

# OpenTheo

## Q&A#100 The Bumper Hundredth Q&A Episode

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For my hundredth question and answer video, I work through over a dozen questions in an hour.

My blog for my podcasts and videos is found here: <https://adversariapodcast.com/>.

If you have any questions, you can leave them on my Curious Cat account: <https://curiouscat.me/zugzwanged>.

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## Transcript

Welcome back. Today is my hundredth question and answer video. And in honor of that fact, I'm going to devote 60 minutes to getting through as many questions as I can.

So beginning now. Do you think the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ affected a shift in the post-mortem location or experience of saints that died prior to his coming? What biblical or theological lines of evidence do you rely on for your view? Yes, I believe it did affect a change. There are a number of passages that suggest this.

I think that we can look at the account of the saints beneath the altar in Revelation 6. I think we can look at the description in Daniel 12. And I'd also suggest the saints that rise and appear to people in the city in the end of Matthew. All of these suggest that something happened.

Now, I believe that prior to the death and resurrection of Christ, the saints went to Abraham's bosom. And this was seen as part of Sheol, as part of the grave. But in the new covenant, as Christ has died and risen again, and as the new order is established in heaven, they go to be with Christ.

And so we also see evidence for this in the contrast between the descriptions of the post-mortem state in the Old Testament and those within the New. What are your thoughts on churches live streaming their sermons with the primary intention of serving their sick and shut-in members who can't make it to the service? I feel like the cons outweigh the pros without question, especially after reading the recent surge of resources on the formative aspects of worship by James K.A. Smith, Alan Noble and others. Would you consider simply recording podcasting sermons as an acceptable alternative? If so, how would you explain the difference to church members who haven't read books on the subject? I think there should be a distinction made between the benefits of the way in which we do need to attend a service to get the full benefits of the formation that's intended to give us.

And distinguishing that from the state of not being able to attend or gain any benefits whatsoever. The experience of just listening to a sermon on live stream or on a podcast is very different from the experience of attending a church service and enjoying everything that goes along with that. And so there's no doubt in my mind that we should make a very clear distinction between those things and stress to anyone who believes that they could substitute for attending a church on a Sunday with just live stream sermons or podcasts.

You can't do that. But yet, if you have a condition where you're shut in or you're sick, then it is far better to be able to listen to a podcasted sermon or live stream sermon over not attending at all, not having any benefit of worshipping with the people of God. And so I would say we need to stress what you lose.

But for a person in a position for a person in a position of sickness, it's ideal that we make as much as possible available to them. So it gives them some sense of connection with the congregation. And again, listening to a sermon and watching a sermon live stream from your congregation is different from just listening to random podcasts on the Internet.

This isn't quite the same thing. It gives you some connection with your immediate community is similar to the experience of talking to someone in person and spending time with them in person over just having Skype conversations. There is a big difference.

You lose a lot from the benefits of being able to spend time with someone and do activities with them and bond with them over that. And when you're just having a conversation over Skype, but the conversation over Skype is considerably better than nothing. I believe that one of the benefits of podcasts, one of the benefits of live stream

sermons, these sorts of things, is that it gives possibilities for people who for accessibility reasons or otherwise would not have had access to Christian teaching, to some sense of connection with their local church when they're sick or shut in.

And to the extent that we can, we should provide that while recognising it is no substitute for the real thing. Paul Maxwell responded to your video on Twitter claiming you're making distinctions without difference. E.g. Locker room talk is bad.

Rough talk is good. What do you make of that critique of your critique? Would you be able to make your distinction more concrete? And so the tweet reads Alastair's criticisms reduced to a distinction without difference. We shouldn't engage in locker room talk, but we should engage in rough talk.

We shouldn't focus on the tokens of masculinity, but we should appreciate distinctively male strengths. We should see the emptiness. Okay.

Well, the first one I think should be fairly clear from anyone who listens to my response. I was referring specifically to the way that he talks about locker room talk as involving sexual discussion of women. And on that particular front, I very strongly disagree with him.

That's a different thing from rough talk. Rough talk is the sort of combative and the arguments and the disputes and the way that men talk often in groups, which isn't coarse. It isn't lustful.

It isn't about praising licentious living or anything like that, which Paul Maxwell obviously isn't in favour of in that particular case. But it is a sort of talk that is far more combative, that's far more, it's rough without being coarse language in the way that scripture talks about it. So we're not revelling in using bad language, in using corrupt communication, in speaking lustfully about women.

Rather, we recognise that there is a certain way in which we can talk in male company that is rougher, but good. And that needs to be tempered by an understanding of what scripture talks about in the case of speech. And scripture has a great deal to say about speech, what speech is and isn't appropriate, if you go to places like Ephesians and elsewhere.

There is a lot of attention given to these things. And I believe that locker room talk in the way that Paul Maxwell was discussing it, which did focus a lot upon sexual conversation about women, I don't believe that's particularly appropriate. I believe we need to be very cautious about that sort of language, particularly if we're going to be people who are marked by chastity, by faithfulness and by people who guard our minds and our thoughts and people who protect the modesty of others.

