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#208 Questions about Doctrine, the Trinity and Baptism

February 29, 2024



Ask NT Wright Anything - Premier

What is the doctrine of the Trinity? Is the Trinity key to being a Christian? Is the doctrine of Baptism an essential? And should we be baptised if we've been christened? Tom Wright addresses these questions and more in this episode. This episode was originally aired on July 30, 2019 • Subscribe to the Ask NT Wright Anything podcast: <https://pod.link/1441656192> • More shows, free eBook, newsletter, and sign up to ask Tom your questions: <https://premierunbelievable.com> • For live events: <http://www.unbelievable.live> • For online learning: <https://www.premierunbelievable.com/courses> • Support us in the USA: <http://www.premierinsight.org/unbelievableshow> • Support us in the rest of the world: <https://www.premierunbelievable.com/donate>

Transcript

Truly understanding your identity is a deeply personal journey and discovering who you are starts with knowing where you came from. This applies to us as individuals as well as collectively. Though it's popular to question the existence of a historic Adam and Eve, did they truly exist? Or were they merely archetypes? The truth is, much of our uniqueness as humans only makes sense in the light of the Genesis account of creation.

These questions and more are explored at length. Welcome to this replay of Ask NT Wright Anything, where we go back into the archives to bring you the best of the thought and theology of Tom Wright. Answering questions submitted by you, the listener.

You can find more episodes as well as many more resources for exploring faith at premierunbelievable.com. And registering there will unlock access through the newsletter to updates, free bonus videos, and e-books. That's premierunbelievable.com. And now for today's replay of Ask NT Wright Anything. With you again, Tom, today's edition of the programme, going to be talking about doctrine on today's edition, and specifically the Trinity and baptism of the ones we're going to try and cover.

Lots of questions on this. Before we do that, you've been involved in a major project over

the last couple of years, really, the Gifford Lectures. Tell us what they are for those who don't know, and what's involved.

It's both something you deliver and something that obviously gets put into a manuscript format. The Gifford Lectures are started in the 19th century by Lord Gifford, who set up a fund, quite a generous fund, to endow a lectureship, which goes around the four ancient Scottish universities, so Aberdeen, St Andrews, Edinburgh, and Glasgow. And its subject is, quote, natural theology, unquote.

Now, what I think Lord Gifford meant by that, and those of us who do the Gifford Lectures, we tend to study his will to make sure we're being vaguely in conformity with it. Though, actually, there's been a lot of people of very widely differing views, given the Giffords over the course of the last 150 years or so. Natural theology is a way of saying, okay, the church gets itself into a twist about claiming that we have supernatural revelation because we've got the Bible and we've got Jesus who knows the Son of God, so therefore what we say is true.

And then the skeptical world of the 18th and 19th century said, you're appealing to something which comes from above, and we've got no proof of that. So we're going to see if you can start, as it were, from below and say, well, here's the world we've got. Here is the grass beneath our feet.

Here are the stars above our heads. Here is the human mind and all that therein is. Can we from those things infer the existence of God, and if so, which sort of God, and how does that work? Now, the problem with that is that it screens out from the beginning something which actually ought to be put back in because the natural world includes history.

It includes Julius Caesar. It includes Queen Elizabeth I. It includes Jesus of Nazareth. And at the same time as the skeptical world was saying, don't give us that supernatural stuff we just want to do.

They were also saying, and by the way, we think your stories about Jesus and the Gospels are all wrong because he was just an ordinary chap in his time who was probably a Jewish Revolutionary or whatever. So there's a lot of confusion about the skepticism itself. And so I decided as a kind of thought experiment that, okay, if they very seldom ask biblical scholars to give their gift, it's normally philosophers or systematic theologians.

