

# Wisdom of the Prayer Book

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Date: 27 January 2008

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[ 0 : 00 ] My theme, as Bill said, is the wisdom of the prayer book, and particularly that aspect of its wisdom that settles for the inclusion of the creed, or one of the two creeds, either the Apostles' Creed or the Nicene Constantinopolitan Creed, in each worship service.

And I am going to celebrate those creeds as presenting the gospel, and I am going to urge that every time we say the creeds in public worship, our minds and our hearts should go over the gospel again, and we should feel something of awe, and something of joy, and something of privilege, and something of delight.

And if saying the creed seems to you, friends, up to this point at any rate, just a traditional routine, something one does the same way that one cleans one's teeth, without thinking about it, you see, you can just do it.

Well, I am hoping to change your attitude altogether. I tell you that right at the outset, so that you will appreciate which way I am going.

I am going to be the same. We want God to be our teacher, so let's begin with prayer. Gracious Father, as we deal today with the celebration of the gospel expressed in the creeds, the grace of the gospel, and we pray that you will be the same.

[ 1 : 54 ] We pray that you yourself will draw near to us, that your spirit will touch our hearts and open our eyes and show us afresh the glory of Christ, and that praise and adoration and joy may become increasingly the temper of our spirits as we think and run our minds back again and again to the words of the creed and the way in which they point to the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So be with us, we pray, as we think together now, for his name's sake. Amen.

Thanks be to God, said Paul in the middle of Romans 7, Romans 6, I'm sorry. Thanks be to God that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching, to which you were committed, and having been set free from sin have become slaves of righteousness.

Well, I hope that all of us can say, yes, thank God, that covers me. And it's as for who have been delivered to the standard of apostolic teaching, and thereby have come to a knowledge of Christ, and being set free from sin, and become servants of righteousness, that I speak to you now. And speak to you about the creeds. Actually, I'm going to focus on the Apostles' Creed, the shorter, the simpler, of the two creeds that we regularly use. The Nicene Creed, as we call it, is an expansion, topically, of what's in the Apostles' Creed.

The purpose of the expansion is to rule out heresies, heresies that were catching people's heads and hearts in the fourth century, when the Nicene Creed was established. We are going back into the formulation that dates from the second and third century, which we call the Apostles' Creed. It's always been called that, not because any of the Apostles wrote it, but because it embodies apostolic doctrine.

Well, what we're going to see, in fact, is that it embodies the Gospel. All right. Now, let's start here. When do we say the Creed? Answer. We say it when we are about to pray.

[ 4 : 58 ] The Creed comes in morning and evening prayer as a prelude to joining in prayer together. And I put it to you straight away that we say the Creed as our ID.

We identify ourselves, in other words, as persons who believe certain things and are praying on the basis of a relationship with God that involves these things.

We are identifying ourselves, in other words, as believers, as children of God by adoption and grace, as heirs of his promises and of the glory to come, as members of his people, his church. As such, we expect that our prayers will be heard and answered. What we should be feeling as we say the Creed is, first of all, gratitude to God. Thank you, Lord, that this is who I am.

And then we should be feeling a sense of awe and expectancy, excitement even. We are going to have an interview with royalty, with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

[ 6 : 36 ] If an interview with royalty, scheduled for us, would get us excited in human terms, well, an interview with the heavenly royalty, the Divine Three, for the purposes of presenting our prayers and desires and looking to them, Father, Son and the Spirit, to answer our prayers, this too should excite and give us a great sense of privilege every time we do it.

And there is a further aspect, of course, to what we are doing. The ID operates as a proclamation to the public, as well as being a prelude to our God.

Anyone who notices what we are doing, the watching world, as Francis Schaeffer taught us to call the observers, the watching world, the watching world, should take note from the things that we declare that we believe, that we are different from other people.

We are on a road less traveled, to use Robert Frost's phrase. We are among the folk of the world, but we are not of them. We are different because of what we believe.

And to proclaim our distinctive faith in a world which needs to share that faith is of itself something worth doing, something which not only honors God, but we hope benefits the people who hear us.

[ 8 : 33 ] So, think of saving the creed as proclaiming who we are, both ways, to God and the world, but primarily to God.

Now, we ask another question. Where did the Apostles' Creed come from? When was it first put together? Why has the Church always used it in worship?

What's the purpose of the exercise? Well, I've begun to answer the last question already. The purpose of the exercise is to identify ourselves before God as His children who have a right to call on Him, and who have a hope that according to His promise, our Heavenly Father will hear and answer our prayers.

But the question of where the creed came from is a distinct question. Let me answer that at once. The creed began life as a syllabus of the Gospel.

It was put together as a syllabus before it began to be used as a formula in worship.

[ 9 : 58 ] The creed began life as a book. The creed began life as a book. Every congregation of any size in the second century had an ongoing activity, a department of its life, called the catechumenate, which was an activity of instructing folk from the world around who had become interested in Christianity and wanted to know more.