We often talk about modesty very much in terms of how people comport themselves,

how people dress themselves. But it's also something about the way we talk, about the way we speak about people, about the way that we invite others to imagine them and to regard them. And in that respect, on the sexual dimension of locker room talk, that is where my criticism was based.

This is a different thing from rough talk, which is the sort of arguments and the rough trash talk that men can have among themselves. And that's that can be good and it has its place. But that is a different sort of thing from sexualized talk.

We shouldn't focus on the tokens of masculinity, but we should appreciate distinctively male strengths. Again, I think that this distinction, if you listen carefully, should be clear from what I said in my video. But to clarify it a bit here, I think that male tokens of masculinity that are very much focused upon are physical tokens or particular things that guys are interested in as groups, certain sports, other things like that.

And often we can become fixated upon those in ways that are unhelpful. And we fail to see the deeper character of manliness that should be expressed. Now, one of the dangers that we have is the more that deep contexts of shared masculinity have been lost, the more that we become fixated upon a performative and contrastive vision of masculinity.

Where you're constantly trying to perform a vision of masculinity to distinguish yourself as a man. Whereas in the past, a lot of that was given. It was recognized that you're a man and you just have to be faithful in your calling as part of a group of men, as someone who is recognized as a man among men.

And that's a big difference from someone who's obsessed with developing a buff physique or whatever it is to appear as a man. Those are tokens of masculinity. But often this is a very unhealthy view of masculinity, a view of masculinity that is sought primarily by looking in the mirror almost, rather than something that is sought in the faithful work within the world.

Now, if you compare, there's always been an emphasis on physicality in relationship to masculinity. And this is not a bad thing. But what, and it's a good thing in many respects, it's something that we should encourage.

But what we see in our day and age that contrasts with prior ages is the degree to which masculinity can often be narrowed to that in people's imagination. And also the way that physicality is very much focused narrowly upon physique. Whereas in the past, physicality was about action, about fittingness for action.

The fact that a man was a laborer or a warrior and was actually using his physique. Now we very much can focus upon the workout in order to gain the physique. And it increasingly becomes a performative thing that's abstracted from actual dominion within

the world.

Now, masculinity and true manliness is associated with the dominion primarily, not primarily with the physique that was formerly associated with that, or the physique that makes you look more manly than some other man. Now, if we're going to celebrate manliness, we need to look at that deeper level. And so the tokens and the features that are associated with masculinity, they're not bad things.

They can often be very good things. They can be contexts within which as men pursue those, men can bond with other men and men can have some sense of their strengths. And these are very positive things.

It can be a way of developing discipline. It can be a context within which a broader constellation of male virtues are pursued. But if that's what we're focused upon primarily, we're really missing out.

We're really narrowing our focus. Are we taking time away from your writing as together by asking you questions? If we stop asking you questions, will as together get finished sooner? Well, when I've been writing, it's great to have a break to do something different. It's one of the reasons why I don't blog so much.

But I do videos because I can't write all the time. I spend a lot of time writing and I spend an awful lot of time reading. If you want to have a sense of the sort of scale of what a reading project like that involves, it's 225,000 words.

That's more than the length of two. It's about two and a half PhD theses in length. The amount of reading for that is considerable.

If you look at that bookshelf behind me, that's less than a half of the books that I've had to read for this project. So it gives you some sense of what's involved. It's not something that you want to have half baked after all the work that you put into it.

So for me, it is something that I've been working at consistently, but it's something that does take a lot of time to do well. And I've had to take time out from it at certain points, but Lord willing, it won't be too long in coming from this point. What is the significance of measuring and measurements in prophetic literature and scripture? In numerous places, such as Revelation 11 or Zechariah 2, among others, the prophet is told to measure Jerusalem or the temple, or encounters another who is given such a task.

And what of the passages such as much as of Ezekiel, where God seems to be at pains to give detailed descriptions of the measurements of the temple? What is at work in these passages? Very basic answer to that question. Sacred space is measured. And so when we see space being measured out and descriptions and dimensions being given, then it is likely sacred space that is in view.

When we look at the dimensions of these spaces, they are often related to other sacred spaces that gives us some sense of their meaning. And numbers are very important in scripture. People get nervous around numerology like they get nervous around typology.

But there's a lot of it in scripture, particularly if you get to a book of the book of Revelation or the book of Ezekiel and places like this. You need to be doing numerology on some level to understand these things. What do you find is a helpful response when the claim is made that scripture doesn't forcefully denounce the institution of slavery or polygamy? And we all agree we must forcefully denounce the institution of slavery and polygamy today.

Therefore, we may likewise adjust biblical ethics in some fashion or that certain hermeneutical moves are now allowed. I.e. culturally people were in X place when X author wrote and cultural accommodations were made. I think we need to begin by determining what exactly was meant and involved in slavery or polygamy in the original context.

When we think about slavery in scripture, it is not the same thing as the sort of chattel slavery that we see in the American South. In the events that are associated or the reality that is associated with slavery in most people's imagination. Biblical slavery is a rather different sort of thing.

It's associated with debt. It's associated with people who are imprisoned for crime. And this is also associated with prisoners of war.

