



Part 1

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Foundations Introduction



In this module we shall be looking at a small, but significant, number of verses in the letter to the Hebrews: -

1 Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, **2** and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. **3** And this we will do if God permits.

Hebrews 6:1-3 ESVUK ¹

These verses serve as an exhortation for us to progress to maturity in Christ, warning us against remaining like newly-born Christians. We are also given a description of *the elementary doctrine of Christ*, which is an interesting phrase, which we will need to explore in this introduction².

¹ All quotations from the English Standard Version Anglicised (ESVUK) © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, unless otherwise stated.

² Other translations: elementary principles (NJKV), elementary teachings (NIV), basic teachings (NLT), first principles (ASV), the word of the beginning of Christ (YLT)



1 Going On To Maturity

The bible tells us that God alone is unchanging as He is already complete (**Mal 3:6, Ja 1:17, He 13:8, Ps 102:27, He 6:13&18**). Everything else He created for change and growth.

When God created Adam in His own image, he was a physically full-grown adult, but not emotionally or spiritually mature. It was God's intention for Adam to experience change, by growing into maturity.

God taught Adam how to be a gardener, tending to the beauty of Eden; later as a farmer and eventually a hunter. God's original intention for Adam was to grow, like all of creation, reflecting God's image and glory with increasing measure.

The Word of God tells us that Christians are born again by the Spirit of Christ; like new-born babes they emerge from above. Jesus explained it to Nicodemus,

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.

John 3:3

God's intention is for all life to grow, including the new-born again babies of the Kingdom of God - to grow and to mature as Christians, from the day we are 'reborn'.

1.1 The Need For Maturity

Why do we need to mature as Christians? Have you ever asked yourself why we are not born again into a fully grown, mature state? Why God returns us to an infant state when we are born again? Like Adam, God intends for us to know the experience of growth into maturity; indeed it is going through this process that shapes our character. God has therefore made this process integral to His purposes here on earth.

If we did not grow and mature as Christians, then the church would not fulfil her destiny,

... what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, **10** so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

Eph 3:9-10

The purpose of God in Christ is that the church is to be the manifold expression of the wisdom of God. For this to happen, men and women of Christ need to take their place in the purposes of the Kingdom, which they do by growing into Spiritual maturity.

In Ephesians Paul tells us that Christ gave gifts to the church as He ascended into heaven, commonly called the ‘ascension ministries’³. He explains that these were given to the church to equip her until she reaches maturity (**Eph 4:13**). Integral to ministry is therefore bringing others through to maturity (**Col 1:28-29**).

This principle applies to all those in leadership in the church; not only is it imperative that they themselves mature and grow into all that God has called them to be, but also that they enable others to grow and fulfil their God-given potential as well.

In these few verses we see that the writer to the Hebrews has laid out for us the basic foundation stones required in us and in others to see this process of maturity take place. They are ‘elementary’ as the writer says, but we must not fall into the trap of thinking they are simple or easy. They are our first principles ‘in Christ’.

1.2 What Is Maturity

Before we move on, a word about maturity that will serve us well; when the bible talks about maturity we can often perceive this as a demand for perfection in the abstract sense of the word. Jesus gave us a command during the Sermon on the Mount,

You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Matthew 5:48

Jesus uses a word here, *teleiōs*, which is often used in the New Testament as the word for maturity, in the sense of reaching the purpose for which we are called, and thus fulfilling our destiny⁴. A useful analogy would be finding the right screwdriver to fit a particular screw; we would say that it is the perfect tool for the job. With each of us who are born again, we have been destined by the Lord

³ Ephesians 4:7-14

⁴ The Greek word *teleiōs* is derived from the word *telos*, meaning “the end,” “the limit,” or “the fulfilment.” Paul used this word to speak of Jesus Christ as “the complete fulfilment” of God’s law (Rom. 10:4). In his letter to the Colossians, Paul uses *teleiōs* to speak of “the end”—that is, the completion or “perfection”—of Christians (Col. 1:28; 4:12). Paul himself was always pressing toward the goal of Christian “perfection,” or “complete maturation” in Christ-likeness (Phil. 3:12–14). We, too, should make perfection in Christ our goal—a goal that will be completely achieved when “that which is perfect,” Jesus Christ, comes again (1 Cor. 13:10). [Carpenter, E. E., & Comfort, P. W. (2000). *Holman treasury of key Bible words: 200 Greek and 200 Hebrew words defined and explained* (359). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers]

to fulfil His custom-made role for us. Paul tells the Ephesians that He has prepared good works in advance for each of us⁵.

