

FIRST PRINCIPLES



OF THE ORACLES OF GOD

Thematic Studies
In Bible Basics

Prepared By Jeff Smith

First Principles Of The Oracles Of God Thematic Studies In Bible Basics

Lesson 1 – General Introduction

When the most basic concepts or elements of some topic are discussed, we often refer to it as the “*ABC’s*.” The image most likely to pop into our minds are those early days in elementary school when we first learned the alphabet. One must master “A...B...C...” before he can be proficient at spelling, writing, or reading. This type of logical thinking has been applied to all sorts of subjects.

- Chefs on T.V. talk about the “*ABC’s of Cooking*” – principles one must master before he can prepare those masterpiece dishes found on menus in fancy restaurants.
- Coaches preach about the “*ABC’s of Football*” – disciplines of blocking, tackling, etc. Entire spring training periods are often devoted to developing these skills before the team is allowed its first glimpse into the playbook to learn all the detailed schemes the coaching staff has in mind for them to use in actual games.
- Lawyers argue among themselves the “*ABC’s of Law*” – ethics that must be fully grasped before one can engage another attorney in the courtroom, or understand before one can present his case before judge and jury.

Thinking along these lines is even appropriate when discussing Biblical truths. In fact, this area of study is far more important than cuisine, sports, or law because the consequences of failure are more than just a ruined dish that tastes terrible, a lost game, or a lost court case that may require monetary settlement. The consequences of failing to grasp “*Biblical ABC’s*” could result in a soul spending all eternity in Hell, separated from heaven and the God who dwells there. Making it even more personal...that “lost soul” could be yours, mine, or belonging to someone we dearly love.

The “*ABC’s*” of anything are the most basic of fundamentals. They are foundational truths that are simple to comprehend, yet so important that without them, later principles cannot exist or even be taught. They absolutely must be mastered *first*.

We believe the Bible contains a well-known passage whose context provides the perfect illustration of what we call the “*ABC’s Of Bible Basics*.” The passage is Heb. 5:11 – 6:3. On the pages that follow, please consider the brief exposition that we believe sets forth the context of this passage. Afterwards, please answer the review questions on pages 3-4.

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Exposition of Heb. 5:11 – 6:3

- Many important truths need to be taught, understood, and practiced for one to be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ. The author is trying to establish the high priesthood of Jesus Christ...a thought he had previously introduced (cp. 2:17; 4:14-15), and one that had been prophesied from long ago (cp. Psa. 110:4). Establishing this link in the minds of his Jewish readers was necessary...they needed to be reminded not to return to the Aaronic *physical* priesthood of the Law of Moses, and to stay committed to the Messianic *spiritual* priesthood of the gospel of Christ.

The priesthood of Christ was “after the order” or “according to the order” (*in the likeness of*) the priesthood of Melchizedek (5:10). Because he was an Old Testament character, Melchizedek’s attributes as both king & priest (cp. Gen. 14) would have to be understood to make the connection to Christ...“Concerning him (Melchizedek) we have much to say...” (5:11a). The readers’ ability to fully grasp Melchizedek’s priesthood would greatly help them understand Christ’s priesthood.

- Sadly, sometimes a teacher must reluctantly pause in an important discussion because his readers are not able to understand what is being taught. Such was the case with these Jewish Christians. Regarding his teaching on Melchizedek, the author states “...it is hard to explain since you have become dull of hearing” (5:11b). “Dullness of hearing” is the equivalent to being “sluggish” or spiritually lazy (cp. 6:12) [*same word in the original Greek text*].

Notice also this “condition” was something they had brought on themselves. They had “become” dull of hearing; they weren’t born that way, nor did they come in the Lord’s kingdom in such a condition. They had stopped listening. Therefore, they had also stopped learning...and stopped growing. It wasn’t because what was being taught was too hard. Often, this is the excuse many will give for not even trying in certain Bible classes. Their failure to *want* to learn was the reason why they could not comprehend what was being taught, not because the “curriculum” was too advanced beyond their ability to understand and learn.

- What made this most disappointing and tragic is the author describes people who shouldn’t have even been in this dilemma in the first place. He was not addressing “new converts” or those who were still new to the faith. “For though by this time you ought to be teachers...” (5:12a). Obviously, enough time had elapsed that they should have been actively teaching others. Yet sadly, they themselves still needed “...for someone to teach again the elementary (first) principles of the oracles of God...” (5:12b).