And this is a very different sort of reality from what we tend to think about. If you live in that sort of society and the structure of support is that of the family, then if you are in Provident or if you're in a situation where there are people that can't provide for you, slavery is an alternative because there's no other support system. It's something to fall back upon.

And it's not a good thing. It's not an ideal by any means, but it is something that in that situation, there may not have been a better alternative. When we look in scripture, this is not something that's celebrated.

It's something that is given to us as a framework that is thrown into question at certain points. There are ways in which it is tempered in a great many ways. Israel has been brought out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

And Egypt is a house of bondage. The whole nation is a house of bondage. It's not just that Israel was enslaved within that context.

The Egyptians are bound to Pharaoh and Pharaoh's household and all the people associated with that world are seen as in some sense in slavery, not just the Israelites. And so Israel is given laws that reflect the fact that God is the one who releases slaves.

Likewise, in the New Testament, we see things that reflect this in certain respects.

So there is a challenging of the opposition between slave and master, as those who were the slaves had to work as to the Lord. And that challenges their relationship with their master. Their master now is the Lord.

They are acting for him and they bring, they work for their master, but not directly for their master in the same way as they once did. They've been in some sense unplugged from that relationship. And now they relate to it as those who are no longer bound by it in the same respect.

Likewise, the master has to give honor to his servant and often recognize him as a brother or as a potential brother. And so we see the story of Philemon and Onesimus. And again, this gives us an example of something that challenges that institution that pushes back against certain of the ways in which it would have been practiced.

So in the case of slavery, what we can do is we can recognize certain of the aspects of its necessity in its original context. Some ways in which it was tempered and challenged. Some ways in which there were developments beyond it that pushed away from it.

And also we can recognize through that the way that there is not just a sort of general trajectory that's set out. But there are very clear principles that guide the way that we relate to the principles, to the practice of slavery today. We see these principles in scripture and they give us a very short basis from which we can deal with these things.

Without saying that scripture absolutely condemns slavery, it doesn't. Rather it sees it as an accommodation to a world that has fallen, to a world that is immature, to a world that does not have ideal conditions. And we have better conditions that we are able to avoid certain aspects of that.

But on the other hand, when you look at the biblical concepts that surround and temper the notion of slavery, it also shows that there are a great deal of aspects of our society that have dimensions of slavery involved in them. The typical relationship that we have with our bosses in the workplace has characteristics that would be associated with slavery. And we don't think enough about that because it's not something that we're paid well.

We have some sort of status that is associated with that. But we are also those who do not have dominion of our own as a result of that. We're working for someone else's household.

And these are things that scripture would be cautious about, that would push against and say this is not an ideal. This is a situation that even if you're earning a six, seven figure salary, it's not the ideal situation. There is something that scripture calls us to that is beyond that and a true freedom that often we do not realise.

In the case of polygamy, I think we see similar things. There were ways in which that was an accommodation to a certain social situation, a situation where the family was the primary organ of support. And it was something that also in situations where you have war widows, where you have others that are not provided for, polygamy was one way of providing that.

And we need to be careful of just having this blanket condemnation when scripture deals with these things a lot more subtly. It points out through the narrative, the deep dysfunctions of polygamy, the undesirable character of it. And I think we can take these same sorts of approaches to thinking about institutions within our society, which may be necessary within our specific contexts, but are not good.

And as we think about them through biblical principles, we can maybe think of ways to phase them out, to move beyond them, to challenge them. So, for instance, the prison system, the way that our prison system works is not ideal in a great many ways. And scripture would help us to think about that carefully and give us principles by which to assess it.

Same with the workplace, these sorts of things. What do you say to criticisms of figural reading that charge an emphasis on this kind of reading with a functional denial of the clarity of scripture? As evidence, they might bring forward the need to be very schooled in the scriptures themselves, and perhaps in literary and theological ways of thinking too, to make much headway in convincing figural readings. In particular, we see that the reformers placed an emphasis on the literal or plain sense.

As I understand it, this was allowed to include divine intent at times, which superseded an author's intent. But that, in the whole, the emphasis was on fairly straightforward textual analysis without the complexity of figural readings. Shouldn't we too prioritise a plain reading? When we're talking about figural readings, these are things that deepen our understanding of texts that are read according to their natural literary sense.

And in their natural literary sense, they have, typically, have a meaning that is very much on the surface. And that meaning that is very much on the surface can be filled out and strengthened and developed and complexified by a deeper understanding of the typology. But generally, we do not need to go to the typology to understand the meanings of these texts.

On some basic level, we can apprehend that just from a surface reading. Likewise, not all parts of scripture are figural. Some parts give us a very direct teaching on particular subjects.

We don't read the epistles figuratively. We don't read many other parts of scripture figuratively. It's the narrative parts of scripture that are primarily the figurative, where we see figurative elements.



I gave a response to Ian Provan in a lecture on these subjects recently. And in that, I give a bit of an explanation of how I'd approach some of these questions, which would fill out what I'm saying here. I don't believe, then, that this is a denial of the clarity of scripture.

Rather, it's saying that scripture is clear. But it's clear for what? It's clear for what we need to know for salvation. There are a lot more things that we can learn by looking deeper into scripture.