This is how we need to understand maturity; it is not about being perfect, nor is it about competing with others, or being better Christians than them. It is about running the race laid out for us by the Lord. Immature Christians (whether newly born again or not) often struggle with this and see themselves in a race, competing with others, or trying to match up to someone else's idea of what they should be. Paul wrote to the Philippians from his own understanding of this.

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made **perfect**, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

Philippians 3:12, NIV

1.3 Leaving Behind

We are exhorted to leave behind these elementary principles of Christ (v.1). We must take care not to misunderstand this instruction. Some translations can give us the impression that we move on from these things as if we don't need them anymore. However the sense here is in the sense of building upon a foundation.

Once the foundation is laid, the builder will start to build upon that, upward. The bigger and higher the building goes up, the stronger the foundation must be, upon which it stands.

The sad situation here we are told from the context is that the Hebrew Christians, many of whom some scholars believe had been saved for 20 years or so, still did not understand the principles of Christ, had not built upon them and were therefore unable to instruct others. The exhortation from the writer was therefore to solidify those foundations and start building upward!

This analogy carries to other areas of life. When a seed of a tree becomes a sapling it has 'left behind' the seed, but the seed is very much still within the tree; it has grown into something more. When we start school we learn things at a basic level and progress onward to the next level, but we are required to take with us those basic things and continue to draw upon that which we learnt early on.

Christians growing into maturity continue to draw upon the foundation stones in our lives. Our revelation, understanding and application of these principles of Christ grow, as we grow up in Christ.

⁵ Ephesians 2:10

1.4 Carried Forward

Another important aspect of our text we need to understand is the grammatical construction used by the author, namely the passive tense, which is very well demonstrated by the New International Version,

Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and **be taken forward** to maturity ...

Hebrews 6:1, NIV

Bob Utley explains,

“let us press on” - This is a PRESENT PASSIVE SUBJUNCTIVE, “let us be born.” The focus is on the continual provision by a divine agent! ⁶

We are not being exhorted to press on ourselves but to be carried forward to maturity by something else, the principles of Christ - the foundation stones. If these are laid properly, then we can expect them to carry us onto maturity, as we build our lives upon them.

Although we are active participants in the process of our maturing as Christians, it is essentially the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, and the tools he uses are the foundation stones that join us to Christ Himself. When all is said and done we are, as Paul said to the Ephesians, *His workmanship!*⁷ Nevertheless as we can see in Paul’s statement above, our perfection and maturity as God’s people whilst being a sovereign divine work in our lives, will always require our cooperation and determination to hold on *unswervingly to the hope we profess.*⁸

1.5 Not Laying Again

What can prevent this process and stunt our growth, so that we stagnate as babies? The warning of the author is that the foundation has not been laid properly but requires relaying again and again.

If foundations are not laid down properly then it means everything built upon this crooked foundation will not be right either. It will be unstable as the man who built his house upon the sand found out when the storms came.⁹

⁶ Utley, R. J. D. (1999). Vol. Volume 10: The Superiority of the New Covenant: Hebrews. Study Guide Commentary Series (61). Marshall, Texas: Bible Lessons International.

⁷ Ephesians 2:10

⁸ Hebrews 10:23

⁹ Matthew 7:24-27

For us as Christians, if we do not have these foundations right in us, then we shall either remain as infants, or worse still start to build something that will come crashing down in our lives, perhaps impacting the lives of others around us.

As leaders in the church of Christ, we need firstly to ensure our own foundations are right and then ensure that those in our care have similarly right foundations upon which to build.

1.6 Progressive Revelation

One of the things we shall see as we start to look at each foundation stone is that our revelation of spiritual things can grow. Indeed our revelation of the things of God will continue to grow until Christ Himself returns.

In light of this we should ask ourselves whether or not our revelation in these things does indeed continue to grow, but if not why not?

Our growing revelation should be both corporate, as the Lord shows us things together, but also personal. There is a sense in which my particular experience of each foundational truth will be different to yours, in how it specifically impacts my life, and as we bring these things together our corporate revelation (as a body of God's people) grows.