So if they've asked me to do this, do this great thing as a New Testament scholar, I'm going to say, right, let's take the bet as it were and say Jesus was a human being in the first century. There is this thing called history. What is history and how does it work? How do we do history? What does that mean? And if we then put Jesus in the middle of the historical picture and hold our nerve, how do we emerge the other side? And might

that actually teach us something about the nature of knowledge itself? And so that's what I was trying to do.

I have to say, I did a summary like that. I tell this story at the beginning of the preface. My mother in the last year of her life, more or less, she died a year ago from when I'm talking now.

She said, now, Tom, you're doing these gifted lectures, what's that? I said a short version of what I've just said that, well, people used to think you could argue up, but in fact, other people think that's not a good idea. But if you put Jesus in the middle, we might learn something about knowledge itself as well as God. And my mother thought for a minute and said, I'm glad.

I don't have to listen to those. Which is a classic maternal put down goodness. You matter on about that stuff if you want.

I'll get on with real life. So the book, when it comes, I've now edited and up the lectures and it's coming out about three times as long as the original lectures, so about 150,000 words or so. And that will be published this November and it's dedicated to the memory of my late mother.

Very good. Very good. Well, look out for that.

For those who want to get the full thing, there are the few. And the title will be History and Eschatology. History and Eschatology.

The Gifford Lectures delivered. Yes, was it last year in 2018 that you delivered? Yeah, spring 2018. This will obviously be the more developed version of those lectures that's published.

But the original ones you gave our odd line as well. So look out for those. Okay, well, moving from natural theology to, in a sense, revelation to some degree.

That's my attempt at doing it that way. We're looking at a doctrine today. His first of all, a general question from Andrew and Aberdeen.

Who says, hello, I'm a first year university student studying divinity at Aberdeen University. Something mentioned a fair bit last semester was heresy. And my question is this.

How far does having the right view of God act in salvation? Obviously we're saved by grace alone. But there must be a point when someone is no longer worshiping the true God. Maybe you can help in this.

So how far does our view of God have to be doctrinally correct before we can say we are a Christian? Yes. The problem about saying that phrase doctrinally correct is that it

presses all the wrong buttons in our culture. It sounds cold and static and mechanistic, et cetera.

And I want to say it's very easy to get God wrong. It's very easy to have false views of God. The last line in the first letter of John is little children keep herself from idols.

And John Calvin once said that the human mind is a perpetual factory of idols. We're constantly imagining gods who don't really exist because they're easier to deal with. The God who does really exist is the one who made the whole world and came to rescue and restore the whole world in Jesus.

And the more we look at Jesus, the more we understand who this God is, and this God is all consuming, all demanding, all loving, all wise. And that's very difficult to do business with. And so the church has developed traditions of worship to say if you're serious about this, then here are wise ways in which your prayer can lead you into the heart of that mystery.

It remains a mystery. God remains a mystery. But we can be drawn into the heart.

And the question of right doctrine or wrong doctrine are as it were symptoms of whether you're on the right path or not. It's like when you go to the doctor and you're worried about a persistent itch or something and the doctor says, we better have a look at that and take a little bit of skin or something and then does chemical tests on it. It's not that being human means having the right sort of little bit of skin on that point in your arm.

It's that this may be a telltale sign that something is going on which could eventually kill you, or not as the case may be. So if somebody were to say, I think that actually the idea of the Trinity is rubbish, I think that there's just the one and that Jesus is just a distant reflection. Then one might say, well, you're on the way.

Keep reading the Bible. Keep saying your prayers. This will sort itself out on the way.

Or that you might say, if you're distancing Jesus from your picture of God, watch out because this may be like the little bit of skin that may be the telltale sign that you're actually moving away from the thing which actually reveals who the true God is and which will then draw you into the fullness of life in him. I suppose what I'm getting from this question from Andrew is, there's this concern that if you don't have the right view, you won't be saved. Now, I'm very glad that I'm not saved by having the right view or else who could be saved.

