

The Strong Foundation

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Scripture reading (HEB 5:11-14; 6: 1-3.)

"For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again" (Heb 5:12). With great burden the apostle is writing these words to the Hebrew believers. They had received God's word with much power for many years. They ought to have grown much spiritually and become teachers but they remained as babes. They were not ready to receive strong meat, just as children who cannot receive strong food. " But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Heb 5:14).

In these days also we notice that believers in many parts of the world remains as babes spiritually for a long time. With all their bible knowledge, they remain infants spiritually. They have no understanding of the deep things of God. Paul wanted to share many things with the Hebrew believers but he could not do so because of their spiritual infancy. The main message of the apostle to the Hebrews is about "the great salvation" and " the great savior". Paul reveals to us the greatness of our Lord Jesus Christ as our heavenly high priest and the great salvation, which we have thru Him. The Hebrew believers were like small children in the kinder garden class who are taught only elementary things.

Now the questions are why they remain babes spiritually. It is because they did not have a clear and sure understanding of the fundamental principles of salvation. Paul says, " Ye have need that one teach you againthe first principles of the oracles of God: and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat" (heb 5:12). So if you are not clear and sure about the foundational, fundamental, first principles of salvation we cannot grow spiritually. A building with out a strong foundation will not stand long. When storms come many buildings fall down because they do not have a strong and a deep foundation. The Lord has warned us in His word that there will be many storms while we are upon this earth. In Mathew 7:27, we see clearly what happened to the house build upon the sand. Unless we are on a strong foundation we will fall like that house. We find many believers losing their faith when they face difficulties, troubles, and trials. They get offended and are easily drawn away by wrong teachings or by worldly attractions. In our lifetime we have to face many storms and that is why we should make sure that we are on a strong foundation.

First of all we should make sure that we are built upon the foundation of the lord Jesus Christ " for we are laborers together with God; ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building. According to the grace of God, which is given unto me, as a wise master builder. I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth there on. But let every man take heed how he buildeth there upon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (I Cor 3:9-11).

We should make sure that we have a definite, personal, living experience of the living Lord Jesus Christ. Having made sure of our personal experiences of salvation, which we have in Him, we must be built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. " And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building

fitly framed together growth upon a holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are build together for a habitation of God through the spirit"(Eph 2:20-22). We follow what the apostles and prophets taught us in the scriptures. That is over heavenly order. We cannot change that divine order and heavenly plan because we have been given in a very clear way all the instructions necessary for our spiritual growth. Paul shows in the epistle to the Hebrews how to come upon this foundation. If you want to go on to perfection be clear and sure about the first, fundamental, foundational principles of the doctrine of salvation. "There for leaving the principles (or the word of the beginning of Christ) of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith towards God, the doctrine of baptism, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment" (Heb 6:1-2).

Here the apostle speaks of six fundamental and first principles of the doctrine of salvation. The first one is repentance for the dead works; the second one is faith towards God; the third one is Baptism; the fourth is laying on of hands; the fifth is the resurrection of the dead; and the sixth one is the eternal judgment. We can divide into three groups of two each, because they go together – repentance and faith go together; similarly, baptism and laying on of hands go together and resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment go together.

1.Repentance.

First of all let us see what repentance means. We have to realize that we can never be justified by good works. No one can become just or righteous by his own efforts, however hard he may try. But by faith any one can become righteous. We only have to believe. It is not by works " for by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast" Eph 2:8-9. None of us can become just or righteous before God by long prayers or by fasting or by the knowledge of the bible or by suffering or any other activity. That is the very first thing we must remember. Many people think that by living simple life or by taking part in the Lord's Table they can become more righteous. The Lord Jesus Christ, the living person Himself is our righteousness. " But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption (I Cor 1:30). He has paid the full price for our sins. He took our judgment, punishment and condemnation, so be repent from dead works. We find that the Jewish nation is spiritually blind because of their self-righteousness and high moral standards. Romans 4:5 says, " But to Him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly. His faith is counted for righteousness". We have to be very clear on this point. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Living God. As we partake of the Lord's Table, we testify that he is our bread. He is our life and He is our righteousness. We have to appropriate His righteousness constantly. It is by appropriating His life by faith that we become more righteous. Otherwise we will go on struggling and trying hard to become holy and will be defeated again and again. That is why many people fall into condemnation. They struggle very hard to become righteous but they cannot become righteous. Our efforts to become righteous are like dead works. So Paul says the very first thing to die to become righteous is to repent from such dead works. We believe with all our heart, that the Lord took our place, and bore our judgment and punishment and He Himself is our righteousness. By faith we should receive more and more of His life. Every time we are defeated, we should say, " Lord, I am not glorifying in myself. You are my life and righteousness." That is the very first, fundamental and foundational principle of salvation.

