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# BUILDING FIRM FOUNDATIONS

**A BIBLICAL REFERENCE GUIDE**

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Authority of the Bible .....	3
False Teachers.....	3
Work of the Holy Spirit .....	3
Role of Grace in Salvation .....	4
Role of Works in Salvation.....	4
Role of the Old Testament Today.....	5
Kingdom of God.....	5
Work of the Church .....	6
Organizational Structure of the Church.....	6
Instrumental Music in Worship .....	7
The Lord's Supper.....	7
What One Must Do to Be Saved.....	8
Baptism.....	8
Divorce and Remarriage .....	9
Apostasy: A Real Possibility .....	9
Heaven and Hell .....	10

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This guide was produced by the **Downtown church of Christ**, a group of people that have been purchased by the blood of the Son of God. We are Christians (**1 Co 6:19-20; Ac 11:26**). Jesus is our Savior and head (**Ep 5:25**) and we live to glorify Him. The Bible is our only guide and all we need to be pleasing to God (**2 Ti 3:16-17; 2 Pe 1:3**), following the pattern described in the New Testament. Therefore, we are the church that Jesus built.

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## AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE

**Authority: the right to command behavior.** Whoever created the universe has the right to rule it. God is that Creator (**Gn 1:1, Ps 14:1a, 19:1-3, Heb 3:4**); thus God has all authority.

The Bible claims to be God's Word (**2 Tim 3:16**). It passes the 'internal evidence' test (*How truthful is the text?*): historically, archaeologically, geographically, prophetically, and scientifically without contradiction (*miracles are acknowledged to be by God's hand*).

The Bible also passes the 'bibliographical' test. (*How reliable are copies of the manuscripts?*) Dead Sea scrolls help prove this.

God gave authority to His Son, Jesus (**Mt 28:18, He 1:1-2**). When He left this earth, He sent the Holy Spirit to guide His apostles (**Jn 14:25-26, 16:12-14**).

The Holy Spirit inspired the apostles (*and 1st century prophets*) to speak and to write the message, the Bible, God's Word (**Ga 1:8, 11-12, Ep 3:3-5, Mt 10:18-20, 1 Th 2:13, 1 Co 14:37**)!

## FALSE TEACHERS

They will come (**2 Th 2:3-4, 1 Ti 4:1, 2 Pe 2:1-2**), and will twist God's Word (**2 Ti 4:2-4**).

They may rely on human tradition (**Mk 7:7-9**), family loyalty (**Mt 10:37**), church authority (**1 Ti 3:15**), religious leaders (**2 Co 11:13-15**), the majority (**Mt 7:13-14**), their feelings (**Mt 7:21-23**) or conscience (**Pr 14:12**), dreams or visions (**Jer 23:25-28, Col 2:18-19 NAS**), etc. **They may be sincere, but when their message contradicts God's Word, they must be rejected (2 Jn 9-11)!**

## WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

In the OT, the Spirit worked with various people in various ways (**Ex 31:1-5, Judg 14:5-6, 2 P 1:21**). In the NT, He works in various ways as well. The apostles were baptized with the Holy Spirit (**Jn 14:26, 16:13, Ac 1:2,5,8, 2:4,14,37,43**), manifested by "the signs of an apostle" (**2 Co 12:12**).

Those upon whom apostles laid their hands received the miraculous "gifts of the Holy Spirit" (**Ac 6:6-8, 8:14-19, 1 Co 12:1, 8-10, He 2:3-4**). Note: "speaking in

tongues” was the ability to speak a foreign language miraculously (Ac 2:8). Gifts were manifested by simply doing miracles.

All Christians receive an “indwelling of the Holy Spirit” (Ac 2:38-39, 5:32, Ro 8:9) which refers to relationship, not physical indwelling (*us in Him, He in us*). Also compare (Ro 8) vs. 10 & vs. 1, then 1 Jn 4:12-15. This indwelling, or relationship, happens through the Word (Ep 6:17) and is manifested by one bearing the fruit of the Spirit (Ga 5:22-23).

## ROLE OF GRACE IN SALVATION

**‘Grace’ is ‘unmerited favor’.** God bestows His favor upon us though we have not earned it. It is God’s grace that saves us from our sins (Ro 5:6-8, *regardless of our past*). But, though His grace is unmerited (*unearned*) it is NOT unconditional.