But there is that sense in which what I get from you there, Tom, is the idea that if you're moving away from the picture of God as revealed in Jesus, then you're moving away from the path he's laid out for us to... Yes. And clearly, there are theologies of justification hovering in the background here. What does justification by faith mean if faith includes specific propositional statements like Jesus is Lord and God raised him for

the dead? If somebody says Jesus is not Lord and God didn't raise him from the dead, then I think there are serious questions to be asked about which God is at your worshiping and particularly has your life been grasped by the gospel and spirit so that you are now a new creature in Christ, because if you have been, then there are certain things that you ought to show up.

Again, the medical analogy, that if this person is really getting better, then they will be either putting on weight or maybe taking it off, depending on what was wrong with them in the first place, and their skin will be a more healthy colour again, etc. And it's not that the aim of the doctor is that you have skin of a certain colour, it's that these are telltale signs of what's going on inside. And so if somebody says to me, if somebody wrote me the other day and said, well, I read a bit of what you'd written on the resurrection and it doesn't make any sense to me because we know that dead people don't rise and so clearly Jesus didn't rise and said, and on and on and on page after page after page telling me why I'm wrong about this.

And I want to say, yeah, I understand those arguments, you're actually distorting various things, but it looks to me as though what you're basically saying is, I do not believe in a God of new creation. And I will say, the God of the Bible is a God of creation and new creation. And if you want to say, I really don't believe in that God, well, then you really don't believe in that God.

And in a sense, Pascal's wager, you might be right, but I don't think you are, because as I look at Jesus, I actually see new creation. And I then see, as C.S. Lewis said again, we keep quoting him, I believe that Jesus is Lord in the same way that I believe that the sun has risen, not because I can see it because actually it dazzles me, but because I can see everything else. I'm sure we'll kind of talk more generally about the way doctrine works as we go through these questions, but specifically the Trinity came up from various people.

He is David in Massachusetts to start us off, who says, the Trinity seems to be a critical and core theological doctrine, and yet not laid out in scripture as simply or obviously as I might expect or want. Could you help me with that? Yes, I hope I can. What the third and fourth and fifth century fathers expressed in terms of Trinity is expressed in the New Testament very clearly, but not in that philosophical formulation.

I'm not saying they were wrong to do the philosophical formulation. They were grasped by the reality, which is expressed in the New Testament. And then as their surrounding pagan culture was saying, what are you saying about God, they were drawing on various different bits of philosophy, including bits of Stoicism, bits of Platonism, to say, well, it's something like this.

And yet, you can see that the line of thought going that way doesn't necessarily work the other way. One of the great theologians of my youth, Henry Chadwick, who's a wonderful

professor in both Oxford and then Cambridge, and a great man of God. He once wrote an article about the famous statement of Chalcedon, which is 451 AD, that Jesus is fully God and fully man.

And he said, yeah, Chalcedon got this right, got this right, got this right. But if we started with Chalcedon, we would never have guessed that the Jesus that they're talking about is the Jesus of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and John. Because in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, John, he leaps off the page as this alive character.

He's not just a combination of static philosophical categories. Now, here's the thing. If I was to do a longer answer to this good person, I would want to go to passages like 1 Corinthians, like Galatians.

Actually, I think Galatians is the earliest Christian letter, even if it's not the earliest, it's pretty early. In Galatians 4, Paul says that God has rescued us by sending his own son, and then because he's rescued us through the son, he has sent his own spirit to cry Abba Father within us. And then he says, this is Galatians 4 verses 8 and following, so you've got a choice.

You either go with this God or it's some form of idolatry. And I want to say it from that moment on, if the doctrine of the Trinity didn't exist, it'd been necessary to invent it. This is the God who sends the Son and the God who sends the Spirit of the Son.

But it's a narrative, it's an exodus-like narrative, it's a rescuing new, creational narrative. And what happens in the exodus is God rescues his people and he comes to dwell with them in the tabernacle, in the tent. And that's where the idea of God who is both over against us and in our midst, and the rescuing one, that sounds like a Trinity to me.

