

# The Internal Unity of Scripture - Part 3

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[ 0 : 00 ] We are going to talk about the Bible, so let's pray for the Lord's help, which we always should pray for when we turn to his word.

Holy Father, we pray that you'll send your Holy Spirit into our minds and hearts, so that we may understand what your Holy Word is saying to us, and through our study of the word, be led afresh to your Holy Son, who is the Lord of the Word and the Lord of our hearts.

Bless us now, we pray, in his name. Amen. As Bill says, this is the third talk that I give under the general title of Grasping the Internal Unity of Scripture.

The problem, insofar as problem is the word that fits, is that within the two covers of the Holy Bible, that's what the spine says that we have, within these two covers there are 66 different books written over a period of more than 1,500 years.

and from a literary standpoint, they are all sorts, history books, poetry books, meditations, hymn books, and prophetic books, which sometimes are sermons about present obedience, and sometimes our visions of the future, and which between them cover a great deal of ground in many different ways.

[ 2 : 05 ] One reviews this, and the question arises, well, what is it that holds the Bible together? What is it that warrants our treating these 66 books as one book?

What is it that gives what we call the Holy Bible its unity? And as I said, this is the third time that we chew away at that question.

The first time I spoke to this subject, I said, well, the Bible has a thematic unity. The 66 books are held together by the fact that the same themes are being pursued from beginning to end.

And I instanced five of them. God, every book of the Bible is about God, even the book of Esther, which doesn't mention his name. God's kingdom, God's covenant, God's incarnate Son, our Savior Jesus Christ.

And, fifth theme, godliness, all that it means to respond to God's revelation in worship and devotion.

[ 3 : 24 ] Second time that I spoke on this subject, I focused on the unity of the story that the Bible tells. The story of God, the creator, who is resolved to create for himself a holy people out of what we may call the moral and spiritual wreckage of a fallen race.

But the holy people will fulfill the destiny for which man, mankind, was originally made. The destiny, that is, of being in fellowship with God in love and joy and reflecting the glory of God, the character of God, the lifestyle, we might almost say, of God in the way that we behave both in our response to God, which is to mirror the way that Father, Son and Holy Spirit, love and serve each other in the Trinity, and in our relations to our fellows.

In the first instance, our fellows within the constructed fellowship of believers, but also in relation to the wider circle of those who as yet are outside, but nonetheless should not be thought of as outside the scope of God's outreaching love.

So, I told the story. The story of what in 19th century Scotland used to be called the Three R's.

Not reading, writing and arithmetic, as the Three R's were jokily abbreviated in England, but ruin, redemption and regeneration, as the three great themes, themes two and three, explaining how it is that God builds for himself a people out of the wreckage, I'll say it again, of a fallen race.

[ 5 : 35 ] When I went through the story, I elaborated it a bit, and after speaking of the ruin, which came on the race through the fall, I spoke about renovation, that is, the renovation of a people who would be God's family.

It was actually the renovation of a physical family, in the first instance, Abram's family. God gave his covenant, God showed his mercy, God revealed the forgiveness of sins to Abram and his seed, and so the rebuilding, or the building out of the wreckage of a people for God himself began.

And you know how the story went. All was relatively well, until Canaan was mainly, not entirely, but mainly conquered.

God had brought his people out of Egypt into the Promised Land, and you would have expected that once they were settled in the Promised Land, faithfulness to God would be the guiding principle of everybody's life.

But it didn't happen. And so after the renovation of a people came the relapses of that same people into idolatry and immorality.

[ 7 : 05 ] And it's a sad story as one goes on. There are flashes of light in the narratives of the good prophets and the good kings who brought people back into line with their God.

But none of these things lasted, and eventually Israel was taken captive, and that was God's judgment on them for their failures and relapses. And then against that background of Israel having failed in that way, we are whisked into the New Testament, where we read of the coming of the Promised Saviour.

We read of the reconstitution of God's people in and through and with him. And the New Testament ends with the church in the world.

The church is the fellowship of those who are in fellowship with Christ. Christ the Lord, having made atonement for his people's sin, is now on the throne.

The world doesn't acknowledge him as its Lord, but that's what he really is. And he will reign until all enemies have been put under his feet, and he returns triumphantly for judgment and for the renovation of the planet and the cosmos.

[ 8 : 27 ] We just don't know how wide a renovation that's going to be. To match the completing of the renovation of his own people by the imparting to us all of resurrection bodies to match our already resurrected and renewed hearts.