And as we look deeper into scripture, we will find that typology is necessary to understand certain things. It fills out our meaning. But it's not something that is radically opposed to the surface meaning of the text.

Rather, it is something that can fill out and strengthen and develop that. I don't believe that the sort of figural reading that some people engage in, where it's a deep allegory that subverts the apparent meaning of the text, that's not usually what we find in scripture at all. Given its advent, soon to be Christmas, a lot of us will be hearing the prologue to John's Gospel read at church and carol services.

When this passage is taught, preached, or preached, much time is usually spent on the meaning of the logos. Two chief allusions for it are acknowledged, the Hebrew word of the Lord in the Old Testament, and the Greek idea of the logos, the great principle behind the universe. The majority of evangelical teachers seem to say that John primarily has the Greek meaning in view, rather than the Hebrew in view, as he writes his prologue.

But it strikes me as thoroughly unconvincing that John would be more concerned with the terms of Greek philosophy than with his own Hebrew scriptures. Which connotation, if either, should be first in our minds when we hear and read John's prologue, the Hebrew or the Greek? I find it unhelpful to pit Hebrew and Greek thought against each other. A lot of the time this opposition is just unhelpful.

Many of these things were in close dialogue and interrelation, and there was cross-pollination between these two things. The concept of the logos, for instance, as it plays out in Greek philosophy, is related to biblical concepts. It's related to the concept, it can be related to the concept of the word of the Lord, it can be related to the concept of wisdom, as we see it in various parts of the intertestamental literature.

And I think that it's that sort of background and context into which John is speaking, which is very much a fusion of Greek and Hebrew thought. We need to remember that Israel and Greece were in close relationship in, there was theological and philosophical dialogue between these worlds. And they're not hermetically sealed from each other, as many people like to think when we think about Hebrew and Greek thought, and have stylized oppositions between these two forms of thought.

It's not that straightforward. And the more I think we get into New Testament thought, the more I think we'll see aspects of Greek thought at play within that context. And so I'd be wary of setting the concept of logos as a dichotomy, are we going to go with Greek or Hebrew thought according to that dichotomy of Greek and Hebrew thought.

Rather, we need to recognize that this is a concept that reveals, I think, the interplay between Greek and Hebrew thought within that context in which John was writing. And by exploring that interplay and the way that Old Testament concepts are refracted through the philosophical concepts of Greek philosophy and related to those, and in many ways leaven those concepts, I believe that gives us a more helpful avenue for thinking about what John might be meaning at this point. I have a question about wisdom literature in the Bible, and more specifically about Ecclesiastes.

Compared to the other books of wisdom, what would you say are the main lessons we as individuals and as a church could learn from it, especially when reading the text in the light of Christ? I'm also curious about the narrator's role in the book. I would appreciate your thoughts on it. I've written, published a video on this before, and I think one of the great keys to the book is the concept of vapour, hebel.

It's the term that is often translated vanity, but yet it's that term that expresses something about the reality of the world and human relationship to it. And it's something that describes the way that we can't see through. There's something about vapour that obstructs our vision.

Vapour is something you can't grasp hold of. Vapour is not something that you can control. Vapour is transitory.

Vapour is something that is there one moment and gone the next. Vapour is weak. And vapour is all these different things that are deep analogies for thinking about human life and activity.

And so when the narrator is talking about these different forms of activity that he engaged in to achieve some sort of purchase upon reality, some power and effect upon reality in generations to come, he realizes the vaporous character of human life. How do we relate this to New Testament thought, to the story of Christ, these sorts of things? I believe by recognizing that this is the human condition, but that God's work is that which God is the one who shepherds the wind. God is the one who controls the vapour.

God is the one who gives surety and stability in a world where things are vaporous. And also recognizing the goodness of living with open hands, of living as those who are receiving gifts from God, gifts that we can't control or grasp hold of and maintain their security and control the future in the way that we might want to. Rather, we must recognize that God is in control and we are at his mercy.

We place ourselves at his mercy. We look to him for security. We do not find it in the things of the world, in our actions, things like that.

I've found a table in the mist. The Through New Eyes book on the book of Ecclesiastes is a very helpful introduction to this and I recommend it to anyone who wants to look into Ecclesiastes more. We see Jesus commanding his followers to pray for their enemies.

And we also see the saints in Revelation 6.10 crying out, I think one of the keys to connecting these two things is thinking about the factor of time, that time can change the character of things. So God's original instructions to Moses and Aaron as they relate to Pharaoh are different as the ones that develop when the heart of Pharaoh becomes heart. In the same way, I think there are differences that we see in the way that Christ forgives his enemies and the way that there is no forgiveness for those who reject absolutely the message of the church and there's judgment that falls upon Jerusalem.

What we see here is what Christ talked about as those who sin against the Son of Man and those who sin against the Holy Spirit. There is a two-stage thing taking place here and we see this pattern in Acts as well. There's a two-stage visitation pattern.

So Joseph first comes to his brothers and he appears to them and then he's sent into Egypt and then when he appears to them and makes himself known to them in Egypt, then they must accept him or die of famine. Likewise with Moses. Moses first appears to the children of Israel as he takes the life of the Egyptian and then the second time he comes back after his time with Jethro and at that point it's the Exodus and if they do not follow him there is judgment.