And I suppose the reason why they felt the need to, in a sense, codify it philosophically speaking in those councils was because there were many other competing ideas, obviously, at the time. People who had very different ideas. And to some extent, obviously, by and large, Christian denominations, whatever their flavour, tend to hold in common, a Trinitarian view.

And it's the ones that deny that, be they, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormonism, whatever, that tends to be the issue that tends to divide. So what, why is, would you say it's so integral to Christian orthodoxy, this particular issue, over and above some, say something like baptism which will come to or any other issue? Yeah. It is because, ultimately, we are in the God business and people in the modern West, I think, have started to realise now that the word God is not univocal.

When I was growing up, the word, people assumed that if somebody said the word God, they were talking about the same thing. And do you believe in God or don't you? And the right answer to that question is which God are we talking about? Because there are

many gods in the New Testament world, there were many, many gods. Paul says there are many gods and many lords, but, and then look what Paul does in 1 Corinthians 8. He says, for us, there is one God, the father from whom are all things and we to him, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things.

What's he doing? He's taking the Jewish, the Lord is one, and it's clear in the Greek what he's doing. He is discovering Jesus inside the definition of the one God. And that's how the church is marked out over against the pagan world around.

We are one God, one Lord people. And then as he says in 1 Corinthians 12, no one can say that except by the Holy Spirit. So in 1 Corinthians 12, again, it becomes Trinitarian.

And I know Richard Borkam in his book, Jesus and the God of Israel also did that. I thought quite revelation rework for me at least as somebody who's new to it. I think Philippians and that obviously very divine passage about Jesus, not choosing equality with God.

But then giving him the name that is above every name again and effectively putting him on saying, you know this is Yahweh, now you know it also is Jesus. Absolutely. And that remains the mystery.

And that's there in glimpses in the Old Testament, like in Daniel 7, when it says, thrones were set in heaven and the ancient of days took his seat. And then one like a son of man came and was presented and took his seat next to the ancient of days and to him was given dominion. And some of the early rabbis puzzled about that.

So are there two powers in heaven? And the answer is no, this is the one throne of the one God, but it is shared with somebody who is a son of man. I will come to more questions, but another question just occurred to me then is, granted that Paul and the early Christians were worshiping God, Jesus as God from the very early stage. To what extent do you think Jesus himself was aware of his divinity? The way I put it is in terms of vocation.

And I think that's very clear that Jesus baptism, as in Mark 1 and so on, something happens which doesn't create a vocation out of nothing, but dramatically confirms a vocation which is already there. And that vocation is expressed in terms of Psalm 2. You are my son this day if I begotten you. And Isaiah 42, behold my servant whom I've chosen, the one in whom I delight.

And the way that I would put it, and interestingly another book you should read, if you haven't already, is Richard Hayes' book, Echor's description of the Gospels, which brings a lot of this into fresh light. That I believe that Jesus from his earliest days was aware of a vocation to do and be this character that scripture was speaking of, aware that strangely in those same passages, this is how God himself expresses himself as a human being.

And that's very mysterious, but ultimately I think it goes back to Genesis 1, the creation of man and woman in God's image, that God creates human beings against the day when he will come and himself be, if you like, a character in his own play, or the character in his own play, to do what only he can do.

And I believe Jesus had that as a vocation. Now, many people, one of the privileges of my life, so I've worked with a lot of people struggling with their vocations. And I know kind of how it goes, sometimes from quite an early day, people are aware, I think maybe I'm supposed to do X, Y, and Z. And then sometimes that's just a fantasy and it's all wrong and it doesn't happen and they're stupid and they need to unlearn that.

And other times things that there have been glimmers of then do actually, and it turns out, yep, they were right, that really was what God wanted to do. And it seems to me, Jesus was aware, richly, deeply of that vocation from his earliest days, to do and be what in scripture only God gets to do and be. We must go to some of the questions that are here.