2.Faith.

Now the second fundamental, foundational principle of the doctrine of salvation is Faith. We should have faith towards God. For everything we need to have faith. For prayer we need faith. TO receive His life we need faith. Otherwise whatever we do will be a failure. That is why on many occasions the Lord said to the sick, " Thy faith hath saved thee"(Luke 7:15, 8:48, 17:19, 18:42). According to Mathew 9:2,seeing the faith of the man who carried the paralytic, the Lord healed him. It is by faith we can understand unseen things. " Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen"(Heb 11:1). The unseen things, which are real, cannot be understood by the visible. However clever we may be, they are mysteries to us, but by faith we can understand the heavenly mysteries and unseen things. By faith our prayers are answered. By faith we enjoy His power. It is all by faith. Thus we see how faith is the fundamental and foundational principle of prayer life, bible study or any other service. By faith we obey the Lord and followed the Lord because of his faith (Mathew 9:9). He did not argue, or question the Lord saying, "Lord, what about my business? What about my people?" But immediately he followed the Lord by faith.

When the lord called me for His service, I could not understand how I could serve Him because of my own handicaps. But I just believed that He could help me even though I stutter and stammer. When I began my public ministry I had to pray very hard.

Then the Lord brought to my attention His promise in Matt.10: 20. "For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you. " I believed it. One day I had to stand before a very large gathering of about seven hundred people. As I saw their faces I started trembling. The bible, which I held in my hands, was shaking. So I prayed, " Lord, have mercy upon me. Touch my lips, tongue and throat." I never knew what I was going to speak, but the lord touched me and some verses and chapters came to my memory. I had to go to schools, college, universities and slum areas. When I went to the slums and saw the people there, I was full of fear because they would not even look at me. Instead they only made fun of me. So I had to ask the lord to have mercy upon me and help me. I knew my own handicaps and drawbacks. That is why every time I called upon Him in faith, He helped me.

Our spiritual life is lived by faith. By faith we bind Satan. By faith we claim the promises of God. It is by faith that we can have eternal life. That is why repentance and faith together. Those who have no faith cannot grow spiritually. Many preachers have no faith. Even though they hold big meetings and campaigns, yet when they want money they start begging. That is where they go wrong. They have so many schemes and devices to get money. When they plan to have Gospel campaigns they start writing letters and go on giving hints for money for many months. That is not faith. By having a living and strong faith in our Lord we can enjoy His perfect peace and have all our needs met.

3. Baptism.

Baptism is the next fundamental and foundational principle of salvation (Heb 6:2). Many believers are ignorant about its necessity and importance. Supposing some vitamins are lacking in our body, we will fall sick. Many people go to the hills in South India for summer holidays because it has a good climate. Years ago, it was found that people there were suffering from some skin disease. The reason was not known. The climate was good, the water was nice and there was plenty of good food, yet people were falling sick. After much research it was discovered that there was no calcium in the water, when calcium was added to the drinking water, they were healed. Thus we see that a lack of calcium or phosphorous or iron or vitamins brings sickness in the body. Similarly, if we do not obey in the waters of baptism we cannot grow spiritually. Baptism is as important as any other fundamental and foundational principle of salvation. The enemy uses many devices to keep believers blind about it. Some believers say that baptism is not necessary; if we are born again that is enough. For nominal Christians baptism is only a ritual, but for believers it is a testimony. It is by baptism that we understand by revelation our union with the Lord Jesus Christ in His death, burial and resurrection.

