

VOLUME 1

BLUEPRINT

Foundations

A clear beginning for new believers

Pastor Blake Hughes

ABUNDANT HOPE CHURCH
WIN DISCIPLE SEND

Digital Edition Information

Blueprint, Volume 1: Foundations

Pastor Blake Hughes

Abundant Hope Church

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DECLARATION OF FAITH

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Purpose of This Volume

Blueprint is written for those who are new to Christ, but it uses language clear enough for a twelve-year-old to understand. Volume 1 contains two units. Unit 1 explains the Gospel. Unit 2 examines the foundational teachings named in Hebrews 6:1-2. Keeping these two units together allows the foundations to remain anchored to Jesus Christ and His saving work.

This book is both discipleship and apologetics. It explains what Christians believe, shows where the Bible teaches it, answers common questions, and helps new believers recognize messages that use Christian words while changing biblical truth (Acts 17:11; 2 Timothy 3:14-17; Jude 3).

All quoted Bible text is from the New King James Version. Scripture references are included so the reader can open the Bible, examine each teaching in context, and learn to build convictions from God's Word rather than from the personality or authority of a teacher (Acts 17:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:21).

Before We Build

A foundation is usually hidden. Once a house is finished, no one walks through the front door and talks about the concrete underneath it. People notice the paint, the furniture, and the rooms. Yet everything they can see depends on what they cannot see.

The Christian life works the same way. A believer may attend church, serve, pray, and talk about spiritual things. Those activities can be good, but they cannot replace the foundation. If we misunderstand the Gospel, repentance, faith, baptism, resurrection, or judgment, the weakness will eventually show. We may trust a persuasive teacher more than Scripture or chase experiences because we never learned what God has already promised in Christ.

Hebrews was written to Christians who needed to grow. Paul told them to move beyond the elementary teaching about Christ and press on to maturity. Then he named the foundation they should already understand. His point was not that the foundation no longer mattered. His point was that a foundation is meant to be laid correctly so that a life can be built on it.

Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. **Hebrews 6:1-2 NKJV**

Before we study that list, however, we must begin with Jesus and the Gospel. The foundation is not a collection of ideas floating by themselves. Jesus Christ is the foundation. Christian doctrine, which means Christian teaching, explains who He is, what He has done, what He promises, and how His people should live because they belong to Him.

You do not need to understand every part of the Bible before you can follow Jesus. You do need to know whom you are trusting, understand the message you have believed, and learn how to test what people say about God. That is where Blueprint begins.

How to Use This Book

Read with an open Bible. Look up the passages rather than relying only on the sentences quoted here. If something is unfamiliar, slow down. Write your question. Ask a mature believer or pastor who will show you the answer from Scripture.

The goal is not to rush through pages.
The goal is to understand the truth well
enough to obey it and explain it to some-
one else.

Unit 1 The Gospel

Everything in the Christian life begins with the Gospel. Before we study the foundational teachings listed in Hebrews 6:1-2, we must know the God who saves, the human problem of sin and trespasses, the identity and work of Jesus Christ, the response of repentance and faith, and the new life God gives by grace (1 Corinthians 15:1-4; Ephesians 2:1-10).

Unit 1 contains five chapters and a short review. Volume 1 will continue with Unit 2, which explains the foundational teachings of Hebrews 6:1-2.

Chapter 1 The Good News

The word gospel means good news. It is an announcement before it is an assignment. Advice tells you what you should do; news tells you what has happened. The Gospel announces what God has done through Jesus Christ to save sinners (Romans 1:16-17; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

The Gospel calls for a response, but it does not begin with our promise to become better people. It begins with God: He made us, we rebelled against Him, Jesus died for our sins and rose from the dead, and God now commands people everywhere to repent and believe (Genesis 1:1, 26-27; Mark 1:14-15; Acts 17:30-31).

Why call this message good news? Because the Gospel addresses our deepest problem and offers what we could never produce for ourselves. It does not merely help good people become better. It announces that God saves people who are guilty, spiritually dead, and unable to make themselves right with Him (Romans 3:19-24; Ephesians 2:1-5).

The Gospel can be summarized, but it should not be reduced to a slogan. To understand it, we must know who God is,

what has gone wrong with humanity, who Jesus is, what He accomplished, and how God calls us to respond (Acts 17:22-31; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

How can we know these things with confidence? Creation shows that God exists and displays His power, but creation alone does not tell us the Gospel. We need God to speak. In Scripture, God tells us who He is, names our sin truthfully, and announces what He has done in Christ (Psalm 19:1-11; Romans 1:19-20; 2 Timothy 3:15-17). The Gospel is therefore received from God's Word; it is not a message we are free to redesign around the desires of our culture or our own imagination.

God Made Us for Himself

The Bible begins, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). Human beings are made in God's image, so every person has God-given dignity, value, and moral responsibility (Genesis 1:26-27; James 3:9). We were made to know God, love Him, reflect His character, and live under His good rule (Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Matthew 22:37-38; Colossians 3:10).

God is not a supporting character in our story. We are creatures living in His world and depending on Him for life and breath

(Acts 17:24-28). Because He is Creator, He has authority to define what is good; because He is good, His commands express His holy character rather than arbitrary restriction (Psalm 19:7-11; 1 Peter 1:15-16).

Being made in God's image also explains why every human life matters. Human worth does not depend on age, ability, usefulness, race, wealth, or social standing. Every person bears God-given dignity and must be treated accordingly (Genesis 9:6; James 3:9-10). Sin damages how we reflect God, but it does not erase the fact that human beings are His image-bearers (Genesis 1:26-27).

Sin and Trespasses: Our Real Problem

Scripture describes sin in several connected ways: lawlessness (1 John 3:4), falling short of God's glory (Romans 3:23), failing to do known good (James 4:17), violating the law of love (Matthew 22:37-40), and acting apart from faith (Romans 14:23). The definition below summarizes these biblical descriptions rather than quoting only one verse.

In this book, sin means any thought, desire, attitude, word, action, or failure to act that falls short of God's holy character and commands (Romans 3:23; James

4:17). Sin includes both what we do and what we leave undone (Matthew 23:23; James 4:17). It is more than a harmless mistake because it places us morally at odds with the God who made us (Isaiah 59:2; Colossians 1:21).

A trespass is a specific violation of a boundary God has established. The picture is of stepping across a line or wandering from the right path. Ephesians says that apart from Christ we were “dead in trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1). Sin emphasizes our failure and rebellion; trespass emphasizes crossing God’s boundary. The terms overlap, and together they show that our problem is not merely bad circumstances but spiritual death and guilt before God (Ephesians 2:1-3; Colossians 2:13).

All people have sinned and therefore stand in need of grace (Romans 3:9-12, 23). Comparing ourselves with someone who appears worse cannot make us righteous, because God’s holiness—not another sinner—is the standard (Isaiah 6:1-5; Romans 2:1-3). Sin earns death, and judgment follows death (Romans 6:23; Hebrews 9:27).

Humanity’s condition is therefore both legal and spiritual. We are guilty because we have violated God’s commands, separated from God because of sin, enslaved

under sin's power, and spiritually dead apart from His life (John 8:34; Romans 3:19; 6:16-17; Ephesians 2:1-3). Education, moral effort, religious activity, and good intentions cannot create spiritual life or erase guilt (Isaiah 64:6; Romans 3:20; Titus 3:5). We do not merely need improvement; we need rescue.

God Has Acted to Save

God did not abandon sinners. The Father sent His eternal Son, Jesus Christ, who became truly human without ceasing to be God (John 1:1-3, 14; Galatians 4:4-5). Jesus lived without sin and willingly died for our sins (Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 2:22-24). He was buried and bodily raised on the third day (Luke 24:36-43; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. **1 Corinthians 15:3b-4 NKJV**

Through Christ, God offers forgiveness, reconciliation, and eternal life (Romans 5:8-11; Ephesians 1:7; 1 John 5:11-12). Jesus is not one spiritual option among many. He is the only Savior and the only mediator between God and humanity (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Timothy 2:5-6).

It helps to follow the movement of the Gospel. Our problem is sin, guilt, and spiritual death. God's provision is His Son, who died for our sins and rose again. The required response is repentance and faith. The saving result is not self-improvement but God's work of forgiving, justifying, giving new life, adopting, and beginning to make the believer holy. Keeping that movement clear protects us from replacing the Gospel with advice about becoming religious or successful (Romans 3:21-26; Titus 3:3-7).

Repent and Believe

Jesus summarized the proper response: "Repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). Repentance turns from sin and self-rule toward God; faith trusts Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior (Acts 20:21; Romans 10:9-13). Neither repentance nor faith purchases salvation. Salvation is God's gift of grace, received through faith rather than earned by works (Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:4-7).

Jesus does not merely call people to agree that the Gospel is true. He calls them to turn from self-rule, trust Him, and follow Him. The same Lord who says, "Come to Me" also says, "Follow Me" (Matthew

11:28; Mark 1:17). Conversion is the beginning of life with Christ, not the end of a religious transaction.

The Good News Is Meant to Be Shared

The risen Jesus commanded His followers to make disciples among all nations by going, baptizing, and teaching them to obey everything He commanded (Matthew 28:18-20). The church therefore does more than collect decisions. It announces Christ, calls people to repentance and faith, receives believers through baptism, and teaches them to live as His disciples.

Evangelism is not salesmanship, pressure, or a contest for impressive numbers. Paul reasoned, explained, testified, and persuaded, but he refused manipulation and dishonesty (Acts 17:2-4; 18:4; 26:1-29; 2 Corinthians 4:1-2). We should speak clearly enough to be understood, listen carefully enough to answer the person in front of us, and care about people even when they do not immediately accept the message. A testimony can show what Christ has done in us, but the Gospel explains what Christ has done for sinners through His death and resurrection (John 9:25; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4).¹

KNOW THE WORDS

WORD	PLAIN MEANING
Gospel	The good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried, rose bodily, and saves those who repent and believe (Mark 1:15; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4).
Sin	Any thought, desire, attitude, word, action, or omission that falls short of God's holy character and commands (Romans 3:23; 1 John 3:4; James 4:17).
Trespass	Crossing a boundary God has established or departing from His right path (Ephesians 2:1-3; Colossians 2:13).
Grace	God's undeserved favor and saving action toward sinners (Ephesians 2:4-9; Titus 2:11).
Salvation	God's rescue from sin, guilt, judgment, and bondage into forgiveness, new life, and fellowship with Him (Romans 5:9-11; Colossians 1:13-14).

THINK IT THROUGH

Q Is Christianity Mainly about Being Good?

No. Good works matter, but they are the result of salvation rather than its price (Ephesians 2:8-10; Titus 2:11-14). If moral effort could make us right with God, Christ's death would have been unnecessary (Galatians 2:21).

Q Can Sincerity Save?

Sincerity cannot turn a false belief into truth. Jesus claimed to be the only way to the Father, and the apostles proclaimed salvation in His name alone (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). The question is not merely whether faith is sincere, but whether its object is the true Jesus and the true Gospel (2 Corinthians 11:3-4; Galatians 1:6-9).

Q Is It Arrogant to Tell Someone about Christ?

It would be arrogant to act as though we invented the truth or earned God's favor. Christian witness begins with the opposite confession: we were sinners who needed mercy, and salvation is a gift we did not deserve (1 Corinthians 1:26-31; Ephesians 2:8-9). If Jesus truly died and rose and is the only Savior, loving our neighbor includes speaking that truth with humility and respect (Acts 4:12; 1 Peter 3:15-16). We do not force conver-

sion; we bear faithful witness and trust the Holy Spirit to convict and draw people (John 16:8-11; Acts 17:32-34).

WATCH FOR COUNTERFEITS

A counterfeit gospel may promise wealth, health, influence, destiny, hidden knowledge, or spiritual power while moving Christ's saving work away from the center. Scripture warns against "a different gospel" and requires every message to agree with the apostolic Gospel already delivered (Galatians 1:6-9; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4; Jude 3). God may heal and provide, but those blessings must never replace reconciliation with God as the heart of the Gospel (Romans 5:1-11).

DECLARATION OF FAITH CONNECTION

This chapter supports these Church of God convictions:

- The verbal inspiration of the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16-17).
- All have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).
- Repentance is commanded by God and necessary for forgiveness (Luke 24:46-47; Acts 2:38).
- Justification, regeneration, and the new birth come through faith in Christ (Romans 5:1; Titus 3:5-7).

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

Write the Gospel in two sentences: first, what Jesus has done; second, how God calls us to respond. Check your answer against 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 and Mark 1:14-15.

TALK IT THROUGH

1. Why does the Gospel begin with God rather than with us?
2. How does Scripture describe sin?
3. What does the word trespass help us understand about disobedience?
4. What are the central historical events of the Gospel?
5. How should a person respond to the Gospel?

FIVE DAYS IN THE BIBLE

Day 1: Created by God — Genesis 1:1-31

List what this passage teaches about God and human beings.

Day 2: The Human Problem — Romans 1:18-32; 3:9-26

Notice both the seriousness of sin and God's answer in Christ.

Day 3: Dead, Then Made Alive — Ephesians 2:1-10

Circle or write every phrase that describes life before and after salvation.

Day 4: The Gospel Announced — 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Write the events Paul delivered “first of all.”

Day 5: Repent and Believe — Mark 1:14-20; Romans 10:9-13

Describe the response God calls for.

Chapter 2 Who Jesus Is

A rescue is only as strong as the rescuer. If Jesus were merely a gifted teacher, He could advise us but could not bear the sins of the world. If He were not truly human, He could not represent humanity. The Gospel depends on Jesus being exactly who Scripture says He is: the eternal Son of God who became truly human (John 1:1-3, 14; Hebrews 2:14-18).

Jesus Is Fully God

John calls the Word both distinct from God and truly God, then identifies the Word as the One who became flesh (John 1:1-3, 14). Jesus existed before creation and participated in creating all things (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16-17). He received worship (Matthew 14:33; John 20:28-29), forgave sins by His own authority (Mark 2:5-12), and used language that identified Him with the eternal “I AM” (John 8:56-59; Exodus 3:14).