Jason asks about whether there's any hierarchy. Jason is in Dallas says, would you mind expounding on the Trinity and discussing if there is a hierarchy between the three persons, do you believe, for instance, the Father is superior to Jesus and the Holy Spirit? Yeah, the word hierarchy, I don't think is really helpful. I mean, you do have those passages where, the Philippians 2, which you just quoted, every tongue should confess Jesus is Lord to the glory of God, the Father, and that in 1 Corinthians 15, you have the Son who is ruling at the moment, and when he has overcome all enemies, including death, he will present to the Father the kingdom which is now complete, and then it says the Son will be subjected to the Father so that God may be all in all.

And I think these are ways of saying something which is almost unsayable, ways for which we don't have very good language. I think to step back and say, oh, it looks like a hierarchy, so you've got the Father and the Son is definitely down there somewhere, and then the Spirit is somewhere else we're not sure where. That's kind of missing the point.

That's not what those ways of speaking were designed to do. These are ways of saying, and in both cases, echoing Isaiah, echoing the Psalms particularly, go back and live within the narrative of Isaiah and the Psalms, and there you find that the Creator God, who is overall and above all and beyond all, nevertheless, dwells with those who are humble and contrite in heart, dwells in the temple in Jerusalem, and it's that to and fro within which the story makes sense. And it's like I'm not an engineer, I'm not an architect.

If I was planning to build a house to live in, there's all sorts of things where I would just have to trust that the architect seems to know what the stresses and strains are in this building. And when I shut the front door, I'll trust that the roof isn't going to collapse on my head. And at a certain point, that's what theology is like.

And the more you live in the house, the more it works, the more you say, yes, I see, we have this and we have that, and here I am, and I can now, I don't want to be purely pragmatic, it's not just, it seems to work for me, though there is an element of that about belief, of course. Another question here on the persons of the Trinity, Toby in Church Stratton Shopshire, asks Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, or Creator, Savior, and Sustainer. Is there really a problem with the gender of the Trinity? And can we have a personal relationship with a job title? That's a very good question, because over the last 20 or 30 years, some people seeking to be sensitive to the fact that many women have found the church's practice, as well as the church's language, to be bruising and dismissive, as though, well, God is the sort of male one, and then you women are out there somewhere.

And people have tried to say, well, instead of Father, Son, Spirit, let's try these other things, the problem with that is that in Scripture and in all the great theologians, the word creator properly goes with Father, and Son, and Spirit, the word redeemer goes with Father, and Son, and Spirit, sanctify it likewise, and everything that God does, God does triunely, so that if you try and split these up, you're not any longer talking about the Trinity, and it is the Trinity, which is the gold standard. Of course, we say, oh, well, we know that many people have suffered from having abusive fathers or whatever, and people in the first century knew that as well, just as well as we did. It's like the language of kingdom, people say, oh, we don't do kingdom language, because we know that kings are tyrants, and they are abusive.

Excuse me, who did they have as kings in the first century? They had Herod, they had Caesar, and yet Jesus talks about God's kingship, because he's reclaiming the idea of God's wise, just healing, redemptive sovereignty. So, yes, I understand why people might want to find other ways of saying things for a short-term purpose, but don't think that those alternative blessings are trinitarian, because they're really not, and if we're blessing somebody in the name of the true God, which is what ministers ought to be doing, then let's make sure it is in the name of the true God. I'm tempted to go off in the direction of that old chestnut of whether we should use female or male pronouns for God, but we'll leave that for another episode, I think, because that's the whole discussion in itself, which often causes... People from the beginning have said God is beyond gender, but if we're confused, face it, the Western world has been confused about gender roles and identities for the last generation.

It's time, hopefully, we move beyond that and settle down again, and so once that confusion is going on, everything feels awkward. Let's live through that awkwardness and hopefully come out the other side. Before we rejoin today's episode, I need to tell you about an urgent challenge Premier Insight is facing today.

