

Important Biblical Concepts

In the book of Hebrews, the author begins to discuss Melchizedek in chapter 5. He then interrupts himself to say that he has many things to say about this, but his readers were dull of hearing. They, by this time, ought to have been teachers, but sadly they were still in need of milk rather than stronger food.

In chapter 6 he challenges them to leave the elementary principles of the Christian life and to move forward toward maturity. But the thing that interests me the most is that in chapter 7, instead of skipping the topic of Melchizedek, as many of us might do, he launches back into it so that they might be able to begin eating a more substantive diet.

I think this needs to be our approach in the church today. Instead of holding back from teaching the whole counsel of God because it might be too difficult to grasp, or because parts might be too controversial, we need to press forward and teach the more meaty topics. In essence we need to tell our listeners, “What we are going to learn over the next couple of weeks is going to make you have to think. Some of you are used to elementary Bible teaching. We are going to tackle some of the more difficult areas. So, take notes, write down your questions, and let's get into the Word.”

The New Testament epistles were not written to the scholars and doctors of theology. They were written to the saints, the regular folks, at the church of Rome or Galatians or Ephesus.

I've been blessed in that there have been people in my life, beginning with my dad, who challenged me to work through the tough stuff. You have to think, analyze sentence structure, and follow sometimes lengthy logical arguments. As a result, there have been several key truths from the Bible that have impacted my spiritual life in significant ways. They have proved to be important turning points in my thinking and in my relationship with God.

What I want to do in the rest of this article is to whet your appetite with some core ideas and perhaps some questions and scripture references that will help you investigate these things yourself. The effort will produce great spiritual fruit in your life if you make the effort.

My recommendation is that every Christian who is serious about growing in his or her walk with Christ, developing a greater appreciation for the ways of God, and in shedding the superficiality of much of Christianity, spend the time necessary to understand these concepts. I would encourage young Christians especially, to make it their goal to go search these things out. Your life will be deeper and highly enriched by doing so. I'm not saying that these topics are the only ones which should be studied, and I'm also not saying that these are the most important topics. Other people might have different recommendations. These are the things that have the greatest direct impact on my understanding of Scripture and how I order my life. I don't hear these topics being talked about much in churches and among Christians, so perhaps I've been focusing on the wrong things for 60 years. I don't think so, but you will have to make that determination for yourself.

These are not in any particular order, and I'm not writing full explanations. These are just seed-thoughts to get you started. You'll need to do the hard work to sort it out and discover what God has given us in Christ as revealed in His Word.

One more introductory point: I think every Christian ought to be able to explain, at least at some elementary level, these things to others, i.e., their own children, their friends, etc. I used to tell my science students that if they couldn't explain a particular concept, they probably didn't understand it very well. Understanding is what you should be working toward in your regular study of God's Word.

With all of that introduction, here are the topics and ideas which have been crucial in my understanding of the Christian message.

Relationship between law and grace

We are no longer under law but under grace. (Romans 6) We have died to the law and are freed from it (Romans 7). What does this mean for living the Christian life? What are the dangers in not properly understanding this concept? Why was the law given? The answer might surprise you. What does the law do the power that sin has in our lives? What effect does the law have on the power of sin? (See 1 Cor 15:26 and Romans 7:8-9)

New Covenant vs. Old Covenant

What are the differences between the two covenants? Which one are Christians under, or are we under both? Are they one-sided or two-sided covenants? Are they conditional or unconditional? How do you know? What was promised and required under the Old Covenant? And the New Covenant? You'll find a lot about this topic in Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews. Check for cross references to Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Read about God's covenant with the Israelites at Mt. Sinai.

The curses and blessings under the Old Covenant

Find out about the blessings and curses given on the two mountains and what was promised in each case? (Deuteronomy 27 and 28). Why does Paul say that those who are under the law are under a curse? Why does he explain this to Christians? Why does he bring up Sarah and Hagar, what do they have to do with it? (See Galatians). Why does he relate Mt. Sinai and Jerusalem to Hagar?