Some of them were sure at the start that they wanted to become Christians. Some weren't sure as yet, but they did know that they wanted to hear more about Christianity because they realized that what Christianity was offering was something that they felt the need of.

In those days, everybody ran scared of evil spirits. And the Christian Gospel proclaimed the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ over evil spirits and promised a life in which your hand would be in His and He would protect you from evil spirits.

And that rang bells in the second century. It was the principal selling line, if I can put it that way, of the preachers of the Gospel.

Oh yes, it didn't take them very long to explain that in fact what we had to face was the fact that the demons whom we fear were rebel creatures and we also are rebel creatures and that there's no hope for us with God unless our sin can be washed out.

[ 11 : 45 ] And so we need to know about Jesus Christ and His cross and so all the things that we regard as central to the Gospel would be brought in before very much had happened and they had accumulated at all.

But it's still a bit with the point of contact. People interested in Christianity because of the quality of life that it offered. And the pattern, may I just divert for a moment to tell you, was that people coming into the Catechumenate would be instructed on a regular basis.

The way actually, the people coming into the Christianity Explore class here in St. John's, a class that we run regularly all year round, they too will be instructed systematically for a certain length of time.

In the second century Catechumenate, it was usually three years, might be two, but usually three. And the instruction worked up to a ceremony on Easter evening where the people who had been instructed and whose understanding of the Gospel had been checked and approved by the teachers, they were ceremonially baptized, they were ceremonially baptized, and then they would stay awake through the night and join with the Church in the Easter Communion, early Easter

morning.

It was quite a big deal on the ceremonial occasion, baptism and First Communion. Well, the Catechumenate was the teaching institution that brought people up to that point.

[13:36] And what they were taught were the Gospel facts. Here, let me say, with emphasis, the Christian Gospel is precisely facts, matters of fact, which make all the difference once one humbly acknowledges their reality, and takes account of them, and allows these facts to take account of us.

In the world of modern messaging, you sometimes see adverts for fax machines. I've seen this often.

And the phrase, the tag phrase in the advert is just the facts, and spelt facts, F-A-X. But the impact of the tag phrase arises from the truth that constantly, in decision-making, giving evidence of the law courts, in academic scholarship, in so many walks of life, we ask people for just the facts.

Well, the Gospel presents just the facts. Facts about God. Facts about new life in Christ. The facts that everybody needs to know.

We're not in the realm of personal opinion. We're not in the realm of human fancy. We're certainly not in the realm of fantasy. Oh, yes, there's plenty of fantasy literature which moves around in the same field in which the Gospel moves.

[15:23] We are used to it. Some of it is Christian, some of it isn't. There are fantasy films about life after death, which as a collection are much more anti-Gospel than pro-it, one has to say that.

But all of that is human fantasy, and the Gospel is not human fantasy. The Gospel is just the facts about what God has done.

And the Creed embodies the facts. That's the point that I'm making. So we ask, alright, what are the facts? What are the realities to which the Creed introduces us?

What is the Gospel according to the Creed? In many circles nowadays, the Gospel according to us is reduced to a very simple presentation of individual salvation, which is often expressed as an ABC.

All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. That is the A. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. That's the B.

[16:46] Confess Jesus Christ risen from the dead and you will be in the new life. That's the C. Well, hold on a minute.

I'm not saying that ABC is not part of the Gospel. Indeed it is. But in the second century AD, when the Church was still finding its way in the pagan world and discerning by experience how much had to be said for the conversion of people with no Jewish or Old Testament background, the Gospel, as they learned to proclaim it, and as they embodied it in the Creed, involved a good deal more than that.

And the Apostles' Creed lays before us the five realities which the early Church came to see as necessary if the Gospel story is to be told, if the Gospel invitation is to be understood, and if the new life in Christ to which the Gospel invites us is to be properly experienced.

And here are those five facts. One. The reality of the Trinity. I believe in God, the Father Almighty, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord.

And I believe in the Holy Ghost. Well, what you have here is the presentation of what Christians know that the real God really is.

[18:33] And there's transcendent mystery here, for sure, because God is not like any of His creatures at this point.

And so we can't point to simple parallels. We simply have to acknowledge a mystery. God is as truly three persons as He is one being.

Three in one and one in three. God is a team. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the three persons, are always working together in all the work that God does.

They are not the kind of team in which you have three separate persons. They are a unique team in which there's always a single plan or purpose being followed through.

The Father forms the purpose, and then it's carried out through the Son and through the Spirit. One can characterize this to some extent.

[19:47] This is a very simple way of putting it, and it's an inadequate way, I know, but it's true as far as it goes. One can characterize this by saying, The Father forms the plans.

The Son is the chief executive through whom the plans are carried into being. The Holy Spirit is the executant of the plans, the hands-on person, whose work brings what is planned to completion.