Calling Jesus the Son of God does not mean that He came into existence after the Father. The title describes His unique relationship with the Father and His shared divine nature (John 5:17-23;

10:30-36). The Son was already with the Father before creation and shared the Father's glory before the world existed (John 1:1-3; 17:5).

Jesus Is Fully Human

The eternal Son "became flesh" (John 1:14). He was born, grew, became tired, felt hunger and thirst, wept, suffered, and died (Luke 2:7, 40, 52; John 4:6; 11:35; 19:28-30). After His resurrection He showed His wounds, invited His disciples to touch Him, and ate food before them (Luke 24:36-43; John 20:24-29). His humanity was real, not an appearance.

Jesus experienced temptation yet never sinned (Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 2:22). Because He is truly human, He can represent us; because He is sinless, He does not need a sacrifice for His own guilt; because He is truly God, His saving work has perfect worth and power (Hebrews 7:26-28; 9:13-14).

Jesus frequently called Himself the Son of Man. The title emphasizes His true humanity, but it also points to the heavenly ruler in Daniel's vision who receives an everlasting dominion, so that "all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him" (Daniel 7:14; Mark 14:61-64). Daniel uses this word for "serve" elsewhere for the religious service owed to

God alone (Daniel 3:28; 6:16). Jesus is therefore not merely a human representative or merely a heavenly visitor. He is the promised divine-human King.

One Person, Two Natures

Jesus is not half God and half man. He is one Person who is fully God and fully human (Philippians 2:5-11; Colossians 2:9). We may not be able to explain every mystery of the incarnation, but we must not solve the mystery by denying part of what Scripture teaches (1 Timothy 3:16).

Q One God in Three Persons

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not three gods, and God is not one Person acting under three temporary names. Scripture distinguishes the Father, Son, and Spirit and speaks of all three together, while continuing to affirm that God is one (Deuteronomy 6:4; Matthew 3:16-17; 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14). The word Trinity is not found in the Bible, but it gives a short name to this biblical teaching.

Jesus Is Messiah, Lord, and Only Mediator

“Christ” is a title meaning Messiah or Anointed One. Jesus fulfills God’s promises of a righteous King and suffering Servant (Isaiah 9:6-7; 52:13-53:12; Luke

4:16-21). God raised Him from the dead and publicly declared His lordship (Acts 2:32-36; Romans 1:3-4). There is one mediator between God and humanity, “the Man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5). Believers do not need a modern apostle, prophet, spiritual specialist, or secret revelation to gain access to God; we come through Christ (Hebrews 4:14-16; 10:19-22).

Jesus Is Prophet, Priest, and King

The Old Testament prepared God’s people to expect prophets, priests, and kings. A prophet spoke God’s word to the people. A priest represented the people before God and offered sacrifice. A king ruled under God’s authority. These roles were carried by different people, and every human officeholder was imperfect. In Jesus, all three come together without failure.

As Prophet, Jesus does more than deliver a message from God; He reveals the Father because He is the eternal Word made flesh (Deuteronomy 18:15-19; John 1:14-18; Hebrews 1:1-3). As Priest, He offered Himself as the final sacrifice and continues to intercede for those who come to God through Him (Hebrews 7:23-28; 9:11-14). As King, He reigns at the Father’s right hand and will openly defeat every enemy (Psalm 110:1; Acts 2:33-36; 1 Corinthians 15:24-28). We

therefore listen to His word, trust His sacrifice, come through His intercession, and submit to His rule.

KNOW THE WORDS

WORD	PLAIN MEANING
Incarnation	The eternal Son of God took on a true human nature without ceasing to be God (John 1:14; Philippians 2:5-8).
Christ/Messiah	God's promised Anointed King and Savior (Psalm 2:2; Luke 4:18-21).
Lord	A title of authority used of Jesus that also identifies Him with the divine name (Acts 2:36; Philippians 2:9-11).
Mediator	One who stands between parties to bring reconciliation; Jesus alone reconciles sinners to God (1 Timothy 2:5-6; Hebrews 9:15).
Trinity	The one true God eternally exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14).

THINK IT THROUGH

Q Did Jesus Ever Claim to Be God?

Jesus did more than speak the modern sentence “I am God.” He claimed divine authority, accepted worship, forgave sins, said He existed before Abraham, used God’s “I AM” language, and required the same honor given to the Father (Mark 2:5-12; John 5:18-23; 8:58; 20:28-29). His first-century hearers understood the weight of these claims (John 5:18; 10:30-33).

Q Was Jesus’ Deity Invented Later?

The earliest Christian proclamation already presents Jesus as risen Lord (Acts 2:32-36). Paul’s letters, written within the first generation of the church, describe Christ as existing in God’s form, receiving universal worship, creating all things, and possessing the fullness of deity (Philippians 2:5-11; Colossians 1:15-20; 2:9). Later councils did not create Jesus’ deity; they defended the church’s reading of Scripture against denials.

WATCH FOR COUNTERFEITS

Any teaching that makes Jesus a created being, one divine figure among many, merely a moral teacher, or a model for discovering our own divinity gives us a different Jesus (2 Corinthians 11:3-4; Colossians 2:8-10). Biblical Christianity

does not teach that believers become gods; we are redeemed creatures adopted into God's family by grace (John 1:12-13; Galatians 4:4-7).

DECLARATION OF FAITH CONNECTION

This chapter supports these Church of God convictions:

- There is one God, eternally existing in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19).
- Jesus Christ is eternally existent with the Father, conceived by the Holy Spirit, and born of the virgin Mary (John 1:1-3; Matthew 1:18-23).
- Christ was crucified, buried, raised from the dead, ascended to heaven, and is at the Father's right hand as Intercessor (1 Corinthians 15:3-4; Acts 1:9-11; Romans 8:34).

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

Read John 1:1-18. Make two lists: what the passage says about Jesus before He became human, and what it says about His coming into the world.

TALK IT THROUGH

1. Why must Jesus be truly God and truly human to save us?

2. What evidence does Scripture give for Jesus' deity?
3. What evidence shows that His humanity was real?
4. What does the title Christ mean?
5. Why is Jesus the believer's only mediator?

FIVE DAYS IN THE BIBLE

Day 1: The Word Became Flesh — John 1:1-18

Mark every statement about Jesus' identity and work.

Day 2: The Image of the Invisible God — Colossians 1:15-20

List what Jesus created, sustains, rules, and reconciles.

Day 3: The Humble Lord — Philippians 2:5-11

Trace the movement from Christ's humility to His exaltation.

Day 4: God's Final Word — Hebrews 1:1-14

Compare the Son with prophets and angels.

Day 5: Our Merciful High Priest — Hebrews 2:10-18; 4:14-16

Write why Jesus' true humanity gives believers confidence.

Chapter 3 What Jesus Accomplished

The cross was not an accident or merely a tragic example of injustice. Jesus said He came to give His life as a ransom, and the apostles taught that His death occurred according to God's saving purpose (Mark 10:45; Acts 2:22-24; 1 Corinthians 15:3). His resurrection was not a comforting symbol; God raised Him bodily from the dead (Luke 24:36-43; Acts 2:32).

He Bore Our Sins

Jesus "bore our sins in His own body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24). He was sinless, yet He suffered for the guilty to bring us to God (2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 3:18). This is substitution: Christ stood in the place of sinners and bore the judgment our sins deserved (Isaiah 53:4-6; Galatians 3:13).

The cross reveals both God's justice and love. God did not pretend evil did not matter; He presented Christ as the atoning sacrifice so that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (Romans 3:25-26). God's love is displayed in giving His Son for sinners and enemies (John 3:16; Romans 5:6-10).

No single biblical picture exhausts the meaning of the cross. Scripture describes sacrifice, substitution, redemption, reconciliation, victory, cleansing, and justification (Romans 3:24-26; 5:9-11; Colossians 2:13-15; Hebrews 9:11-14). These truths belong together. The cross defeats evil because it deals with guilt; it reconciles us because Christ bears sin; and it frees us because the price of redemption has been paid.

The Sacrifices Pointed to Christ

Why does the Bible spend so much time describing altars, priests, blood, and sacrifices? God was teaching His people that sin brings death, that guilt cannot be dismissed, and that approach to a holy God requires the provision He appoints (Leviticus 17:11; Hebrews 9:22). The worshiper did not invent a sacrifice or decide the terms of forgiveness. God provided the pattern.

Those sacrifices could not finally remove sin. They were repeated because their work was incomplete, and the priests who offered them were themselves sinners (Hebrews 7:27; 10:1-4, 11). They pointed forward to Jesus. Christ entered once with His own blood, offered Himself without spot to God, and secured redemption that does not need to be repeated (Hebrews 9:11-14, 24-28; 10:10-14). The

cross is not one more religious sacrifice added to many others. It is the fulfillment to which the earlier sacrifices pointed.

He Redeemed and Reconciled Us

Redemption is the language of release by payment. Jesus gave His life as a ransom and purchased people for God by His blood (Mark 10:45; Revelation 5:9-10). Reconciliation is the restoration of a broken relationship. Through Christ's death, enemies may be brought into peace with God (Romans 5:1, 10-11; Colossians 1:19-22).

Justification belongs closely with the cross. Because Christ died and rose, God can declare the believer righteous without denying the believer's former guilt (Romans 4:23-25; 5:1). This verdict is received through faith, not achieved through a lifetime of religious performance (Romans 3:26-28; Galatians 2:16).

He Rose Victorious

The resurrection vindicates Jesus' claims, confirms the saving sufficiency of His work, defeats death, and guarantees the future resurrection of believers (Romans 1:4; 4:24-25; 1 Corinthians 15:20-23, 54-57). If Christ has not risen, Christian faith is empty and believers remain in their sins (1 Corinthians 15:14-19). Chris-

tianity therefore rests on a public claim about history, not merely on a private spiritual feeling (Acts 2:22-32; 26:22-26).

He Ascended and Reigns

After appearing to His disciples, Jesus ascended to heaven and will return (Acts 1:3, 9-11). He reigns at the Father’s right hand, intercedes for believers, and will finally defeat every enemy (Psalm 110:1; Romans 8:34; 1 Corinthians 15:24-28). The risen Christ is not absent or powerless; He is Lord (Acts 2:33-36).

KNOW THE WORDS

WORD	PLAIN MEANING
Atonement	Christ’s saving work by which He dealt with sin and reconciled sinners to God (Romans 3:25-26; 1 John 2:2).
Substitution	Jesus suffered in the place of sinners, bearing our sins and judgment (Isaiah 53:5-6; 1 Peter 3:18).
Redemption	Freedom secured by the price of Christ’s blood (Ephesians 1:7; 1 Peter 1:18-19).
Reconciliation	God restoring sinners to peace and fellowship with Himself through Christ (Romans

WORD	PLAIN MEANING
	5:10-11; 2 Corinthians 5:18-21).
Resurrection	God's bodily raising of Jesus from the dead and the promised future raising of the dead (Luke 24:39-43; 1 Corinthians 15:20-23).

THINK IT THROUGH

Q Why Could God Not Simply Ignore Sin?

A good judge does not call evil good. God's forgiveness is not indifference to justice; at the cross, God deals with sin while mercifully saving believers (Exodus 34:6-7; Romans 3:25-26). We should not imagine an unwilling Son being punished by an unloving Father. The Father sent the Son in love, and the Son willingly gave Himself (John 3:16; 10:17-18; Galatians 2:20).

Q Is There Reason to Believe Jesus Rose?

The New Testament presents early testimony that Jesus died, was buried, rose, and appeared to individuals and groups, including more than five hundred people at once (1 Corinthians 15:3-8). The disciples proclaimed the resurrection publicly in the city where Jesus had been executed (Acts 2:22-32). The empty tomb alone does not prove every Christian claim, but the combined testimony of Jesus' death,

burial, empty tomb, appearances, and the transformed apostolic witnesses calls for an explanation (Matthew 28:1-10; Luke 24:1-49; John 20:1-29).

WATCH FOR COUNTERFEITS

Some messages reduce the cross to a path toward comfort, wealth, or personal success. Others suggest Jesus had to suffer in hell or become sinful in nature to finish redemption. Scripture says Jesus bore our sins in His body on the cross and declared His work finished there (John 19:30; 1 Peter 2:24; Hebrews 10:10-14). We should not add speculative teachings that Scripture does not require (1 Corinthians 4:6).

DECLARATION OF FAITH CONNECTION

This chapter supports these Church of God convictions:

- Jesus' death provides atonement and forgiveness for sin (Romans 3:23-26; 1 John 1:7-9).
- Jesus was crucified, buried, and raised bodily from the dead (Luke 24:36-43; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4).
- Christ ascended and now intercedes at the Father's right hand (Acts 1:9-11; Romans 8:34).

- A bodily resurrection awaits both the saved and the lost (John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15).

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

Using Romans 5:6-11, write what we were before Christ acted, what Christ did, and what believers now possess.

TALK IT THROUGH

1. What does it mean that Jesus died as our substitute?
2. How does the cross display both justice and love?
3. What is the difference between redemption and reconciliation?
4. Why is the bodily resurrection essential to the Gospel?
5. What is Jesus doing now?

FIVE DAYS IN THE BIBLE

Day 1: The Suffering Servant — Isaiah 52:13-53:12

List what the Servant suffers and what His suffering accomplishes.

Day 2: Just and Justifier — Romans 3:21-31

Notice how righteousness is received and how God remains just.

Day 3: Reconciled to God — Romans 5:1-11

Write every result of being justifieded by faith.

Day 4: Raised Indeed — Luke 24:1-49

List the evidence Luke presents for bodily resurrection.

Day 5: The Resurrection Chapter — 1 Corinthians 15:1-28

Write why Paul says resurrection is essential.

Chapter 4 Repent and Believe

When people heard the Gospel at Pentecost, they asked what they should do. Peter called them to repent, identify publicly with Jesus in baptism, and receive God's promise (Acts 2:37-41). Throughout Acts, the apostolic message calls people to repentance toward God and faith toward Jesus Christ (Acts 17:30-31; 20:21).

