

How to understand the marvelously gifted Apostle Paul and the doctrines that depend on his writings.

The Apostle Paul is incredibly important to our faith. Many of the “doctrines” (for lack of a better word) come directly from Paul. I say “for lack of a better word” because the concepts, teachings, doctrines, or however we call them are more than doctrines. They are foundational. They are facts of our faith that we depend upon for our identity and our theology. And they are things that are either not found elsewhere in scripture or are not put in the New Covenant context in those other places. Today we’re going to talk about many of these topics. But first, we need to establish some pre-requisites.

The first pre-requisite is you must have a basic understanding of everything from Genesis to the end of the Book of John before referencing Paul. Paul was a Pharisee Rabbi trained under Gamaliel. His morning, noon, and night was Torah. He knew the bible like he knew his right hand. And he knew it like a Rabbi. He was on par to become the head Rabbi of Israel before his conversion. This is why he was able to command an audience in every synagogue he walked into. He was known as an authority throughout the synagogues, which were ran by the Rabbis.

To obtain this first pre-requisite, simply read the Bible. And read it in a modern translation. I prefer the NASB95 but the NASB is also good. So is the ESV. You want to have something that’s been updated since the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered because they have provided more clarity to the Old Testament. And you want to have something that you can simply understand. Bibles with archaic language or that have been customized to drive you into a particular perspective can be stumbling blocks or create false impressions. Another benefit to these newer, scholarly translations is that they often make note of when the NT is quoting the OT. That because really important and eye opening when you realize how much of the NT is really a citation of the OT. The point here is to have a foundation about the scriptures in a manner you can comprehend, and that the information stays linear when you get to Paul.

The second pre-requisite is to have a rudimentary understanding on how first century Jews communicated. This is very important because the NT, while written in Greek, is written in the culture of Jewish literature. And yes, I mean Jewish literature, not Hebrew or Israelite. When first century Jews quoted scripture, they didn’t have chapters and verses for reference points. If they wanted to refer to a section of earlier scripture, they would often just say a line from the verse or passage they were referencing.

Slide 2 "Moses said, 'THE LORD GOD WILL RAISE UP FOR YOU A PROPHET LIKE ME FROM YOUR BRETHREN; TO HIM YOU SHALL GIVE HEED to everything He says to you. 'And it will be that every

soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.' "And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and his successors onward, also announced these days. "It is you who are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'AND IN YOUR SEED ALL THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH SHALL BE BLESSED.' "For you first, God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways." (Act 3:22-26)

This is from my preferred translation, the NASB95. Peter is speaking to the Jews at Solomon's portico in the Temple. The verses in all caps are direct references to the OT. "Raising up a prophet" is Deuteronomy 18:18. The "in your seed" part is Genesis 22:18. We can see that Peter is communicating in a way that shows both he and the hearers are expected to be completely fluent in the Torah. For those of us who have spent time studying the Old Testament, aka the Tanakh, we can see that more of these verses should be in all caps than there is. The part about "it shall be that every soul..." is part of the Deut 18 prophesy and Isaiah 59: 20-21 is being reference with the last sentence so that could be in all caps, too!

You can see by being familiar with the Old Testament, it brings to life that the Messiah is tied directly to these OT verses. If you have a familiarity with the OT before getting into the NT, you will see this a lot. Having a bible that identifies when these things happen is a big help to understanding. The New Testament itself is relatively small in relationship to the OT. This is because the NT writers are not making a new religion but they are building upon the existing faith of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. When we get to Paul's writings, these becomes more important because he quotes the OT heavily so to fully understand what he's saying, we need to flip back to the passages being referenced and read them in their entirety to see what's really meant.

The next pre-requisite is to understand that the OT is written and given with the intent of being interpreted and being applied in more than just the literal sense. Verses can be cited or re-applied in a number of different ways. They can be adapted as metaphors, analogies, hints at greater understanding, or prophetic or "yet to be revealed" sense. And if something is revealed as a larger topic once, it can happen again to the same verse or concept. The divorce commandment is a great example of this. Deuteronomy 24: 1-5 explains the law of divorce, that if a woman remarries after being divorced there is no way for her to go back to her original husband. This is what it means in the literal. This commandment is applied as an analogy when Yahweh get's upset at Israel and says He divorces her. This is not a literal application because marriage between the Eternal and a nation is absurd. Yahweh uses marriage and divorce to illustrate how angry it makes Him when His people go after other gods. And Yahweh takes Israel back after the hypothetical divorce, which is not possible in the literal. Marriage is also used as analogy by Paul and others when the return of the

Messiah is spoken of. The marriage supper of the Lamb is not a literal marriage, but a representation of the joy of the union between the Messiah and the church upon His return. Yeshua is our adopted brother and the church is made up of men and women, so this being a literal marriage is absurd. However, applying this concept as a metaphor is just fine. But I wanted to make the point that, just in our modern parlance, many verses are not meant to be taken literally at all. So we need to be aware of that and the other ways scriptures can be applied prior to delving into Paul because he employs all these literary devices.