The Father, Son, and Spirit are always together. God, as I said, is a team. And the Father's purposes are being worked out through Jesus Christ the Lord and through the Holy Spirit. Once one sees that incidentally, one realizes that the New Testament, though it has nothing technical to say about God as three in one.

And so there are folk who deny that the Trinity is in the New Testament. But in actual sense, what the New Testament is displaying on page after page is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit working together, the three persons executing a single plan, a single purpose for the salvation of persons like you and me.

[ 21 : 12 ] And once one sees that, well then one has to say, the New Testament is full of the Trinity. You can say, perhaps to make this easier to grasp, that the doctrine of the Trinity, viewed as a doctrine, is in solution in the New Testament in the way that the sugar is in solution in our cup of coffee when we've stirred it up.

Well, I'll give you that. If it's any help to you, hold on to it. And I find that thoughts like this are useful when I'm teaching the Trinity at Regent College, and I'm sharing them with you now.

So, God's life, as Scripture reveals it, is a threefold life. It's a life of love, mutual love between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

And then it's a life in which all three together love God's people in the created order. The created order which itself is a result of the planning of the Father and the action of the Son and the Spirit. All things were made through the Son. Without Him, nothing was made, but was made, says the prologue to John's Gospel. And right back in the second verse of the Bible, we are told that the Spirit of God brooded over the waters, as the created order of things was being put in shape.

[ 22 : 58 ] And we are to understand that it was the hands-on work of the Holy Spirit that put everything in shape. Through the Son, through the Spirit, the Father's purpose is fulfilled.

And so, in redemption. Well, this means that the Christian life is and must be a life in which we acknowledge the Father, the source of it all.

The Son died and rose and reigns and yet gives us His fellowship. He walks with us through life. I am with you always, he said.

How does that happen? Well, it happens through the Holy Spirit, who makes this a reality. And so, supernaturalizes our lives in the distinctive Christian way.

And when one thinks about the Church, well, the story is the same. The Church is a supernatural society. The Church is the people of God, the Father.

[ 24 : 04 ] But the Church is also the body of Christ, which has its being and its life through union with Christ.

And all of that becomes reality through the action of the Holy Spirit. You can distinguish the Father, the Son and the Spirit in terms of the things, the specific things that they do.

But you mustn't separate them. They're always together. Just as they were at the Lord's baptism, remember? The Holy Spirit descended on Him and the form of a dove, John the Baptist saw it.

The voice came from heaven. This is the Father speaking. This is my beloved Son, he said, in whom I am well-keased. Well, that's where the Christian story about God has to begin.

You can't really understand the Gospel until you appreciate that the Trinity is matter of fact. One further scripture reference to confirm that.

[ 25 : 16 ] Jesus, you will agree, announced the Gospel to the Jewish theologian Nicodemus. We read all about it in the third chapter of John's Gospel.

Well, what ground did Jesus cover as he spoke to Nicodemus? He spoke of being born again of the Spirit of God.

He spoke of this as the means of entry into the kingdom of God. We're talking about two persons here then, Spirit and the God whose kingdom it is and whom we know as Father.

And then before very long we find that he's talking about the importance of attending to his teaching. You folk, he says, speaking of Nicodemus and his fellow Jewish theologians, you folk don't receive our witness, but we speak of what we know and we testify of what we've seen.

And you should receive our witness. And then he sweeps on and says this, we remember the words, I'm sure. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

[ 26 : 40 ] So there you've got the third person. He's speaking of himself, of course, when he refers to the Son of Man. Now, you will agree with me, won't you, that he has stated the Gospel as fully as

it could be stated right at the beginning of his ministry to a Jewish theologian.

You will agree with me that if there wasn't a reference to the cross, and if there wasn't a reference to the new birth through the Spirit, well, the Gospel wouldn't have been properly stated, not yet. And here is Jesus, staking the Gospel fully, in terms of the cross, in terms of the new birth, in terms of entry into the kingdom of the Father.

All right. All right. But, you see, it takes reference to all three persons of the Trinity, all three persons of the Godhead, to state that Gospel.

And if you're not willing to speak of any one, let alone any two of the three, you cannot state the Gospel. Can you see that?

[ 27 : 55 ] It's a very simple and basic point which lots of people don't see, so I hammer it a little bit here. So, that's where the Creed starts, introducing you to the three persons who are the one God, so that the full Gospel may be stated and known and experienced, and life be transformed through these things.

Now, second reality that the Creed expresses, the reality of our creaturehood.

We are confronted right away with the thought of God as maker of heaven and earth.

What follows? What follows? What follows is that we are then his creatures. We are not independent beings in the way that non-Christian philosophy would suggest.

God made us, and we depend on him just because he made us, and because he keeps us in being, having made us, just as he keeps the rest of the creation in being, now that he's brought it into being, we have to appreciate that there's no stability making for permanence in any part of God's creation, including ourselves.

