

Spiritual Foundations: Hebrews 6:1-2

Introduction:

This morning we will carry on with our teaching and interaction with regards to the call to grow spiritually. Last week we reminded ourselves of the necessity to mature in our relationship with God. We likened it to paddling a canoe upstream, if you are constant in your efforts you will move forward and yet if you stop paddling you will begin to drift downstream. The same is true in our walk with Jesus; we must maintain our spiritual disciplines or else suffer the effects of falling away, as the writer of Hebrews states.

Last week we looked at the importance of repentance from acts that lead to death and our faith in God. Repentance – that 180 degree turning for sin and self and satan towards God, is directly related to our trust and confidence in God and our Lord and Saviour. Repentance can be identified as our Conversion to Christ, while our faith in God can be seen in our Conviction of who He is. This morning we will be looking at the instructions about baptisms (Confession), and the laying on of hands (Confirmation) as part of the elementary teaching about Jesus Christ.

Baptism – Our identity in Christ

This morning I am going to briefly talk about how baptism is a symbol that identifies us with Jesus Christ. Baptism in itself has no saving power. The apostle Paul tells us in **Ephesians 2:8-9**, “**For by grace [or God’s free gift of his Son] have you been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.**”

- Salvation is a free gift that God grants to those of us who simply have faith in his Son, Jesus Christ.
- We are saved through our faith in Jesus Christ, not through baptism.
- Baptism is only a symbol of our faith in Jesus Christ. Baptism itself does not wash away any sins. There is no magic in the water that we use. It is the same kind of water that we drink and the same kind that we bathe in.

I came across this story that I thought was great with regards to baptism... “Our three-year-old daughter, Rena, sat with us during the baptismal service last Sunday night, which was a new experience for her. She exclaimed in surprise, ‘Why did he push that guy in the water? Why, Dad, why?’ My wife tried to explain briefly and quietly, but Rena just wouldn’t be satisfied. Later that night we tried to provide an answer that a child’s mind could comprehend. We talked about sin and told Rena that when people decide to live for Jesus and ‘do good’ they want everyone to know. We then explained that water symbolizes Jesus’ washing people from sin - when they come out ‘clean,’ they are going to try to be ‘good.’ A moment later, we realized we’d have to work on our explanation a bit. Rena had immediately responded, ‘Why didn’t the Pastor just spank him?’”

Sometimes there is confusion regarding baptism. Maybe we think a little bit like this three year old. If I get baptized then I will be a good person and do good things. If we believe that baptism is responsible for changing a person’s behavior, then we too might wonder why we don’t just

spank people instead. As I have already stated, baptism is only a symbol and it can't change anyone. Our repentance and faith in Christ precede the instructions about baptism.

The writer to the Hebrew Christians was speaking about baptisms – plural – not simply about Christian baptism. He was concerned about Jewish believers returning to the old Jewish belief and actions.

- Some Jewish people practiced ceremonial washings as a way of spiritual purification. **Hebrews 9:10** – speaks of ceremonial washing or external regulations that the Jews practiced. (see also **John 3:25**). Leviticus 15 speaks to the various instructions given to the Jews about ritual immersions; to wash or bathe, to rinse the hands or feet, and to be washed and this is used only for things like clothes or the rims of cups etc...
- As well, proselytes to the Jewish faith were baptized into Jewish beliefs, being cleansed from their idolatry.
- The Hebrew Christians would also need clarification about John's Baptism. **Acts 19:1-6** tells us of some believers who were baptized into John's baptism which was a baptism of repentance showing the way for people to believe in the One who was coming after him. Paul then baptizes these believers in the name of Jesus...

So the writer of Hebrews was bringing clarity to the believers with regards to baptisms... Here are a few Scriptures that I share with people as they take the class for baptism.

- **Acts 2:38** - “repent and be baptized...”
- **Mark 16:16** - “whoever believes and is baptized will be saved...”
- **Acts 1:5, 8; 2:4** - “For John's baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit”. I believe that the baptism of the Holy Spirit empowers believers to exalt Jesus, to live lives full of holiness, the experience the fruits and gifts of the Spirit, and to be witnesses of God's saving grace. Foursquare Gospel
- **Romans 6:3-5** - ³Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. ⁵If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. (NIV)
- **Col 2:9-15** - For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, **10** and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. **11** In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, **12** *having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.* **13** And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, **14** by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. **15** He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by

triumphing over them in him. (ESV)

The purpose of baptism is that it identifies us openly and publicly with the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord.” This is the **Confession** of our faith in God. Baptism is our confession of our faith and trust in the Lord Jesus, providing the forgiveness of sins and a new way of living. The life that we gain in Christ is not fully realized in the here and now, but is fully known in eternity. In other words, our salvation in Christ is now and not yet. The fullness of our salvation takes place after our bodies pass away and we die here on this earth. And yet we live in the here and now, letting our salvation experience grow within our lives as we live according the purpose and grace of God’s Kingdom. Therefore, we should no longer live according to the ways of this world but we must spiritually die to our selfish ways and the corruption that is in the world.

- This is taking up our cross as Jesus said. We must crucify our former life of sin in order to identify ourselves with Jesus Christ. This sounds like a great mystery. The apostle Paul expressed this seeming mystery in **Galatians 2:20** when he said, **“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”** We are (spiritually) crucified with Christ whenever we accept him as our Lord and Savior, yet we continue to remain alive on this earth.