After my conversion, for two years I never thought of baptism. I read the bible every day. Sometimes I used to spend a whole day with the Bible, but was not baptized thinking that it was not necessary. One Saturday morning in the month of February 1932 as I was having my quiet time the Lord spoke to me through Matthew 3:13. "Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him." The Lord said to me clearly, "Are you in any way better than your Savior?" I replied, "Lord, I never said so. He said," Then what about baptism? " I had been thinking that baptism was not very important because I was born again and was giving my testimony everywhere. But the Lord spoke to me very clearly, that He was baptized for my sake, even though there was no need for Him to do so. The very next day I took baptism. That day I myself took the meeting and during the meeting I was baptized. I was filled with great joy when I came out of water, and from that day onwards the Bible became a new book to me. I enjoyed much liberty in prayer and witnessing, every thing became new to me. I discovered that there are fifty-one references in the Gospels and the Epistles about baptism. I put them all together and studied them.

Now we read in Heb.6: 2 that is the doctrine of baptism. Why is it written "baptism"? When we are born again we are baptized into one body, by the Holy Spirit. That is the first baptism. " For by one spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit" (I Cor.12: 13). The second one is the water baptism.

In the Bible the word baptism is never used for fullness. Baptism means washing or dipping or bathing. When we take bath we wash our whole body. If we wash our hands or feet only, it is not a bath. In the same way, in baptism we are immersed into water by which we testify that the Lord Jesus Christ has completely washed all our sins away.

Secondly, through baptism we declare our union with the Lord Jesus Christ in His death, burial and resurrection. " Know ye not, that is many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have

been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection"(Romans 6:3-5). As we have already seen, when we are saved we are baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ, which means we are joined to Him. We become members of His Body and His life begins to flow in us. In water baptism we declare this spiritual union with the Lord Jesus Christ. He is our Creator, He gave us His life. In other words our life was in Him. " In Him was life; and the life was the light of men"(John 1:4). That is why when He died, we died with Him. When He was buried, we were buried. When he rose again, we too were raised with Him.

Our union with the Lord Jesus Christ can be explained like this. If a woman who is about to deliver a child dies, the child in her womb also dies. When she is buried the child is also buried. If by some miracle that woman is brought back to life, the child in her womb also is made alive. Our life is in the Lord Jesus Christ. That is why we are united with him in his death, burial and resurrection. To declare such oneness with our Lord we are baptized.

By faith we can enjoy fully our spiritual union with the Lord Jesus. He died many years ago and yet even now we can be benefited by it. By the power of His death, we can die to our old nature. We cannot die to it by our own will power. For all our weaknesses like bad temper, jealousy, pride and hatred and for all our failures we should say by faith, "Lord Jesus, I see these weaknesses in me. Please take away my doubts and fears. I want to die to my weaknesses, thoughts, longings and plans by the power of Thy death. Similarly, I want all my desires and weaknesses to be buried by the power of Thy burial. By the same faith, I want to receive in to me the power of Thy resurrection." That is how we have to appropriate the power of His death, burial and resurrection. His death has eternal and abiding value. His words are eternal, and His deeds are also eternal because He is eternal. His death benefits those who lived before Him and also those who live after him.

Every day we receive into us by faith the power of the death of the Lord Jesus die to our thoughts; the power of His burial to forget them; and the power of His resurrection to receive new life for victory over sin and temptation. It is for this purpose that we should be baptized, and learn to enjoy our spiritual oneness with the Lord in this threefold manner. Baptism is not a ceremony, but a testimony. Those who do not obey in baptism live defeated lives. They depend upon will power or fasting or long prayers for victory, but they are defeated. It is by our oneness with the Lord that we get victory. By water baptism we declare that we are spiritual united with our Lord. That is why baptism is a fundamental principle, which helps us to enjoy our share in the fullness of Christ.

4. Laying-on-of Hands.

The fourth fundamental and foundational principle of salvation is laying on of hands (Heb 6:2). In the Bible laying on of hands was used for different purposes such as showing relationships, oneness, equality and identification. The first mention of the laying on of hands is found in Genesis 48:14. " And Israel stretched out his right hand, and laid it upon Ephraim's head, who was the younger, and his left hand upon Manasseh's head, guiding his hands wittingly; for Manasseh was the first-born." Jacob laid his hands upon his grandson and blessed them. Joseph had become a very great and wealthy man in Egypt; he was next to Pharaoh, and yet he brought his sons before his poor father Jacob so that he might bless them. He did not bring them for a worldly blessing. Materially Joseph was much more wealthy than Jacob yet he brought his sons to his father Jacob because he knew that God had promised a seven-fold blessing to Abraham and his seed (Gen. 12:2-3).

