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Q&A#37 Bumper Q&A Episode!!

September 2, 2018



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Today's questions:

1. Does the Scripture teach that the Holy Spirit indwells believers individually or corporately?
2. What do you think about ghosts, UFOs, bigfoot, etc?
3. You mentioned you like to listen to the Bible. Do you have a recommendations on recordings?
4. Which translation of scripture do you use for memorization?
5. You wrote a series in 2006 called "Election, Etc." which I have found very interesting and helpful. But 12 years is a long time, so I was wondering to what extent it still represents your views on election.
6. Reading a recent article by a rabbi, I noted that the interpretation of various aspects of OT is quite different from ours. If the Torah was given to them, shouldn't we let Jewish scholars teach us Christians?
7. Do you generally read from a "Reader's bible" or from a "regular" bible with chapter and verse references?
8. Have you engaged much with the Radical Orthodoxy crowd, like John Milbank and company?

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Transcript

Welcome back. Today I thought I'd do a rapid fire question and answer video. I'll answer several questions that wouldn't take a full video, but could be answered in a couple of minutes.

And so the first one is, does the scripture teach that the Holy Spirit indwells believers individually or corporately? I have in mind 1 Corinthians 6 19-20 as well as 2 Corinthians 6 14-18, which though popularly understood to be speaking to individuals, seems to me to be talking about the Spirit's presence among the church as a whole. Or is this a distinction without a difference? I think it's both. If we look in 1 Corinthians 6 19-20, the context there is the man who has sexual relations with the prostitute and talking about the body being the temple of the Holy Spirit.

In that context, I think it seems to be fairly clearly talking about individuals. It's not just talking about the gathered church or the church as a whole. I think it primarily refers to the church as, I think the indwelling of the Spirit primarily relates to the church as a whole, but also relates to individuals.

And it's individuals' bodies that are the members of the Holy Spirit. We present our bodies, plural, as a living sacrifice, singular. And so our bodies are members of Christ.

And that distinction, individual-corporate, is not always the most helpful one. It can often suggest that you've got a lot of detached individuals joined together to form a corporate body, whereas we're members of a body, which is a different sort of metaphor. A member is always implicated in the body of which they are part.

An individual can stand independent of that body and still be what they are, whereas an eye cannot truly be an eye if it's detached from the rest of the body. It can't function as such. And so the indwelling of the Holy Spirit relates to all the members of the body, but as members of the body, not as detached individuals.

What do you think about ghosts, UFOs, Bigfoot, etc? Are they evil entities? Are they entities at all? Or is there some sort of psychological explanation for people's experience of them? Well, we do have references to spirits and ghosts within scripture, even if that's just within the understandings of the disciples and the early church. I think there is some reality to these things. We know that there are evil spirits at work in the world.

When it comes to cryptozoology, I'm sceptical about the claims of the existence of many creatures, but it would not entirely surprise me if they discovered a yeti or something along those lines. I think there's reasons to believe it could exist. We must also ask when

people have witnessed some of these things, whether they are witnessing angelic phenomena.

It's not entirely clear. How would we categorise these things if we saw them? Do angels have technology? That's another interesting question. When we're addressing these issues, though, my first instinct is to be very sceptical of claims that are made.

There's usually some psychological explanation, I think. But that should not lead us to dismiss the existence of ghosts and evil spirits, things like that. I think they do exist.

Whether they mean the same thing as what people think, and many people's understandings of ghosts are quite problematic from a biblical perspective, that doesn't mean that we should dismiss everything that's claimed on that front. You mentioned that you like to listen to the Bible. Do you have a recommendation on recordings? Not particularly.

I've always listened to, almost always listened, to Alexander Scoby, just because it's what I have and what I was used to. What translation of scripture do you use for memorisation? Again, I use the New King James Version because that's what I grew up with and it's what I'm most familiar with. The version of the Bible that I have now is the same version I was given when I was eight years old.

This Bible is the Bible I use for absolutely everything and it's pretty much falling apart. But it is a New King James Version and it's what I'm familiar with and it's very difficult to change version once you've memorised so much of a particular version. It's very frustrating to read another version and realise all these slight changes of familiar verses.

