

The doctrine of Christ

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In Hebrews 5:11-14 the writer of Hebrews stated that his readers need milk, not solid food. Milk is for infants, *not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness*, while solid food is for the mature, *who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil*.

The milk and the meat of the word

Milk is food that has been pre-digested by a cow. When we drink milk it is easy to get its nourishment because it is already in a digested state. Meat is not like that. We have to digest it ourselves to get nourishment.

The milk of the word, then, relates to any aspects of God's word which someone else has studied, understood, learned and shared with us. Examples of the *milk of the word* include sermons, studies, commentaries, articles, books, websites etc. The *meat of the word* is what we have learned as we studied the Word of God for ourselves. Most Christians get plenty of milk, but few seriously study God's Word for themselves. Perhaps that's why so many are still immature in their faith?



The writer then states that he wants us to leave *the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity*. He lists some of the basic doctrines that all Christians should know and understand which are the basic foundations of our faith. They constitute the *doctrine of Christ (KJV)*:

- Repentance from dead works
- Faith toward God
- Instructions about baptisms
- The laying on of hands
- The resurrection of the dead
- Eternal judgment.

If we will study these doctrines for ourselves and put their principles into practice they will help form the foundations of a stable, mature and fulfilled Christian life. Unfortunately many Christians are still immature *needing others to teach them the elementary truths of God's word all over again*.

The way to Christian maturity is to feed on the word of God ourselves (the meat of the word). Solid food *is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil*. Time spent studying the *doctrine of Christ* will be time well spent! These doctrines are the foundational truths which must be embraced in our lives as prerequisites for Christian growth.

1. Repentance from dead works

The Greek word for “repentance” is *metanoia*. It means “to change the mind, or purpose, for the better”, so repentance is concerned with our attitude to and involvement in sin.

- Repentance was widely preached throughout the Bible. e.g. 2 Chronicles 7:14; Isaiah 1:16-18; Jeremiah 3:22; Joel 3:12-19; Amos 5:12-15; Jonah 3:2,10; Matthew 3:1-10.
- The first thing Jesus preached about was repentance. Matthew 4:1. When He sent the disciples out they were also to preach repentance. Mark 6:7-13.
- To become a Christian the first thing we must do is repent. Acts 2:37,38; 2 Corinthians 7:10. This means that we turn our back on sin, never willingly indulging in it again. We must also ask God to forgive us, 1 John 1:9; ask forgiveness of those we have hurt, and make restitution as required.
- One of the Holy Spirit’s roles is to convict us of sin so that we will recognise it and repent. John 16:7,8. If we repent immediately it stops sin gaining a stronghold in our lives and we are able to walk in righteousness. Romans 6:1-14.

Repentance is central in our new life in Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:17. It enables sin’s power in our lives to be broken so that we can live for Jesus, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 8:1-17. Matthew 10:39.

2. Faith toward God

Like repentance, faith is vital for becoming a Christian, and in the daily living out of our Christian lives. The Greek word for “faith” is *pistis*. It means “having a firm persuasion or conviction based on hearing”. Faith is simply hearing God speak, believing what He says, then acting in obedience to it. Faith is always imparted by the quickened, spoken Word of God. (*rhema*) Romans 10:17. It is not something that can be ‘worked up’.

- Hebrews 11 is often called the “Faith Chapter”. It describes how Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, the children of Israel, Rahab, and others heard a word from God, believed it, and then acted in obedience. They are all rightly called “heroes of the faith”.
- We are saved by faith. We believe in the Lord Jesus and put our trust in Him as Saviour. Acts 16:31; Acts 20:21.
- When we put our faith in Christ we are justified - declared righteous in God’s sight - and can have a relationship with Him. Romans 3:21-5:21. “Justification by faith” (rather than by any works that we could do), was the great hallmark of the Reformation under Martin Luther.
- We have relationship with God by faith; walk by faith, live by faith, and serve God in faith. Mark 9:14-29, Romans 1:17, 5:1, John 14:12-14, 1 John 5:4,
- All Christians have a ‘seed’ of faith in them. Romans 12:3, Luke 17:5,6. This seed has the potential to grow if planted in good soil. Luke 8:5-8. Our spiritual lives need to be cultivated by spending time in the Word of God, under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Luke 6:38. We will then see a progressive growth in our faith from *little faith* Matthew 6:30, to *great faith* Matthew 8:10, to *perfect faith* James 2:22.
- Faith must be backed up by actions. James 2:14-26. It’s not enough to believe one thing and do something else. We must practice what we believe and preach. Hebrews 4:2
- Faith is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. Galatians 5:22. The more the Holy Spirit is in control in our lives the more faith we will demonstrate.
- Faith is also a gift of the Holy Spirit. 1 Corinthians 12:9. The Holy Spirit may impart this gift so He can do miraculous things through us to benefit others. We can then believe for things which are naturally impossible, and God (for whom nothing is impossible) will bring them to pass. Mark 11:22-26. When we receive a gift of faith we hear the voice of God telling us what to say; we believe Him; we say what God tells us to say, and it comes to pass. *Have faith in God* in Mark 11:22 is literally *have the faith of God*. When God imparts His faith for a particular situation nothing can prevent His will coming to pass. Even mountains can be moved! Other examples of the gift of faith in action are 1 Kings 17:1; Acts 3:6-8, Acts 13:11....
- We can’t please God without faith. Hebrews 11:6