There are many believers who are deceived by worldly people. They walk in the ways of the world. They are more interested in dinner parties and picnics than in the things of God. That is why they do not grow spiritually. As believers we cannot have any fellowship with worldly people. We should not have any share in their worldly activities. We can be kind and polite to them, but our fellowship should be only with God's people even if they are poor or illiterate, because they are our people. So by laying on of hands after baptism, we declare together that we are identified with God's people.

I remember an incident in my life. During my college days I had a very good friend. When I returned to India from Canada, I went to see him. By then he had become very wealthy. He requested me to spend a few days with him. He was very kind to me, and made me very comfortable, but I felt only like a stranger in his house. I could not pray with him or talk to him about God. I could not even find a proper place for my quiet time. So every morning, I used to go to a nearby field. One day after finishing my quiet time, I heard some singing from the other side of the field. I went in that direction and saw a very small hut made of mud and straw. I stood there and heard the family singing a Christmas song. Seeing me standing there, a man came outside and asked me, "Sir, do you want to see someone?" I said, "No, I am a Christian. I heard a Christian song being sung and my heart is drawn towards you." He said, "Come inside please." I went inside. It was a small hut. There was no furniture. I sat on the floor, but I was very happy. Though my friend was so very good to me, his house was furnished with costly furniture and everything was so wonderful, still I felt like a stranger. But I met this man for the first time; I did not even know his name. He was very, very poor, earning hardly Rs.10/- a month, yet I was happy with him because we sang together and prayed together. I said to myself, "I have found my people." We belong to God and His people. Those who are attracted by their worldly friends do not grow spiritually.

When Joseph brought his two sons before Jacob, he laid his hands on them. By doing so, he identified those boys with his whole family saying, "You are my children, even though you were born in Egypt. You belong to my family. Now you have an equal share in the blessing, which God has given to Abraham and his seed. "By laying his hands on them he also reminded them, "Now, my grandsons, do not be deceived by Egypt and its wealth or glory. God has given you a great spiritual and eternal inheritance along with the other children of Abraham. " Thus, by laying on of hands, we show our spiritual oneness and relationship with God's children who are bought by the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. In your town there may be many people, but only those who know the Lord Jesus Christ are your brothers and sisters. In Matt.12: 5, our Lord said, "whoever shall do the will of my father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother." In the laying on of hands we declare that we belong to those who love the Lord, irrespective of nation or culture or education. We belong to the same family. We cannot be deceived any more by the world and its attractions. So the first significance of the laying-on of hands is our spiritual relationship with other believers.

Secondly, by the laying-on of hands we declare our identification with the Lord Jesus in His sacrificial death. "And he shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering; and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him" (Lev. 1:4). Whenever anyone brought a sacrifice to the door of the tabernacle, he would lay his hands upon the animal and confess his sins. The animal was then killed and sacrificed upon the altar.

By laying his hands upon the animal, he declared, " This animal is going to die in my place." He himself could not go inside. In his place the animal was killed and taken inside for a sacrifice. Similarly, by faith we declare that the Lord Jesus died in our stead. Thus our spiritual identification in the death of the Lord Jesus is expressed by the laying on of hands.

Nest, we read in Acts 8:14-17 how Peter and John laid their hands upon the Samaritan believers. " Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they went unto them Peter and John: who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus). Then they laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost. " In the normal course the Samaritans should have received the Holy Ghost when they believed, but in this particular case, for a purpose, the Lord withheld the Holy Ghost, who was given afterwards with the laying on of hands.

We read in John 4:9 that the Jews had no dealings with Samaritans. Now the very same Samaritans had believed on the Lord Jesus Christ. If the Lord had given them the Holy Spirit at their new birth the Jews would have said that what they received on the day of Pentecost was something better than what the Samaritans received. That is why God sent Peter and John to Samaria so that they could see for themselves how the very same gift, which the Jews received on the day of Pentecost was also given to the Samaritans. Then Peter and John laid their hands upon the Samaritans to acknowledge that they were equal and that they were their brothers. Before that, they were divided. They laid hands upon them to show spiritual equality and oneness. To express this truth that we are all one, we have the testimony of the laying on of hands. We declare that there is no difference between the rich and the poor, high and low, literate and illiterate: we are all one. " There is neither Jew nor Greek. There is neither bond nor free, there is neither male or female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus"(Gal 3:28). We may come from any family, any country, or any walk of life when we are born again; we become equally precious, equally necessary, and equally important to God. We express this truth by the laying-on of hands.