2 Christ Our Foundation



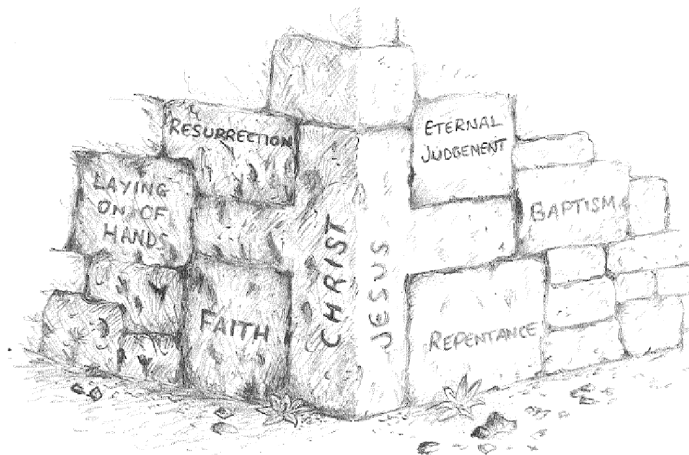
2.1 What Are The Principles of Christ?

The term 'principles of Christ' or elementary teachings about Him may seem an odd description, considering they are defined as things which are more about us than about Him. The writer lists them for us.

- Repentance from dead works
- Faith toward God
- Instruction about washings (baptisms, NJKV)
- The laying on of hands
- The resurrection of the dead
- Eternal judgment.

These things are not in themselves Christ, but foundation stones. Each of them forms part of our joining to Christ, the chief cornerstone. They are God's means of connecting us with Him. The title 'Christ' when used of Jesus refers to his Messiah-ship. The Messiah was the promised deliverer and anointed one to whom the Old Testament pointed, who would restore Israel and reunite God and man together.

It is Jesus' death and resurrection that makes possible the rebirth of our spirits through the Holy Spirit. Through the cross, Christ invites us to identify with Him in His death, allowing our old nature to die in order that we may be reborn in Him¹⁰. The process of rebirth amongst other things, transforms our lives from being centred around ourselves, to being centred around Jesus. The picture below illustrates this for us. Christ becomes the cornerstone in our lives and the principles of Christ, being the other foundation stones, are our means of 'keying' our lives into Christ.



¹⁰ Romans 6:3-4, 2

God starts our lives afresh, as new creations, a new divine construction for His glory. He always starts by laying the cornerstone, Christ Jesus before anything else and then the foundation stones (of Christ) are laid next, to wrap the building around Him. Each of the foundation stones in themselves is well beyond the scope of this module, so we'll focus our time on exploring how each of them join us into Christ Jesus the cornerstone.

2.2 The Role Of The Cornerstone

It is worth taking a few moments to consider the role of the cornerstone.

- 1. Foundation of the House.** The Old Testament pointed toward a cornerstone which God would lay, which the New Testament recognised as speaking of Jesus Christ.

The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

Psalm 118:22, ESVUK

... therefore thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: 'Whoever believes will not be in haste.'

Isaiah 28:16, ESVUK

Jesus applied these references to Himself¹¹, as did the Apostles¹². Paul described Jesus as the cornerstone of the temple of God,

19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, **20** built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, **21** in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. **22** In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Ephesians 2:19-22, ESVUK

Peter completed the picture by describing the church as a House of God made up of 'living stones', founded upon the cornerstone foundation of Christ,

¹¹ Matthew 21:41, Mark 12:10 and Luke 20:17

¹² Acts 4:11, Ephesians 2:20 and 1 Peter 2:6-7

4 As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, 5 you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 2:4-6, ESVUK

The image is clear – Christ is the cornerstone and we as the house of God are stones built upon Him. Equally Christ is the cornerstone in each of our lives, and the stones that join us to him are the foundation stones listed by the writer to the Hebrews.

2. **Joining the Walls.** The passage from Ephesians above alludes to another aspect of the cornerstone. It forms not only the centre of the foundation of a building but also joins together the walls which are keyed into it. Christ brings together different things: -

- Holy God and Fallen Man
- Broken lives (joining back together a life broken by sin & circumstance)
- Husbands and Wives
- Jews and Gentiles

In each case, just as Jesus was the agent of creation itself, He brings things and people together again and heals the wound, bridges the gap, breaks down the divide. This is the ministry of reconciliation, of which Paul writes to the Corinthians,

18 All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. 20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

2 Corinthians 5:18-20, ESVUK

3. **Setting the Plumbline.** The cornerstone is the stone which the two joining walls are set in alignment with. It sets the angle for the walls and thus for the building as a whole, keeping everything straight. In fact the building

takes shape, building from the cornerstone outward and upward. The building grows and takes shape, keeping its walls aligned with the cornerstone.