Well, that's a mouthful, but that's the glorious story. And that was my theme the second time I spoke on the unity of Scripture. This time round, I am going to focus on the relationship with God, out of which the whole Bible comes, and into which the whole Bible is concerned to draw us.

This is something so obvious that it only has to be stated for its truth to appear, and yet very often it isn't stated, and people forget the truth that I'm just going to set before you.

Every book of the Bible, however much they differ among themselves, was written in order to help people, one way or another, into a closer relationship with the God of grace.

The God whom the human writer knew as his God, and whom he wanted everyone else to know as their God. Every book of Scripture, Old Testament and New Testament, is rooted in God's revelation, and in some shape or form, is a celebrating of that revelation, and a response to that revelation.

[ 10 : 14 ] But as I say, the thrust of the book, in every case, is not simply to honor God, and thank him for his revelation, though that's a big theme, of course, in many of the books, but the basic reason why each book was composed, is the pastoral reason, that the writer wants others to come into the blessing of knowing God, which he himself enjoys.

So, discipleship and devotion, are the purposes for which all these books were written. They are written to help people forward in their faith, that is, their belief of the truth, and then their response to the truth in life.

And the following of God, well, let's say specifically, the following of God in Christ. In the Old Testament, it's God who has promised to appear in Christ, and in the New Testament, it's following the Christ who already has appeared.

That's the response to revelation, which each of the writers is concerned to draw out of us. And we don't handle the Bible the way that Christians should, unless we appreciate that, and seek, in our own dealings with the Scriptures, to let them have their way with us in this regard.

How could one say it? The Bible comes from spiritual insiders, people who know God. And now they are talking to us in the way that in old-fashioned English picture postcards sent from the seaside, you would often have the picture of somebody in the water, bathing away, and waving a hand, perhaps, and there would be a balloon coming out of his or her mouth, and in the balloon would be words of address to whoever reads the postcard, come in, the water is lovely.

[ 12 : 31 ] Well, that's really what all the writers of Scripture are saying to all the readers of Scripture. There's something here that I want you to come into, and it's wonderful to be part of it.

So, both the Old and the New Testaments, at each stage of God's ongoing revelation that climaxed in Christ, all his books are, one way or another, invitations.

Invitations. Invitations to listen, listen to God, to learn, learn the ways of God as he's revealed them, and then to love.

I can jump to that because faith expresses itself in love. Learn to love God for the love that he's shown you. Learn to love others for his sake.

Learn the life of love. So, here I am focusing on the Bible's unity of function. Everything that we want to say about the Bible as written to instruct and inform and evoke worship and bring knowledge of God and so on.

[ 13 : 54 ] All of that phraseology is covering the big idea that I'm trying to present to you of the Bible's basic function. The function which unites these 66 books together as messages from God.

And so, straight away, as a corollary of what I'm saying, I charge you, brothers and sisters, every time you read the Bible, and I hope you read it daily, pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will keep your mind on the purpose of what you're reading and enable you to receive the invitations that the Bible and the directions that the Bible is setting before you.

That's a word from the Lord to you and to me, to all Christians, and you can't say it too often or too strongly. Why do I say that?

Well, because today, irresponsible head knowledge about the Bible is doing almost as much damage as irresponsible ignorance about the Bible.

People pick up isolated phrases from Scripture and they throw them around without regard to the context. And so, muddle and misleading utterance abounds.

[ 15 : 25 ] We all know that, I think. This is an age of great confusion as well as of great ignorance. God, keep all of us from lapsing in that way.

So there's the Bible's unity of function to bring us to what the Bible itself calls in all sorts of places knowing. God.

That's its label for the overall relationship into which the Bible would draw each one. And because that is the Bible's unity of function, and because what you have in the Bible is the unity of a single story, a story of the Creator becoming Redeemer, a story which reaches its climax in Christ, and which looks forward to Christ's return to complete the work of salvation that he came to begin for the world and for his people.

Not, I mean, to make atonement for sin all over again, but to bring us the bodies to match our renewed hearts, which the bodies which are promised for resurrection day.

Because, as I say, the Bible is telling us that one story, and that's the unity of its, that's its uniting theme. We may now say the Bible, which has this unity of function and this unity of story, has a unity of focus all the way through, and the focus is precisely our Lord Jesus Christ himself.