Some teach that grace requires NOTHING of us, and they will often quote Ep 2:8-9 to make their point. But when Paul writes that we are saved by grace, not by works, he is not saying works don’t matter (*vs 10*); he is saying works do not EARN our salvation. For example, a paycheck at the end of the workweek is earned; a \$100 trillion bonus that week for showing up would be grace – unmerited favor.

God’s willingness to cleanse Naaman from his leprosy was grace; dipping seven times in the Jordan was a condition (2 Ki 5). Salvation from sins and the gift of eternal life are by God’s grace (*nothing we could ever do can earn it*); but faith, repentance, and baptism are simple conditions which must be met to receive the gift (Ac 2:38, Col 2:12).

## ROLE OF WORKS IN SALVATION

**No works can earn our salvation.** These would be works of merit (*enabling us to boast about what we have done* - Lk 18:11-12, Ro 4:2, Ep 2:8-9).

Likewise, works of the Law of Moses, works of our own imagination, and works of darkness cannot save us (Ga 2:16, Mt 7:21-23, Ep 5:11).

But many passages underline the importance (*even necessity*) of working (*or obedience*) in salvation. **Note just a few:** Mt 5:16, 7:21, 16:27, Lk 6:46, Ac 10:34-35, 26:20, Ro 2:10,

1 Co 15:58, Ga 6:4, Ep 2:10, 4:12, Ph 2:12, Col 1:10, 2 Th 2:17, 2 Ti 3:16-17, Ti 2:14, He 10:24, 13:21, Ja 2:24, 3:13, 1 Pe 1:17, and Re 14:13, 20:12, 22:12.

Such ‘works’ would include everything from the fruits of repentance (Mt 3:8), to baptism (Ac 22:16), to walking in the light (living the way God wants us to live, positive and negative, 1 Jn 1:7), and even faith (1 Th 1:3). Yet we must always remember that none of these works can earn our salvation; we are only doing our duty (Lk 17:10).

## ROLE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT TODAY

The Bible makes a distinction between the OT and the NT (Jer 31:31-33, He 8:7-10).

The OT was a covenant between God and the physical nation of Israel (Ex 19:3-6, 24:4-8). That covenant (including the Sabbath law, Neh 9:13-14), was done away with when Jesus was crucified (Mt 26:27-28, Ga 3:23-25, Col 2:11-14).

However, the OT is still profitable for people today as a proof of the divinity of Jesus (Jn 5:39), and as a source of comfort (Ro 15:2-4), warning (1 Co 10:6-12), and wisdom (2 Ti 3:15).

## KINGDOM OF GOD

Since the time of David, the prophets had foretold of a coming kingdom (2 Sam 7:16, Da 2:44). Jesus came to fulfill that promise (Lk 1:31-33). He began His ministry announcing it (Mt 4:17), and often taught the importance of it (*‘kingdom’ found more than 50 times just in Matthew*).

John the Baptist, Jesus, and the apostles all taught that it was “at hand” (Mt 3:2, 4:17, 10:7). Jesus even said it would come in the lifetime of some of His hearers (Mk 9:1) and it did (Col 1:13, Re 1:9).

Though many rabbis in Jesus’ day (*and premillennialists today*) believed the kingdom was physical, Jesus taught that His kingdom is spiritual (Jn 18:33-36) and resides in the hearts of people (Lk 17:20-21). To enter the kingdom, one must be born

of water and the Spirit (Jn 3:3-7), must be humble (Mt 18:3-4), and must have an eternal focus (Lk 9:62).

## WORK OF THE CHURCH

Some teach that the church, as a collective, can do whatever an individual can do, because the church is comprised of individuals. This human reasoning has been used to justify everything from church involvement in general benevolence to secular education. This reasoning could justify church participation in retail, banking, real estate, and entertainment enterprises and more. It could be used to justify involvement in environmental, political, and social issues. Is any of this the mission of the Lord's church?

**What does the Bible say?** To learn what the mission of the local church is, just follow the money. The common collection was distinct from an individual's money (Ac 5:1-4, 1 Ti 5:16). It was used for benevolence for needy saints (Ac 11:27-30, Ro 15:25-26, 1 Co 16:1-2, 2 Co 9:1-2), and for the preaching of the gospel (1 Co 9:4-14, Ph 4:15-18). These define the work, or mission, of the Lord's church. **No other organization has such a noble purpose. Let's respect it.**

## ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE CHURCH

The organization of the church in the first century was very simple. The one church had Jesus as its Head (Ep 1:22) and Cornerstone (2:20-22), and the apostles and prophets as its foundation.