In the same way our lives grow outward from Christ, if we are building upon Him and if our lives (the rest of the building) are aligned with Him. This is another reason why the 'Word of God' is synonymous with Jesus, because it is the written embodiment of Him and the plumbline against which we must line everything up in our lives.

So in his role as the Cornerstone, Jesus is the foundation upon which all things eternal must rest – including our lives. As the cornerstone He has become God's means of reconciliation of all things to Himself. As individuals this means Jesus must be the glue that holds our life together. He provides the plumbline against which we line everything up in our lives. Now we shall consider how this cornerstone is laid in our lives.

2.3 The Imputation Of Christ

We should ask at this point what it means to have Christ as the cornerstone in our lives. Like the cornerstone it means that Christ is laid at the very heart of our foundations. As we have said, the principles of Christ are God's means of joining us to Him – a structure built around the cornerstone. It is however a two way process; not only are we joined to Him but He is laid in us. To understand how and why we need to go back to the beginning.

1. God's Created Son

In the beginning God created a man in His own image with the intention that he would grow and mature. We should ask ourselves, 'mature into what?' or rather 'into whom'. Adam was God's son, but he was God's created son and not His eternally begotten Son, who was Jesus. God's intention was for Adam to grow into the fullness of Christ. The Tree of Life is a foreshadow of Christ, representing His perpetual dependency on the Father and the source of life.

We shall never know what would have happened had Adam and Eve not chosen their own will over that of their Father. There was no limit to their growth and the intention had been to fill the cosmos with the image of God. What they were learning to do in Eden, God was training them to export to the whole world. If they were faithful in the small plot of Eden, He would entrust them to replicate this in the wider world and beyond to the waiting universe. However they failed the test of self-will, which God allowed into the garden through the actions of the serpent.

2. God's Begotten & Resurrected Son

Unlike Adam who was a reflection of God, Jesus is of the very same substance as God the Father¹³. He was therefore not Adam 'mark II', but instead the real deal. He was the very one, the very fullness of whom Adam had been intended to grow up into.

Nevertheless, when the Son of God became of a man, He became the Son of Man also. The uniqueness of this position Paul tells us is that God did not respond to Adam's failure by coming to the job Himself, or by bringing divine power bear to the task He had set Adam.

God the Son had agreed to limit Himself to the capabilities of Adam, as he was created, a man without sin fully dependent on God the Father. Jesus was fully man and yet fully God. Nevertheless what is remarkable is that the incarnated Son of God also had to grow to maturity like Adam, the created son of God. It is the writer to the Hebrews that has already touched on this just before the verses we are examining in this Foundations module. Observe the following words,

5 So also Christ did not exalt Himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by Him who said to him, **"You are my Son, today I have begotten You"**; **6** as He says also in another place, **"You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek."** **7** In the days of His flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to Him who was able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His reverence. **8** Although He was a son, He learned obedience through what He suffered. **9** And being made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, **10** being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

Hebrews 5:5-10, ESVUK

The first Messianic reference above is taken by the writer from the second Psalm¹⁴, which we know does not refer to Christ's incarnation (for He was already God's Son) but to His Resurrection, as Paul proclaimed to those in the synagogue in Antioch in Pisidia,

32 And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, **33** this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you."

¹³ Hebrews 1:3; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Col 1:15. The Nicene creed thus states 'We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father.'

¹⁴ Psalm 2:7

Acts 13:32-33, ESVUK

What does all this mean? The key for us lies in **(Hebrews 5) verse 8** above - Jesus' **'Resurrected Sonship'** was something that He grew up and matured into, just as God had intended for Adam. He was willingly shaped and moulded by His experiences, through the hand of His Father, *'He learned obedience through what He suffered.'*

The 'perfection', which the writer here describes, is not an absence of imperfection, but instead refers to the suffering which Christ obediently endured in order to become our Great High Priest.

What is amazing and at the very limits of our understanding and revelation is that the pre-incarnate Son of God was somehow different to the resurrected Son. This is a holy mystery, but the Son of God was shaped by the Father into the great cornerstone for the restored and reconciled creation. That cornerstone was laid by God, as an eternal foundation for His New Creation to be built upon.

3. God's Adopted Sons

Now we come to a third type of son, an 'adopted son'. Adopted sons are different again. When we were born we were different from Adam before the fall, because we inherited the sinful nature which came as a result of his and Eve's sin. We were also different from Christ because we were created and not begotten. Jesus is of the same substance as God, but we are not; in the same way that a statue of a man is not a real man. God begets God but creates man¹⁵. Man is of a different substance to God.