- Faith is worked out in love. Galatians 5:5,6. 1 Corinthians 13:13.(An interesting exercise is to find how many verses in the New Testament contain the two words 'faith' and 'love').

Faith isn't easy! We all struggle with it, and have lots of unanswered questions. But the Christian life is a moment by moment walk in faith: hearing God, believing Him and acting in obedience.

3. Doctrine of baptisms

The Greek word for baptize is *baptizo*. It means "dip, sink, immerse or plunge in". So to baptize simply means to immerse in. In the New Testament there are a few different baptisms mentioned (hence the *doctrine of baptisms*).

- **Baptism in Christ.** Galatians 3:26,27, 1 Corinthians 12:13,14. This takes place at salvation when someone repents, receives Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, and is immersed by the Holy Spirit into the Body of Christ, the Church. They are saved, become part of the Body of Christ, receive the Holy Spirit, have eternal life and become a Christian.
- **Baptism in water.** Matthew 3:15. New Christians are immersed in water to declare publicly that they are Christians and that they want to live for Christ. Symbolically this shows that they have moved from death (going down into the water) to life (coming up out of the water). In water baptism you die to sin; the power of sin from your old life is broken; and you rise to a new life of righteousness. Romans 6:3,4. The normal New Testament practice was for new Christians to be baptised in water immediately and then to be baptised in the Holy Spirit, Acts 2:38,39.
- **Baptism in the Holy Spirit.** Matthew 3:11, Acts 1:8, 2:1-4, Luke 11:13. John 7: 37-39. Christians are immersed in the Holy Spirit by the Lord Jesus Christ. To receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit you ask Jesus to fill you with the Holy Spirit, then you open yourself to the Holy Spirit and let Him fill you. The Holy Spirit comes upon you and you are filled with the Holy Spirit by faith. As the Holy Spirit comes upon you typically begin to worship God "with your spirit" i.e. speak in tongues. 1 Corinthians 14:14, John 7:37-39. As you receive this infilling of the Holy Spirit you are given power to be an effective witness for Jesus Christ. Acts 1:8.
- **Baptism in fire.** Matthew 3:11 Here you present yourself to God as a living sacrifice. Romans 12:1. Your old nature is consumed by the fire of God and you are cleansed of its power. Baptism in fire is often called having a 'sanctification experience'.

4. Laying on of hands

Laying on of hands is mentioned in both the Old and New Testaments.

- In the **Old Testament** laying on of hands took place to impart blessings or to confer authority. Examples of impartation of blessing are in Genesis 27:22-40; 46:4, 47:28-31; Deuteronomy 34:9. Examples of conferring of authority are in Genesis 24:2,9; Numbers 27:15-23. In the sacrificial system hands were laid on the sacrifices by the priests. Symbolically this identified the sacrifice with the one who was making the offering and imparted their sin to it. The innocent, sinless sacrifice died and the guilty sinner went free. (A wonderful fore-shadowing of the perfect sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. John 1:29). Hands were also laid on the priests when they were being consecrated. Exodus 29:1-46. This imparted God's strength and authority to them so they could serve Him as priests.
- In the **New Testament** laying on of hands was important in many areas of Christian ministry and service. Often the baptism of the Holy Spirit was received through the laying on of hands. e.g. Acts 8:14-20; 9:17-19; 19:6. Laying on of hands also took place when healing the sick Mark 16:18; James 5:14,15; Luke 8:44-46; Acts 3:6,7; Acts 19:11,12; It was also part of commissioning people for the work of the Lord Acts 13:1-4, and in the ordination of deacons Acts 6:1-7.