[ 29 : 35 ] We think of ourselves, of course, as having a principle of continuance in ourselves. We think of the world as having a principle of continuance in itself.

But the truth is that we, as individuals, and the world around us, walls of this building, trees outside, mountains north of Vancouver, everything in creation, we, none of us, and no part of creation at all, has a principle of continuance in itself, which is a way of saying that it's like the image on your television screen.

And you and I are like the image on our television screen. If the signal didn't keep coming out, there wouldn't be a steady image, there wouldn't be anything at all. The image would simply vanish from the television screen.

And you and I would simply vanish this very moment. If God weren't actively upholding us this very moment, through Christ, actually, Christ from his throne, that's very explicitly in the New Testament. Hebrews 1 and verse 3, the Son of God upholds all things by the word of his power. And Paul, in Colossians chapter 1, verses 16 and 17, says that through him all things were created, and by him all things hold together.

[ 31 : 15 ] That means continue in being, in a single system, the way that they actually do. So we have to realize our dependence on God for our very continued existence moment by moment is as real and radical as that.

How much we owe God, then, for our continued life, and how weighty is our duty, it is a duty, man's duty, of gratitude to him for the life he desires, and obedience to him when he declares his will.

This takes a good deal of getting over, getting across to people nowadays, because we are in this modern post-Christian world, we are so heavily conditioned not to think in these terms.

To think of the world as self-sufficient, to think of ourselves as self-sustaining. And then people wonder why it is that somehow life doesn't satisfy and their longing for significance simply isn't satisfied by anything that they do or anything that they experience.

Truth is, we were all made, in our dependence on God, to worship God. And if in worshipping him, in gratitude, in praise, that we find our significance.

[ 32 : 58 ] Maybe Christian knows this. The joy of one's heart increases and deepens steadily the more one gets into the habit of worship morning, noon and night.

But the world doesn't know this. Just as the world has no idea about the Trinity, some of the world has no idea about our creaturehood.

As I say this, I think of Billy Graham's song leader, George Beverly Shea. Some of you probably are too young to know who George Beverly Shea is.

He's about 100 years old now. He's still very strong as far as I know. He was a singer, a Canadian, with a wonderful bass voice.

And in the early days of the Graham missions in Britain, where I heard them, or heard him, and in the States also, Beverly Shea regularly sang a song which I would suppose that you know, even if you don't know who George Beverly Shea is.

[ 34 : 11 ] He's got the whole world in his hand. Yeah? Yeah. And then verse after verse, he's got the tiny baby in his hand. He's got you and me in his hand.

He's got the whole world in his hand. Let's just check. Is there anybody here who's never heard those words? Doesn't know that song? No? Okay.

Well, it's truth, you see. It's truth to be sung. It's truth to be said. It's truth to be insisted on. It's the second truth with which the Creed is confronting us when it says, remember, God is creator of heaven and earth.

Again, I say the world has no idea about this, but this is the world's blindness. Not superior wisdom, just the rivers.

Then thirdly, the Creed sets before us the reality of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in, I believe, in Jesus Christ, his only son, our Lord.

[ 35 : 22 ] One of the dimensions of modern culture is that we do history. We study history. We love history.

We are history conscious. Well, what is history? We think of history as a flow of events.

We think of it as a series of processes. And we think of every event as having a cause, every process as instituted or triggered by something prior, which is its cause and its trigger.

And we think of reality as a seamless flow of historical causation.

And that, as I said, is part of a conscience. Well, the Christian thing that must be said about that is that the Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, has torn a hole in history.

[ 36 : 40 ] Because you cannot explain the Lord Jesus Christ, his appearing, his ministry, the things that he said, and certainly his rising from the dead after they crucified him and thought they'd got rid of him.

You can't explain any of those things in terms of what went before. And in the church, week by week, day by day, the hole is still present.

People are being born again through faith in the Lord Jesus. And you cannot explain the new birth and the new attitude of heart, mind, spirit, which the new birth brings.

You can't explain that in terms of anything that went before. Anything that was already there in the makeup of our human nature. This is something new.

Well, yes, it is. It is a creative act of good, right at the very core of a person's being.

[ 37 : 53 ] And it imparts to us motivations that were never there before, attitudes that were never there before. And this inexplicable reality, I mean this historically inexplicable reality of the new birth, is happening again and again and again everywhere that the gospel goes.

Well, I use this image of the Christian order of things as tearing a hole in history. You can't explain Jesus Christ in terms of what went before.

You can't explain individual Christians in terms of what went before. And the gospel proclaims that out of the facts of Christ, which the creed lists for you, Jesus Christ, his only son, our Lord, conceived by the Holy Spirit.

Now that's God breaking into history, issuing in virginal conception and then virgin birth. Conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified dead and buried.