- **Titus 2:11-14 - For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, 12 training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, 13 waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, 14 who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.**

In baptism we identify ourselves as Christians – those who follow the ways of Jesus Christ.

The Laying on of Hands:

The Laying on of Hands is described as an elementary teaching of Christian doctrine. The writer of Hebrews states, along with the instruction about baptisms (Confession), we must understand the basic teaching of the laying on of hands. There are several concepts behind the laying on of hands.

Firstly, that of separation or transfer. In the Old Testament, **Leviticus 1:4, 3:2, 4:15, 16:21** – describes the priest transferring the sins of the people onto an innocent animal by laying his hands on the animal prior to being sacrificed. The people were then separated from their sins. This was a foreshadowing of the Work of Christ on the Cross as the lamb of God. **Isaiah 53:6— all we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.**

As well we see, Moses laying hands on Joshua (**Numbers 27:18,22-23**) just before his death. Moses was transferring spiritual authority to Joshua. He was appointing Joshua into a position of

leadership and responsibility. In one sense Joshua was ordained for ministry.

We see in the New Testament several other passages relating to the laying on of hands.

- Blessing the children - **Mark 10:16**; this is such an exciting opportunity for all believers to bless their children. Speaking a Word over them is great, but there is something special about that touch. Sometimes there is a laying on of hands, sometimes there is a joining of hands as a sign of agreement and friendship.
- Ordination of leaders - **Acts 6:6**; once again I stress that biblical ordination doesn't come from the people, but from God through his leadership.
- Sending Missionaries into service - **Acts 13:2-3**; an exciting part of Christian ministry is the sending out of missionaries to the field. The leaders lay hands on them and pray they will prosper in their work. One of the problems of an election process, is church politics. Someone isn't ordained into ministry because of popular vote or election, they are ordained into ministry as spiritual elders confirm them by the laying on of hands under the direction of the Spirit of God. This is the practice of the Foursquare Gospel Church. Leaders aren't ordained because the body votes them in, they are ordained for ministry as they are installed by their spiritual leaders and Pastor.
- Receiving the Holy Spirit - **Acts 8:18**; Simon (the sorcerer) saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of hands. He actually offered Paul money to buy this gift from God.
- Impartation of Gifts - **Romans 1:11; 2 Timothy 1:6** There is much confusion around this aspect of the laying on of hands. Paul actually desires to impart to the believers in Rome **“some spiritual gift to strengthen you”**. Not just anyone can lay hands on people – it is the spiritually mature that impart the gifts of the Spirit under the direction of the Holy Spirit.
- Receiving a prophetic word over your life – (a sense of being called out) **1 Timothy 4:14** – **Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you.** There was evidently a prophetic word was spoken over Timothy, and this was accompanied by the laying on of hands.
- Praying for the sick - **Mark 16:18; James 5**. Praying for the sick was a regular practice in the early church and one of the primary callings of the elders with the believers' community.

Guidelines for laying on of hands:

The Scriptures give us several cautions with regards to the laying on of hands. Firstly, **“lay hands on no man suddenly” - 1 Timothy 5:22**. This is good sound wisdom. Leaders must be proven responsible before they are given authority. It is easier to lay hands onto someone than to lay hands off of someone.

In the same vein of thought, don't lay hands on someone until you have had hands laid on yourself. In other words, you cannot give away what you have not received. It is very serious to lay hands on someone because by doing so you are seen as God's representative into their lives.

We should be cautious about who lays the hands on us. We must know and approve of the leader and or pastor who is laying hands on us. The Laying on of Hands is intimate and personal...

As well, some people run here and there to have someone lay hands on them so that they can be

seen as spiritual or mature. **Galatians 1:10** warns us about “trying to get the approval of men or God, if I am seeking man’s approval, I should not consider myself the servant of Jesus Christ.”

Conclusion:

As part of our elementary training – baptism and the laying on of hands is foundational. The symbolism behind baptism is very powerful indeed, and we need to realize that when we are baptized we are reenacting that glorious morning when Jesus broke free from that tomb and that Jesus’ Spirit is with us during that moment of baptism. It is through the baptism of the Spirit that we gain strength to walk out our faith in the Lord Jesus, becoming full of the fruit of the Spirit and flowing in the Gifts of the Spirit.

The laying on of hands has equal importance as we seek to fulfill God's purpose and grace in our lives. What a joy it is to be blessed, sent out, filled up in the Spirit, encouraged and even healed...

Application:

- Describe your own baptism experience...

If not baptized, why not get baptized. The Scriptures command it.

If you are not a Christian:

I first want to encourage you to accept the free gift of eternal life that is gained by having faith in God’s Son, Jesus Christ. If you truly believe that Jesus died for your sins and rose from the dead in order to conquer sin and death, you will be saved.

Once you have accepted Jesus Christ into your hearts you need to identify yourself with Christ by symbolically crucifying your life (which represents your dying to sin), by being buried with him (in the water), and by being resurrected with him as well (by rising from the water).

- A little deeper; Do you think of your baptism or have you lost sight of what your baptism symbolized?
- Deeper still; Are you living a crucified life or are you struggling with sin?

With regards to the Laying on of Hands:

- Describe the last time someone laid their hands on you. What did you experience?
- When was the last time you laid your hands on someone. What did you/they experience?