In the same way, Christ comes in his earthly ministry and after that comes in the ministry of the church. Those who reject the second time, judgment falls upon them. And in that sort of context I believe there is a principle that we have in scripture that allows us to pray for the judgment of the enemies.

And this is exactly what I think the saints in Revelation 6 are praying for. They're praying for the people who took the blood of Christ and they took the blood of the saints as well and now they have filled up the full cup of wrath and that will fall upon them. So I believe that that is a key factor that helps us to discern.

We pray for our enemies, we seek their conversion but yet when our enemies harden their hearts, when they set their face, when they reject and absolutely stand against Christ, then there comes a point where things shift and I think that that factor of time is very important. What do you consider the dangers are of under emphasizing systematic theology? For example, those who say, yes you need to go to college to get some systematics but when you're doing your ministry let the Bible authors themselves be your theologians. Or if you get too excited about church history and systematics then you aren't really learning your faith from the text of scripture yourself.

You are making yourself a third or fourth or fifth generation Christian. Whereas if you study the Bible for yourself you are a second generation Christian. You are sitting directly at the feet of the apostles who give you all the theology you need in the best form and structure.

Or scripture is sufficient to fully equip you for every good work. These are superlatives. Get the minimal systematic you need to not become a heretic and then just teach the Bible.

I'm in the UK, conservative evangelical context. Any thoughts? Much appreciated. Well, I think there's a bit of a caricature here perhaps of some of the positions that are out there but not too much.

I believe systematic theology is very useful for understanding scripture better. Systematic theology helps us to gain some better purchase upon the text. It helps us to understand some of the concepts that are at play, how certain things fit together and it gives us in many respects the foundations of the edifice of scripture.

And so if we look through the book of scripture it's like wandering through a house and seeing the different rooms within it. Where systematic theology acquaints you with the foundations, the weight distribution, how the building is formed and what is its plan and structure. And this can really help us when we're going through the text of scripture.

It gives us some sense of how these things fit together. There are dangers however in treating systematic theology as a sort of independent edifice from scripture. That you have your scripture and then you have your systematic theology and the systematic theology is this great building that you have formed out of the blocks of scripture, out of the clay and the straw of scripture.

And then you bring this all together into this great system and the system is what you need. What we see I think in more traditional historic approaches of systematic theology is a recognition that that theology is constantly in dialogue with and an attempt to guide us through the realm that is disclosed by scripture itself. It's a different way of approaching that realm.

It's something that gives us a different angle or a different form of appropriation of that. So for instance the reading of scripture can be very much like following an itinerary through a territory. And systematic theology is in many ways like viewing that territory from a very exalted vantage point and helping to integrate that larger itinerary into a single entity rather than just a sequential path that is being followed.

And systematic theology when it engages in dialogue with scripture and as a form of discipline that is constantly helping us to read the actual text it can be incredibly helpful. For instance if you're reading something like Calvin's Institutes, Calvin's Institutes of the

Christian Religion are intended to work alongside his commentaries on scripture. It gives you a better way of understanding what the scriptural text teaches and gives you some framework within which to relate different parts of scripture together.

One of the things that you see that people without a systematic theological education lack is the ability to bring those things together. It's an inability also to relate scripture well to a broader framework of philosophy, of thought more generally. And that's one of the reasons why systematic theology can be incredibly important.

It gives us a more synthetic and fuller purchase upon the realm of divine revelation and how that fits in with other aspects of reality. And gives us a way in which to witness effectively into the world. Again systematic theology is in many respects that which enables us to get to the process of application to a lot of issues of ethics in a far readier manner than just studying biblical texts.

And so biblical texts and systematic theology need to be brought into very close correspondence with each other. I would not find it as easy to study scripture if I did not have a background in systematic theology and have spent time studying that. It is very important.

It's very valuable I find for that study. This idea of second generation Christian if you just are reading scripture for yourself. There is something deeply lacking about that.

You should be reading scripture for yourself engaging directly with that voice. But if you're not engaging with the larger conversation of the Christian church that has been developing and enriching its understanding of that text over 2000 years. You are missing out.

There are great insights and riches from that conversation and many things that will help us fall from going astray in our understanding. If you believe that your own understanding of scripture is sufficient and is something that outmatches the insights of many people who have been reading throughout the generations. Then there is something that is either you are an incredibly remarkably gifted person and far more likely you have an excess of confidence of unmerited confidence in your own abilities and a lack of humility.

One of the reasons why it's important to engage with other voices in our reading of scripture also is that it is those voices that will often push the challenge of scripture against us. Because if it's just us reading scripture on our own basis what easily happens is it becomes a matter of our authority as interpreters. That ultimately it's not the authority of scripture itself but our authority as its interpreters.

Whereas if you have a number of different voices in conversation with each other and in unity with each other then you have the authority of scripture functioning far more

effectively as something that pushes back against your word, against your viewpoints. This is one of the reasons why we have the creeds. The creeds are a consensus of voices throughout the church's history.