He descended into Hades, that is, the realm of reality into which the dead go. Hades or hell, as it's translated in our prayer book version, isn't any more specific about the sort of place it is, than simply to say, it's the place where the dead go.

[ 39 : 26 ] The creed hammers this, actually, because in the second century, as indeed at the end of the first, there were a lot of heretics around who were maintaining that Jesus never really died on the cross.

Something else happened. They had different ideas as to what happened. But the thing they were all agreed on was that he didn't really die. Well, the creed is insistent that he did really die.

And then, the third day he rose from the dead. Again, you can't explain this in terms of historical causation. Jesus' resurrection wasn't triggered by anything that went before.

This, again, is a created act of God. He rose from the dead. He ascended into heaven. He sits at the right hand of the Father. He's coming again.

All of this is celebrated in the creed. And none of it can be explained in terms of the ordinary categories of this world's history.

[ 40 : 36 ] You know, of course, that butterflies come out of a chrysalis. Have you ever seen it happen?

Yes, and so have I. It's a wonderful thing to watch. The chrysalis cracks. The butterfly slowly creeps out. It takes a bit of time.

The time that I was watching it, it took between one and two hours to happen. I imagine that's par for the course. But then, well, the chrysalis was left behind and there was the butterfly.

An incredible feeling, well, this is really a miraculous process in nature. It looks like something that is naturally inexplicable.

Though, of course, we know that it isn't really inexplicable. But as an illustration of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus from the dead, and as a pointer to how it will be for you and me when we are raised from the dead, well, it carries weight.

[ 41 : 53 ] And it's very moving to think of those things as you watch the butterfly slowly emerging from the Christmas. Through Christ, new life is going to be ours.

In Christ, we share the resurrection life that he is enjoying already. I can't explain any of this in terms of world history.

This is the work of God. And the Creed proclaims it, and so must we as we witness to the gospel. The reality then of the Trinity and of our creaturehood and of Jesus Christ is being highlighted in the gospel.

And, sorry, highlighted in the Creed, I should say. And every time we say the Creed, we should realize this. This is the gospel, and in it we rejoice.

Then the fourth reality is the reality of the Holy Catholic Church. The Apostolic Church, one might say.

[ 43 : 04 ] Actually, the Nicene Creed does say it. The Apostles' Creed doesn't use that word. The Apostles' Creed does add a phrase to explain to us the sort of reality that the Church, the Holy Catholic Church is.

The communion of saints is the phrase that the Creed adds to, I believe, in the Holy Catholic Church.

And communion of saints is a phrase that seems to mean a genuine fellowship between people who are genuinely renewed, spiritually renewed, and consecrated to God, and consecrated to God. This is using the word saints, you see, in the way that it's used in the Scripture. The Church is not just a humanly organized institution.

The Church is, in essence, a fellowship of people who are sharing holy things, because they themselves are alive in the Lord, and in that sense have become holy people.

[ 44 : 22 ] And this supernatural view of the Church is there in the Creed, and it is right for us, as we preach the Gospel, to go to town a bit in celebrating the supernaturalness of the Church.

After all, in the New Testament, two great passages in which the nature of the Church is taught are these. John chapter 15, Jesus as the vine, and all Christians as branches in the vine, sharing the life of the vine.

And then, Paul, in a number of places in his letters, speaks of the Church as the body of Christ, with the Lord Jesus as its head.

Now, if you stand back and look at those two images, you realize what we're being presented with here is the thought of a single, organic life, in which all individual Christians share.

Yes, that's how we are to think of the Church. And that's how we are to live as part of the Church.

[ 45 : 42 ] Christ is the focus, the focus I trust for all of us. He is to be the focus for all the Lord's people. The life that each of us knows, the spiritual life, the resurrection life, the energy for the worship of God, and the witness to the world, to which we call.

All that life and energy comes from God, through Christ. Actually, when we fulfill our calling in this way, in worship and witness, we are exhibiting Christ's image of lightness in our own behavior.

And we are doing it together, sharing with each other, as we do it. And we are to think of ourselves as linked to each other, not by any kind of physical link, but nonetheless by a real spiritual link.

We share the life, the resurrection life of the Lord Jesus with each other. How do we do that? Well, by talk, by empathy, by sympathy, by helping each other.

This is the life of Christ going to and fro between us, as we serve each other in the Lord. It's a tremendous notion, and I haven't time to work it out in full.

[ 47 : 16 ] But that's the implication of both these images. We're all branches of the same vine, sharing a common life. We're all of those beings, or units shall I say, of the same body, sharing the risen life of the Christ who is our head.

The head being the control center of the whole body in the way that, in your case and mine, the head is the control center for all that we do.

This is the reality of the church. The world has no idea that the church is any more than a club. A club for like-minded people, you see, like a tennis club or a golf club.