As we begin this new year, \$20,000 is needed by February 29th, in order to keep Premier Insight strong and financially on target. At the outset of this new year, that couldn't be

more important. As you know, all said to Christianity is in rapid decline across the United States.

So many Christians feel ill-equipped to defend their faith against the angry and antagonistic rhetoric of our day, but at the very same time, there's also a growing spiritual openness, with 84% of Americans saying they're open to a conversation about Jesus. Both these trends mean that America is crying out for a clear and courageous Christian voice in 2024, a voice that not only equips believers to stand firm, but one that also winsomely engages skeptics and seekers with the claims of the gospel. That voice is Premier Insight.

Your gift today will help keep Premier Insight strong at this pivotal moment, so please give generously to help meet the \$20,000 need. You can give online at premierinsight.org forward slash NT right. That's premierinsight.org forward slash NT right.

Thank you so much. Let's turn to the other doctrine. We'll have to deal with this more briefly from the Trinity, but baptism was another subject that a number of people have written in about.

Here's James in China, who says, no, actually, let's do Oscar, first of all, in the Netherlands before James. In your answers, you often underline the importance of baptism. In my conversations with pastors from other denominations, I notice a growing openness towards different forms of ways to baptize, infant adults, water on the forehead, full immersion.

Where do you stand on what Oscar calls the friendly discussion about baptism? I remember being in a discussion in Rome, an ecumenical discussion some years ago, where some of the Roman Catholic theologians were saying that there are two great ecumenical instruments, baptism in the Bible, the two V's, which is really exciting, because actually officially, if somebody moves from being Roman Catholics, being Anglican or vice versa, they don't get re-baptized, because we recognize one another's baptize. And actually, I, of course, recognize if somebody has been baptized in a Baptist church with full immersion, they've been baptized. Sadly, not all Baptists will recognize that I've been baptized, because I was sprinkled as a child.

And I know that that remains a bone of contention. It's a curiously modern bone of contention. I'm not an expert on early Baptist history, but the fact is that the church baptised inference right the way through from very early on.

Of course, there is a debate as to whether that happened in the New Testament. It seems to me obvious that it did, but not everyone agrees with me. But certainly from the second century, right the way through.

So there is a peculiarity about that. Not that the church cannot have gone wrong for those years, because I think it has in some ways. But I want to say, hang on, what are we saying about all sorts of things at this point? But most Christians recognize most other Christians as fellow Christians, however they've been baptized.

And then the question is, what does baptism mean and why do we do it? And that has to do with the fact that Christianity is not a form of Platonism, which is about something internal purely for which the outward thing would only be a vague visual aid. But it is about a community. It's a community which is formed by the death and resurrection of Jesus.

And Jesus himself was baptized by John in the River Jordan, and his early followers were people who had been baptized by John, and then by Jesus' own followers. And then that obviously continued in the early church. And that wasn't just some odd magical thing.

It was evoking the crossing of the Red Sea and the crossing of the River Jordan. So the book of Exodus and the book of Joshua, and it was saying that we are the new Exodus people. And that means we are the people of new creation, and that means that we take this precious symbol, water, which goes right back to Genesis 1, you know, out of the waters of chaos.

God brings new life. And it says we are people of new creation. And that matters bodily.

It matters that that's happened in my personal history, not in my imagination or in my inner spirit, leaving my body unaffected. And that's why Luther says that the Christian life is a daily baptism, a daily dying to sin and coming to life with God. So all of that matters in a way which goes beyond the mere visual aid idea, which is easier for Western Christians to slip back into if they're not careful.

Let's go to James in China now who asks, does one receive forgiveness at the time of baptism into Christ? Emotion in water preceded by faith in Jesus as Messiah, or repentance and confession of Christ and illustrates that with a number of passages, Mark 1, 4, 16, 15, Luke 3, 3, Acts 2, 38 and various others. But it's an idea I've seen, you know, that people can get hung up sometimes on the specific language that accompanies baptism in the Gospels and the Acts. And that obviously even denominations have emerged out of this idea that actually it is the act of baptism that imparts, if you like, the forgiveness of God.

