symbolizes burial, and being raised from the water pictures a resurrection to “newness of life.” After baptism we consider ourselves dead to sin, that is, we have completely divorced ourselves from living a sinful way of life (Romans 6:11). Once baptized, we are to give our lives to God and use our time to become “instruments of righteousness to God” (verse 13).

**8.** Into what are we baptized? Matthew 28:19; I Corinthians 12:13.

**COMMENT:** Baptism also serves to induct us into God’s church and Family. We are literally baptized *into* the name of God. It becomes our Family name, and we have a great responsibility to uphold it (see Exodus 20:7; Proverbs 22:1). Afterwards, when a minister lays his hands on us, God gives us of His Spirit, and we truly become Christians, members of the body of Christ. In addition, we become God’s children and heirs with Christ of all things (Romans 8:14-17; Hebrews 2:5-13)!



# Laying on of Hands

To someone in the world, “laying on of hands” conjures up thoughts like, “I’d like to get my hands on him for the way he cheated me!” or, “Just wait ‘til I get my hands on him!” In sharp contrast, God’s use of the laying on of hands symbolizes the bestowal of blessings, authority and distinctiveness. It appears in the Old Testament in various connections: in the act of blessing, in the ritual of sacrifice (the hands of the offerer were laid on the head of victims) and in bearing witness in capital trials. In the New Testament, Jesus laid hands on the little children in

blessing and on the sick, and the apostles laid hands on those they baptised to receive the Holy Spirit and on those who were ill. Finally, the laying on of hands was used in the setting apart of people to a particular office or work in the church. It is a symbolic act designed to represent God Himself setting a person apart for a holy use, whether for service, healing, protection and guidance or blessing. This Bible study will analyze the fifth basic doctrine of God’s church listed in Hebrews 6:2, “laying on of hands.”

**1.** In the Old Testament did the laying on of hands play a part in offering sacrifices? Exodus 29:10; Leviticus 1:4; 3:2, 8, 13; 4:15.

**COMMENT:** The Aaronic priests were purified for service to God through the transferal of their sins to a bull. Similarly, when an Israelite presented a peace or a sin offering, he laid his hands upon the animal being offered, identifying himself with it and transferring his guilt to the animal. Thus, the animal was set apart by God through the laying on of hands.

**2.** Why did the high priest lay hands on the Azazel goat on the day of Atonement? Leviticus 16:7-10, 21-22.

**COMMENT:** The goat that represented Jesus Christ was offered as a sin offering, typifying His taking our sins upon Himself as an innocent substitute sacrifice. The other goat, representing Satan, was called the *azazel*. The high priest laid his hands upon the Azazel goat’s head, confessing the sins of the people. The goat, now bearing those sins, was driven into the wilderness. After Christ’s return, Satan will bear his own guilt and be completely removed from man’s presence, being bound for 1,000 years (Revelation 20:1-3).

**3.** Was the laying on of hands used in Old Testament ordinations? Numbers 8:10; 27:16-23; Deuteronomy 34:9.

**COMMENT:** Moses laid his hands upon Joshua, signifying the transferal of some of his authority to lead the nation. This rite of ordination was always accompanied by a special commission and the giving of special authority.

**4.** Was laying on of hands used in passing judgment? Exodus 7:4; Leviticus 24:14; Deuteronomy 13:6-10. Was it used when sparing someone from judgment? Genesis 22:12; Exodus 24:9-11.

**COMMENT:** God laid His hands on Egypt in divine judgment by sending plagues. When trying a blasphemer, each witness placed his hands upon the guilty person to signify his acceptance of the verdict. Conversely, when a victim was spared death—as when God commanded Abraham not to sacrifice Isaac or when He allowed the leaders of Israel to see Him without dying—mercy is described as hands not being laid on the spared victim.

**5.** Were special blessings conferred by the laying on of

hands? Genesis 48:12-20; Psalm 139:4-6; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17.

**COMMENT:** Jacob laid his hands on his grandsons’ heads to confer God’s blessing upon them. David considered God’s hand upon him as a blessing and comfort. Jesus blessed little children by laying His hands on them.

**6.** Does the Bible sanction the laying on of hands for healing? Matthew 9:18-30; Mark 6:5; 16:17-18; Luke 4:40; 13:10-13; Acts 5:12; 28:8; James 5:14-15.