No, no, no. The church is so much more than that. The creed proclaims it. The holy Catholic church, which is the communion of saints. And then, fifthly, within the frame of proclaiming the supernatural church, becomes the proclaiming of the reality of personal salvation, supernatural again, and enjoyed, fulfilled, realized, and expressed within the larger fellowship of the church. Where, in our thinking about evangelism and so on, we tend to start with the individual. The creed reminds us, not that there's anything wrong with focusing on the individual, but the creed reminds us that if there's real spiritual life anywhere, well, it's life within a fellowship.

[ 48 : 59 ] And if a person to whom we're witnessing becomes a believer, from the word go, that person is in fellowship with the rest of them. The rest of the believers, in the neighborhood, and in the local congregation, and throughout the world.

Well, the reality of personal salvation is focused in three phrases, and with this I sign off. Phrase one, the forgiveness of sins.

Who forgives? Well, we know the answer to that one. How does he forgive? We know the answer to that one also. God forgives.

Christ forgives on the basis of what was achieved at Calvary, where the penalty of sin was tasted by the dying Savior, and so our guilt was washed away.

That's the pattern of substitution and exchange which the Father devised. That's the way of divine wisdom, whereby the foundation for the forgiveness of sin is laid.

[ 50 : 15 ] And when we turn in faith to the Father and the Son, the forgiveness of sins is ours. And then the Creed speaks of the resurrection of the body.

Or, in some versions of the Creed, the date from the second century, the resurrection of the flesh.

This point was being made very strongly against heretics, once more, who were quite sure that salvation involves the permanent separation of the self or the soul from the body.

That idea goes back to Plato, the philosopher. Plato got a number of things right, but he was radically wrong here. He thought, and these heretics following Plato also thought, that the only way of real happiness for a person is to be disembodied.

And there was a tag that they used, Soma Sema, that's two Greek words together.

As you see, there's a sort of essence between the two words. What the tag means is that the body, Soma, is a tomb, Sema. And ourselves, that is our souls, our persons, we are, as it were, locked in the tomb.

[ 51 : 52 ] But the time is coming when we shall be freed from the tomb. And that will be salvation.

Well, Christians, right from the start, insisted that that isn't so.

Jesus Christ, who rose bodily from the dead, is the model for what we hope for. And the resurrection of our flesh, to be made like his glorious body, is essential to the hope that we've been given and that we cherish.

And you've got to remember, friends, it's a matter of everyday experience, that we live through our bodies, not just in them, but through them.

It's through your body that you're listening to me, and I hope understanding what I'm saying. It's through your body that you'll be in conversation with each other after I'm through.

It's through your body that you experience all that you do experience. It's through your body that you express all that you do express.

[ 53 : 04 ] We were made to be embodied creatures, not disembodied. There will be, for those of us who leave this world before Christ comes back, as every Christian, of course, prior to today, who has left this world, has done.

There will be a period, I think, for sure, of disembodiment, that that will be a period of limitation, of enrichment perhaps in some ways, but of impoverishing in other ways.

What we're to look forward to is the day when the Lord comes back, and all of us will be re-embodied in a physical body, a form of flesh, which will certainly be the body of its best, better than our bodies have ever been in this world, and which will permit expression and experience that goes beyond anything that we've known in this world.

That's what we look forward to. That's the hope of the resurrection of the body. When I teach this, I regularly illustrate it from that great lady, Jolly Erickson, whose body became useless to her when she became a quadriplegic at age 16.

For the last 40 years, she's had a marvelous ministry in all sorts of ways. She's still with us. One wonders how long she will be with us.

[ 54 : 45 ] But early on in her ministry, she used to say, quite regularly when she spoke in public, that what she was looking forward to was having a body through which she could express herself.

And she used to fancy that the first thing that she would want to do in heaven is to dance with Jesus. Well, it's a sweet thought, you see, from a quadriplegic who couldn't move her limbs at all. You can't, still, can't move her limbs at all. Well, our hope, according to the Creed and according to the Scriptures, 1 Corinthians 15 and all that, is a hope of the resurrection of the body.

And then, the life everlasting. What that means is that nothing ends.

Everything goes on. And you can express the condition of life in the way that Lewis did, wonderfully, in the very last paragraph of the last Narnia book, *The Last Banter*, where the Pevensie family, the children, that is, they do finally move into Aslan's country through a railway accident.

[ 56 : 15 ] And Lewis writes that, for them, just reading now, for them it was only the beginning of the real story.

You think of Bonhoeffer, when, on the day that he was to be hung, saying, Well, for me this is the end, but this is also the beginning.

Yes, for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world, and all their adventures in Narnia, had only been the cover and the title page.

Now, at last, they were beginning chapter one of the great story, which no one on earth has read, which goes on forever, and in which every chapter is better than the one before.

I think that's marvelous. And I would be bewildered if you didn't think it's marvelous. Well, that's where the creed takes you.

[ 57 : 24 ] The resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. A life which never ends, and in which every chapter is better than the one before.