Yes, it seems to me that anyone who turns to God, who simply, whether they kneel down or stand up or whatever and says to God, Lord, I am a mess, sorry about that, please forgive me because of Jesus. I want to say that person receives forgiveness right then and there. However, forgiveness is not simply a private transaction between me and God, as in the New Testament, forgiveness involves being part of a community that are formed by forgiveness, that know themselves to be the people who've been rescued

from Egypt, as it were, the people who've come out from the land of sin and slavery and are now in this strange, dangerous new creation place and hence have to offer one another forgiveness as well.

And so what baptism does is it brings you, ideally, brings you into the community where the word forgiveness is over the door. So in that sense, yes, personally you can know God's forgiveness right now and that's so for practicing Christians when we sin, we can know God's forgiveness right now. But often, as the church has discovered over the years, when somebody who is a Christian has done something which they know is wrong, sometimes they find it hard to forgive themselves and sometimes the only way they can really be assured of God's forgiveness is by somebody in the community, perhaps somebody in authority in the community, assuring them almost formally that yes, you are part of this forgiveness community and God forgives you.

And so the baptism bringing you into the community is also the means by which that sense that you may or may not have as a sinner that God has forgiven you. The fact that you are welcomed into this community, often that's the thing that really makes people know it's true, I am forgiven, these people love me. Isn't that wonderful? There's a wonderful viral video.

I don't know if you've seen it, it's in a sort of African-American congregation and the minister has a boy probably sort of 11 or 12 who is going to baptise by full immersion and the minister is going on at some length and the boy eventually says I can't wait any longer, he holds his nose and he does himself under it. It's tremendous fun. There's a sense of the expectation and joy in that video.

As somebody who does believe in infant baptism and I've baptised my own children and two or three of my five grandchildren, I've baptised, that is a very special moment but equally there are very special moments for young adults and in my tradition that's confirmation etc. It is indeed. I must confess that I have seen one or two Anglican churches, more evangelical ones, something almost like re-baptism happening where perhaps because someone comes to faith really as an adult but has been baptised, I think it still goes under the labour of reaffirmation of baptismal vows but nonetheless water is involved and so on.

What do you think of that? How closely does that become a sort of second baptismal? Second baptism is a contradiction in terms. Baptism by definition is once, you can't come into the house twice. However, if somebody has behaved as if they weren't in the house, then there may be all sorts of ways of recognising and celebrating under God.

They're returning to the family but I wouldn't myself go anywhere near treating that as second baptism. What we've often done and is now quite regular I think in the Church of England is where you have confirmation services which of course I've done quite a lot. You also have baptism services, a baptism as part of the service.

So people who haven't been baptized get baptized and confirmed in the same event. But then often the confirmation candidates and sometimes the whole congregation will come to the font, dip their finger in and make the sign of the cross to reaffirm their baptismal vows. This is not a re-baptism but here's the point.

We in the West have often thought of baptism as something which we do to this candidate. I think it's better to see baptism as one of the things which the Church regularly does to say, this is who we are in Christ. Like the breaking of bread and the wine, the Eucharist, whatever we call it.

That's one of the things we do which affirms and which embodies who we are in Christ. So baptism is something that we all do together frequently into which we incorporate this person who's come as a candidate. And rather think of it like that rather than something which is just us doing it to this one person.

It's been tremendous stuff. Thank you. We're already at the end of today's program.

But we've covered Trinity and the baptism. That's not bad going. It's a start.

Anyway, thank you very much. Thank you. There are many other questions of doctrine that I'm sure we'll come to in another edition of the program in due course because that's always various things that people are interested in finding your thoughts on.

But for the moment, we'll leave it there. Until next time, thanks for being with me. Thank you.

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