As these voices join together and in the presence of many witnesses there is a more authoritative voice that is expressed. The voice of many witnesses to scripture's voice. Now if you're just relying upon your personal witness to scripture's voice you're missing out because there are many other voices that you should be engaged with.

And these other voices will help you to grasp scripture better than if you were just left to your own devices. I would really love to know how a young man may grow in confidence that he has been called to ministry. I think one of the best ways to grow in this is by practice, by learning through apprenticeship with others.

And so I think this is one of the reasons why the training of ministers starts with typically being apprenticed to elders as a deacon. That you're apprenticed to elders, you work alongside elders and you learn from them, they train you. It's a father-son relationship.

And as they train you and as you're apprenticed to them and you serve under them and with them and in their name then you reach a point where you gain more confidence. There's also the fact that as you have that sort of relationship they will be the ones that will often give you the confidence in your calling. They will assess and discern whether you have that calling.

The sense that we have to be the source of our own sense of vocation is a far more modern concept than I think we are aware of. That ultimately we're not looking for a sense of our own vocation in a purely private sense. Rather we should be looking at other people.

Does the church discern that I have a calling to this role? Are there elders and godly men and women who can see that this is something that is good for me? That is good for the church that I exercise this role? This isn't just a private choice that I have. Rather it is something that is there for the church as a whole. And as they discern by working closely with me and alongside me, by training me, by my being apprenticed to them, by their mentoring me and assisting me in my growth, that I'm ready for such a role.

I think these are important things. That if you are seeking confidence primarily within yourself, you will struggle to get a good confidence. And the confidence that you have may be an unfounded confidence.

The confidence that can be given to you by people who are wise and discerning, who have worked with you at length and spent time mentoring you is a much greater confidence. And so I'd recommend seeking it in those places primarily. Can you do a video on Herod in Acts 12 and 13 but specifically on 13 verse 1? I've already done a

video on Acts 12 which talks about the resurrection of Peter.

The whole chapter there is framed by Paul and Barnabas going to Jerusalem, by the events at Passover of Peter being taken, about to be given at the Passover time. But then he's delivered from prison by an angel who strikes him and raises him up. But yet Herod at the end of that is struck by an angel and struck down.

So there's a contrast between these two figures, between Peter and then between Herod. It's the story of Pharaoh in many ways. There's a poetic justice as this Pharaoh figure is brought down and as there's a deliverance by the angel through the open doors.

And then the appearance to the woman, the disciples who don't believe, all these sorts of things. And then Peter largely disappearing from the scene. He only appears really once after that in chapter 15.

These are significant features that suggest that there's a broader typological pattern playing out. The pattern of Jesus and his resurrection and the pattern of the Passover and deliverance from Egypt. And that pattern I think helps us to understand the place of Herod which is the place of Pharaoh.

And there's a contrast between Pharaoh and Peter. One is struck by an angel and raised up, the other is struck by an angel and struck down. And this again that's associated with Passover themes.

The passing over of the first, the deliverance of the firstborn and the slaying of the firstborn. And in verse 1 of chapter 13, now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers. Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger.

Lucius of Cyrene, Manion who had been brought up with Herod the Tetrarch and Saul. We see within the story of Acts and the Gospels that there were a number of people within the early church and among these disciples who had connections. There were people who were part of these houses, that had money, that had connections, that had connections with the high priest, that had connections with Herod's house.

They even had connections with Caesar's house. And these were some of the lines of influence upon which the early church moved. I think that is an important thing to understand.

We often can think about the early church very much as poor people but there were connections and important connections. As we see in the list of Jesus' female disciples who supported him financially in his ministry. Some of those women were very, they're stewards of Herod and things like this, the wife.

These were important figures, these were figures with connections and places in society that weren't just among the general population. Why does the Bible, Old and New

Testament, focus on meeting the needs of widows and orphans and specifically the fatherless? Nothing to my knowledge about widowers and the motherless. Don't these people need caring for and protecting too? I think the focus on widows and the fatherless, they are seen as a pairing.

It's the widows and their children. It's those without fathers and that would be a far more common position to be in within the ancient world than to be motherless in these situations, even despite high levels of death and childbirth. The particular sort of care that is provided by people to the widows and the fatherless is primarily financial and support, material support.

There's a different sort of support that is needed for those who lack mothers. That's not the sort of support that can be provided by as wide a group as are called upon to exercise charity towards the widows and the fatherless. And those who are widows and fatherless can be more readily, they have far more immediate needs.

It's not primarily the relational needs of having a mother. It's the financial and providential needs of actually just being saved from dying of starvation, from having the means by which to have a profession and a place in the world, all these sorts of things. In a society where a lot depended upon a father's provision, the loss of a father was far more immediately, it had a far more immediate impact.

And so the widows and the fatherless have a great significance in the focus upon charity because they need immediate material support. And they need security in a way that those who are motherless do not. What is meant by the knowledge of good and evil in the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? Were Adam and Eve meant to eat of this tree after a certain period? When Eve says they cannot even touch the fruit of the tree, is she being legalistic or is she growing in wisdom? I think as we look at this concept throughout the whole of scripture, there is the suggestion that they would, first of all, they would have eaten of the tree at some point.