You wrote a series in 2006 called Election Etc which I found very interesting and helpful but 12 years is a long time so I was wondering to what extent it still represents your views on election. I haven't revisited it but I think it would loosely be along the same lines. I think my concerns within that series, among other things, were to root the doctrine of election first of all within Christ and his work, within the moment of redemptive history that Christ brings about through his redemptive activity and the resurrection and ascension, death resurrection and ascension, and also to understand how closely it is related to the doctrine of the church.

Many people draw their understanding of election around detached individuals and I think they miss what's going on in scripture. That it's very much a doctrine that has its ground in redemptive history not just in eternity past and playing out throughout history as if a printout of some image that was on the screen of a computer. But there are ways in which I would tweak it, things that I would emphasise differently and other things like that.

What I think needs to be held clearly is that God is sovereign in all of these things, that

the centre of gravity of the doctrine of election should not be in the detached individual but should be in Christ, the church and the fullness of time that Christ brings about. There's a lot more that I could say on that and maybe if someone asked me a question I could produce a video on the subject. Reading a recent article by a rabbi I noted that the interpretation of various aspects of the Old Testament is quite different from ours.

If the Torah was given to them shouldn't we let Jewish scholars teach us Christians? There's a lot bound up in this question. I think first of all there are a lot of different views among rabbis, Jewish scholars and others and there's often this appeal to the rabbis as a generic group, as if they were some manic pixie dream teachers for Christian theologians. Often in a certain part of progressivism you see them appealed to in this sort of way, in a way that's fairly uncritical, fairly unaware of the actual character of the traditions that are being appealed to.

It's really just because the Jews are supposed to have some special secret source that helps them to understand scripture properly. That's just not the case. There are ways in which we can learn from gifted Jewish teachers but there's nothing, the ways that people talk about Jewish or Hebrew thinking and Greek thinking and those sorts of polarizations, they're very unhelpful and the assumption that simply because teaching comes from a Jewish background that it will be illuminating or helpful, that's not the case.

That said, there are a great many helpful resources that come from Jewish thinkers and we'd be foolish if we were not engaging with them. But we need to be critical, we need to recognize there's nothing about the fact that they're Jewish as such that gives them some special insight. Rather it's the quality of the study that they're doing and you'll find plenty of great rabbis and Jewish scholars that we should be reading but it's not the same thing as presuming just on the basis of their identity that or the fact that they were given the Torah that they are the people that we should be listening to.

Also as Christians we have an understanding of the Old Testament that occurs as it's unveiled by Christ and so there's a deeper understanding that we can enter into of the text simply because there is no longer a veil resting over the text, there's no longer a veil over Moses as Paul talks about in 2 Corinthians 3. This is very important so the text makes more sense in the light of Christ. There are many ways in which we can learn from Jewish scholars but there will always be something of that veil resting over the text and so we need to be cautious of appeals that presume that there's some special insight just because they have some greater connection to the origins of the text. However what they do have is a for the most part a better knowledge of the traditions of reading of the Old Testament, a better knowledge of the Old Testament more generally because most Christians have not studied the Old Testament to any significant degree and it's been a neglected part of the Bible.

They also have knowledge of certain biblical traditions and institutions and rituals from a

lived perspective that's significant. They can have more grounding within the word of the text because they know Hebrew and they're familiar with certain of the details surrounding it. They're familiar also with a body of tradition that can really be illuminating for our understanding because they've been engaging with this text for a long time and all of that can be helpful but I don't believe that there's anything about the fact that they are Jewish as such or the fact that they received the text originally that gives them some special privilege over Christians in terms of as interpreters.

We need to be careful of that attitude and many of the ways in which Hebrew-Greek dichotomies and these other sorts of things have been set up. It's been fairly uncritical, it's been fairly careless and we need to be a lot more cautious about taking those sorts of approaches that simply privilege certain people of certain backgrounds as interpreters just because they have a supposed magical mindset that gives them an insight into the text. That's just not the case.

As a follow-up to your video on Bible software which also included your reflections upon how our engagement with the form of the scriptures shapes our engagement with the scriptures themselves, I was hoping you might give some insight into your daily engagement with the scriptures. Do you generally read from a reader's Bible or from a regular Bible with chapter and verse references? Perhaps both but for different reasons and with different ends in mind. One concern I have with using reader's Bibles regularly is that they can make finding passages to which I'd like to return very difficult.