That was the only organizational structure larger than a local church then – and it still is today. Local churches had bishops and deacons (Ph 1:1, 1 Ti 3:1-13). The term “bishop” (*overseer*) refers to the same office as “elder” (*older man*) and “pastor” (*shepherd*). These three terms are used interchangeably in Ac 20:17, 28 and 1 Pe 5:1-4, all referring to the same office (see also Ti 1:5-7). Numerous departures from this simple organizational structure have occurred through the centuries, from the Roman Catholic hierarchy (*pope, cardinals, archbishops, bishops, priests*) to the one-man pastor system.

Every Christian is a priest (1 Pe 2:5, 9, Rev 1:6). Pastors (*elders*) were always a plurality. Preachers hold no authoritative office in the church; their ‘authority’ is found only in their message (Ti 2:15).

## INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC IN WORSHIP

Under the Mosaic Law, instruments of music were commanded as part of the worship (2 Chr 29:25, Ps 150). But just as animal sacrifices, sabbath observance, dietary restrictions, and circumcision were done away with at the cross (Col 2:11-17), so we cannot go to the Law of Moses (Old Covenant) to learn how to worship God under the New Covenant (Ga 3:24-25). In the New Testament, Christians are commanded to “sing” (Ep 5:19, Col 3:16, 1 Co 14:15, Ja 5:13).

The Greek word “psallo” literally means “to pluck the strings” – but the instrument we are to pluck is the heart (Ep 5:19). When God specifies “sing” we are not authorized to add instruments.

## THE LORD’S SUPPER

The night before Jesus was crucified, He instituted a memorial feast so that His followers would be reminded regularly of His sacrifice (Mk 14:22-24).

Early disciples partook of that communion on the first day of the week (Ac 2:42, 20:7, 1 Co 10:16). Sadly, it has become the focus of much controversy.

The church at Corinth abused it (1 Co 11:20-34). Around the 8th century, the frequency began to be emphasized less, and in the centuries since, practice has ranged from daily to annually.

The Catholic Church began to interpret “this is My body/blood” as a literal statement (*rather than metonymy, as “fox” in Lk 13:32, or “house” in He 11:6*) around the 11th century.

Some churches began to demand the use of only one cup (Mk 14:23), again literalizing a statement of metonymy. (*Did 3,000 people drink from one cup in Jerusalem?*)

In recent years, some brethren have refused to offer the Lord’s Supper multiple times on Sunday (*mistakenly calling it a “second serving”*), although we are commanded to “tarry for one another” (1 Co 11:33).

# WHAT ONE MUST DO TO BE SAVED

**Salvation from sin is the most important need we have.** Our eternal destiny depends on it. It cannot be earned ([Ep 2:8-9](#)) either by religious ritual or our own goodness.

Salvation from sin requires help from God (*His gracious willingness to forgive*), which He provided in the sacrifice of Jesus ([Ro 3:24-26](#)). We, on the other hand, must respond to God's offer of forgiveness by meeting a few simple conditions.

No single passage contains all these conditions but note the following: Jesus said we must believe on Him as the Messiah ([Jn 8:24, 14:6](#)), we must repent of our sins ([Mt 4:17, Lk 13:1-5](#)), we must confess Him ([Mt 10:32-33](#)), we must be baptized ([Mk 16:15-16](#)), and we must submit to His rule ([Mt 7:21-23, Lk 6:46-49](#)). The apostles taught the same things: faith ([Ac 16:30-31, Ro 1:16](#)), repentance ([Ac 17:30, 2 Pe 3:9](#)), confession ([Ro 10:9-10](#)), baptism ([Ac 2:38, 1 Pe 3:21](#)) and walking the walk ([1 Jn 1:5-7](#)).

**Are you saved?**

## BAPTISM

The word 'baptism' translates the Greek word baptizo, which means to submerge, immerse, dip, or plunge (*Thayer, etc*). It is never translated as 'sprinkle' or 'pour' (*rituals that were added more than 200 years after the establishment of the church*).

Though the NT mentions several 'baptisms', Paul affirmed that only one is now valid ([Eph 4:5](#)). It is not the baptism of John the Baptist ([Ac 19:1-6](#)) or the baptism of the Holy Spirit (*which was promised only to the apostles, [Ac 1-2](#), and was never commanded of anyone*).

The one baptism is a burial ([Ro 6:3-4](#)) in water ([Ac 8:35-39](#)). Proper recipients must be able to hear, understand, and believe the gospel message ([Ac 8:5-6, 12, 35-38](#)) and be able to repent of sins ([Ac 2:38](#)); thus, infants are not to be baptized.