Two benefits of New Covenant over the Old

What two things would have happened if the Old Covenant would have "worked" by making the worshippers perfect? Since the sacrifice of Christ was effective whereas the old covenant was not, these two results are a reality for us. How should that change the way we deal with guilt? What about the consciousness (conscience?) of sin. (All of this is explained in Hebrews 10)

Regeneration/New birth

What did Jesus mean when He said the activity of the Spirit in the new birth is like the wind? (John 3) Why should Nicodemus, a Jew, have known about this? What is a natural man unable to discern? Why? What condition are we in when we are born? List some descriptive words. What does John 1:12 mean when it says we were not born of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man?

Are Repentance and Faith are gifts of God?

Are repentance and faith actually gifts, or something we all naturally have? (Eph 2:8,9). Was Esau able to repent when he wanted to? What reason did Jesus give for people not believing in Him (John 10:26)? Do all people have faith? (2 Thess 3:2). What happened to Lydia so she could believe? What did Peter say God had given to Israel? (Acts 5:31; See also Acts 11:18, 2 Timothy 2:25). Do you have a solid understanding of these things so that you can explain them to your children or friends? If they are not that important to understand, why did Jesus and the apostles stress issues like these?

What is the Bible talking about when it refers to elemental or elementary things?

The Bible says we should get past elementary (elemental) things. Most elementary things the Bible speaks of belong to the Old Covenant and should be abandoned. Have you abandoned them? Some of the elementary things seem to be worthwhile. Why does the Bible say not to continually revisit these things? We need to get

past them. (Gal 4; Heb 6:1ff; also called basic or rudimentary things in Col 2:20). Use a concordance or your electronics to find if there are other places where elemental things are discussed.

Calling of God

Who does God call? Does God call everyone? Which sheep hear the shepherd's voice? Study the word call (or called, calling) in the New Testament. If you have software, combine "call" with "God" or "Jesus" in your search to see what turns up. The Bible says that the calling of God is irrevocable. Many are called but few chosen. Romans 8 says those God called he also justified. Do a thorough study of God's calling and see what you can learn.

The Father has given Christ a people

What does the Bible tell us about these people and Christ's relationship to them? What does Jesus say about these people in His prayer in John 17? Who does He pray for and who does He not? In other places what does Jesus say about those the Father has given Him? (John 10:29 for example). Can you find anywhere in the New Testament where it says when these people were given to Christ, and what will ultimately happen to them?

Promises to Abraham as applied to Christians

What were the conditions put on God's promises to Abraham? Who are the heirs of these promises? What affect did the law have on the effectiveness of these promises? What do these promises guarantee to their recipients? I believe that one of the greatest joys of the Gospel is knowing how this applies to us Christians today. (Study Romans 4 and Galatians 3)

Law as school master

Children need rules because they are too young to have internalized life principles. How does this relate to the law as school master? When was the childhood period in the history of the world? What do we have now that is analogous to being grown up and having the principles of life internalized so that we don't have to be told every move to make as adults? You'll find this explained in Galatians. What does all of this have to do with our relationship to the law? If these things are not that important, why does Paul spend so much time talking about them in Romans, Galatians as well as several other places?

Our need is to have perfect righteousness.

How do we get it? What mistake did Israel make? (Romans 10). What's wrong with our own righteous efforts? Does God take our righteousness and add enough to it to make it perfect, or does He replace it? What does it mean to be credited with Jesus' righteousness? Jesus didn't worry. Do you get the credit for His not worrying? How do we receive this benefit? Why must we have this righteousness to be saved? Find the passage where the Bible speaks of being clothed in the righteousness of Christ. What did Paul say in Philippians about not having his own righteousness. Paul talks in Philippians about not having his own righteousness but having the righteousness from God.