Repentance Is a Turn

Repentance includes a change of mind, but it is more than exchanging one opinion for another. It is a change of mind and heart that turns a person from sin, idols, and self-rule toward God (Isaiah 55:6-7; Acts 3:19; 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10). Genuine repentance produces fruit in keeping with repentance, though that fruit does not purchase forgiveness (Matthew 3:8; Acts 26:20).

Repentance is not the same as regret. Judas felt remorse, but his sorrow did not lead him back to Christ in trusting obedience (Matthew 27:3-5). Godly sorrow produces repentance, while worldly sorrow remains centered on loss, shame, or consequences (2 Corinthians 7:9-10).

Repentance may include sorrow, confession, and making wrongs right where possible, but these responses are the fruit of repentance rather than payment for forgiveness (Luke 19:1-10; 2 Corinthians 7:10-11). A person who has harmed someone should not use “grace” to avoid responsibility. At the same time, no amount of sorrow or restitution can replace Christ’s saving work (Ephesians 1:7; Titus 3:4-7).

Consider the difference between being sorry that sin was exposed and being ready to turn from it. Both people may cry. Both may fear consequences. Only one agrees with God about the sin and turns toward obedience. Repentance reaches the mind, affections, and will: we recognize God’s verdict as true, grieve that we have sinned against Him, and surrender the right to keep ruling ourselves (Psalm 51:3-4; Luke 15:17-20). The depth of repentance is measured by its direction, not by the volume of emotion.

Faith Is Trust in Christ

Saving faith includes knowing the Gospel, agreeing that it is true, and personally relying on Jesus Christ (John 3:16-18; Romans 10:9-13). Faith is not positive thinking, confidence in ourselves, or a force

that controls outcomes. Its value rests in its object: Jesus Christ (Galatians 2:16; 2 Timothy 1:12).

Biblical faith is alive and therefore begins to produce obedience (James 2:14-26). Works do not make faith worthy or earn salvation, but a settled refusal to obey exposes an empty profession (Matthew 7:21-23; Titus 1:16). We are justified by faith apart from works, and the faith that receives grace leads into the good works God prepared (Romans 3:28; Ephesians 2:8-10).

The strength of faith is not measured by how confident we feel. Weak faith resting on a strong Savior is better than great confidence placed in a false promise. The father who cried, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" brought his need to Jesus rather than pretending certainty (Mark 9:24). Saving faith looks away from self and rests on Christ's identity, work, and promise (John 6:35-40; 2 Timothy 1:12).

Saving faith also engages the whole person. The mind hears and understands the Gospel. The heart recognizes Christ as worthy of trust. The will entrusts the person to Him. Knowing facts without relying on Christ is not saving faith, but neither is a sincere feeling detached from the

truth about Jesus. Biblical faith receives the true Christ revealed in the true Gospel (John 20:30-31; Romans 10:9-17).

Repentance and Faith Belong Together

Repentance and faith describe one turning from two directions: turning from sin and turning to Christ (Acts 20:21; 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10). We must not make repentance a work that cleans us up before we come to Jesus. We come honestly, abandoning our claim to self-rule and trusting His mercy (Luke 18:9-14; Titus 3:3-7).

A Decision Begins a Life of Discipleship

A person truly comes to Christ at a definite point of repentance and faith, but the New Testament never treats that beginning as permission to remain unchanged. Jesus commands the church to make disciples and teach them to obey (Matthew 28:19-20). New birth begins new life; it does not instantly produce maturity (1 Peter 2:2; 2 Peter 3:18).

This guards against two errors. One error keeps asking sincere believers to be saved again because they are still growing. The other counts a raised hand, repeated prayer, or emotional moment as

sufficient even when a person rejects Christ's lordship. We are saved by grace through faith, not by our progress, yet saving grace trains us to renounce ungodliness and live under Christ's rule (Ephesians 2:8-10; Titus 2:11-14).²

Confession and the Sinner's Prayer

Scripture teaches believers to confess Jesus as Lord and call upon Him for salvation (Romans 10:9-13). A prayer can express genuine repentance and faith, but no arrangement of words saves by itself. The tax collector's brief cry for mercy was received because he humbled himself before God, while religious words offered in pride did not justify the Pharisee (Luke 18:9-14). Christ saves those who come to Him; a formula is not a spiritual spell (John 6:37; Acts 16:30-31).

Q An Example Prayer

Lord Jesus, I know that I have sinned and cannot save myself. I believe You died for my sins and rose from the dead. I turn from my sin and place my trust in You. Please forgive me, make me new, and help me follow You as my Lord. Amen.

These words do not save merely because they are repeated. The prayer should express a heart that is humbled before the Lord, honestly turning from sin and trusting Christ. Salvation rests in Jesus and

His promise, not in the wording or length of the prayer (Psalm 51:17; Luke 18:13-14; Romans 10:9-13).

KNOW THE WORDS

WORD	PLAIN MEANING
Repentance	Turning in mind, heart, and direction from sin and self-rule toward God (Acts 3:19; 20:21).
Faith	Trusting and relying on Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior (John 3:16; Romans 10:9-13).
Confession	Openly agreeing with God's truth, including acknowledging Jesus as Lord and acknowledging our sins (Romans 10:9; 1 John 1:9).
Conversion	The turning to God expressed through repentance and faith (Acts 14:15; 1 Thessalonians 1:9).
Fruit	Visible attitudes and actions produced by genuine repentance and life with God (Matthew 3:8; Galatians 5:22-23).

THINK IT THROUGH

Q Must I Fix Myself Before Coming to Jesus?

No. Jesus calls sinners, not people who have already made themselves righteous (Mark 2:17). Repentance means coming into the light and turning to God, not becoming worthy before asking for mercy (John 3:19-21; Luke 18:13-14). God receives the one who comes to Christ (John 6:37).

Q What If I Do Not Feel Enough?

Strong emotion can accompany repentance, but salvation does not rest on achieving a certain intensity of feeling. The question is whether you are turning to Christ and trusting His promise (John 5:24; Acts 16:30-31). Feelings change; Christ's word remains true (Matthew 24:35).

Q Does One Decision Make a Mature Disciple?

No. A genuine decision to repent and believe is a real beginning, but maturity develops as a believer learns Christ's teaching, obeys it, remains in fellowship, receives correction, serves others, and perseveres (Acts 2:41-47; Ephesians 4:11-16). We must neither belittle the beginning nor confuse birth with growth.

The church should seek conversions and then help converts become steady followers of Jesus.

WATCH FOR COUNTERFEITS

Beware of “faith in faith”—the idea that certainty, visualization, declarations, or spoken words create reality. Biblical faith does not trust its own intensity. It trusts God and submits requests to His will (Mark 11:22; 1 John 5:14-15). Likewise, repentance is not public humiliation imposed by a controlling leader; it is a sincere turning to God that may include appropriate confession and restitution (Luke 19:8-10; James 5:16).

DECLARATION OF FAITH CONNECTION

This chapter supports these Church of God convictions:

- Repentance is commanded for all and necessary for forgiveness (Luke 24:46-47; Acts 17:30).
- Justification and regeneration come through faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1; Titus 3:5-7).

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

Read Luke 18:9-14. Write a short prayer to God that confesses your need, trusts Christ’s mercy, and submits your life to

Him. The prayer does not earn salvation; it gives words to repentance and faith (Romans 10:9-13).

TALK IT THROUGH

1. How is repentance different from regret?
2. Why is faith more than agreement with facts?
3. How do repentance and faith belong together?
4. What place can prayer have in conversion?
5. Why can neither strong feelings nor exact words provide assurance?

FIVE DAYS IN THE BIBLE

Day 1: Jesus Calls for a Response — Mark 1:14-20

Write the two responses Jesus commands and what the first disciples leave to follow Him.

Day 2: Two Prayers — Luke 18:9-14

Compare the two men's view of themselves and of God's mercy.

Day 3: Cut to the Heart — Acts 2:22-41

Trace the message, response, command, and result.

**Day 4: Turn to God — Acts 17:22-31;
20:17-21**

Write what repentance is based on and how Paul summarizes his message.

**Day 5: Believe and Confess — Romans
10:1-13**

Notice the difference between establishing our righteousness and receiving God's righteousness.

Chapter 5 Grace, Assurance, and New Life

A new believer may wonder, “What happened when I trusted Christ?” and “How can I know I truly belong to Him?” Scripture answers with several connected truths. God forgives, justifies, gives new birth, adopts, joins the believer to Christ, gives the Holy Spirit, and begins a life-long work of making the believer holy (John 1:12-13; Romans 5:1; 8:9-17; 2 Corinthians 5:17).

These words do not describe competing versions of salvation or a list of achievements the believer must complete. They describe what God’s one saving work accomplishes from several angles. In the courtroom, justification answers our guilt. In the language of birth, regeneration answers our spiritual death. In the family, adoption answers our alienation. In a life set apart to God, sanctification answers sin’s continuing influence. Each truth helps us understand a different part of the same gracious rescue.

Saved by Grace

Grace means God acts favorably toward people who cannot earn His rescue. We were dead in trespasses and sins, “but God,” rich in mercy and love, made believers alive with Christ (Ephesians 2:1-5). Salvation is by grace through faith, not from ourselves and not from works (Ephesians 2:8-9). Grace does not excuse continued rebellion; it trains believers to reject ungodliness and live for God (Titus 2:11-14).

Forgiven and Justified

Forgiveness means God releases the believer from the debt of sin because of Christ’s blood (Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 2:13-14). Justification means God declares the believer righteous on the basis of Christ, received through faith (Romans 3:24-28; 5:1). Justification changes our standing before God; it is not God pretending that we never sinned but God crediting righteousness apart from works because Christ has dealt with our guilt (Romans 4:5-8; 2 Corinthians 5:21).

This distinction matters when conscience accuses us. Justification does not mean that our past suddenly becomes imaginary. It means the Judge has dealt with our guilt through Christ and has issued a new verdict over the believer. We do not

keep returning to the courtroom to earn another acquittal through better performance. We return to Christ in confession and faith, resting in the sufficiency of His sacrifice (Romans 5:9; 8:31-34; 1 John 1:9-2:2).

Born Again and Made New

Regeneration, or the new birth, is the Holy Spirit's work of giving spiritual life (John 3:3-8; Titus 3:5). The person who was dead in trespasses is made alive with Christ (Ephesians 2:1, 4-5). A believer is a new creation, although growth in thought, character, and habits continues over time (2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 4:20-24).

Regeneration is not self-reinvention. The Holy Spirit does what human effort cannot do: He awakens the sinner to life, enables a genuine response to the Gospel, and begins a new work within the believer (John 3:5-8; 6:63; Titus 3:5). This new life produces new desires, although old habits and temptations may still need to be resisted and unlearned (Romans 6:11-14; Galatians 5:16-17).

Adopted into God's Family

God does more than cancel guilt. He adopts believers as His children and gives the Spirit of adoption, by whom they cry,

“Abba, Father” (Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 4:4-7). Adoption gives belonging, access, inheritance, and loving discipline (Ephesians 2:18-19; Hebrews 12:5-11).

Every true believer belongs to Christ and has the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 12:13). The Spirit assures believers of their adoption, helps them pray, produces Christlike fruit, gives power to resist sin, and equips the church for service (Romans 8:13-16, 26-27; Galatians 5:22-23; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11). Later chapters will distinguish the Spirit’s indwelling work in salvation from the Pentecostal teaching concerning baptism in the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-8; 2:1-4).

Sanctified and Being Sanctified

Sanctification means being set apart for God and increasingly shaped into Christ’s likeness (1 Corinthians 1:2; Romans 8:29). In one sense believers have been sanctified in Christ; in another, they are called to pursue holiness through the Spirit’s power (1 Corinthians 6:11; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Hebrews 12:14). Growth is not instant perfection, but grace establishes a new direction (Philippians 1:6; 3:12-14).

Sanctification involves God’s work and our responsive obedience. God works in His people “both to will and to do for His

good pleasure,” and believers are therefore called to obey, put sin to death, renew their minds, and practice what Scripture teaches (Romans 8:13; 12:1-2; Philippians 2:12-13; James 1:22-25). Depending on grace is not passive. It means obeying with confidence that God supplies what He commands.

How Can I Have Assurance?

Assurance begins outside our changing emotions—with God’s promise and Christ’s finished work. Whoever hears Christ’s word and believes the Father who sent Him has eternal life and has passed from death into life (John 5:24). God has given eternal life in His Son, and those who have the Son have life (1 John 5:11-13). The Spirit also bears witness that believers are God’s children (Romans 8:15-16).

Scripture also points to confirming evidence: continuing trust in the true Christ, growing obedience, love for other believers, confession rather than concealment of sin, and perseverance (John 8:31; 1 John 1:6-2:6; 3:14; 4:13-15). These fruits are not the foundation of acceptance, but they help confirm that faith is living.

Believers may stumble, but Christ is their Advocate, and God promises cleansing to those who confess their sins (1 John

1:9-2:2). Scripture does not teach sinless perfection at conversion, nor does it give comfort to a person determined to remain in unrepentant rebellion (1 John 1:8; 3:6-10). The normal Christian life includes both real struggle and real growth (Galatians 5:16-25).

KNOW THE WORDS

WORD	PLAIN MEANING
Forgiveness	God releases the believer from sin’s debt because of Christ (Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 2:13-14).
Justification	God’s gracious declaration that the believer is righteous in Christ through faith (Romans 3:24-28; 5:1).
Regeneration	The Holy Spirit gives new spiritual life—the new birth (John 3:3-8; Titus 3:5).
Adoption	God receives believers as His children and heirs (Romans 8:15-17; Galatians 4:4-7).
Sanctification	God sets believers apart and progressively forms Christlike holiness in them (1 Corinthians 6:11; 2 Corinthians 3:18).
Assurance	Spirit-given confidence, grounded in God’s

WORD	PLAIN MEANING
	promise and confirmed by living faith, that one belongs to Christ (Romans 8:15-16; 1 John 5:11-13).

THINK IT THROUGH

Q What If I Still Struggle with Sin?