I know I just said a lot about pre-requisites. But just this knowledge alone will enrich your reading and study of the New Testament. You don't need a magical, mystical translation of the bible. You just need one that is up to date, relatively literal, and easy to read. Knowing that the first century Jews, the authors of the NT, wrote in a contemporary style of writing is another benefit. And realizing that not all verses or applications of verses are meant to be literal frees us up to realize the bible authors were normal human beings who communicated normally.

Slide 3 For you are all sons of God through faith in Messiah Yeshua. For all of you who were baptized into Messiah have clothed yourselves with Messiah. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Messiah Yeshua. And if you belong to Messiah, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise. (Gal 3:26-29)

Still slide 3 So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. (Rom 8:12-14)

Without Paul, bluntly, we do not make any sense. Aside from two sentences, one at the end of Matthew and one in the end of Luke, we really don't have any justification at all for our being grafted in. Paul writes about our adoption many, many times. The book of Acts was not written by Paul but it is largely about Paul and his journeys. Peter gets the vision not to call any man unclean in the book of Acts, but after that, Paul is the apostle to the Gentiles. This is what I mean by foundational doctrines or even more than doctrines. This can't be overstated. While most read the New Testament that it applies to all mankind, which it does, the verses we have that explain how are almost exclusively from Paul. Without him explaining how this happened, from the Old Testament, then the Messiah would only have come for the Jews.

Slide 4 For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and all ate

the same spiritual food; and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Messiah. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness. Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. (1Co 10:1-6)

This point about Paul being point for our being grafted in can't be overstated. His letters don't just tell us we are adopted children of Abraham, it's his foundational perspective. "brethren, our fathers were under the cloud" to a mixed church in a pagan city is an amazing shift. Have you ever heard any Jewish person speak this way, that gentiles and Jews are both children of God and heirs according to the promise? I have not. In fact, the Messianic Jewish teachers still to this day teach a wall of separation. But the biblical truth is that by accepting Yeshua as the Messiah and being baptized, we are reborn into the family of God and join Israel in both the promises and the curses. Without Paul's writings, I can't imagine how we would apply the Gospels to ourselves.

Slide 5 For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Messiah all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Messiah the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. (1Co 15:21-24)

The entire chapter of 1 Corinthians 15 ties in the plan of salvation. This chapter, coupled with Paul's other writings on this topic, provide the clearest data we have on how the next steps of prophecy, how the Messiah fulfilled the Spring Holy Days, and how this mechanism or framework of events have meaning. Paul compliments Revelation and even gives us better insight than that prophetic work. 1st Corinthians 15 is pivotal. It explains how Yeshua's death proves the resurrection of the dead, that it happened on first fruits and fulfilled first fruits, and that the next step are His at His return. Then comes the end, the second resurrection, the day of judgment. It's impossible for me to imagine how we could understand these things without the Apostle Paul.

Slide 6 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Messiah; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Messiah. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Messiah, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper

working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.
(Eph 4:11-16)

The New Testament assembly rests entirely upon Paul. The Torah commands a holy convocation on Shabbat but doesn't give us much more than that to go on. The synagogue system was established after the return from Babylon and it became a mainstay for Jews living in Judea or abroad. Yeshua begins His ministry in a synagogue in Luke 4 and He clearly sanctions this practice. We know the faith was going to go forth through the synagogues because Yeshua said the apostles would be thrown out of them. But once we got thrown out, then what? Without Paul, we wouldn't know what they did nor have a pattern for what to do unless we resorted to using historical documents. In a few of Paul's letters, we can piece together what their assemblies were like and they appear to be similar to synagogues. We know that Paul established local leadership in cities and they had people doing a host of things, just like we do today.

Slide 7 This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Messiah Yeshua, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time. For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying) as a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth. (1Ti 2:3-7)

This one doesn't depend on Paul but he's incredibly clear and succinct about it. We could derive this information from the Gospels and the other letters but it would take a little work. This is the Gospel and the point of Paul's ministry. I have to wonder if he knew he was going to be the preacher and apostle to billions and billions of gentiles? At the resurrection, I bet he will have mixed emotions. Gladness for how far his preaching went and for how long, and sadness at how many people took his words and created strange and antinomian doctrines.

Those four things are the big items that depend on Paul. And they are very big. I'm sure there are others. Many people have problems understanding Paul. I do, too. He was a super intelligent, super inspired minister and he communicated on a level we don't share. We are also reading somebody else's mail. His letters were to churches that had problems and their own unique relationship to Paul and the apostles. In museums today we have mail to and from soldiers from wars in the last few hundred years. We can understand when they are speaking of current events, especially if they are speaking about things that are historical records. But we don't understand the interpersonal dynamics between the two individuals. In the case of Paul's letters, he's writing to groups of people in cities with cultures that died out 1800 years ago. We can see him answering controversies, but we don't know why the controversies arose and oftentimes how they were resolved. When Paul is

writing about doctrine, we should pay close attention. When he is writing about group controversies, we must be careful not to read too much into things.

If you apply the bible study hints I gave at the beginning to Paul's letters, there is much more to be gleaned than what I covered today. The way he references and applies Torah is mastery. Understanding the rest of the Bible and how it was written and communicated before delving deeply into Paul's writing will bring a richness that you don't expect!