There is nothing wrong with being a “babe in Christ” and “on the bottle of the sincere milk of the word” if one is new to the faith...at some point, all Christians have been “babes” at their new birth (5:12c; cp. 1 Pet. 2:1-3). But that is not the situation faced by the writer of Hebrews.

The cause of their “dullness of hearing” and having to be on a “milk diet” is that they were “*not accustomed to the word of righteousness...*” (5:13). They had failed to behave as an “adult meat eater” in their spiritual growth. The writer describes mature disciples as those “...*who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil*” (5:14).

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If we stop and carefully consider the Hebrews writer's rebuke of these Jewish Christians, we also are made to realize something else...a point that is very appropriate for our present generation. We must not fall into the trap into thinking that length of time as a Christian or "heritage" enjoyed in a family with generations of Christians will cause us to grow from a "spiritual baby" into a "spiritually mature disciple." Judging from the lack of growth and involvement in the work and attendance in a local church, some present-day Christians seem to have this mentality. Maturity in Christ (*the ability to "eat the strong meat"*) will only be accomplished "by reason of use" of a disciple's senses, training them to know good from evil. That is the only way spiritual maturity will come to a saint (cp. 1 Thess. 5:21-22; Rom. 12:1-2; 1 Pet. 2:11; 4:1-4).

- "Elementary teaching" (i.e. "*Biblical ABC's*") must eventually be left behind, and students of the Scripture must "*press on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of...*" those basic principles (6:1-2). Each disciple must grow from childhood to adulthood (cp. Eph 4:11-15). God has made all necessary provisions for this growth to take place. This is what made the situation faced by the readers of the Hebrews epistle all the more sad & tragic. One must eventually be finished with laying a foundation, and finally get around to building the house. All this can be done "*...if God permits*" (6:3). He does...and we can!!

The answer to such a spiritual dilemma of "dullness of hearing" or "spiritual laziness" is dedicated training of the senses to properly discern good and evil. The lessons planned in these Biblical studies will be aimed at reviewing some of the most fundamental and basic concepts of New Testament Christianity. We're not specifically discussing those "first principles" of how one becomes a Christian (those "steps of salvation"). In fact, we'll not spend much time on those important truths at all. We're going to review the "*ABC's of the gospel.*" We're going to address bedrock principles that are necessary to grasp what the Scripture teaches overall...points of reference New Testament disciples of Christ need to know so that they can "*rightly divide (handle accurately) the word of truth*" (2 Tim. 2:15). Yes, sometimes the Scripture contains "hard" teaching (cp. 2 Pet. 3:16). Peter classified some of Paul's teachings as "hard." That doesn't mean they were "impossible." Surely we are able to tell the difference. Whether it will be hard or easy for each of us to successfully understand these basic principles, it is a "journey" we must be willing to take so that we "...may grow up in all things into Him who is the Head – Christ..." (Eph. 4:15).

Perhaps these Biblical lessons will be nothing more for you than a review. Review is good, even for seasoned saints (cp. 2 Pet. 1:12-15; 3:1-2).

- Experienced Christians should have already mastered these concepts because enough time has elapsed that their senses need to be properly trained to discern good from evil.
- New converts or inexperienced disciples may not be as familiar with these truths. They may even struggle with them somewhat. That is okay...as long as they put forth the effort. With such effort they will be able to lay a lasting foundation and then press on to other topics.

Review Questions On Heb. 5:11 – 6:3

1. In the context of Heb. 5, what must the author begin to do at v. 11? Why was this necessary?

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2. When the author mentions "dull of hearing," what do you think is meant by this? (cp. 6:12) How is this "condition" further explained in 5:13-14? What is the reason given for the inability of these Christians to being able to understand what the author wanted to present about Melchizedek? (5:14)

3. What "obligation" is mentioned in 5:12? What made this "ought" a fair expectation?

4. Research question: to illustrate the importance of each disciple being able to teach (*the task of teaching is far too important a work to be left to one man – i.e., the preacher*), find other N.T. passages that show the involvement or command of individual Christians engaged in teaching.

5. What must eventually be done with "elementary principles?" (6:1-2) How will this be accomplished? (6:3)