Struggle does not automatically prove that conversion was false. The Spirit opposes the desires of the flesh, so conflict is part of Christian growth (Galatians 5:16-17). The right response is not denial or despair but confession, dependence on the Spirit, renewed obedience, and help from the church (1 John 1:9; Romans 8:12-14; Galatians 6:1-2).

Q Can I Base Assurance on a Past Prayer?

A past prayer may mark the moment you trusted Christ, but the prayer itself is not the Savior. Assurance rests on Christ, His promise, and present faith in Him (John 6:35-40; 10:27-30; 1 John 5:11-13). Scripture calls believers to examine themselves without becoming trapped in endless fear or self-analysis (2 Corinthians 13:5; 2 Peter 1:5-11).

WATCH FOR COUNTERFEITS

One counterfeit turns grace into permission to live without repentance; another makes acceptance depend on constant

performance. Scripture rejects both. Grace saves apart from works and then trains believers in godliness (Ephesians 2:8-10; Titus 2:11-14). Our confidence is in Christ, while our lives increasingly display His work (Philippians 2:12-13; 1 John 2:3-6).

DECLARATION OF FAITH CONNECTION

This chapter supports these Church of God convictions:

- Justification, regeneration, and the new birth come through faith in the blood of Jesus Christ (Romans 3:24-26; Titus 3:5-7).
- Sanctification follows the new birth through faith in Christ, the Word, and the Holy Spirit (John 17:17; Romans 15:16; 1 Corinthians 6:11).
- Holiness is God's standard of living for His people (1 Peter 1:15-16; Hebrews 12:14).

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

Read 1 John 5:11-13 and write the promise in your own words. Then read 1 John 2:3-6 and name one area in which Christ is calling you to growing obedience.

TALK IT THROUGH

1. What is the difference between forgiveness and justification?

2. What happens in regeneration?
3. What privileges come with adoption?
4. How can sanctification be both already true and still in progress?
5. What is the foundation of assurance, and what fruit confirms living faith?

FIVE DAYS IN THE BIBLE

Day 1: But God — Ephesians 2:1-10

Contrast what we were, what God did, and what believers are created to do.

Day 2: Peace with God — Romans 5:1-11

List the blessings that follow justification.

Day 3: Born of the Spirit — John 3:1-21

Write what Jesus says is necessary and what God's love provides.

Day 4: Children and Heirs — Romans 8:1-17

Notice the Spirit's work and the privileges of adoption.

Day 5: That You May Know — 1 John 1:5-2:6; 5:11-13

Write the basis of assurance and the marks of walking in the light.

Unit 1 Review

Before moving to Hebrews 6:1-2, explain the Gospel in ordinary words and support it from Scripture. Use this review for conversation, writing, or personal study.

1. Explain why the Gospel begins with God as Creator (Genesis 1:1, 26-27).
2. Define sin and trespass, and explain why both leave humanity in need of grace (Romans 3:23; Ephesians 2:1-3).
3. Explain why Jesus must be truly God and truly human (John 1:1-3, 14; Hebrews 2:14-18).
4. State the central events of the Gospel (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).
5. Explain what the cross accomplished using the words substitution, redemption, and reconciliation (Isaiah 53:5-6; Ephesians 1:7; Romans 5:10-11).

6. Explain why the bodily resurrection is essential (Luke 24:36-43; 1 Corinthians 15:14-20).
7. Distinguish repentance from regret and faith from positive thinking (2 Corinthians 7:9-10; Acts 20:21).
8. Explain salvation by grace through faith and the place of good works (Ephesians 2:8-10).
9. Define justification, regeneration, adoption, and sanctification (Romans 5:1; Titus 3:5; Romans 8:15-17; 2 Corinthians 3:18).
10. Explain how a believer may have assurance without trusting feelings or excusing sin (John 5:24; 1 John 2:3-6; 5:11-13).

A Simple Gospel Summary

God created us for Himself, but all people have sinned and are dead in trespasses and sins (Genesis 1:26-27; Romans 3:23; Ephesians 2:1). Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God who became truly human, lived without sin, died for our sins, was buried, and rose bodily from the dead (John 1:1-3, 14; Hebrews 4:15; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4). God commands us to repent and believe in Jesus Christ (Mark 1:15; Acts 20:21). Everyone who trusts Him is saved by grace, forgiven, made alive,

adopted into God's family, given the Holy Spirit, and called into a new life of obedience (Ephesians 2:4-10; Romans 8:9-17).

Personal Response

Have you turned from sin and trusted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior (Mark 1:15; Romans 10:9-13)? If so, thank God, tell a mature Christian, be baptized, and become part of a faithful local church (Acts 2:38-42). If you are unsure, ask a pastor or mature believer to open the Bible with you (Acts 8:30-35).

Unit 2 The Foundations of Christian Doctrine

The Gospel is the beginning of the Christian life, but God does not intend believers to remain spiritual infants. Hebrews 6:1-2 names elementary teachings that should be understood well enough to support a life of maturity: repentance from dead works, faith toward God, instruction about baptisms, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.

Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. **Hebrews 6:1-2 NKJV**

These teachings are elementary because they come first, not because they are optional. A foundation is meant to be laid accurately and then built upon. Unit 2 ex-

plains each teaching in its biblical setting, answers common misunderstandings, and identifies distortions that can keep believers immature or place them under unhealthy spiritual control (Hebrews 5:12-14; Ephesians 4:11-16).

Chapter 6 Moving toward Maturity

A newborn is expected to grow. No one criticizes an infant for needing milk, but something is wrong if years pass without development. Hebrews uses that picture to challenge believers who had heard enough truth to become teachers but still needed the basics explained again (Hebrews 5:12-14).

What Christian Maturity Means

Christian maturity is not knowing impressive words, collecting spiritual experiences, or holding a church position. It is growing into steady obedience, sound judgment, Christlike character, and the ability to use Scripture rightly (Hebrews 5:14; Ephesians 4:13-15; Colossians 1:9-10). Mature believers are not carried about by every new teaching because they have learned to recognize the difference between truth and error (Ephesians 4:14; 1 John 4:1).

A Disciple Learns, Follows, and Becomes Like Christ

A disciple is first a learner. No believer outgrows the need to hear, study, and obey the words of Jesus. A disciple is also a follower who accepts the authority of the Master rather than borrowing only the teachings that fit personal preference. Finally, a disciple is an imitator: not a copy with no personality, but a person whose character is being shaped into Christ's likeness (Luke 6:40; John 8:31-32; 1 Corinthians 11:1).³

That definition joins truth and life. Learning without following can produce pride. Following without learning can become zeal without knowledge. Trying to imitate Jesus without depending on the Holy Spirit becomes moral strain. Christian maturity grows as the Word renews the mind, the Spirit produces holy fruit, and obedience turns truth into practiced wisdom (Romans 12:1-2; Galatians 5:16, 22-25; Hebrews 5:14).

Maturity includes both becoming and doing. We become more like Christ in love, purity, humility, courage, and endurance; we also do the work He gives us through worship, witness, generosity, service, and care for others (Colossians 3:12-17; James 1:22-27). Activity without character can wound people. Character that

never serves others remains incomplete. Christ forms a people who both bear His likeness and participate in His mission.

Some Christians speak as though doctrine belongs to the mind while spiritual life belongs to the heart. Scripture does not separate them. What we believe about God shapes how we worship, pray, endure suffering, recognize error, and treat other people. A sincere experience interpreted by false teaching can lead a believer away from Christ. Sound doctrine gives spiritual experience its biblical boundaries, and life with the Spirit moves truth from the page into faithful obedience (John 4:23-24; 1 Timothy 4:16; Titus 2:1, 11-14).

Hebrews 6:1 says, “let us go on to perfection.” The word points to maturity or completeness, not sinless perfection achieved by human effort (Philippians 3:12-14; James 3:2). Growth is God’s work in us, but believers must respond through obedience, practice, correction, and perseverance (Philippians 2:12-13; Hebrews 5:14; 12:5-11).

A Foundation Is for Building

Paul does not tell Christians to discard repentance, faith, resurrection, or judgment. He warns against repeatedly laying the same foundation without building

upon it (Hebrews 6:1-3). We return to foundational truths for strength and correction, but we should not remain unable to explain or apply them.

The six items appear in three natural pairs. Repentance and faith describe conversion toward God (Acts 20:21). Baptisms and laying on of hands concern introductory teaching and embodied practices in the believing community (Acts 2:38-42; 8:12-17). Resurrection and eternal judgment direct the believer toward the future completion of God's plan (John 5:28-29; Acts 17:30-31).

Growth Happens in the Church

Maturity is personal, but it is not private. Christ gives ministers to equip the saints, and every member contributes to the body's growth (Ephesians 4:11-16). Believers grow through teaching, fellowship, the Lord's Supper, prayer, service, correction, and encouragement (Acts 2:42; Hebrews 3:12-13; 10:24-25). A person who refuses accountable fellowship cuts himself off from means God ordinarily uses for growth.

Why the Church Exists

A church can be busy without being faithful. Programs, meetings, and crowds are not the mission by themselves. Jesus

gives the church a clear direction: worship God, proclaim the Gospel, make disciples, teach His Word, build up believers, and show His love through holy and compassionate service (Matthew 22:37-40; 28:18-20; Acts 2:42-47; Ephesians 4:11-16). These purposes belong together under Christ's authority.

The church must not choose between truth and love as though Jesus permits only one. He proclaimed repentance and the kingdom, and He also fed the hungry, welcomed the rejected, healed the sick, and showed mercy (Matthew 4:17, 23; 9:35-38; Luke 4:18-19). Compassion does not replace the Gospel, because temporary help cannot reconcile a sinner to God. Gospel proclamation does not excuse indifference, because the love we announce must become visible in our treatment of people (James 2:14-17; 1 John 3:16-18).⁴

The Great Commission includes the whole path: going to people, making disciples, baptizing believers, and teaching them to obey Jesus (Matthew 28:18-20). A healthy church therefore asks more than, "How many responded?" It also asks, "Are people learning Christ, joining His people, growing in holiness, serving with their gifts, and helping others follow Him?"

Numbers can describe part of the work, but only Scripture can define success (1 Corinthians 3:5-9; 4:1-5).

Belonging, Accountability, and Service

Church membership does not save anyone, and a membership roll is not the Book of Life. Yet the New Testament does not picture Christians as permanently unattached individuals. Believers are joined to a body, known by shepherds, responsible for one another, and called to gather, encourage, correct, bear burdens, and serve (Acts 2:41-47; 1 Corinthians 5:12-13; 12:12-27; Hebrews 13:17). Meaningful belonging gives visible form to those responsibilities.

Biblical accountability is not unquestioning loyalty to a leader. Christ is Lord of the church, Scripture judges every teaching, and leaders themselves are accountable to God (Acts 17:11; Galatians 1:8-9; 1 Peter 5:1-4). Healthy leaders equip rather than possess people; they welcome honest questions, correct with gentleness, and refuse to use fear, secrecy, or claims of spiritual "covering" to control consciences (2 Corinthians 1:24; 4:1-2; 2 Timothy 2:24-26).⁵

Every believer has a place in the body. The Spirit gives gifts for the common good, not for self-promotion or spiritual rank (Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11; 1 Peter 4:10-11). Mature disciples move from being only receivers to becoming servants, while still remaining teachable and willing to receive care. No gift makes a person independent of the body, and no quiet gift is unimportant.

Faithfulness Is Not Measured by Church Size

A small congregation is not a failed large congregation. The New Testament recognizes churches meeting in homes as well as larger public gatherings (Acts 2:46; 19:9; Romans 16:5). Size changes available resources, but it does not change the church's calling. A small church can worship deeply, teach carefully, care personally, evangelize faithfully, and send workers generously.

Large churches and small churches face different temptations. A large church may mistake reach, excellence, or visibility for spiritual health. A small church may become inward-looking, resistant to newcomers, or convinced that little can be done. Christ evaluates faithfulness, truth, love, holiness, endurance, and obedience—not prestige (Revelation 2:2-5; 3:7-13).

The right question is not, "Are we impressive?" but, "Are we obeying Jesus with what He has entrusted to us?"⁶

KNOW THE WORDS

WORD	PLAIN MEANING
Maturity	Growing stability in truth, character, discernment, and obedience (Hebrews 5:14; Ephesians 4:13-15).
Foundation	Essential teaching that supports later growth (Hebrews 6:1-2; 1 Corinthians 3:10-11).
Discernment	The practiced ability to distinguish truth from error and good from evil (Hebrews 5:14; Philippians 1:9-10).
Perseverance	Continuing in faith and obedience through pressure and delay (Hebrews 10:35-39; James 1:2-4).

THINK IT THROUGH

Q Does Maturity Mean Needing Less of the Gospel?

No. Maturity means understanding the Gospel more deeply and living consistently with it (Colossians 1:23; 2:6-7). The mature believer does not graduate from Christ; he becomes more firmly rooted in Christ.

Q Can I Follow Jesus without Belonging to a Church?

A person may be separated from a congregation for a time because of illness, persecution, travel, or the need to leave

an abusive setting. Those situations deserve patience and care. But choosing permanent isolation is not the New Testament pattern. Jesus saves individuals into a people, and many commands—bear one another’s burdens, forgive one another, encourage one another, submit to one another, and use gifts for one another—cannot be practiced alone (Galatians 6:2; Ephesians 4:32; 5:21; Hebrews 10:24-25; 1 Peter 4:10).

Q Does Evangelism Treat People like Projects?

It can, if the goal is merely a statistic or a quick story. Jesus saw people as sheep needing a shepherd and responded with compassion (Matthew 9:36). Faithful witness listens, speaks truth plainly, respects the person’s dignity, and continues to love even when the answer is no (Mark 10:21-22; 1 Peter 3:15-16). We cannot control another person’s response; we can refuse manipulation and represent Christ truthfully.

Q Is a Small Church Less Important?

No. Christ’s presence and authority do not depend on attendance figures. A congregation should desire to reach people and should not use smallness as an excuse for fear or stagnation, but biblical fruit is larger than numerical growth. Faithful teaching, genuine conversions,

holy lives, loving care, persevering prayer, and sacrificial mission all matter to God (Acts 14:21-23; 1 Corinthians 3:6-9; Revelation 3:8).