God can flow His blessing through you as you lay hands on others while ministering to them so the ministry of laying on of hands is not to be taken lightly or done in haste. It should always be done under the clear guidance of the Holy Spirit. 1 Timothy 5:22. That's because when it happens there is some impartation. e.g. of power, blessing or authority.

5. Resurrection of the dead

The Greek word for resurrect is *egeirontai*. It means “to waken, raise up, arouse”. The word for resurrection is *anastasis*. It means “a raising up, a causing to be made alive from a state of death”.

The Bible speaks of a number of resurrections:

- **The resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.** Jesus was crucified and rose again on the third day. 1 Corinthians 15:3,4; 2 Timothy 2:8; Acts 2:24; Acts 10:39-41; Colossians 2:12.. The resurrection of Jesus means He is now alive, and proves that He was who He said he was: the Son of God. Romans 1:4, Acts 17:31; Romans 8:34. Through the resurrection Jesus has given us salvation and the hope of eternity with Him in heaven, 1 Peter 1:3,4. He was raised from the dead and now has eternal life and so can we. 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17; 2 Corinthians 4:14; Ephesians 1:18-20.
- **The spiritual resurrection of Christians.** 1 Corinthians 15:21-23. We pass from spiritual death because of our sin, Romans 6:23, into spiritual life - relationship to God. This is a spiritual resurrection. Because Jesus lives we do too. John 5:21-26; Ephesians 2:4-6; Colossians 2:12,13; 1 John 3:14. This takes place when we receive Jesus Christ as our Saviour.
- **Resurrection of the body.**

- **For Christians.** When Jesus returns we will be resurrected and will have a new body in heaven. 1 Corinthians 15:20-23; Philippians 3:20,21. Our resurrection body will not be a natural body with all of its limitations. It will be heavenly, immortal and incorruptible. 1 Corinthians 15:44-50. We will be able to stand before the Lord complete and whole in every way!

When Christians die we go to Heaven awaiting the resurrection of our bodies. 2 Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:21-23; Hebrews 12:22-24. The moment at the Second Coming when we receive our new bodies is called the **First Resurrection**. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; John 11:24; 2 Corinthians 5:1-10; Luke 14:14; Revelation 20:4-6. This has been the great hope for God's people throughout history! Philippians 3:11.

- **For those who died before Christ.** When people died their body went into the grave (Hebrew *qeber*) and their soul and spirit went down to *sheol* (Greek *Hades*) – the abode of the dead. Genesis 3:19; Psalm 55:15; Proverbs 15:24. Sheol was apparently in two parts: paradise (a place of comfort for the righteous), and the pit (a place of torment for the wicked). Luke 16:19-31; Psalm 116:3. When Jesus died on the cross He descended into Hades and raised the righteous souls up to heaven to live with Him forever. Luke 23:43; Acts 2:27; Ephesians 4:8-10.
- **For those who have died outside of Christ.** Those who have rejected Christ will also be raised from the dead. At the **Second Resurrection** they will be raised and will face God's judgment be for the Great White Throne. Their judgment will be to spend eternity in hell. Revelation 20:11-15.

Christians have been resurrected to new life in Christ. We are encouraged to learn more of the power of this resurrection and to look forward to our great hope: the resurrection of our bodies and eternity in heaven! Philippians 3:10,11.



6. Eternal Judgment

The Greek words for judgment are *krisis* and *krima*. *Krisis* is “the process of separating, sifting or distinguishing evidence” while *krima* is “the decision, condemnation, or verdict resulting from such an investigation”. In the Bible judgment is often made by appointed Judges, but ‘eternal judgment’ is only made by God Himself.

God is righteous and all-knowing so His judgments are perfect and just. Psalm 7:1-17. He has committed all judgment to Jesus, John 5:22,23, and judgment is made on the basis of our response to the word of God. John 12:46-48.