**COMMENT:** Jesus and His apostles touched the sick when they healed, yet miracles often occurred without this physical act. The miraculous power to heal derives from God’s authority, not from the physical touch of the hands.

**7.** Are special spiritual gifts given through the laying on of hands? Acts 9:17; 19:6; I Timothy 4:14; II Timothy 1:6-7.

**COMMENT:** Usually, the Holy Spirit was given by the laying on of an elder’s hands, confirming baptism. However, Acts 8:14-17 says that the Samaritans received the Holy Spirit after baptism, while Acts 10:44-48 says that it fell upon Cornelius’ household before baptism. Sometimes God makes exceptions to work out His own will and plan.

Timothy received special spiritual gifts from the hands of the elders, including the gifts of wisdom and teaching. Paul reminded him that ordination bestowed such gifts upon him and that he needed to stir up God’s Spirit to use them.

**8.** Is this rite used to set people apart for special tasks? Acts 6:3-6; 13:2-3; I Timothy 5:22.

**COMMENT:** As in these examples, the laying on of hands is part of a formal ceremony by which the church commissions selected people into their new service. Paul advises that this should take place only after the entire matter is properly and prayerfully considered.

Laying on of hands, performed by ordained elders of the church during prayer, signifies an ordination or setting apart. The church, following biblical precedent, uses the laying on of hands for requesting the Holy Spirit after baptism, anointing the sick, ordaining ministers, consecrating marriage vows, blessing little children and requesting special gifts of God.

# First Resurrection

Death is a reality we all must face (Hebrews 9:27), but the hope of the Christian is the resurrection of the dead (I Peter 1:3). The same God who resurrected Jesus Christ from the grave nearly two thousand years ago will also raise all the dead to life again. The New Testament consistently teaches hope in the resurrection based upon the resurrection of Christ as the firstborn from the dead.

By means of the resurrection, the vast majority of mankind will receive the opportunity for salvation and subsequently the gift of eternal life. Only a few who willfully reject God's way of life will not. This Bible study begins a three-part series on this basic biblical doctrine (Hebrews 6:2). This installment will analyze the first resurrection, that of the firstfruits of God's Kingdom.

**1.** How many kinds of resurrections are there? John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15; Revelation 20:5-6, 12-15.

**COMMENT:** The Bible identifies two types of resurrections: special acts of God's mercy in which He restores people to physical life, and resurrections to spiritual, eternal life. The New Testament also contrasts resurrection to life with resurrection to judgment or condemnation. Theologically, resurrection to judgment can also mean being raised to one's opportunity for salvation, in the same way that "the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God" (I Peter 4:17).

**2.** What makes the resurrection to life possible? John 3:16; Romans 5:8-10; I Corinthians 15:14-18.

**COMMENT:** Our resurrection to eternal life is possible because Jesus Christ died to pay for our sins and rose from the grave as the firstborn of many brethren. His death justifies us, but His resurrection to life makes our resurrection possible. Of itself, the blood of Christ does not save us, and had He remained dead, we could not be saved or given eternal life. We are saved because Christ lives now and forever.

**3.** Is there more than one resurrection of the dead? Daniel 12:2-3; John 5:28-29; I Corinthians 15:22-24; Hebrews 11:35.

**COMMENT:** The saints of God will be part of the first and better resurrection. The Bible nowhere says that those resurrected to everlasting life and those resurrected to shame will both come up in the same resurrection. The apostle Paul tells Felix, the governor of Judea, that there would be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust dead, indicating at least two separate resurrections.

**4.** Who is resurrected at Christ's second coming? I Corinthians 15:23, 50-53; Revelation 20:4-6; Romans 8:9, 11, 14.

**COMMENT:** Only the just, the righteous, will rise at Christ's second coming. God will raise the martyred saints to eternal life, but the unjust dead will not be resurrected until the end of this period. If we have the Holy Spirit dwelling in us when we die, we will be resurrected through the power of that same Spirit at that time. In addition to the dead in Christ, those who are true Christians at His coming will rise in the first resurrection. The Feast of Trumpets celebrates the second coming of Jesus Christ to intervene in world affairs, resurrect the firstfruits, and

establish God's Kingdom on earth (Matthew 24:30-31; Revelation 11:15).

**5.** Where do Christ and the saints go after this rendezvous in the air? Zechariah 14:1-9; Acts 1:4-12. When and how long will the then-immortal saints rule with Christ? I Thessalonians 4:14-17; Revelation 5:10; 19:11-21; 20:4.