WATCH FOR COUNTERFEITS

Some movements measure maturity by unusual experiences, special titles, secret knowledge, or access to powerful leaders. The New Testament measures growth by truth, love, holiness, service, endurance, and likeness to Christ (Ephesians 4:13-16; Galatians 5:22-23; 2 Peter 1:5-8).

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

Read Hebrews 5:11-6:3. Write one area where you need greater understanding and one area where you need repeated obedience. Ask a mature believer to help you take a concrete next step (Proverbs 15:22; Hebrews 10:24-25).

TALK IT THROUGH

1. Why does Hebrews compare basic teaching to milk?
2. What does maturity look like in Ephesians 4:13-16?
3. Why is a foundation necessary but incomplete by itself?
4. How does the local church help believers grow?

5. What false measurements of maturity should Christians reject?

FIVE DAYS IN THE BIBLE

Day 1: Ready to Grow — Hebrews 5:11-6:12

Identify the warning, the foundation, and the encouragement.

Day 2: Built on Christ — 1 Corinthians 3:5-17

Notice the only foundation and the responsibility of those who build.

Day 3: Equipped Together — Ephesians 4:11-16

List the marks and means of maturity.

Day 4: Add to Your Faith — 2 Peter 1:3-11

Write the qualities believers are told to develop.

Day 5: Pressing Forward — Philippians 3:7-16

Contrast perfection already reached with pressing toward the goal.

Chapter 7

Repentance from Dead Works

Repentance was introduced in Unit 1 as turning from sin and self-rule toward God (Mark 1:15; Acts 20:21). Hebrews adds the phrase “repentance from dead works” (Hebrews 6:1; 9:14). This includes turning from sinful deeds that produce death and from religious works treated as a way to earn righteousness before God.

One of the first truths a Christian must learn is that works do not save. We are justified through faith in Jesus Christ, not by deeds that place God in our debt or prove that we deserve acceptance (Romans 3:20-28; Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5).

Even after hearing the Gospel and trusting Christ, a believer may continue thinking that human effort helps obtain righteousness. This feels natural because pride wants to contribute something to the rescue. Paul repeatedly corrects that idea in Romans: Abraham was counted righteous by faith rather than works, righteousness is received through Christ, and grace cannot be mixed with works as its basis (Romans 4:1-5; 5:17; 10:1-4;

11:6). Good works follow salvation as its fruit, but Christ does not need our assistance to complete the salvation He provides (Ephesians 2:10; Hebrews 10:10-14).

What Are Dead Works?

Works can be called dead when they arise from spiritual death, serve sin, or cannot give life (Ephesians 2:1-3; Romans 6:21). The deeds of the flesh are destructive even when culture excuses them (Galatians 5:19-21). Christ cleanses the conscience from dead works so that believers may serve the living God (Hebrews 9:13-14).

Dead works may also include religious efforts used to establish our own righteousness. Paul had impressive religious credentials, yet counted them loss in order to be found in Christ with righteousness through faith (Philippians 3:4-9). Good deeds cannot erase guilt or place God in our debt (Romans 3:20; 4:4-5; Titus 3:5).

Picture two people standing before God. One points to obvious sins and admits the need for mercy. The other points to church attendance, generosity, knowledge, and discipline as reasons God should accept him. Their lives may look very different, but neither person can be justified by presenting a record of works.

The first must turn from rebellion; the second must turn from self-righteousness. Both need the righteousness God gives through faith in Christ (Luke 18:9-14; Romans 10:1-4).

Repentance Produces a New Direction

Repentance does not mean that a person instantly understands every sin or never struggles again. It means the rule of life has changed. The repentant person stops defending rebellion, agrees with God, and turns toward obedience (Proverbs 28:13; Acts 26:20; 1 John 1:9). When the Holy Spirit exposes further areas, the believer continues to confess and turn (Psalm 139:23-24; Revelation 2:5).

Fruit Does Not Purchase Forgiveness

John the Baptist called for “fruits worthy of repentance” (Luke 3:8). Zacchaeus demonstrated repentance by changing how he treated money and making restitution (Luke 19:8-10). The fruit did not buy salvation; it showed that grace had changed his direction. Biblical repentance avoids both legalism, which tries to earn grace, and empty profession, which claims grace without turning from sin (Ephesians 2:8-10; Titus 2:11-14).

KNOW THE WORDS

WORD	PLAIN MEANING
Dead works	Sinful or self-righteous deeds that cannot produce spiritual life or acceptance with God (Hebrews 6:1; 9:14).
Conviction	The Holy Spirit's exposure of sin and truth, leading a person toward Christ rather than mere shame (John 16:8-11).
Confession	Agreeing with God about sin and bringing it into the light (Proverbs 28:13; 1 John 1:9).
Restitution	Making reasonable amends for harm where possible, as fruit of repentance rather than payment for salvation (Luke 19:8-10).

THINK IT THROUGH

Q Is Repentance a Work That Earns Salvation?

No. A work that earns salvation would give us merit before God or make Him owe us a reward. Repentance does neither. Repentance is the sinner's surrender to the truth: agreeing with God about sin, abandoning self-rule, and turning to Christ for mercy. God's kindness leads us to repentance, and He grants the opportunity to repent, yet He also commands every person to respond (Romans 2:4; Acts 11:18; 17:30). Repentance does not clean us up so that we deserve Christ. It comes with empty hands to receive what

Christ alone provides. Like faith, repentance is a necessary response to the Gospel, not the cause or price of salvation (Mark 1:15; Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5).

WATCH FOR COUNTERFEITS

Legalism turns repentance into endless self-punishment, an attempt to earn acceptance, or submission to human rules that God did not command (Colossians 2:20-23).

Hyper-grace is not simply belief that God's grace is abundant. It is a label for teaching that separates grace from continuing repentance, confession, obedience, and holiness. Some versions claim that because future sins were already forgiven, a believer never needs to confess sin or turn from it, and biblical warnings are dismissed as legalism. This confuses the basis of salvation with the life salvation produces. We are saved by grace rather than conduct, but the grace that forgives also trains believers to reject ungodliness and live holy lives (Romans 6:1-2; Titus 2:11-14; 1 John 1:7-2:2; Jude 4).

DECLARATION OF FAITH CONNECTION

This chapter supports these Church of God convictions:

- All have sinned and repentance is commanded for all and necessary for forgiveness (Romans 3:23; Luke 24:47).
- Justification and the new birth are received through faith in Christ, not earned by dead works (Romans 5:1; Titus 3:5-7).
- Holiness is God's standard for His people (1 Peter 1:15-16).

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

Ask God to search your heart (Psalm 139:23-24). Confess any known sin, receive His promised cleansing, and identify one concrete act of obedience or restitution (1 John 1:9; Luke 3:8).

TALK IT THROUGH

1. What two kinds of activity can be described as dead works?
2. How is repentance different from self-punishment?
3. Why does repentance produce fruit?
4. What is the difference between fruit and payment?

5. How do legalism and false grace both distort repentance?

FIVE DAYS IN THE BIBLE

Day 1: Turn and Live — Ezekiel 18:21-32

Notice God's call, human responsibility, and His desire.

Day 2: A Broken and Contrite Heart — Psalm 51

Identify confession, cleansing, and renewed obedience.

Day 3: Repentance with Fruit — Luke 3:1-14

Write how repentance affects ordinary life.

Day 4: Lost and Found — Luke 15:11-24

Observe the son's turn and the father's welcome.

Day 5: Cleansed to Serve — Hebrews 9:11-14

Write what Christ's blood cleanses and what that enables.

Chapter 8 Faith toward God

Faith is vital because no one is justified or lives faithfully before God apart from it (Romans 5:1; Hebrews 10:38; 11:6). Yet faith is often misunderstood. Faith is only as reliable as its object. Hebrews does not describe it as confidence in confidence, a power of the mind, or a spiritual law that forces results. The foundation is “faith toward God” (Hebrews 6:1)—trust directed to the God who has spoken and fulfilled His saving promise in Jesus Christ (Romans 10:17; Hebrews 1:1-3).

Biblical faith means taking God at His word because He is truthful and faithful. It is not pretending that problems are unreal, suppressing every question, or producing a particular feeling. A believer may confess weakness and still bring that weakness honestly to Christ: “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!” (Numbers 23:19; Mark 9:24; Hebrews 10:23). Faith looks away from the strength of self and rests in the character, work, and promise of God.

Faith Responds to God's Word

Biblical faith does not create truth; it receives God's testimony as true and acts upon it (Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:18-22). Faith comes by hearing the word of Christ (Romans 10:17). This means faith requires knowledge of what God has actually said. Confidence in something God did not promise is presumption, even if it sounds spiritual (Matthew 4:5-7).

Faith Has Content, Trust, and Loyalty

Saving faith includes knowledge, agreement, and personal trust. A person must know the Gospel, agree that its message is true, and entrust himself or herself to Jesus Christ (John 20:30-31; Romans 10:9-13). The demons know true facts about God but do not lovingly trust or obey Him (James 2:19). Biblical faith therefore involves more than saying that Christian claims are correct; it receives Christ as Savior and submits to Him as Lord. Living faith begins to produce faithful action, although those actions never become the basis of justification (James 2:14-26; Ephesians 2:8-10).

Saving Faith and Daily Faith

We are saved through faith in Christ, and we continue to live by faith after conversion (Galatians 2:20; Colossians 2:6-7). Daily faith trusts God enough to obey when obedience is costly, to wait when an answer is delayed, and to remain faithful when circumstances are confusing. Faith is not a one-time decision that makes trust unnecessary afterward; it becomes the continuing posture of a life dependent upon God (Proverbs 3:5-6; 2 Corinthians 5:7).

Faith in Suffering and Delay

Faith does not guarantee that believers receive every desired outcome in this life. Hebrews 11 celebrates people who saw miracles and others who suffered without earthly deliverance; both groups were commended for faith (Hebrews 11:32-40). The difference was not that one group had faith and the other lacked it. Faithfulness may look like receiving deliverance, and it may look like enduring without denying Christ. Faith trusts God's character and final promise when circumstances remain painful (Habakkuk 3:17-19; Romans 8:18-39).

Faith Can Grow

Believers may honestly ask Christ to help their unbelief (Mark 9:24). Faith grows through Scripture, prayer, remembered faithfulness, obedience, and fellowship with other believers (Psalm 77:11-14; Romans 10:17; Hebrews 10:23-25). Its security rests in the faithful God, not in a perfectly steady emotion (2 Timothy 2:13; Hebrews 10:23).

Faith and the Gift of Faith

Every Christian must trust Christ for salvation and continue walking by faith (Romans 5:1; 2 Corinthians 5:7). First Corinthians 12 also names faith among the Spirit's gifts. These should not be confused. Saving faith is the response through which a person receives Christ. Daily faith is the continuing trust and obedience of Christian life. The gift of faith is a special enabling the Spirit may give for a particular need or ministry within the body (1 Corinthians 12:7-11).

The gift does not create a superior class of Christians, and it does not give anyone authority to promise outcomes God has not promised. The same Spirit distributes gifts as He wills, and every gift must serve the common good (1 Corinthians 12:7, 11). Whether God grants unusual

confidence in a particular moment or calls us to ordinary perseverance, faith remains dependent upon Him.

Faith Prays under God's Rule

Jesus' model prayer teaches the order of faithful prayer. It begins with the Father's name, kingdom, and will before asking for daily bread. It also includes forgiveness and deliverance from temptation (Matthew 6:9-13). We may bring specific needs to God with confidence, but prayer first seeks His honor and rule: "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matthew 6:33). Faith asks boldly while remaining surrendered to the Father's wisdom (Matthew 26:39; 1 John 5:14-15).

Philippians 4:6-8 tells believers to replace anxious brooding with prayer, supplication, and thanksgiving. Its immediate promise is that God's peace will guard the heart and mind in Christ; it does not promise that every request will be answered in the exact way desired. After praying, believers are to direct their thoughts toward what is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, and praiseworthy. Faith therefore brings the need to God, gives thanks, receives His peace, and keeps the mind anchored in truth.

KNOW THE WORDS

WORD	PLAIN MEANING
Faith toward God	Personal trust in the God who has revealed Himself and fulfilled His saving promise in Christ (Acts 20:21; Hebrews 11:6).
Faithfulness	Steady loyalty and obedience flowing from trust (Galatians 5:6; Revelation 2:10).
Doubt	Uncertainty or divided confidence that should be brought honestly to God and answered by His truth (Mark 9:24; James 1:5-8).
Faith	Trusting God because He is truthful and faithful, relying on His word and acting upon it (Romans 10:17; Hebrews 11:1, 6).

THINK IT THROUGH

Q Does Faith Guarantee Healing or Wealth?

No. God heals and provides, and believers should ask Him confidently rather than praying as though He were unwilling or unable to help (Matthew 7:7-11; James 5:14-16). Confidence, however, is confidence in God—not certainty that our preferred outcome must occur. Jesus teaches us to seek the Father’s kingdom and will before our comfort and to trust Him for daily provision (Matthew 6:9-13, 31-33).

Faithful believers may experience healing and abundance, but they may also experience weakness, persecution, loss, delayed answers, or a request God answers differently (2 Corinthians 12:7-10; Philippians 4:11-13; Hebrews 11:35-40). Philippians 4:6-8 commands prayer with thanksgiving and promises God's guarding peace; it does not make prayer a guarantee of wealth or freedom from suffering. Biblical faith submits every desire to God's wisdom and will rather than treating Him as a system that human words or certainty can control (Matthew 26:39; 1 John 5:14-15).

WATCH FOR COUNTERFEITS

Word-of-faith teaching may treat faith as a force released through visualization, declarations, or positive speech. Scripture commands faith in God, not faith in words or inner power (Mark 11:22; Romans 4:20-21). Words matter morally, but human speech does not possess God's creative sovereignty (Proverbs 18:21; Isaiah 46:9-10).

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

Choose one promise in Romans 8:31-39. Write what God actually promises, what the passage does not promise, and how that truth should affect your response to a present difficulty.