The key passage describing the nature of God's judgment is Romans 2:1-16. This shows that:

- We have no right to judge others. If we do we just condemn ourselves because we are just as sinful as they are. Matthew 7:1-5.
- God is *kind* towards us and wants us to repent of our sins. If we don't repent we are storing up *judgment on ourselves*.
- God's judgment is *righteous*, and based on *truth*. Psalm 96:13; 9:7,8.
- God's judgment is based on the *works* we have done. Those who have persistently done good will receive *glory, honour and immortality*. Those who are *self-seeking* and *reject the truth* or who *follow evil* will experience God's *wrath and anger*. *There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil.... but glory, honour and peace for everyone who does good*. Works that are judged include the state of our hearts, 1 Samuel 16:7; Hebrews 4:12; how we have used our time and possessions, Matthew 6:19,20, Ephesians 5:16; our faithfulness in prayer, Luke 18:1; whether we have sought to save the lost, 2 Corinthians 5:11; etc. All of these are related to whether or not we have obeyed the Lord and followed His word.
- God doesn't show *favouritism*, and treats everyone the same, regardless of whether they are Jews or Gentiles.
- God's judgment is according to the light we have received. The more light we receive the more responsible we are. Those who have never heard of God's standards still have His law written on their hearts and will be judged accordingly.

God's judgment takes place for two reasons:

- **To purify and restore to fellowship.** God chastens, disciplines, punishes and judges so that we will repent of our sins and come back to Him. Hebrews 12:1-13; 1 Corinthians 11:32. On the cross Jesus became sin and took the judgment that we deserved – death – so that we might be reconciled to God. Romans 6:23; 2 Corinthians 5:21-13. On the basis of this we have been justified – declared righteous in God's sight - and can have un-hindered fellowship with Him. Romans 3:21-26; 5:1, 12-19; 8:1-4.
- **To condemn sinfulness.** Those who refuse to accept God's salvation heap up judgment upon themselves. If God didn't spare His only Son how could he spare those who refuse His offer of eternal life? John 3:18, 36; 5:24-29. The end result of human sinfulness and rejection of God's offer of salvation is separation from God, spiritual death and eternal damnation. Romans 6:23; Revelation 20: 11-15.

A number of judgments will take place when Jesus returns:

- **Judgment of the nations.** Matthew 25:31-46; Joel 3:2, 9-17.
- **Judgment of unbelievers.** Those whose names are not written in the Lamb's Book of Life will experience the ultimate judgment and be cast into the Lake of Fire. Revelation 20:11-15.
- **Judgment of believers.** When we stand before the *Judgment Seat of Christ* it will not be for a judgment of our sins. (That judgment has already been poured out on Jesus at the cross). Rather, it will be a judgment of our works to determine our rewards in heaven. 2 Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:10-12; 1 Corinthians 3:13-15.; Matthew 25:21. We will receive crowns as our rewards. These crowns could be incorruptible, 1 Corinthians 9:25; rejoicing, 1 Thessalonians 2:19,20; glory, 1 Peter 5:2-4; righteousness, 2 Timothy 4:8.

How wonderful that we don't need to fear God's judgment! And how imperative it is that we share the gospel with others so they have the opportunity to receive Christ, and not come under God's eternal judgment.



Going on to maturity

The writer to the Hebrews encourages us *to leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity*. The Greek word for mature is *teleios* which means “mature, perfect, fully formed, having full growth”.

The *doctrine of Christ* forms the essential fundamental doctrines upon which Christianity maturity is built. They are the doctrines which make any system of belief “Christian” e.g, 2 John 8-11

The early Church started with a perfect revelation culminating in the writing of the New Testament, Gradually, throughout history important doctrines and practices were lost from the Church as the Bible was rejected as authoritative, From the time of the Reformation God has been restoring to His Church that which was lost. We are in *the time of the restoration of all things*. Acts 3:21 when God is bringing His Church back to maturity. We study *the doctrine of Christ* because this is the foundation upon which we build: as we *go on to maturity*.

Discussion questions

What is the difference between the milk of the word, and the meat of the word? How can we interact with God’s word in a way that could be considered milk? What about meat?

Conservative Jews try to learn the Torah (first five books of the Old Testament) off by heart, and Muslims try to learn the Koran off by heart. Contrast this with the way that Christians approach their Bibles.

How much does our interaction with, and study of, the Bible influence our Christian maturity?

Why are the doctrines in the Hebrews 6:1,2 called the *doctrine of Christ*? The NIV translates this as *elementary teachings about Christ*. If these doctrines are “elementary”, what kind of doctrines could be considered advanced?

Put the essential teaching of each of the doctrines in your own words. How does each doctrine affect your life?

What can you do to grow in maturity in Christ?

What have you learnt from your study of the doctrine of Christ? How will you apply this in future?