**COMMENT:** Christ's angels tell the disciples that He will return to this earth just as He left it. On that day, Christ will descend through the clouds to stand on the Mount of Olives with His saints to begin ruling as King over all the earth. Paul says those who die faithful before that time will rise first, then the faithful who are still alive will ascend to meet Christ in the air as He returns. From that time on, through eternity, the saints will be with Him as He rules the nations with a rod of iron.

**6.** What did Paul mean by "the redemption of our body"? Romans 8:19, 23; I Corinthians 15:42-44; Philippians 3:7-12, 20-21; Colossians 1:9-18.

**COMMENT:** Paul was willing to suffer the loss of all things so he could experience the power of Christ's resurrection. Since our citizenship is in heaven, our hope lies there. Christ our Savior will change our corrupt bodies into bodies like His glorious body—from mortal flesh to immortal, incorruptible spirit.

**7.** What does Christ promise the overcoming saints? Revelation 2:17, 26-27; 3:5, 12, 21; Ephesians 2:6.

**COMMENT:** Jesus promises the saints that, if they overcome and live His way of life, He will give them a new name that only the recipient knows, as well as the names of God and of His city, New Jerusalem. God will give the saints power over the nations under Christ. They will also be clothed in righteousness and sit with Him on His throne. The resurrection of the saints is so certain that Paul speaks of it as already accomplished.

God has established an order of resurrections. His saints will rise first, followed at length by a second resurrection of most of mankind who never had a chance to know God's truth during their lives. Finally, in a third resurrection, the wicked—those who knew God's truth and rejected it—will come up to face eternal judgment, death in the Lake of Fire. It is far better to be in the first resurrection, to live as eternal spirit beings in the God Family, filled with God's own character and incapable of sin.

# Second Resurrection

Today, large bodies of people claiming the Christian faith sincerely believe that this is the only day of salvation. They believe that, if a person does not repent and believe in Jesus Christ as personal Savior before this physical life ends, he will be lost forever to burn in torment in a fiery hell. Is this true? It surprises many to learn that the Bible reveals more than one resurrection.

1. Will God resurrect all the dead in the same resurrection? Revelation 20:4-5; Acts 24:15; John 5:28-29; I Corinthians 15:23-24.

**COMMENT:** “This is the first resurrection” in Revelation 20:5 refers back to the events of verse 4, which describes those who are raised to immortality at Christ’s second coming to become rulers with Him as kings and priests on the earth during the Millennium. The Bible nowhere says God will resurrect all the dead in the same resurrection. The apostle Paul affirms that both the “just” and “unjust” will be resurrected, and Jesus speaks of a “resurrection of life” and a “resurrection of condemnation” or judgment. However, these do not occur simultaneously. God has an orderly plan whereby He resurrects different groups of people at different times, “every man in his own order.” This implies a succession of resurrections. Regarding the resurrection of the unjust, “the rest of the dead,” who have not understood God’s way of life, they must wait in their graves until the thousand years are over.

2. Are the unjust dead eternally lost? Acts 4:12; John 10:1, 9; Revelation 20: 7-12.

**COMMENT:** The unjust dead are not eternally lost and without hope of having an opportunity to obtain immortality. God will not resurrect them merely to throw them into the Lake of Fire! Salvation only comes through one Person; only by learning of the life and work of Jesus Christ and accepting His supreme sacrifice in payment for our personal sins can human beings be saved. No one can obtain salvation except through Christ, who is the door. Anyone trying to enter another way is a thief and a robber. Therefore, we can enter the Kingdom of God only one way, through Christ.

3. Can a person have a second chance at salvation? II Peter 3:9; I Timothy 2:4-6; Ezekiel 37:1-14.

**COMMENT:** In resurrecting humans to mortal life, God will *not* give them a second chance for salvation—He will give them their first chance! At that time, He will raise those who were deceived and never understood His way, and reveal His plan of salvation to them. God wants all mankind to receive the gift of salvation, but He requires repentance and righteous living. He is responsible to grant people the knowledge of the truth, and only when He calls them do they have their first real opportunity to hear, understand and follow His way of life.

4. What is “the resurrection of judgment”? John 5:29; I

As we saw, at Jesus Christ’s second coming, truly faithful Christians will be raised to immortality, but what will happen to those who are not resurrected then? Are all those who died in sin fully accountable for their actions in this life, or will God ultimately give *everyone* a chance for salvation? In this continuing study of resurrections, we will see that the Bible reveals a second resurrection.

