

The Basics of Faith

Hebrews 6:1–2 lists six matters as “basic teaching” that mature Christians should have down pat. It is a little embarrassing that we lack clarity regarding things that are supposed to be so obvious that no instruction is necessary, but sometimes that is the case.

- *Repentance from dead works.* Believers should reject “dead works,” but what are those? The reference may be to sinful behaviors that lead to death, or it could be to ritual practices of the Jewish religion that Christ has rendered obsolete. See also Hebrews 9:14.
- *Faith toward God.* Believers should trust radically in God and in God’s promises (cf. Heb. 11:1–12:2).
- *Baptisms.* Why is this in the plural? Perhaps it refers to various purification rites practiced by Jews (cf. Heb. 9:10). Did the readers of this letter practice those rituals? Or did they have some variant understanding of Christian baptism as an action practiced more than once or for diverse functions (cf. 1 Cor. 15:29, a verse that also refers to some primitive baptismal practice about which we have no knowledge)?
- *Laying on of hands.* This refers to a rite through which human touch accompanies or imparts divine authorization or empowerment (cf. 2 Tim. 1:6), but it could be practiced for a variety of reasons: conveying the gift of the Holy Spirit to believers (Acts 8:17; 19:6); commissioning leaders (Acts 6:6; 1 Tim. 5:22); healing the sick (Acts 9:12; 28:8).
- *Resurrection of the dead.* All persons will be raised to new life when Christ returns.
- *Eternal judgment.* God will judge all people, granting them salvation or condemnation (cf. Heb. 9:27; 10:26–27; 13:4).