The knowledge of good and evil is associated with positive things elsewhere in scripture. The knowledge of good and evil is associated with the knowledge of the angel of the Lord. It's also associated with kingly rule.

Solomon is someone who gains the knowledge of good and evil, which is associated with wisdom needed to rule God's great people. And so the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is associated with judgment, with rule, with discretion, with learning the skill of rule. Now, the promise or what happened when they ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil is they became like one of us, knowing good and evil.

Who are the us? The us, I believe, are the members of the divine council. So those who are the angelic rulers and those who exercise rule within the creation on a higher level. And this is something that Adam and Eve became part of when they ate of the tree.



And this is significant because in the garden, they were very much functioning as servants within God's house, being trained for greater service. They were not yet vicegerents, working with God and ruling within the creation on a broader scale, ruling alongside an underguard. Nor were they members of the divine council itself.

They were just those who had to manage the affairs of the sanctuary, of the garden, of the divine sanctuary. And this, I think, gives us some sense of what is involved in the eating of that tree. Other things to note that Eve says that you should not touch the fruit of the tree.

I believe that there is some justification for saying that this was an appropriate thing to say, that if you should not eat of something, nor should you touch it. These are some connections that we see within the Book of Leviticus, those things that you don't eat under certain conditions you don't touch either. And that connection is one in which the knowledge of what that prohibition meant was maybe being fleshed out a bit.

Either way, I think that the significance of that is the challenge of the serpent is not primarily found in those slight twists. It's found in the fundamental insinuation that God is a prohibitive God, a God who wants to destroy any sense of pleasure, any sense of enjoyment of his creation. That God is a God who's fundamentally about telling us no, you shall not eat of any tree.

God says that you can eat of every tree, save this one. And that insinuation that God is fundamentally prohibitive is one that Eve does not effectively answer. And so I think that is where our focus should be in Eve's failure of response, not primarily in the idea that they should not even touch the fruit of the tree.

That, again, I don't think is being legalistic. I think it's recognising the broader concept of what that restriction meant. When we look at the story of Solomon and David, that connection of the knowledge of good and evil with wisdom, I think, suggests that as they gained in authority within the world, as they gained in training within the garden, they would be equipped and one day they would eat of that tree.

And that that would be associated with them going out and then acting as rulers. Giving them the clothing, I think, is also associated with that. The clothing, for instance, the common dream that people have when they're having to do something important in front of a large number of people and then they discover that they're naked, that's similar to the experience of Adam and Eve.

They're called out into this great calling within the world and they realise they are desperately unequipped. They are not prepared to exercise this. They're naked and God gives them clothing that equips them for that.

The knowledge of good and evil, then, is something that is associated with wisdom, with

rule, with judgment, with seeing and judging. And that knowledge of good and evil is also something that could be read against God's own act of judging. That God sees and he judges.

Eve sees and she judges. And God judges his creation. He declares that his is good.

And yet God has to train Adam and Eve in order to recognise that appropriately. And so when we see before the creation of Eve, God is training Adam in basic tasks. He gives him the calling within the garden and then he trains him to discern the animals, to name the animals.

And that is part of his training and the knowledge that will equip him for the knowledge of good and evil, to act in a broader sense as a creator within the world, a creator under God. But to that point, he has to work within God's pattern, within God's context. And as he grows within that, he will be able to stretch out into the world and do something more.

I think that this is probably the most helpful way of understanding what was involved there. I think I've just about reached the end of my time. And actually, no, I have a little bit more.

And let's see what other questions we have here. I've reached the end of these ones. OK, I'll buff this up.

What was the role of the Holy Spirit prior to Pentecost? Did believers under the Old Covenant experience the indwelling of the Holy Spirit? I believe the Holy Spirit was active prior to Pentecost. What we see with the work of the Holy Spirit prior to Pentecost, though, is that it was not, the Holy Spirit was not active in the same way and as generally as we see in the New Covenant. So in Chapter 2 of Acts with Pentecost, the Spirit is poured out on all flesh, sons and daughters prophesying, etc., referring back to Joel and the prophecy of Chapter 2. That, in turn, refers back to Numbers 11 and God putting the spirit of Moses upon the 70 elders.

I believe that that gives us a sense of part of what is meant by the expansion of the work of the Holy Spirit. There is a greater entrance into the work of the Holy Spirit, a greater work of the Holy Spirit within people. The Holy Spirit is the one who equips people for office, the one who qualifies them for rule, for entering into God's presence, for those who participate in the divine council.

The prophets have the Holy Spirit working within them. They're caught up by the Holy Spirit. The work of the Spirit at Pentecost is, in many ways, preparing the Church to be a priestly people, a kingly people and a prophetic people.

So the work of the Spirit as it changes after Pentecost is a work that expands to bring us into fuller roles within the work of God within the world. So we're participating in a

deeper sense in what God is doing. Did God work within the Old Testament believers through his Holy Spirit to change their hearts? Yes, he did.