Peter 4:17; Hebrews 2:3; 6:4-6; 10:26-29; Matthew 10:15.

**COMMENT:** Most modern translations correctly render the last word in John 5:29 as “judgment” rather than “damnation” or “condemnation.” God is now judging Christians; we are having our opportunity for salvation now. He holds every Christian accountable for his actions, but the vast majority of mankind today does not understand or believe the truth of God. By “the resurrection of judgment,” Christ means that, in a future time, God will raise many from their graves to learn the truth and have their opportunity to walk in it. Based on how they live, God will then decide their fates. Most He will save, but some, in stubborn rebellion against Him, will condemn themselves to eternal death.

5. Will God resurrect physical Israel? Romans 11:2-3, 7-15, 25-27, 30-33.

**COMMENT:** God Himself has kept Israel from seeing and hearing (understanding and applying) His truth, giving Israel a spirit of slumber to make possible the salvation of the Gentiles. He has determined to call and choose only a limited number from Israel in this age, allowing the rest to remain blinded. With the rest of humanity, they will rise in the second resurrection and have the opportunity for salvation.

6. What is the Great White Throne Judgment? I Thessalonians 4:13-18; I Corinthians 15:53-54; Revelation 20:11-15.

**COMMENT:** The resurrection of the righteous takes place at Christ’s return, but that of the uncalled—the second resurrection—will occur in the Great White Throne Judgment after the Millennium. God is merciful, loving and kind, not willing that any should perish. He desires all to come to the knowledge of the truth and to true repentance at the proper time. He has determined that most will receive this opportunity when He has set up His Kingdom on the earth, an environment most conducive to salvation.

These people will be raised up to physical existence. The “books” that are opened at this time are the books of the Bible in which are revealed true knowledge and understanding. The “Book of Life” will also be opened so their names can be written in it when they repent of their sins, accept Christ as personal Savior, and receive the Holy Spirit. During this time, they will be judged according to their works. Thus, we see most of humanity standing before God to be judged. God in His wisdom has determined that this is the best way to bring the most sons to glory and eternal life in His Kingdom.

# Third Resurrection

Revelation 20 clearly describes three resurrections. We have previously seen that the first resurrection will take place at Jesus Christ's second coming. It will include only the "just," who will be raised to life and clothed with immortality (I Thessalonians 4:13-18; I Corinthians 15:33). After Christ's Millennial rule, God will resurrect those who in past ages died in sin and ignorance, having never had a chance for salvation, and in many cases having

never heard of Jesus Christ or seen a Bible. Others were spiritually blinded, and God will resurrect them in a second resurrection (Romans 11:7).

Scripture speaks of yet one more resurrection for the group not dealt with in either of the other two. This third resurrection is a resurrection to the second death, for those resurrected will be cast into the Lake of Fire and burned up.

**1. Whom does God raise in the third resurrection?** Revelation 20:11-15; John 5:29.

**COMMENT:** The incorrigibly wicked are the last of mankind to be resurrected from their graves—from "the sea" (where they may have perished), from death (without burial), or from *hades* (a grave in the ground). God Himself will sentence these unruly, miserable human beings—hopefully few—and whoever is not found written in the Book of Life will be cast into the Lake of Fire.

**2. Will the wicked realize what they will be missing?** Luke 16:19-31; II Peter 3:10; Ecclesiastes 9:5.

**COMMENT:** In the Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man, the latter, a heartless person, speaks to Lazarus while being "tormented in this flame." This alludes to the wicked being cremated when God burns up the earth, turning it into the final Gehenna, called elsewhere "the Lake of Fire." The rich man is raised out of his grave at the end of God's plan for humanity on earth. Because the dead know nothing, he does not realize the passage of time, but he certainly realizes that he has failed to receive salvation. He sees "a great gulf fixed" between him and those who are with Abraham in the Kingdom of God. At this point, it is impossible for anyone to change his fate.

**3. Will Jesus "answer the knock" of incorrigibly wicked human beings?** Luke 13:22-30; Matthew 7:13-14, 21-23.

**COMMENT:** Many will seek to enter the Kingdom of God but be barred from it because of flagrant sin. Jesus will refuse to answer the knock of unruly sinners who have rejected salvation, though they weep and grind their teeth when they find out they cannot enter God's Kingdom. When the third resurrection arrives, all humanity will have had the opportunity to be saved; everyone's ultimate destiny will have been eternally set. It will be too late for anyone who, after coming to the knowledge of the truth, sins willfully and thereby rejects eternal life. Those who reject God and His way of life must then reap the consequences of that decision—the second death following the third resurrection to judgment.