Christ took the penalty for our sins

What does it mean that Christ bore our sins? Is it all sins or just confessed sin? Think about what that looks like that Christ took the blame. Picture some known sin of yours and picture what it looks like that Jesus was blamed for it. How much forgiveness do we have? What does it mean that God won't impute our trespasses unto us? (2 Cor 5:19) What group of people is Paul talking about in 2 Cor 5:19? How far has he removed our sins from us? (Ps 103) Find other places where God's forgiveness is mentioned and described?

Our identity is being in Christ. Our sins and failures are not our identity.

What does it mean that we are **in** Christ? What are the implications of our being in Christ? Died with Him, buried with Him, raised with Him, seated with Him. He is our life. He is our sanctification and redemption. What do these things mean? Paul covers these things in Romans and Ephesians primarily. How does one get placed into Christ? What are the implications of our having died with Christ?

This is such an important concept for you to spend a large amount of time studying and thinking about the implications. Can you explain this to your children or friends?

Fighting Sin

The war against sin in your life is not to be fought using the law. Why not? (1 Cor 15:56; Rom 4:15; Rom 7:5, 8, 13) The Bible speaks of the need to reckon ourselves dead with Christ, etc. What does this mean and how does that help with the defeat of sin? This is directly related to the previous point about our identity. You need to really read and study thoroughly Romans 1-8, especially 4-8. Colossians 2 is helpful in this regard as well.

The church as the body of Christ literally

We share in His flesh and bones (Eph 5:30 KJV). We share His spirit. The church is the fullness of God. The church is the dwelling place of the Spirit. It's through the church that the principalities and powers know about the wisdom of God. What are the implications of all of this? (Take each phrase in this paragraph, find the Scripture, and meditate on that truth.) What gifts has God given you for use in His body? How are you using them in the day-to-day life of the church? Is the body of Christ healthier because of your functioning within it, or is it weaker and more dysfunctional?

The church gathered

What are the essential components of the gathered church? How important is it for a Christian to be involved in each of these components? I mean, should we pick and choose, or should we involve ourselves regularly in each of these essentials? How much flexibility do we have in what we include in our gathering times? How should a church be structured, i.e., what are the roles, offices, and officers to be, according to the Bible? How much modification are we allowed to have? When I was a young adult just beginning service and leadership in the local church, a missionary gave me the book, God's Work in God's Way. This book, and the Scriptures it focused on taught me to think more biblically about church structure and function. See Acts 2:42 for some key essentials. We are to speak to one another in Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. What do these means and how should we achieve that balance?

Christ – Church in marriage

We are members of the body of Christ literally. We are one flesh and one spirit with Christ, therefore husbands and wives leave parents and become one (see Ephesians 5). Marriage pictures Christ and the church. How? How should the reality of this picture direct how husbands and wives relate to each other? Divorce covers our garments with violence. (Malachi). God desires godly offspring. What is the importance of understanding this when it comes to living out our married lives? Is your marriage producing godly offspring? Is that your goal for when you do get married? How important a priority ought this to be in marriage? What characteristics of a godly marriage would show the world how Christ and the church relate?

Family

What does the Bible say about relationships in the home? What are the roles of the man and the woman, the father and mother? What is the responsibility of parents when it comes to training and discipleship of their children? How should children be involved in the worship and instruction within the church? There are many

Old Testament passages in addition to the New Testament instruction. What do these passages teach us about these things? Look for involvement of children in the gatherings of the Israelites in the Old Testament. Look at passages such as Deuteronomy 6. Check on passages that say things like, “Train up a child in the way he should go” and “raise the children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”

What does the Bible mean when it says Christ is the second, new, or last Adam?

What does it mean to be **in** Adam or **in** Christ. Paul uses phrases like “much more” when referring to Christ as the last Adam. What does the much more mean? Look for what did the first Adam bring about and how does that compare to what the Last Adam accomplished?