Purposes accomplished in baptism include obedience to Christ ([Mt 28:19-20](#)), remission [*forgiveness*] of sins ([Ac 2:38, cp Mt 26:27-28](#)), and to be added to the body of Christ ([1 Co 12:13](#)).

**Those who have been baptized in any other way, or for any other purpose, should be rebaptized ([Ac 19:5](#)).**

# DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

This question impacts congregational fellowship (1 Cor 5:11) as well as individual souls (6:9-10). God's design for marriage has always been 'one man, one woman, for life'. It was instituted that way (Ge 2:24), and Jesus reaffirmed that standard (Mt 19:3-9, 5:31-32). God's design is simple; but many efforts have been made to circumvent that design.

One may be accused of being unloving or too negative, yet we are to speak truth with love (*which may appear negative*, Ep 4:15, 2 Ti 4:2). We may be accused of judging, yet Jesus commands us to judge (*without hypocrisy*, Jn 7:24, Mt 7:1-5).

Some believe a guilty spouse may remarry, yet the two scenarios mentioned in Mt 5:32 preclude that. Others believe that only Christians are subject to Christ's law of marriage, yet the gospel is for all (Mk 16:15) and the words of Jesus will be the standard of judgment (Jn 12:48). Some believe that 1 Cor 7:17, 20, 24 permits one to remain in an adulterous (*or homosexual*) relationship upon becoming a Christian; yet, the context is clearly pointing to non-sinful options (*single or not, married to unbeliever or not, circumcised or not, slave or not*). And "bondage" in (1 Cor 7) vs 15 is from a Greek word which never refers to the marriage bond. Adultery can be forgiven, but like any other sinful relationship (*e.g., homosexuality*), it must be abandoned upon repentance (Mt 3:8).

# APOSTASY: A REAL POSSIBILITY

**Apostasy can be defined as 'a sustained departure from God's will'.**

It was a recurring problem for God's people in the OT, and so it is today. The NT foretold that "the apostasy" (*or "falling away"*) would come (1 Ti 4:1-3, 2 Th 2:3) and, in fact, it had already started in the first century (vs 7, 1 Jn 4:3). Two thousand years have only widened that departure from the simple gospel.

**Individually, apostasy can be a real problem as well.**

From the parable of the sower (Mt 13:20-22), to the warnings of Paul (1 Co 9:27, 10:12) and Peter (2 Pe 2:20-22), to the entire book of Hebrews (2:1, 3:12-14, 4:11, 6:4-6, 10:26-27), we are warned of the possibility of apostasy.

The usual passages referenced to 'prove' that we cannot fall away are usually 1.) References to God's unwavering faithfulness, not our own (Jn 10:27-29, Ro 8:35, 38-39, see vs 37 "Him who loved us"), or... 2.) Focused on the present possession of 'eternal life' (Jn 5:24). But the term 'eternal life' refers to the **nature** of that life, not our possession of it. Continued possession of it is conditioned on our choices (2 Pe 1:10-11).

## HEAVEN AND HELL

Hell (*Gehenna*) is described as a place where the "worm does not die" and the "fire is not quenched" (Mk 9:48). It is a place of "outer darkness" (Mt 22:13) away "from the presence of the Lord" (2 Th 1:9) where there will be "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Mt 13:42).

Jesus said more about the reality of hell than any other NT speaker or writer. Is hell just? God is love, but God is also light, and He cannot have fellowship with sin. Those who refuse His offer of pardon through Christ have no one to blame but themselves. Even those who have never heard God's Word can know of God's goodness (Ro 1:18-20) and fundamental distinctions between right and wrong (Ro 2:14-16, Lk 12:47-48). **Hell is consistent with God's love.**

The concept of Heaven has been corrupted by Islam (*viral men and virgins*) and Mormonism (*divided into three 'heavens': celestial, where faithful Mormons go to evolve into gods; terrestrial, where 'good people' go; and teletial, where 'bad people' go, to be eventually rescued by Jesus*). Jehovah's Witnesses believe only 144,000 people will go to heaven. Others believe heaven will be on this earth, after a thorough cleansing; but Peter taught otherwise (2 Pe 3:10-13).

Heaven is called a "reward" (Mt 5:12), a place prepared by the Lord for the faithful (Jn 14:2-3), and a paradise (Re 2:7) where righteousness dwells (2 Pe 3:13). It's a prepared place for a prepared people.

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"...Teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom...." (Col 3:16)