That was until we were born again. Then something extraordinary happened to us. The Bible tells us that this was the beginning of our adoption as sons of God. No longer were we separated from God by a sinful nature for it died with Christ and no longer were we now purely part of God's creation and nothing more.

Now the eternal became a part of us and we are a part of Him. When we become "In Christ" we become truly "begotten" of God. We are no longer sons of Adam but instead sons of God who, like Christ, are born from above and not below; no longer reaching up from the dust but reaching down from the heavenlies,¹⁶ where we are seated with Christ¹⁷. *With Christ's incarnation God took humanity into Himself - the Son of God became a man to enable men to become sons of God*¹⁸.

¹⁵ C S Lewis, Mere Christianity

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 15:47

¹⁷ Ephesians 2:6

¹⁸ C S Lewis, Mere Christianity

The Son of God brought us together in union with the Father for the very first time. The statue came to life; the created has become the begotten.

We must be clear here in that the union of the soul with Christ is something different from the union that Adam had with God. Adam was a created being into whom God breathed life. Christ who lives in us is a life-giving Spirit¹⁹. The redeemed are not the same as the pre-fallen Adam. The redeemed have known sin and now knows the holy presence of the Divine in permanent residence,

Jesus answered him, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

John 14:23, ESVUK

This unique union enables us to partake of the Divine nature,

3 His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, **4** by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become **partakers of the divine nature**, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

2 Peter 1:4, ESVUK

It also means that as the Spirit of Christ lives within us, we are able to perceive things Spiritually (i.e., living by the Spirit and not dominated by the flesh any longer), which is what it means to have the mind of Christ,

12 Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. **13** And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.

14 The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. **15** The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. **16** “For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.

1 Corinthians 2:12-15, ESVUK

¹⁹ 1 Corinthians 15:45

Interestingly, returning to our theme of maturity for a moment, in the Scripture above, Paul was writing to the Corinthians about things going in their midst and in the very next few verses tells the saints that he cannot address them as *'spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ'*²⁰, because they were not growing up and maturing. Paul had been forced to give them milk because they could not handle solid food. Although we have the mind of Christ, it requires us to practice the discernment of the Spirit of Christ within us frequently, so that we mature in it.

This brings full circle to our passage in Hebrews about going on to maturity,

14 But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

Hebrews 5:14, ESVUK

God's adopted sons do partake of the divine nature and of the mind of Christ, but this is not something handed to us on a plate, or a passive activity; it is something we have to lay hold of and apply in our lives. It is a process and not a single event in our lives. This is where the foundation stones of the principles of Christ come in.

It is no revelation to us that although our spirits are reborn anew, as new creations, our body and mind lag behind this somewhat. In fact much of our Christian walk is taken up in dealing with this lag. This process is what the bible refers to as *adoption*, which begins with salvation and ends with our physical resurrection when we shall no longer have to deal with the physical imperfections that remain in the fragile human condition.

23 And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

Romans 8:23, ESVUK

The work of God when we are first born again is that Christ is born in us, in **seed** form,

23 since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;

²⁰ 1 Corinthians 3:1

1 Peter 1:23 , ESVUK

This seed slowly grows and begins to take shape and form, by the work of the Holy Spirit. As we allow Him to shape and mould us, our characters form into the shape of Christ's, expressed through our own personalities. The apostle Paul laboured ceaselessly to encourage and nurture this process of seeing the divine nature of Christ taking shape within the believers.

18 It is always good to be made much of for a good purpose, and not only when I am present with you, **19** my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth **until Christ is formed in you!**

Galatians 4:18-19, ESVUK

What is crucial to this process and enables it to take place is the proper laying of the cornerstone of Christ and the keying in of the rest of the building to Him. As we have said, the means of 'keying in' (or joining) are the **Principles of Christ**. This is why it is imperative that we draw increasingly upon these foundation stones to enable the process of *'transformation from one degree of glory to another'*, or to put it another way - until the whole building spreads out from the Cornerstone and resembles Christ.

The imputation of Christ is the process of 'sonship', which began with Christ taking on the mantle of man, learning obedience in the human condition, allowing God the Father to shape Him into the cornerstone He needed to be for the establishment of God's house, made of living stones. God then lay that cornerstone at the heart of everything to begin the process of restoration of all things. For each of us this means the cornerstone, that is Christ, has been laid in our lives and is slowly transforming the whole building into the image of Christ, as we allow God to build upon Him.

We are now going to turn to the Principles of Christ to see how each in particular plays its part as a foundation stone in our lives.