The Corinthian believers were divided into many groups. " Now this I say that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollo's; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?" (I Cor.1"12-13). In this way they began to call themselves by different names, when we call ourselves by different names, such as Baptist, Methodist, Anglican, Brethren, Pentecostal and so on, it brings division. We all belong only to Christ. We have no right to be called by any other name.

When I applied for a license to solemnize marriages, I was asked, " What is your denomination? I answered. " The Body of Christ. We have no name and no label; we are only Christians." Then the next questions was, " how many members do you have?' I replied, " we do not have any membership; we are all equal. We are all one. All are welcome if they are born again. But this oneness must be maintained.

By laying-on hands we testify together that we are all one and equal in the sight of God. Whatever education or wealth or position we have, it is only by the grace of God. " But by grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all; yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me"(I cor.15: 10). Paul the apostle labored more abundantly than other apostles, only because of the grace of God. If

God has given any one of us any gift of teaching or preaching it is only by His grace, we do not deserve it. We are saved by His grace, and we receive different gifts also by His grace. When we go to heaven we will be rewarded according to our faithfulness, and not according to our gifts.

In the early Church the enemy brought division between the Jewish and the Gentile converts. We see in Gal. 2:11-14, how God had to rebuke even Peter through Paul because we find differences of high caste and low caste. In the same way some nominal Christians believe that one cannot take part in the Holy Communion unless he is confirmed. Such divisions come because of wrong teachings. All those who are born again are one and must remain as one. As believers we should refuse to take part in any activity, function or ritual, which brings division among God's people.

In Acts 13:2-3 we have another instance of the laying-on of hands. "As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them, they send them away." Barnabas and Saul were being sent by the Church. They were not going on their own. By laying hands upon them, the elders were saying, "you are going on our behalf. We are going with you. We are standing by you in prayer and fellowship."

The laying on of hands is not a ritual. There is nothing in the hands. When we shake hands to greet people we show that we are good friends. To show our spiritual equality, oneness and identification, we lay hands on behalf of the whole Church scattered all over the world and declare that we belong to one family, the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are bought by the same precious blood, and so we are equally important and precious to Him.

In 1cor. 12:18-21 we read about the mystery of the Body of Christ. In the human body every little member and gland is necessary. Even the head cannot say to feet, I do not need you. God has made us so. In the same way every believer in the heavenly family is equally necessary and equally useful in God's sight. The laying of hands should not be taken as a ceremony but as a testimony. Baptisms and the laying on of hands go together. If we really follow God's order, after baptism we should lay hands and pray for those who obey in baptism. These days there is spiritual darkness everywhere and many ignore these divine truths.

5. Resurrection of the Dead.

This is the fifth fundamental principle of salvation. We must believe that one day we are going to be resurrected from the dead (1 cor. 15:50-57). Those who do not believe this truth become careless. By resurrection I believe, that just as my Lord Jesus Christ rose again, He is also coming back for me and when I see Him, I shall be like Him. Those who do not believe in the resurrection of the dead become worldly. They have no desire to get ready for the Lord's Second coming.

Sunday by Sunday we take part in the Lord's Table to be prepared for that day. "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come"(I Cor.11: 26). Thus we declare that the Lord Jesus Christ who died for us is coming back again to receive us and give us immortal bodies. By believing in the resurrection of the dead, we are saved from worldly deceptions.

6. Eternal Judgment.

This is the sixth and the last fundamental principle of salvation. One day we have to stand before God to give account of our lives upon the earth. "Every one of us shall give account of himself to God"(Rom 14:12). This means we will have to give an account to God of our words and deeds. "But I say unto you that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the Day of Judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned"(Matt. 12:36-37). If we believe in eternal judgment, we will be very careful with our speech. Our yea should be yea and our nay should be nay. Many times we say things, which we do not mean. Those who believe in eternal judgment will not waste their money or time or energy. We should be very careful to live a life of watchfulness.

These six fundamental principles go together; we cannot separate them. If you have repented from dead works, and have faith towards God, if you have testified in the waters of baptism and the laying on of hands, and if you believe in the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment, you will come on a strong foundation and will grow spiritually.