Well actually that's one of the benefits of the reader's Bible, it forces you to find your bearings in a different way. When you're used to a Bible with verses and chapters it means that you can always pinpoint as if on a map where you are within the text whereas in a reader's Bible you have to know the itinerary, you have to know the landmarks of the text, you have to know your surroundings very well and that leads you to have a better knowledge of the text more generally. It forces you to find your bearings without relying upon the sat-nav as it were or some other facility that enables you to pinpoint as if from a great height where you are within the text in some system of measurement that's fairly abstracted from the substance of what's within the text but getting your bearings by referencing a particular context, saying the things that have surrounded this particular event and knowing what chapter, the events of which chapter succeed on the events of which other chapter, all of that helps us and it helps us to know the Bible in a different sort of way, knowing it in terms of full stories and narratives and arguments rather than in terms of very much piecemeal or detached or atomized texts which is how many people engage the scriptures today particularly because they've never actually had to find their bearings and learning to find your bearings within the text is good.

I tend to use for just if I'm quickly referencing something, I will use my personal Bible, I will use an old New King James Bible, the one I mentioned earlier and I will use that for

my personal Bible reading much of the time as well. I have an ESV reader's Bible which I will use to read whole books through and I find that very helpful. It's a beautifully produced Bible, it has a very elegant form to it, it is in some ways like reading a novel, a similar sort of experience and there are some limitations to that, it's a different thing from hearing the Bible read loud.

I will listen to the Bible on occasions, not so much now, I tend to when I listen I'll go for a walk. So at the moment I'm going for walks and listening to John Barrett's series on Joshua, Judges and Ruth which I'm finding superb, I might comment on that at some point in the next few days and when I'm doing reference or study work I will either use, I will generally use Bible works for that. So I have Bible works up on my computer at any time and I'll reference that and move around within the text there, I find it a very good tool for critical study but in terms of my regular reading it will be my personal Bible and New King James Version or it will be my ESV reader's Bible if I'm reading a longer section of scripture.

I also like reading the King James Version simply because of the poetry of the text, it's a text that is written for the ear in a way that most modern Bibles are not and for that reason alone even if I have differences with the, it wouldn't be my preferred textual tradition, it is a text that is very good for getting under your skin, very good for getting into your ear and it captures something about the form of the text, that the text is poetic and that I think is very important. I've read John Milbank, several of his things, I've found him very helpful at points, he's certainly a stimulating writer and he's the sort of person who's a valuable interlocutor whether you agree with him or not, he is worth dialoguing with, you'll learn things from engaging with him. I've also enjoyed people like Catherine Pickstock and I actually considered studying, doing a PhD with either Catherine Pickstock or John Milbank, it wasn't the route that I took but they are people who I found very helpful in my own thinking.

I found their treatment of the history of the Reformation very questionable at points, Duns Scotus I'm not sure is quite as they describe him, their descriptions, their treatment of the Reformation again I have problems with that, their accounts of ontology I think there are many helpful points there, and the emphasis upon being suspended upon God's being and that radical account of createdness I think is quite helpful and their challenge to univocity that again has many helpful points to make and pushes back against certain unhelpful tendencies within theology. I find the revival of an understanding of the significance of time within someone like Catherine Pickstock, I've really found that helpful, I found it illuminating within my own work and there are points where I will find them the most useful people to turn to in questions of ontology and emphasis upon peace at the heart of ontology rather than conflict, that's a very helpful insight and something to work with. As it relates to biblical interpretation there's certainly things that are helpful there and particularly if we're trying to get a creational understanding of existence, but yes I wouldn't be completely on board with what they're

saying although I can't think of many other people I'd find more stimulating to engage with and to forge my position in dialogue with.

If you have any further questions, any of these quick-fire questions that I could answer in the future as well, then please leave them in my Curious Cat account, if you'd like to support these videos then you can do so using my Patreon account and if you found these videos helpful please tell your friends and get other people interested in them too. Thank you very much and hopefully see you again tomorrow. God bless.