I believe that the Holy Spirit's work of regeneration, as we use that term within systematic theology, was operative within the Old Testament for people to believe their hearts were worked upon by the Spirit. And God's Holy Spirit works throughout the whole of creation, giving life and breath to all things and animating things with life. But yet that work of the Holy Spirit is something that awaits its fuller form within the work of Christ, through the work of Christ in the New Testament.

The work of the Spirit also needs to be closely connected then with the work of Christ. Christ is the man of the Spirit. Christ is the one who has the Spirit beyond all measure.

Moses receives the Spirit of God to equip him for office, and then that Spirit is given from Moses to the 70 elders and also to equip Joshua in particular. Christ gives his Spirit in a far fuller sense. The Spirit flows from Christ to fill his church.

The Spirit is also that which creates a bond of fellowship. The Spirit is the one who brings people together in one body of the church, a body that is formed of people, a building that is formed of people. It's not just a physical building with tablets of stone and a budding rod and these sorts of things at the heart of it.

It is a building formed of people, and that union of the Holy Spirit is another aspect of the Holy Spirit's work that changes after Pentecost. Now this is very much an escalation of what has gone before, not an absolute change in terms of the Spirit's work. The Spirit was still active, but there is an incredible escalation of that work.

The Spirit forms us into one people. The Spirit is also the one who anoints us for ministry, he fills us and brings us together as one people, and he's the one who unites us to Christ that we share in his status, so that we are seated in heavenly places with him, so that we enjoy God's blessing of us as his beloved children. And these are things that we do not see in quite the same way in the Old Testament.

The language of God as Father and of his people as children is used of the nation as a whole, but not individualised to the same degree as we see within the New Testament. I believe that that again is something associated with the work of the Holy Spirit as it expands within the New Testament. What else is there? I believe that the Spirit's work expands in the scope of the Spirit in the creation, or the nations more generally.

The work of the Spirit is part of the extended work of the Spirit is God not overlooking the nations anymore, but bringing his word to them and making that word effective as a calling to those nations to come to his people and to be brought into part of the commonwealth of his people. That again is an extension of the work of the Holy Spirit. These things are not alien to people under the Old Covenant.

People in the Old Covenant had their hearts circumcised in certain respects, but there was always this difficulty that the people were fundamentally rebellious and they did not keep the law. The law was this tablet of stone that was held against them that they failed to keep. And so the promise was that the Spirit would one day circumcise their hearts so that they would keep this law from the heart.

And this is the promise of the New Covenant. The Spirit prepares a people. And so there's a greater extension of the work and intensity of that work.

More generally, the Spirit works within people's hearts to circumcise them so that the law is now kept. And also at the heart of the people of God is no longer this rebellious son of Israel that's turning away, but the faithful son of Jesus Christ to whom we are connected by the Spirit and in whose image we are being formed. And so that Spirit is transforming us from glory into glory.

That Spirit is the glory of God seen in the face of Jesus Christ that works upon us to perform and create that same glory within us. And so in these respects, in all of these respects, we see foreshadowing of that within the Old Covenant. The Old Covenant saints, the prophets, the kings and the priests all had certain aspects of this work of the Spirit.

And the average Israelites, we see people also in foreign nations where God's Spirit was at work within those situations too. But there is an intensity and an extent and a greater extension of the work of the Spirit within the New Covenant that is unparalleled within the Old, although it is foreshadowed. What else can we say about the role of the Spirit prior to Pentecost in the more immediate background of that? The background of that is the work of the Spirit in the ministry of Christ.

As we look in the ministry of Christ, so many of the events of Christ's ministry are works of the Spirit. Christ is conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. Christ is baptised with the Spirit.

The Spirit anoints him at Pentecost, at his baptism. He is filled with the Spirit and brought by the Spirit into the wilderness prior to his temptations. He is the one who is filled with the Spirit without measure.

He's the one who gives the Holy Spirit. He's the one who gives up the Spirit at his death. He's the one who is raised by the power of the Holy Spirit.

He's the one who's caught up by the Spirit into heaven. He's the one who, like Moses, delivered the law from the mountain. Christ delivers the Spirit from heaven to his people.

And so that great transition that occurs is not just an Old Covenant, New Covenant thing. It's something that finds its pivot in the work of Christ, who is the man of the Spirit. And as the man of the Spirit, just as Moses was a man of the Spirit, and the Spirit was

channeled through him in various ways to the elders, to Joshua and to Israel more generally, so Christ is the great man of the Spirit, the one who receives the Spirit without measure.

And by that Spirit forms a new people around himself, with himself as the temple of his body, and that body being expanded by the Spirit to include all his people, the bride. That, I believe, helps us to understand part of the transition that's taking place. The transition is between people like Moses and David, who are filled with the Spirit for their ministry, and Christ, whose ministry is so much greater.

And so the ministry of the Spirit is connected with the ministry of the people anointed by the Spirit. The ministry of Moses was a powerful ministry of the Spirit, but he did not receive the Spirit without measure. Christ has, and that is the great transition that we see between the Old and the New Covenants.

Hopefully these questions and answers were helpful. If you have any further questions, please leave them on my Curious Cat account, and I'll be delighted to answer them in the next few days. Lord willing, I'll be back again tomorrow if you'd like to support this and other videos.

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