**4. Does God care whether everyone perishes?** II Peter 3:9; I Timothy 2:3-4; Hebrews 10:26-31.

**COMMENT:** God does not want anyone to perish but desires all to come to repentance. However, to those who refuse

His mercy and trample the sacrifice of His Son Jesus Christ as if it were vile, He is a God of justice and righteous judgment. These, who leave Him with no alternative but to put them to death for eternity, will know what He earnestly desired them to achieve.

**5. Does every human being eventually have to choose between God's way of life and Satan's?** Genesis 2:15-17; Deuteronomy 30:19; Romans 6:23.

**COMMENT:** Since God made man with the power of volition, man must choose either His way or Satan's way, either life or death. All humans must die at least once (Hebrews 9:27). From Abel's time until now, even the righteous have suffered the first death, from which God will resurrect them to eternal life. But the second death is final.

**6. What will God do after the second death of the wicked?** II Peter 3:7-13; Revelation 21:1-5; Matthew 5:5; Psalm 37:9, 11, 29.

**COMMENT:** After describing the destruction of the wicked, the apostle John immediately mentions God creating a new heaven and earth where only righteousness dwells. He then gives a glowing account of the peace, happiness, beauty and glory that will characterize this new earth where the righteous will eternally dwell.

**7. What will ultimately happen to the wicked?** Daniel 12:2; Malachi 4:1. Where will the righteous be? Daniel 12:3; Malachi 4:2-3; Matthew 22:30; Luke 20:34-38.

**COMMENT:** Daniel and Malachi speak of the wicked who will awake in a resurrection to shame and everlasting contempt, having rejected eternal life, while the righteous will awake to everlasting life as glorified sons of God, living and serving their Creator eternally. In the third and final resurrection, the wicked will be made to see that they have scoffed at God's priceless offer for salvation. As punishment and as an eternal example, they will be annihilated in the second death.

The doctrine of the resurrection is the truth that the God who resurrected Jesus Christ will also raise all the dead to life. For some, that resurrection will be to eternal life. For others, it will be to physical life with an opportunity for eternal life. For a few, it will be a resurrection to the second death. If we obey, serve God the Father and Jesus Christ, and overcome our sins, we have a wonderful future ahead of us: We will inherit all things.

# Eternal Judgment

Most people have heard about “Judgment Day.” We often hear jokes bantered around about meeting “Saint Peter” at the “pearly gates” and about the different things that are required to convince him that he should let you into “heaven.” People have written songs about the time when “the roll is called up yonder,” “when we all get to heaven.” Most people have a vague notion that someday, somehow, judgment will be meted out to everyone; the “good” will receive their reward and the “bad” will be punished.

But what does the Bible say about this? Will there be a “Judgment Day” when all people will be judged? Who will do the judging? Upon what criteria? What kind of reward and punishment will be meted out? Is there hope for those who have never heard of Jesus Christ or never practiced any kind of religion? These questions and others flood into the mind when this subject comes up. In this lesson, we will find the answers to these questions and what God, the great Judge of all the universe, says about eternal judgment.

**1.** Is eternal judgment one of the basic doctrines of the church of God? Hebrews 6:1-2.

**COMMENT:** Eternal judgment is equal in importance to repentance, faith, baptism, etc. *Webster’s New World Dictionary* defines judgment as “a legal decision, order or sentence given by a judge.” In eternal judgment, God decides a person’s reward or punishment for all eternity.

**2.** Has judgment begun yet? I Peter 4:17.

**COMMENT:** Most people regard judgment as something that occurs only at the end of the age. However, the Bible shows that Christians are being judged today. As in human courts, judgment is a process. Judges do not render decisions without getting the facts and pondering all the evidence. Today, God is putting Christians through trials and tests to see if they will be faithful to Him and His way of life.

**3.** Whom has God appointed to be the Judge of all mankind? John 5:22; Acts 10:42; 17:31; Romans 2:16.

**COMMENT:** God the Father has appointed Jesus Christ to judge humanity. Only He has ever lived a perfect life. In addition, He knows what it is like to be a human being and what difficulties His people have while living in this present, evil world (Hebrews 2:14-18). Thus, He is eminently qualified to be the Judge of all mankind.