TALK IT THROUGH

1. Why must faith be grounded in what God has spoken?
2. What is the difference between faith and presumption?
3. Why are works evidence rather than the basis of salvation?
4. What does Hebrews 11 teach about faith and suffering?
5. How do the Lord's Prayer and Philippians 4:6-8 shape the way believers bring requests to God?

FIVE DAYS IN THE BIBLE

Day 1: Abraham Believed God — Genesis 15:1-6; Romans 4:13-25

Identify the promise, obstacle, and basis of Abraham's confidence.

Day 2: Faith and Works — James 2:14-26

Explain how living faith becomes visible.

Day 3: By Faith — Hebrews 11:1-40

Notice the different earthly outcomes experienced by faithful people.

Day 4: Help My Unbelief — Mark 9:14-29

Observe honest weakness brought to Jesus.

Day 5: Pray with Trust — Matthew 6:5-13,
25-34; Philippians 4:4-9

Notice the priorities, promises, and practices that guide faithful prayer.

Chapter 9

Instruction about Baptisms

Hebrews 6:2 speaks of “the doctrine of baptisms” in the plural. The Greek term can refer to washings, and Hebrews elsewhere uses related language for ceremonial washings under the old covenant (Hebrews 9:10). Faithful interpreters therefore differ over whether Hebrews 6:2 points primarily to Jewish washings, Christian baptisms, or broad instruction that prepared converts to distinguish them. We should acknowledge that question and teach baptism from passages where its meaning is clear.

Water Baptism

Jesus commanded disciples to baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19-20). In Acts, people who received the Gospel were baptized as a public identification with Jesus and His people (Acts 2:38-41; 8:12; 10:47-48). Baptism pictures union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection and marks the beginning of a life under His lordship (Romans 6:3-4; Colossians 2:12).

Baptism Begins a Taught Life

In the Great Commission, baptism is joined to teaching believers to obey all that Jesus commanded (Matthew 28:19-20). Baptism is therefore not a graduation ceremony for people who already know everything. It is an early act of discipleship that publicly identifies a believer with the triune God, the Gospel of Christ, and the community that will help teach and encourage obedience.

This also explains why the church should not baptize carelessly and then neglect the person. The pattern in Acts moves from receiving the word and baptism into continuing in apostolic teaching, fellowship, the Lord's Supper, and prayer (Acts 2:41-42). The church does not merely count baptisms; it cares for baptized disciples as they learn to follow Jesus.⁷

The Church of God practices water baptism by immersion for those who repent. The water does not possess saving power. We are justified by grace through faith, while baptism is the commanded response and public confession of a disciple (Ephesians 2:8-9; Acts 8:36-38; Romans 10:9-10). A believer should not dismiss baptism as unimportant merely because it does not earn salvation (Luke 6:46; Matthew 28:19).

The pattern in Acts is simple: people hear the Gospel, believe, and are baptized (Acts 2:41; 8:12; 16:30-33). Baptism should therefore follow a credible profession of faith rather than replace personal faith. Immersion also gives the church a visible picture. Going beneath the water portrays burial with Christ; rising from it portrays participation in His resurrection and the beginning of a new life under His lordship (Romans 6:3-4). The picture does not produce the saving reality, but it declares that reality openly.

The Spirit's Work in Conversion

Every believer is born of the Spirit, indwelt by the Spirit, and incorporated into Christ's body by the Spirit (John 3:5-8; Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 12:13). No Christian belongs to Christ without the Holy Spirit. This must remain clear so that later teaching about baptism in the Holy Spirit never divides Christians into saved and unsaved classes.

Baptism in the Holy Spirit

Jesus promised His disciples power when the Holy Spirit came upon them, and that promise was fulfilled at Pentecost (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-8; 2:1-4). The Church of God teaches baptism with the Holy Spirit as an experience subsequent to a clean heart, with speaking in other tongues as

the Spirit gives utterance as its initial evidence. Acts records believers receiving the Spirit with observable manifestations after conversion or Gospel reception (Acts 8:14-17; 10:44-48; 19:1-7).

Tongues are the initial evidence of Spirit baptism, but tongues are not the baptism itself. The promised gift is the Holy Spirit, not an isolated phenomenon. This distinction keeps believers from chasing a sound while neglecting the Person who fills, empowers, and directs them. We should pray for believers to receive the Spirit's fullness, not coach them to imitate a manifestation (Acts 2:4, 33; 10:44-46).

Why then do Pentecostals speak of initial evidence when no single verse uses that complete phrase? The doctrine is drawn from the pattern in Acts. Tongues are explicitly present at Pentecost, in Cornelius's household, and among the Ephesian believers (Acts 2:4; 10:44-46; 19:6). In Acts 8, an observable event caused Simon to react, though Luke does not name the manifestation (Acts 8:14-19). The case rests on the repeated narrative pattern, not on pretending that every account contains identical details. That makes careful reading important: we should affirm what Acts repeatedly shows without adding what the text does not say.

This experience is given for empowered witness, worship, prayer, and service—not spiritual status (Acts 1:8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-7; 14:2, 14-17). The Spirit distributes gifts according to His own will; no minister owns the power to activate gifts or manufacture manifestations (1 Corinthians 12:11). All public expressions must operate under biblical order and discernment (1 Corinthians 14:26-33, 39-40; 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22).

KNOW THE WORDS

WORD	PLAIN MEANING
Water baptism	Immersion in water after repentance and faith, publicly identifying the believer with Christ and His disciples (Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:38-41; Romans 6:3-4).
In-dwelling	The Holy Spirit’s presence in every person who belongs to Christ (Romans 8:9-11).
Baptism in the Holy Spirit	Pentecostal empowerment for witness and service, distinct from but dependent upon salvation in Christ (Acts 1:4-8; 2:1-4).
Initial evidence	Speaking in other tongues as the Spirit gives utterance is the initial outward evidence of baptism in the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4; 10:44-46; 19:6).

THINK IT THROUGH

Q Does Water Baptism Save?

The New Testament closely joins faith, repentance, and baptism because converts were expected to obey Christ openly (Acts 2:38-41). Yet salvation rests on Christ and is received by grace through faith, not on the physical action of water (Ephesians 2:8-9; 1 Peter 3:21). Baptism is not optional obedience, but neither is it a human work that earns justification.

This question matters because two verses seem, at first reading, to say that the water itself saves. A new believer should not skip past them. Both should be read carefully and in context.

On the Day of Pentecost, Peter said, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). Peter joins repentance and baptism because the first Christians were baptized as their first public act of faith, not long afterward. Luke’s wider account shows where forgiveness itself is received. In Peter’s next sermon he says, “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out,” without mentioning baptism (Acts 3:19). In Cornelius’s house, Peter announced that “whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins,” and those listeners received the Holy Spirit before

they were baptized in water (Acts 10:43-48). God had already accepted them by faith, so baptism followed as the church's obedient response (Acts 11:17; 15:8-9).

Peter also writes that baptism "now saves us," but he immediately explains what he means: "not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God," and its power comes "through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 3:21). Peter rules out the idea that water accomplishes anything by touching the body. Baptism expresses a conscience that has turned to God, and the saving power belongs to the risen Christ, not to the water. Peter's comparison makes the same point: Noah's family was brought safely through the flood because they were inside the ark God provided (1 Peter 3:20).

Read together, these passages teach the truth found throughout the New Testament. Forgiveness is received by grace through faith in Christ (Romans 3:24-26; Ephesians 2:8-9). Baptism is the commanded, public confession of that faith, and the church should practice it promptly and joyfully (Acts 8:36-38). We should not tell a believer that baptism is unimportant, and we should not tell anyone that water saves apart from Christ.

Q If Baptism Does Not Save, Why Is It Urgent?

Because the authority of Jesus makes obedience important even when obedience is not the basis of justification. The first Christians did not separate trusting Christ from publicly identifying with Him (Acts 2:38-41; 8:36-38). Deliberate refusal raises a heart question: why call Jesus Lord while rejecting a clear command? A delayed baptism does not prove a person is unsaved, but a teachable believer should seek to obey as soon as reasonably possible (Luke 6:46; John 14:15).

WATCH FOR COUNTERFEITS

New believers should avoid two opposite errors. The first is neglect: treating water baptism as unimportant, ignoring the Holy Spirit's power, or acting as though spiritual gifts no longer matter. Jesus commands baptism, and the New Testament teaches believers to welcome the Spirit's work while testing everything by Scripture (Matthew 28:19; 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22).

The second error is manipulation. No one should be pressured to copy another person's experience, repeat sounds to imitate tongues, or accept a leader's touch as necessary for receiving from God. A dramatic reaction is not proof of spiritual maturity, and a quiet response is not

proof that God is absent. The Holy Spirit glorifies Christ, distributes gifts according to His own will, and produces holy fruit (John 16:13-14; 1 Corinthians 12:11; Galatians 5:22-23). Seek all that God promises, but do not pretend, perform, or surrender biblical discernment to please people.

DECLARATION OF FAITH CONNECTION

This chapter supports these Church of God convictions:

- Water baptism by immersion is commanded for all who repent (Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:38).
- Baptism with the Holy Spirit is subsequent to a clean heart (Acts 1:4-8; 8:14-17).
- Speaking with other tongues as the Spirit gives utterance is the initial evidence of Spirit baptism (Acts 2:4; 10:44-46).

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

If you have trusted Christ but have not been baptized in water, speak with your pastor about obeying Jesus publicly (Matthew 28:19). Ask the Father for the Holy Spirit's fullness and power while submitting the experience to Scripture and His will (Luke 11:13; Acts 1:8).

TALK IT THROUGH

1. Why is the plural “baptisms” in Hebrews 6:2 interpreted in more than one way?
2. What does water baptism declare?
3. Why does baptism not earn salvation?
4. What belongs to every believer through the Spirit?
5. What is the purpose of baptism in the Holy Spirit?

FIVE DAYS IN THE BIBLE

Day 1: Baptized Disciples — Matthew 28:16-20; Acts 2:36-42

Write the command, response, and continuing practices.

Day 2: Buried and Raised — Romans 6:1-14

Explain what baptism portrays and how believers should live.

Day 3: Power to Witness — Acts 1:1-8; 2:1-21

Notice the promise, fulfillment, and mission.

Day 4: The Spirit Given — Acts 8:4-25; 10:34-48

Compare the two accounts without forcing every detail to be identical.

Day 5: Gifts and Order — 1 Corinthians 12:1-13; 14:26-40

List what the Spirit decides and what the church must regulate.

Chapter 10 Laying on of Hands

The laying on of hands is a biblical sign used in several settings. The physical act does not carry magic, and Scripture does not present an anointing as private spiritual substance owned by a minister. Hands visibly express prayer, blessing, identification, recognition, or commissioning, while God remains the One who acts (Numbers 27:18-23; Acts 13:1-3).

Biblical Uses

- Blessing: Jesus placed His hands on children and blessed them (Mark 10:13-16).
- Prayer for healing: Jesus and the early church sometimes laid hands on the sick while praying (Mark 6:5; Acts 28:8; James 5:14-16).
- Recognition and commissioning: the church laid hands on qualified servants and missionaries, identifying them publicly with an entrusted work (Acts 6:3-6; 13:1-3; 1 Timothy 4:14).

- Prayer connected with receiving the Holy Spirit: Acts records occasions when apostles or disciples laid hands on believers who then received the Spirit (Acts 8:14-17; 9:17; 19:6).

The Holy Spirit Gives Gifts

The New Testament teaches that gifts are distributed by the Spirit according to His will (1 Corinthians 12:4-11). A believer may desire gifts, pray, receive prayer, and grow in faithful use, but no person can manufacture a gift or confer spiritual status by technique. Gifts are grace for serving others, not proof that the recipient is superior (Romans 12:3-8; 1 Peter 4:10-11).

Gifts Serve the Body and the Mission

The Spirit's gifts are given "for the profit of all" (1 Corinthians 12:7). Their purpose is not to build a personal platform but to strengthen the church, bear witness to Christ, and meet real needs. The believer asks, "How can this gift honor Jesus and help His people?" rather than, "How can this gift make me important?" (Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 Peter 4:10-11).

Giftedness and maturity are not identical. The Corinthians were rich in gifts but troubled by jealousy, disorder, pride, and lovelessness (1 Corinthians 1:4-7; 3:1-3;

13:1-3; 14:26-33). Scripture therefore requires both spiritual power and spiritual character. A genuine gift never excuses manipulation, immorality, lack of accountability, or teaching that contradicts God's Word.⁸

This part of the teaching also concerns the Holy Spirit's anointing and gifting of believers for ministry. Every believer receives grace to serve, and the Spirit gives manifestations for the common good of Christ's body (Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-7; 1 Peter 4:10-11). No Christian should assume that ministry belongs only to pastors or unusually gifted personalities. Every believer should learn to serve faithfully with what the Holy Spirit supplies.

In the early church, prayer and laying on of hands sometimes accompanied receiving the Holy Spirit, recognizing a gift, or commissioning someone for ministry (Acts 8:14-17; 13:1-3; 19:6; 1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6). Paul had already given extensive instruction about spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12-14, teaching that the Spirit distributes them as He wills and that they must build up the church. The hands did not create or control the gift; they visibly joined the church's prayer and recognition to the work God was doing.

What the Sign Does Not Mean

The New Testament does not make laying on of hands a required technique for every healing or every reception of the Spirit. Jesus healed without touch, and the Spirit fell on Cornelius's household before anyone laid hands on them (Matthew 8:5-13; Acts 10:44-48). God is free to work with or without the sign.

Paul reminded Timothy of a gift associated with prophecy and the laying on of elders' hands, but Scripture still says the Spirit distributes gifts "as He wills" (1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6; 1 Corinthians 12:11). These passages do not authorize modern leaders to claim they can activate any chosen gift or transfer a personal anointing on demand.

Use Wisdom and Accountability

Paul warned Timothy not to lay hands on anyone hastily, in a context involving recognition and responsibility (1 Timothy 5:22). Churches should therefore examine character and doctrine before commissioning leaders (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9). A dramatic ceremony cannot substitute for proven faithfulness.