Well, once again I have to say the world has no idea about any of this. And if we are going to proclaim the gospel to the world, we've got to cover all this ground, as well as talking about the Trinity, talking about our creaturehood, and talking about the ministry of the incarnate Savior. And I'm putting it to you that the Book of Common Prayer is very wise to keep us saying the creed, and encourage us to think about what we're saying every time we say it.

And I want to encourage you to remember, always, that the creed is a full statement of the gospel. The gospel by which we live, the gospel to which we must witness the gospel which is the saving truth of God for eternal life.

Now, this is a very basic point, but I think it's a very far-reaching point. And I'm very happy to discuss any of the things that I've touched on.

[ 58 : 54 ] So, let monologue move into dialogue. How do you react to all of these things? Questions, comments, observations? Let's see.

Please. Usually when I'm praying, I'm not... I often use three names or one name for it. Sometimes it seems to be a little confusing.

You know what I mean? But the mystery of the Trinity, when you're praying. Yes, but the three persons are... How can I say...

I mean, like using the words. Yeah. But the three persons, they're distinctly characterized in Scripture, because in the divine team, where they're always together, each of them is doing a distinct job.

And, Jesus said, when you pray, say, Father. And I think it's a good rule to say, well, I pray to the Father, unless there's a particular reason to pray to the Lord Jesus, or to pray to the Holy Spirit.

[ 60 : 02 ] But then there are particular reasons for doing precisely that. If, for instance, you are praying for any form of healing, Jesus is the healer.

And Paul, with his thorn in the flesh, was praying to Jesus, asking that it be cured, because Jesus was the healer. And that becomes clear as he finishes the story by telling us, He said to me, my grace is sufficient for you.

My strength is made perfect in weakness. And then he immediately reacts by saying, most gladly then will I glory in my weakness that the power of Christ...

Yes, he's been praying to Christ, you see, now he tells us. ...that the power of Christ may rest upon him. Christ is the Lord who has reassured him. Well, that's an apostolic example, you see, of prayer to Jesus, because what Paul was asking for was something specifically up Jesus' alley, if I may say it that way.

And if we are praying now that the fruit of the Spirit may appear in our lives, or something of that sort, if we are praying for particular graces or gifts which are bestowed by the Holy Spirit, well, it's equally appropriate, it seems to me, to pray to the Holy Spirit directly.

[ 61 : 34 ] Though one cannot go wrong if one keeps praying to the Father and asks for this blessing to be given through the Holy Spirit, or you ask for healing to be given through the Lord Jesus, whatever.

So I don't think that there's any basis here for, you say, being confused. I don't think we ought to be confused, I think we ought to see that the three divine persons are reality, and we may pray to the Son and the Spirit as well as praying to the Father when there's particular reason to do so.

And I expect we all of us do that as a matter of fact. Yes, different issue. Jim, from what you're saying, if the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are one, is it significant which one of them we are talking to in terms of, you know, I don't know whether I should pray to the Holy Spirit for this, and Jesus for life, and the Father for something else, would it matter?

No. Yes, I'm sorry. I sounded as if it did matter. I was only trying to spell out how this could be done in an orderly, especially from a disorderly way.

I often think it's much easier for children to think of the Lord Jesus, because it's really hard when they ask about God. Yes, well, I would encourage children to pray to Jesus.

[ 63 : 29 ] We've got, as I said, we've got every reason to hammer away when we're teaching children with the fact that Jesus is real, and Jesus is here, and Jesus is with us, and Jesus is the focus.

If we never told them that they have a heavenly Father, as well as a Savior, and that, how shall I say it, He needs to get a look in in our prayers.

Well, I think we would be selling the children short at that point. But yes, as we said, it isn't going to make any difference. But to keep our own heads clear as to what we're doing, that's spiritually a gain.

I saw it, yeah. Jim, if the Creed writers, I'm thinking about their collective mindset, God is persons in relation, an unthinkable thought before the gospel came to the world.

And then the church is persons in relation. Did they bring that to echo one another? Is that just a later observation? Which is, I think, a very happy observation. But were they thinking of it?

[ 64 : 42 ] I doubt they were, frankly. I think the two thoughts are parallel rather than being interconnected. And I think we get further faster in our own thinking and our own praying and then in the church, in our own fellowship.

If we don't try to assimilate the two instances of connectedness to each other. I think so. I'm, as you can see from the way that I'm responding to some of these questions, I'm a clarity man.

And I do think it's important to be very clear in your mind as to what you do in life in general, and certainly in the world of spiritual realities.

Where you're developing your fellowship with the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The New Testament seems quite capable.

That it's a relationship with all three persons. And this, it seems to me, is the pattern which we should be seeking to fulfill in our own prayers.

[ 65 : 59 ] Just then. Yes, I'm not sure. I think you come next, Debbie. Are there any churches today that hold catechism classes?

I went through it as a child, and I just wondered, how does a sort of regal sense about it doing catechism? You know, rather than modern day teaching, I feel?