**4.** Will all humans ultimately be judged before the judgment seat of Christ? Romans 14:10-12.

**5.** Can we be certain that the judgment of Jesus Christ will be fair and righteous? Isaiah 11:1-5; John 7:24.

**COMMENT:** Jesus will not judge according to appearances. He will not pay attention to anecdotal evidence or rumors. Jesus, filled with the Spirit of God, can judge on the basis of true knowledge, understanding and wisdom.

**6.** Upon what things will we be judged? Ecclesiastes 11:9; 12:14; Matthew 12:36; Luke 12:3; I Corinthians 4:5.

**COMMENT:** God says that individuals will have to account for all of their works, including our secret sins. Even the words we have spoken will be judged.

**7.** Against what standard or criteria will we be judged? John 12:48; Revelation 20:12; James 2:12.

**COMMENT:** God will judge us by the things written in the “books,” that is, His Word. The Bible contains God’s laws, the standard of righteousness by which everyone is judged.

**8.** Will some be judged more strictly than others? Luke 12:48; James 3:1.

**COMMENT:** God’s judgment is eminently fair. In this life, some have better opportunities to develop God’s character. Others have greater intelligence or natural abilities. God will apply the principle of “to whom much is given, much is required” with perfect fairness. Teachers of God’s way will be held to an even higher standard.

**9.** Will the resurrected saints participate in the judging process? I Corinthians 6:2; Revelation 20:4.

**COMMENT:** Under the guidance and authority of Jesus Christ, the resurrected saints will help to judge the world. Just as we are being judged now, we will judge those who live and die throughout the Millennium. We will also judge the angels who rebelled against God under Lucifer (I Corinthians 6:3; II Peter 2:4; Jude 6; see Isaiah 14:12-15).

**10.** What about the millions who never had a chance to learn about God’s plan of salvation? Revelation 20:4-5.

**COMMENT:** Those who never had an opportunity to learn God’s way will be resurrected after the Millennium. “But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished” is parenthetical and does not refer to the first resurrection, but to a second resurrection.

**11.** Will these people be resurrected to physical life? Ezekiel 37:1-10. In what kind of world will they live? How long will they live? Isaiah 65:17-25.

**COMMENT:** Those in the second resurrection will be raised to life as physical, flesh and blood human beings. They will live in a peaceful, prosperous world free from the demonic influence of Satan. God will grant them a hundred years of life to learn and accept His way.

**12.** Will they be judged by the same criteria as those who preceded them? Revelation 20:11-12.

**COMMENT:** The Great White Throne Judgment will occur during this hundred-year period. At this time, those of the second resurrection will be judged by the same standard as everyone else—the Word of God.

**13.** Will the incorrigibly wicked be judged in yet a third resurrection? Revelation 20:13-15.

**COMMENT:** This third resurrection will comprise those who are unwilling to live by God’s laws and refuse to repent. These incorrigible people will be cast into the Lake of Fire and completely burned up. They can never be resurrected again, having rejected God’s wonderful offer of salvation and eternal life.

# Going on to Perfection

Just what is perfection? Paul admonishes us to go on to perfection, but is that possible? We often reason away our imperfections with the rationale, “Well, I’m not perfect. . .” Others use the common dodge, “There was only one perfect man. . .” Armed with these ready phrases, we can

go through life not squarely facing or accomplishing Paul’s instruction. Will this let us off the hook? Is our Judge in sympathy with our excuses, or will He require performance? We need to know where God stands on the issue of perfection so we can put ourselves in line with Him.

**1.** What is perfection? Colossians 4:12; Luke 8:14; Ephesians 4:13; Job 36:4; Psalm 18:30; 19:7; Matthew 5:48.

**COMMENT:** The context of these passages show perfection to entail completeness, ripeness (like fruit), and the fullness of the stature of Christ. The biblical Hebrew and Greek definitions of *perfect* and *perfection* include “without spot or blemish,” “complete,” “full,” “sound,” “undefiled,” “whole,” “mature” and “ripe.” These all describe Christ’s character, who embodies all these traits. God’s perfection means that He is complete in Himself. He lacks nothing; He is without flaw. He is the basis for and the standard by which all other perfection is measured. In contrast, man’s perfection is relative and dependent on God for its existence.