A healthy commissioning joins two realities. God calls and equips a person, and the church recognizes that calling through observed character, sound doc-

trine, and faithful service (Acts 13:1-3; 1 Timothy 3:1-13). Laying on of hands does not manufacture the call. It publicly identifies the church with the person and the work being entrusted. This protects the church from self-appointed leaders and reminds the commissioned person that ministry is accountable service rather than private authority.

KNOW THE WORDS

WORD	PLAIN MEANING
Laying on of hands	A visible biblical act accompanying prayer, blessing, identification, healing ministry, or commissioning (Mark 10:16; Acts 6:6; 13:3).
Commissioning	Publicly recognizing and sending qualified believers for an assigned ministry (Acts 13:1-3).
Anointing	In the New Testament, God’s gracious consecration and empowering by the Holy Spirit; not a commodity owned or sold by a minister (2 Corinthians 1:21-22; 1 John 2:20, 27).
Impartation	A word sometimes used for God giving grace or gifts, but never a human power to distribute the Spirit at will (Romans 1:11-12; 1 Corinthians 12:11).

THINK IT THROUGH

Q Can God Work through the Laying on of Hands?

Yes. Scripture records healing, the reception of the Spirit, commissioning, and the recognition of gifts in connection with laying on of hands (Acts 8:17; 9:17; 13:3; 1 Timothy 4:14). The power belongs to God, not to the hands or status of the minister. Prayer may be offered with confidence while the outcome is entrusted to God's wisdom.

Churches may pray with hands laid upon a person in the biblical settings described above. The error is not the practice; the error is assigning automatic power to the act or authority to the person performing it. Faith rests in God, and every ministry remains subject to Scripture (Acts 8:18-24; 1 Corinthians 4:6).

Q Does a Spiritual Gift Prove a Person Is Mature?

No. A gift shows the Spirit's gracious activity, not the recipient's flawless character. Jesus warned that impressive works can be claimed by people He does not approve, and Paul placed love above spectacular manifestations (Matthew 7:21-23; 1 Corinthians 13:1-3). Test teaching by Scripture, examine fruit over time, and never let visible gifting silence necessary

questions about doctrine or conduct (Matthew 7:15-20; 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22).

WATCH FOR COUNTERFEITS

Beware when leaders advertise transferable anointings, sell access to impartation, promise activation of gifts, demand physical contact, or use touch to establish dependence. Spiritual gifts are grace-gifts belonging to Christ's body and distributed by the Spirit, not personal property controlled by a celebrity minister (1 Corinthians 12:4-11; 1 Peter 4:10-11). Appropriate consent, accountability, and respect should govern physical contact (1 Timothy 5:1-2).

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

Review Acts 13:1-3. Notice the church's worship, fasting, the Spirit's direction, and the community's commissioning. Pray for those your church sends and ask how you can serve faithfully without seeking a title.

TALK IT THROUGH

1. What different purposes accompany laying on of hands in Scripture?
2. Why is the act neither magical nor always required?
3. Who distributes spiritual gifts?

4. Why must churches avoid hasty commissioning?

5. What warning signs distinguish biblical prayer from manipulative impartation?

FIVE DAYS IN THE BIBLE

Day 1: Blessing and Healing — Mark 6:1-6; 10:13-16

Notice two settings in which Jesus laid hands on people.

Day 2: Servants Recognized — Acts 6:1-7

Identify the qualifications, selection, prayer, and result.

Day 3: Sent by the Spirit — Acts 13:1-12

Observe the roles of the Spirit and the gathered church.

Day 4: Receiving the Spirit — Acts 8:4-25; 19:1-7

Notice God's action and the warning against buying spiritual power.

Day 5: Do Not Be Hasty — 1 Timothy 3:1-13; 5:21-22

List the character requirements that precede recognition.

Chapter 11

Resurrection of the Dead

Christian hope is not escape from physical existence. God raised Jesus bodily, and He will raise the dead (Luke 24:36-43; John 5:28-29). The resurrection of the body affirms God's victory over death and the goodness of His purpose for creation (Romans 8:18-25; 1 Corinthians 15:20-28).

Jesus Is the Firstfruits

Paul calls Christ "the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Corinthians 15:20). Firstfruits were the beginning of a harvest and the promise of more to come. Jesus' resurrection is therefore both unique and representative: because He rose, those who belong to Him will be raised (1 Corinthians 15:20-23).

A Real and Transformed Body

Jesus' risen body could be seen and touched, and He ate with His disciples (Luke 24:39-43; John 20:27). Yet His body was also transformed and no longer subject to death (Romans 6:9). Believers will likewise be raised imperishable, glorious,

powerful, and fitted for life in God's completed kingdom (1 Corinthians 15:42-49; Philippians 3:20-21).

Paul calls the future body a "spiritual body," but he does not mean a ghost or a body made from spirit instead of matter (1 Corinthians 15:44). "Spiritual" describes a body fully directed and sustained by the Holy Spirit, just as the present "natural body" is suited to mortal life. Continuity remains—we are raised—but transformation is complete. What is perishable becomes imperishable, weakness gives way to power, and death can never claim the believer again (1 Corinthians 15:42-54).

The Intermediate State and Final Hope

Believers who die are with Christ while awaiting the resurrection (Luke 23:43; Philippians 1:21-23; 2 Corinthians 5:8). That conscious presence with the Lord is precious, but it is not the final stage of Christian hope. The final hope includes bodily resurrection when Christ returns (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

The Rapture and the Resurrection of the Church

The resurrection appointed for the church is commonly called the Rapture. Paul teaches that the Lord will descend from heaven, the dead in Christ will rise first, and living believers will be caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). The word rapture describes that catching away. At that time, believers who have died will receive resurrected bodies, and living believers will be changed without first passing through death (1 Corinthians 15:50-53).

The Rapture is therefore not an escape into a bodiless existence. It is the resurrection and transformation of Christ's people. Because Christ conquered death, physical death cannot have the final word over anyone who belongs to Him (John 11:25-26; 1 Corinthians 15:54-57). The believer's hope is not a date-setting scheme but confidence that Christ will return, raise His people, gather them to Himself, and complete their salvation (John 14:1-3; Philippians 3:20-21).

Paul names resurrection among the elementary teachings because every new believer needs this hope early in the Christian life (Hebrews 6:1-2). This volume teaches the pre-tribulation Rapture:

Christ will gather His church before the Tribulation, delivering believers from the coming wrath and bringing them to Himself (1 Thessalonians 1:10; 4:13-18; 5:9; Revelation 3:10). The central promise is certain: Jesus will return, the dead in Christ will rise, living saints will be transformed, and all who belong to Him will be with the Lord forever.

Sincere Christians disagree about when the Rapture happens in relation to the Tribulation, so a new believer deserves to see why this book teaches a pre-tribulation Rapture. The question matters because it shapes how believers wait: watching for Christ Himself, or watching for a period of judgment that must come first.

First, Scripture promises that the church is not appointed to God's coming wrath. Paul writes that Jesus "delivers us from the wrath to come" and that "God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 1:10; 5:9). Revelation describes the Tribulation as the time when God's wrath is poured out on the earth (Revelation 6:16-17; 15:1). We therefore understand Christ's promise as removal of His church before that wrath begins, not preservation through it.

Second, Jesus promised a faithful church, “I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth” (Revelation 3:10). The promise is to be kept from the hour itself, a world-wide time of testing aimed at “those who dwell on the earth.”

Third, the New Testament calls believers to watch for Christ, not for a list of events that must happen first. Believers are “looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing” of Jesus (Titus 2:13), and Paul tells grieving Christians to “comfort one another with these words” (1 Thessalonians 4:18). That comfort fits a hope that could be fulfilled at any time (Matthew 24:42-44).

This teaching does not promise that Christians escape suffering in this life. Jesus said, “In the world you will have tribulation” (John 16:33). The distinction is between the trouble believers face now and God’s outpoured wrath at the end of the age. Christians who hold other views of the timing remain brothers and sisters in Christ. The practical result of this hope is readiness: everyone who has this hope “purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:3).

Jesus did not give His people permission to calculate a date for His return (Matthew 24:36; Acts 1:6-8). Biblical watchfulness means living ready: remaining faithful, pursuing holiness, encouraging one another, and carrying the Gospel while we wait (Matthew 24:42-46; Titus 2:11-14; Hebrews 10:24-25). Speculation may create excitement for a season; resurrection hope produces steadfast obedience.

Resurrection of the Saved and the Lost

Jesus taught that all who are in the graves will hear His voice: some to the resurrection of life and others to the resurrection of condemnation (John 5:28-29). Paul likewise confessed a resurrection of both the just and the unjust (Acts 24:15). Resurrection leads into final judgment and eternal destiny; it is not a second opportunity to choose Christ after death (Hebrews 9:27).

KNOW THE WORDS

WORD	PLAIN MEANING
Resurrection	God’s raising of the dead to embodied life (John 5:28-29; 1 Corinthians 15:42-44).
First-fruits	The first portion that promises the coming harvest; Christ’s resurrection

WORD	PLAIN MEANING
	guarantees His people's resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:20-23).
Rapture	Christ's pre-tribulation gathering of the church, when the dead in Christ are raised and living believers are caught up and transformed to meet Him in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 Corinthians 15:50-53).
Glorification	God's final transformation of believers into perfected likeness to Christ, including the resurrected body (Romans 8:29-30; Philippians 3:21).

THINK IT THROUGH

Q Is Resurrection Merely the Soul Living On?

No. Scripture teaches continued personal existence after death, but resurrection specifically concerns the raising and transformation of the body (Luke 24:39; 1 Corinthians 15:42-44). The Christian future is embodied life with God in a renewed creation (Revelation 21:1-5).

WATCH FOR COUNTERFEITS

Reincarnation, communication with the dead, and the idea that humans dissolve into impersonal divine consciousness contradict biblical resurrection (Deuteronomy 18:10-12; Hebrews 9:27; 1 Corinthians 15:20-23). Our hope is not repeated

earthly lives or hidden knowledge but Christ's return and God's act of raising the dead.

DECLARATION OF FAITH CONNECTION

This chapter supports these Church of God convictions:

- Jesus was raised bodily from the dead (Luke 24:39; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4).
- Christ will return to resurrect the righteous dead and gather living saints to Himself (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).
- There will be bodily resurrection, eternal life for the righteous, and eternal punishment for the wicked (John 5:28-29).

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

Read 1 Corinthians 15:50-58. Write how future resurrection should affect grief, fear, steadfastness, and present service.

TALK IT THROUGH

1. Why is Jesus called the firstfruits?
2. What continuity and transformation belong to the resurrection body?
3. What is the intermediate state?
4. Who will be raised?

5. How should resurrection hope change life now?

FIVE DAYS IN THE BIBLE

Day 1: The Risen Jesus — Luke 24:1-49

List the physical evidence and the mission Jesus gives.

Day 2: If Christ Is Not Risen — 1 Corinthians 15:1-19

Trace what would collapse without resurrection.

Day 3: The Resurrection Body — 1 Corinthians 15:20-58

Write the contrasts Paul uses for the future body.

Day 4: Caught Up Together — 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Identify the sequence and the commanded comfort.

Day 5: All Things New — Revelation 21:1-8; 22:1-5

Describe embodied life in God's renewed creation.

Chapter 12 Eternal Judgment

Eternal judgment belongs to eschatology, the Bible's teaching about the last things. It includes God's final dealings with both unbelievers and believers. God's judgment is not an embarrassing edge of the Gospel. It reveals that evil matters, that God is perfectly just, and that history moves toward a true moral conclusion (Genesis 18:25; Ecclesiastes 12:13-14; Acts 17:30-31). The Judge is Jesus Christ, the same Savior who gave Himself for sinners (John 5:22-27; Acts 10:42-43).

Judgment Is Certain and Just

Every person will give account to God (Romans 14:10-12; Hebrews 9:27). God judges impartially and knows hidden motives as well as visible actions (Romans 2:5-11, 16; 1 Corinthians 4:5). No false accusation, missing evidence, prejudice, or corruption will distort His verdict (Deuteronomy 32:4; Revelation 20:11-15).

Salvation and Condemnation

Those who are in Christ are justified and do not come into condemnation (John 5:24; Romans 8:1, 33-34). Their salvation

rests on Christ's righteousness and atoning work, received through faith (Romans 3:21-26). Those who reject God's Son remain under condemnation because they refuse the light and the only Savior (John 3:18-21, 36; 2 Thessalonians 1:8-10).

Believers and Evaluation

Freedom from condemnation does not make Christian conduct meaningless. Believers will appear before Christ to receive what is due for deeds done in the body, and their work will be tested (1 Corinthians 3:12-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10). This evaluation concerns reward and accountability, not a second trial to determine whether Christ's atonement was sufficient (Romans 8:1; 1 Corinthians 3:15).

Keep the foundation and the building distinct. Christ alone is the foundation of salvation; Christian service is what believers build upon that foundation (1 Corinthians 3:10-15). At Christ's judgment seat, poor work may be exposed and reward may be lost, yet Paul can still say of the believer, "he himself will be saved" (1 Corinthians 3:15). This truth removes the fear that salvation must be earned again while preserving the seriousness of how a redeemed life is lived.

Eternal Life and Eternal Punishment

Jesus spoke of eternal life and eternal punishment in parallel terms (Matthew 25:46). The same word describes the duration of both. Scripture gives serious images—darkness, exclusion, fire, punishment, and destruction—and we should neither soften their warning nor speculate beyond what is written (Matthew 8:12; Mark 9:43-48; 2 Thessalonians 1:9). Those who reject Christ face conscious punishment with no promise of recovery or later opportunity for salvation (Luke 16:19-31; Hebrews 9:27).

Hell, Hades, and the Lake of Fire

The word hell is often used broadly for the punishment of the wicked, but Scripture helps us see a sequence. Hades is the place of the unbelieving dead while they await bodily resurrection and final judgment (Luke 16:19-31; Revelation 20:13). At the Great White Throne, the dead are judged, and death and Hades are cast into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is called the second death and is the final place of punishment for Satan and for all whose names are not written in the Book of Life (Revelation 20:10-15; 21:8).