Well, I'm not sure how that question should be answered, Betty. It's not just a question about whether we use the word catechism.

I use the word catechumenate. Because that's the word that everybody who talks about this second century institution does use.

And actually, at this present time, the Roman Catholic thinkers, from the Pope down, are very explicit about the need for a new catechumenate, in which they use the new catechism.

[ 67 : 12 ] That's a book, a very large book, you may know it. It's a book of resources, of material for teachers in catechism classes.

It's not a question and answer set up for people to memorize, to get the wrong idea. But, yes, Catholics are talking about a new catechumenate.

They say, we need it. And frankly, I think they're wrong. So stick a pen in the end. I will talk about our need and the new catechumenate also. And I will celebrate the Alpha Course and the Christianity Explored Course as two instances of attempts.

In fact, no matter if I've said this explicitly or perhaps realized it at all, but they are two attempts, in fact, to fill the gap which the catechumenate filled in the second century AD.

There are people who are prepared to be interested in Christianity if instruction is given at their level. All right. Let them come and let us discuss, explain at their level and introduce them to the realities of the faith as inquiring adults.

[ 68 : 34 ] That's the catechumenate for substance. And I do think that we need that and a lot of it throughout the evangelical world.

Is that enough of an answer? It is. It's just that I remember that it was almost a form of worship to go to catechism classes on Sunday afternoon.

Really? To me, as a child, that's how it seems. The reverence of God was really lifted high. Well, I'm so glad that that was your experience of being catechized, taught the catechism of a child.

I was taught the prayer book catechism also when I was a child. And there was no touch of reverence about what went wrong. It was just a burden as well.

And I would be very cautious, frankly, today in... Well, cautious before I tried to restore question and answer in the old style.

[ 69 : 42 ] I think that far more people would be, how can I say it, dumbed down and wearied and made subliminally hostile, shall I say, to the thing.

If you insist on putting them through question and answer, then would be led into reverence and worship by it.

That's a problem. You may disagree with me, but that's what I think. Yeah? Yes, you made two points. One, that this is, like when we do missions, this is what we should be teaching people.

And two, that this creed is in pretty well direct opposition to what people contemporarily believe now. And so my question is, when the rubber hits the road and when we're doing things like missions, what would be a way of proclaiming this to a culture in which it's so unfamiliar without compromising what we're doing?

I think that the thing that one has to say in whatever shape or form it can be heard by the person of the receiving end is this.

[ 71 : 05 ] Look, Christianity is quite different from the things that we ordinarily take for granted. And I have to tell you a story which takes a little time to unfold.

It's a story about who God is and the status of this cosmos as created and the sin, therefore, of ingratitude and disobedience on the part of God's rational creatures, that's us.

And then it's a story about God's restoring love, about incarnation, about atonement, about the kingdom of Christ and coming, his coming return and the renewal of the cosmos.

All of this is part of the plan of God. And we have to ask people, do you mind letting us tell you the whole story before we start discussing any part of it?

And put that way, it seems to me that we are saying something which can't really be objected to because in other fields of study also there are, shall I say, whole stories that you have to know, whole units of instruction that have to be given before you can sensibly discuss any part of them.

[ 72 : 35 ] And I find that if you say this to people, they'll give you a little of the time of day and respect you rather than otherwise for recognizing that a half, half presented Christian message isn't likely to be worth listening to really.

It needs to be the whole thing, the real thing, or nothing taught. I think it varies very much, of course, what circumstances you're in and what sort of a conversation you've been having prior to making this point with whoever it is that you're talking to.

But Francis Schaeffer is the man who, to my mind, says the prophetic thing about this. Francis Schaeffer's style in evangelism was to engage a person in conversation and to tear down all the cultural prejudices which this person had brought with him.

As a conversationalist, he exposes them and shows that they are incoherent and unwarrantable. And then, when he's made the, when he's brought the person, when he brought the person to the point of recognizing that his or her present outlook on life wouldn't do, then he would ask if he might tell the Christian story.

And he told it pretty much the way that the Creed does, from God the Creator through to the fullness of redemption for life to come.

[ 74 : 30 ] And God blessed Schaeffer's personal evangelism very much, as you may know. Is this going to be the last question, Bill? Perhaps it is.

Well, I just wanted to add, that's on my reading list, I haven't read it yet, but despite Dr. John Stackhouse, humble apologetics, would you recommend that to, in this instance?

Yes, I would, actually. I think that John Stackhouse realizes that you've got to tailor your presentation to what people are able and willing to receive.

And yet, at the same time, you've got to be radical, when you call in question the things that they're taking for granted already. Otherwise, what you say will be misheard, put into the wrong frame of reference.

And then there'll be misunderstanding, and your attempt at evangelism, they run into the sand. Bill, I think, wants to close the meeting.

[ 75 : 38 ] Well done.