**2.** Does this definition fit what Paul admonishes us to be? Hebrews 5:12-14; 6:1-12. Does perfection come easily? What should we expect? I Peter 5:10; Hebrews 2:10; 5:7-9.

**COMMENT:** In his analogy Paul compares babies to adults. Little children are unskillful at many tasks, often becoming discouraged and quitting when the going gets tough. A sure sign of approaching maturity is endurance, but this is not passive waiting. Paul urges diligence in becoming perfect and complete, following those who endured great trials. Peter warns us that we will suffer during the perfecting process. We can not expect to escape what Christ Himself endured, learning perfection by the things He suffered.

**3.** Can we be perfect apart from others? Matthew 5:43-48; 19:21; Luke 6:39-49; John 17:20-23; Romans 8:35-39; Hebrews 13:5; Psalm 138:8.

**COMMENT:** The Bible links perfection with human relationships. Christ urges us to be as perfect as our Father in heaven, and ties the process to how we treat each other. The Kingdom of God is about eternal, peaceful relationships. We cannot withdraw from people and still develop the necessary relationship skills, just as God never leaves us but continues to work with us. Life would be easier for Him if He ignored us, but He works on, helping us develop our relationships with Him. He is the One who works perfection in us.

**4.** No one really expects “perfection.” If we were perfect, however, would it make us everyone’s friends? Psalm 64:2-5; Job 1:1, 8; 2:3; Isaiah 53:3-9.

**COMMENT:** Jealousy is the rage of a man! Those who begin to reach a degree of spiritual maturity will constantly suffer the arrows of those who compare themselves

among themselves. By God’s own mouth, Job was a “perfect” or mature man, but his friends—and even his wife!—turned bitterly on him when they thought they saw the first sign of imperfection. Christ, the paragon of perfection, was despised more than any man has ever been.

**5.** What are the fruits of perfection? How can we judge our progress toward it? Luke 8:14-15; Psalm 37:37; II Corinthians 13:11; Romans 12:2-3; Acts 3:16; James 1:4; Hebrews 13:21; James 3:2; II Timothy 3:17; I John 4:17; Matthew 19:21.

**COMMENT:** These verses can help us quickly check how we are doing. Is the direction of our life producing peace, soundness, patience, faith and good works? Is our tongue under control? Are we still fearful? Perfect love casts out fear! The young rich man had to be willing to give up what was dear to him for God and man, a fruit he was not willing to produce!

**6.** Does perfection ultimately mean we are completely without fault? Matthew 5:48; Philippians 2:5; II Corinthians 10:5; James 3:2.

**COMMENT:** Perfection, as used in Scripture regarding everyday life, means maturity and completeness. We can certainly attain an increasing level of spiritual maturity, yet we cannot truly complete the process until changed into God—until our human nature has been totally changed. Only then can we reach the stated goals of being perfect “as our Father in heaven,” having “the mind of Christ,” bringing “every thought into captivity,” and never uttering a wrong word.

**7.** Is there hope for us? Philippians 3:12-15.

**COMMENT:** Though Paul urges us on to perfection, he was admittedly not completely there himself. He struggled to leave the past in the past and pursue the future. He shows that part of the process is maintaining a perfect attitude—a mind ready, willing and seeking after the prize of the high calling of Christ.

**8.** What promises are associated with perfection? Proverbs 2:21; Hebrews 11:38-40.

**COMMENT:** Sinlessness and incorruptibility are characteristics of perfection, and they go hand-in-hand with God’s promises. Those who “go on to perfection” will never be cast out of the land—their inheritance is eternal. Even those we consider spiritual giants in Hebrews 11, mature and complete as they were, will not receive their inheritance ahead of those of us now being perfected. They must wait in their graves for us, and we will inherit God’s Kingdom together!



# The Basic Doctrines

For many Christians, doctrine, the church's teaching, is difficult to understand and—let's face it—downright boring. It certainly does not have the intrigue of biblical history and prophecy or the practicality of Christian living. To some, doctrine is dry and confusing.

However, biblical doctrine is the foundation of Christianity. Without it, we would never know the church's beliefs or know how to apply them in our daily lives. In addition, both the historical and prophetic sections of the Bible make little sense without the support of the spiritual truths contained in Christian doctrine.

The church's seven foundational doctrines are listed in sequential order in Hebrews 6:1-2. This study takes us through each in turn, opening up God's revelation of His way of life from repentance to going on to perfection.

Once we understand these fundamental teachings, God's tremendous way of life becomes clear and exciting!

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