The Great White Throne is therefore not a scene in which good deeds are weighed against bad deeds to see whether some-

one can earn eternal life. The books reveal works and demonstrate the justice of God's verdict, while the Book of Life identifies those who belong to Christ (Revelation 20:12, 15). Works provide evidence of a life's allegiance; they do not become a substitute for the Savior. The only refuge from final condemnation is the grace of God received through Jesus Christ (John 5:24; Romans 6:23).

This judgment is eternal. Scripture does not teach that the condemned will eventually be released or restored after a period of punishment. Jesus described a fixed separation and eternal punishment, and Revelation describes torment that continues forever (Luke 16:26; Matthew 25:46; Revelation 14:10-11; 20:10). This truth should produce sober urgency, compassion for the lost, and faithful Gospel witness—not cruelty, speculation, or delight in anyone's condemnation (Ezekiel 33:11; 2 Corinthians 5:11, 20).

Why Judgment Strengthens the Gospel

Judgment explains why salvation is urgent and why the cross is necessary (Romans 3:25-26; Acts 17:30-31). It also comforts those who suffer injustice: vengeance belongs to God, and He will set things right (Romans 12:19; 2 Thessa-

lonians 1:5-10). Christians therefore proclaim both warning and mercy, pleading with people to be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:10-21).

KNOW THE WORDS

WORD	PLAIN MEANING
Judgment	God’s perfectly just evaluation and verdict concerning every person (Romans 2:5-11; Revelation 20:11-15).
Condemnation	God’s guilty verdict and resulting punishment; believers in Christ are freed from it (John 3:18; Romans 8:1).
Reward	Christ’s gracious recognition of faithful service, distinct from earning salvation (1 Corinthians 3:12-15; 4:5).
Second death	Revelation’s description of final punishment in the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14-15; 21:8).
Eternal life	Unending life in fellowship with God, beginning now in Christ and completed in resurrection (John 17:3; Romans 6:22-23).

THINK IT THROUGH

Q How Can a Loving God Judge?

Love does not require indifference to evil. A God who never confronts abuse, cruelty, deception, and rebellion would not be good. At the cross, God’s justice and love meet: He judges sin and offers mercy at immeasurable cost to Himself (Romans 3:25-26; 5:8-9).

Q What about Those Who Have Never Heard?

God is perfectly just, every person is accountable for the light received, and no one is condemned through a mistake in God's knowledge (Genesis 18:25; Romans 1:18-23; 2:12-16). Scripture still commands the church to take the Gospel to all nations because salvation is found in Christ (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 4:12; Romans 10:13-17). We trust God's character and obey His mission.

This is one of the most honest questions a new believer can ask. It is really a question about God's character: Is He fair? It also tests whether we believe Jesus is truly the only way to the Father (John 14:6).

Scripture answers in several steps. First, God genuinely desires the salvation of all people. He "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" and is "not willing that any should perish" (1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9). Second, no one is left without any witness from God. Creation shows His eternal power and divine nature, and conscience bears witness to His moral law (Psalm 19:1-4; Romans 1:19-20; 2:14-15). Third, God arranged the nations "so that they should seek the Lord," and He rewards those who diligently seek Him (Acts 17:26-27; Hebrews 11:6).

Scripture also guards us from two errors. It never teaches that people are saved through other religions or apart from Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). It also never pictures God as eager to condemn people who had no opportunity. When Cornelius sought God, God sent Peter to tell him the Gospel of Christ (Acts 10:1-6, 30-33). The Bible shows God bringing the message of Christ to seekers, not offering them a different path.

We leave what Scripture has not revealed in the hands of the Judge of all the earth, who will do right (Genesis 18:25). What Scripture has revealed is our responsibility: “How shall they hear without a preacher?” (Romans 10:14). The question should move us to prayer, giving, and going, not to speculation.

WATCH FOR COUNTERFEITS

Some use fear of judgment to manipulate people into loyalty to a leader or organization. Others replace Scripture with wishful thinking by claiming that hell does not exist, that punishment is merely symbolic and harmless, or that everyone will eventually be released and saved. These claims contradict Jesus’ teaching about fixed separation and eternal punishment (Luke 16:26; Matthew 25:46). We must allow God’s Word—not our discomfort—to define judgment. Biblical judg-

ment directs us to Christ, produces reverent living, and leaves final vengeance with God (John 5:24; 1 Peter 1:17-19; Romans 12:19). No minister has authority to manipulate fear or pronounce personal eternal destinies beyond Scripture's Gospel terms.

DECLARATION OF FAITH CONNECTION

This chapter supports these Church of God convictions:

- There will be bodily resurrection, eternal life for the righteous, and eternal punishment for the wicked (John 5:28-29; Matthew 25:46).
- Christ will return and reign (Acts 1:11; Revelation 19:11-16).
- Repentance is commanded for all and necessary for forgiveness (Luke 24:47; Acts 17:30-31).

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

Read 2 Corinthians 5:10-21. Write how judgment, Christ's love, reconciliation, and Christian witness belong together. Pray for one person who needs the Gospel and plan a gracious way to speak with that person.

TALK IT THROUGH

1. Why is divine judgment good news for victims of injustice?

2. On what basis are believers free from condemnation?
3. How is believers' evaluation different from condemnation?
4. What does Scripture teach about eternal punishment?
5. How should judgment shape evangelism and daily life?

FIVE DAYS IN THE BIBLE

Day 1: The Righteous Judge — Romans 2:1-16

List what makes God's judgment different from human judgment.

Day 2: Life and Condemnation — John 3:14-21, 36; 5:19-29

Trace the roles of faith, rejection, life, and resurrection.

Day 3: Work Tested — 1 Corinthians 3:5-17

Distinguish the foundation from the quality of work built upon it.

Day 4: Ministry of Reconciliation — 2 Corinthians 5:1-21

Connect accountability, Christ's love, and the Gospel appeal.

Day 5: The Great White Throne — Revelation 20:11-21:8

Identify the judgment, second death, and promised new creation.

Unit 2 Review

A learner should now be able to explain each item in Hebrews 6:1-2, show where the wider New Testament develops it, and distinguish the biblical teaching from common counterfeits.

1. Explain why foundational teachings must be retained and built upon (Hebrews 5:12-6:3).
2. Define dead works and explain why repentance cannot earn grace (Hebrews 9:14; Titus 3:5).
3. Distinguish faith toward God from presumption and faith in faith (Hebrews 11:6; 1 John 5:14-15).
4. Explain water baptism and its relationship to salvation and discipleship (Matthew 28:19; Romans 6:3-4).
5. Distinguish the Spirit's indwelling of every believer from Pentecostal baptism in the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9; Acts 1:8).

6. List biblical uses of laying on of hands and explain why it is not magical impartation (Acts 6:6; 13:3; 1 Corinthians 12:11).
7. Describe the bodily resurrection and the Christian's final hope (1 Corinthians 15:42-49; Revelation 21:1-5).
8. Explain eternal judgment, freedom from condemnation in Christ, and believers' accountability (Romans 8:1; 2 Corinthians 5:10).

The Foundation in One Paragraph

Because Jesus Christ died and rose, we turn from sin and dead works and place our faith toward God through Him (Acts 20:21; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4). We identify publicly with Christ through water baptism and seek the Holy Spirit's promised power for witness and service (Matthew 28:19; Acts 1:8). We receive prayer, blessing, and commissioning within the accountable life of the church without treating human hands as magic or spiritual gifts as transferable property (Acts 6:6; 13:1-3; 1 Corinthians 12:11). We live in hope of bodily resurrection and in reverence before the righteous Judge, confident that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (John 5:28-29; Romans 8:1).

Appendix A Church of God Declaration of Faith

The Church of God believes the whole Bible to be completely and equally inspired and that it is the written Word of God. The following Declaration of Faith is the denomination's standard and official expression of doctrine.⁹

1. In the verbal inspiration of the Bible.
2. In one God eternally existing in three persons; namely, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.
3. That Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of the Father, conceived of the Holy Ghost, and born of the Virgin Mary. That Jesus was crucified, buried, and raised from the dead. That He ascended to heaven and is today at the right hand of the Father as the Intercessor.
4. That all have sinned and come short of the glory of God and that repentance is commanded of God for all and necessary for forgiveness of sins.

5. That justification, regeneration, and the new birth are wrought by faith in the blood of Jesus Christ.

6. In sanctification subsequent to the new birth, through faith in the blood of Christ; through the Word, and by the Holy Ghost.

7. Holiness to be God's standard of living for His people.

8. In the baptism with the Holy Ghost subsequent to a clean heart.

9. In speaking with other tongues as the Spirit gives utterance and that it is the initial evidence of the baptism in the Holy Ghost.

10. In water baptism by immersion, and all who repent should be baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

11. Divine healing is provided for all in the atonement.

12. In the Lord's Supper and washing of the saints' feet.

13. In the premillennial second coming of Jesus. First, to resurrect the righteous dead and to catch away the living saints to Him in the air. Second, to reign on the earth a thousand years.

14. In the bodily resurrection; eternal life for the righteous, and eternal punishment for the wicked.

Official text: Church of God, Cleveland, Tennessee, Declaration of Faith, churchofgod.org/beliefs/declaration-of-faith/.

Appendix B How to Test a Teaching

No teacher should be believed merely because the message sounds powerful, uses Bible words, includes supernatural claims, or attracts a large audience. God calls believers to test teaching carefully (Acts 17:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:21; 1 John 4:1).

What does the passage say in context?

Read the paragraphs before and after it. Identify the author, audience, purpose, and kind of writing (Nehemiah 8:8; 2 Timothy 2:15).

Does it agree with the Gospel already delivered?

Reject any message that changes Christ, the Gospel, or the means of salvation (1 Corinthians 15:1-4; Galatians 1:6-9).

Is a clear text controlling an unclear claim?

Do not build doctrine on an isolated phrase, private experience, or symbolic passage while ignoring clearer teaching (Acts 20:27; 2 Peter 3:15-16).

Does it exalt Christ or the teacher?

Faithful ministry points people to Jesus and serves the church rather than building dependency on a personality (2 Corinthians 4:5; Colossians 1:28).

Can the claim be examined?

Biblical leaders do not demand that questions be silenced by titles, threats, or claims of special anointing (Acts 17:11; 1 Corinthians 14:29).

What fruit does it produce?

Examine doctrine, character, money practices, treatment of the vulnerable, and long-term fruit (Matthew 7:15-23; 1 Timothy 3:1-13; 1 Peter 5:2-3).

Questions to Ask When Something Feels Wrong

- Where does the Bible teach this clearly?
- What do the surrounding verses mean?
- Is the teacher describing what the text says or importing a system into it?
- Is disagreement treated as rebellion against God or merely disagreement with a leader?

- Does the teaching require access to a special person, impartation, revelation, or technique that the Gospel does not require?
- Can mature believers examine the claim openly without intimidation?

Appendix C

Sources and Citation Notes

How Sources Are Used

Bible references appear in the text so readers can examine each doctrinal claim in context. Direct Bible quotations are from the New King James Version (NKJV). Secondary sources support historical information, educational structure, or ministry application; they do not replace Scripture as the final authority. When an earlier training source summarized other works, the notes below cite the underlying books, articles, or denominational papers rather than the secondary summary.

Scripture Copyright

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Endnotes

1. Kenneth L. Chafin, *The Reluctant Witness* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1974), 11-22; Rebecca Manley Pippert, *Out of the Saltshaker and Into the World: Evangelism as a Way of Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 16; and Paul E. Little, *How to Give Away Your Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1962), 83-90. Together these works support clear, relational, and truthful personal evangelism.

2. Win Arn and Charles Arn, *The Master's Plan for Making Disciples* (Pasadena, CA: Church Growth Press, 1982), 43. Arn and Arn distinguish an initial decision from the church's continuing work of forming disciples.

3. John MacArthur Jr., "Discipleship Giving All," *Fundamentalist Journal* (November 1986): 18; and Leslie A. Andrews, "Christian Education and Discipleship: Either . . . Or . . . Both?" *His Dominion* (January 1983): 7. These articles present discipleship as wholehearted allegiance, continuing learning, and growth toward Christlikeness.

4. Terry L. Cross, "Why Church?" (Cleveland, TN: Church of God Doctrine and Polity Committee, 2017), 1-7. Cross presents the church as Christ's people gathered for God's glory, mutual formation, Spirit-empowered service, and witness in the world.

5. Bill George, *Added to the Church: A Church of God Membership Manual* (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 1987), 77; and Cross, "Why Church?" 1-7. These sources support meaningful belonging, participation, mutual care, and ministry in the local church. The limits placed on church leadership in this volume are argued directly from Acts 17:11, 2 Corinthians 1:24, 1 Peter 5:1-4, and related texts.

6. David R. Ray, *Small Churches Are the Right Size* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1982), xi; Lyle E. Schaller, *The Small Church Is Different!* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1982), 11, 41; and William H. Willimon and Robert L. Wilson, *Preaching and Worship in the Small Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980), 18-19, 42-43. These works treat the small church according to its own ministry setting rather than as a defective large church.

7. Arn and Arn, *The Master's Plan for Making Disciples*, 43; and Andrews, "Christian Education and Discipleship," 7. These sources support the connection between evangelism, baptism, teaching, and the continuing formation of mature disciples.

8. Ray H. Hughes Sr., *Church of God Distinctives*, rev. ed. (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 1989), 42, 67; and Jerald Daffe, "The Operation of Spiritual Gifts" (Cleveland, TN: Church of God Doctrine and Polity Committee, 2024), 1-2. These sources support the Pentecostal affirmation that the Spirit sovereignly distributes gifts for service and the common good. The distinction between gifting and maturity is developed directly from 1 Corinthians 1-3 and 12-14.

9. Church of God, "Declaration of Faith," official denominational statement, <https://churchofgod.org/beliefs/declaration-of-faith/>, accessed September 23, 2026. The Church of God identifies this statement as its official expression of doctrine.

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