[ 17 : 13 ] Here, I may quote what he himself said in one of his long debates with the self-styled religious authorities of Israel.

you search the scriptures, John chapter 5 verse 39, you search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life.

And it is they that bear witness about me. Yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. You can't have life through the scriptures without coming to Christ for it.

The scriptures send you to Christ. The scriptures testify to Christ. And who is Jesus Christ? Well, I'm thinking of the Christ of the Creed, who is personally divine, second person of the Godhead, who is incarnate, as truly human as he is divine, who has died for the sin of the world, and who has risen and reigns and will return, and is himself now the mediator of all the mercy that anyone ever receives from God.

Christ is to be our focus for the next half hour or so, as I try to elaborate this theme, or this line of thought, to fill in what needs to be filled in, in what I've already said about the unity of the Bible.

[ 19 : 08 ] Christ is the center, Christ is the focus. The New Testament books specifically, we may fairly say, were written by people for whom the Lord Jesus Christ, crucified, risen, ascended, and now enthroned, Christ fills the whole horizon of their life.

Everything that their life involves its seen, thought through, and lived out in terms of its relationship to Christ and Christ's relationship to it.

When I say he fills the horizon, I mean that. I mean that the writers of the New Testament don't see any part of life or live any part of life apart from its relation to him and apart from his will in our handling of it and apart from his help in our handling of it.

Christ is all and in all for these New Testament teachers and the books that they've left us, all 27 books of the New Testament, four Gospels, the Acts, which is a history book, all the epistles, and then the visionary book of Revelation, all of these books express that same perspective and all of them seek to draw us, the readers, into embracing and enjoying that perspective as the rule of our own lives.

And here we are, part of the Church of Christ today in 2006, and we are to think of ourselves the way that the Lord Jesus from his throne is presented in the book of Revelation as inspecting and watching over, helping, admonishing, guiding, and encouraging his Church everywhere.

[ 21 : 20 ] Seven churches of the Revelation, you see, not the second coming friends, let's not be distracted.

What was I trying to say? I was trying to say that you have the Lord acting Lord of the seven churches in the book of Revelation chapters 2 and 3, and the same Lord acts as Lord in all these respects, in relation to St.

John's congregation and every other congregation represented here, and indeed every other congregation throughout the world. Nothing changes there. The New Testament tells us how it is, as well as telling us how it was.

The relation of the Lord Jesus to his people is exactly the same today as it was in the first century AD. already following the ascension, the people of God were learning to live in fellowship with Jesus as his disciples.

The way that his disciples did when he was on earth, the difference is of course that we don't see him, don't feel him. The physical dimension of living with Jesus is not reality for us.

[ 22 : 50 ] What is reality for us is the ministry of the Holy Spirit through the word, making Jesus personally present to us, even if not physically present to us, personally present to us, through the word, through the sacraments, which are visible words, through the fellowship that we enjoy together, through the whole life and ministry of the church.

That's how it is, that again and again we Christians are able thankfully to say, yes, the Lord Jesus drew near to me today and made me very conscious of this, that, or the other aspect of his word too.

That's the Holy Spirit. As I don't know whether you ever have read any of the letters of Samuel Rutherford, 17th century Scottish saint, who for political reasons was imprisoned for some years.

He wrote pastoral letters to people to whom he'd had a developed pastoral ministry before he was thrown into jail. And there's a golden sentence from one of them that has never left me since first I read it.

Christ came into my cell last night. What do you think about a man who can say that? But then can't we all of us think of moments when through the word, through our meditations, in our hearts, Christ has drawn near and touch this?

[ 24 : 38 ] Now, don't be shy about this, friends. I'm not going to test the meeting, but I am going to say that I think that we Anglicans who've inherited this characteristic restraint, which is so much part of our style, we very often go too far in that department and we're unwilling to share, even to be conscious in presenting to ourselves the ways in which the Lord Jesus draws near and touches our heart from time to time.

When it happens, we don't cherish the moment, we sort of shrug it off. Thank you, Lord, on to next business. These moments are precious and shouldn't be shrugged off in that way.

And you will know that in the 20th century, God has fantastically blessed the witness and ministry of people in, let's call it, the Pentecostal style, because it isn't just one denomination.

People in the Pentecostal and charismatic style were not at all averse to sharing these moments of joy and conviction when the Lord Jesus draws near and impacts us through his word.

Well, as I say, the Holy Spirit makes Christ real to us, present with us, and the one who fills out the horizon of our thinking and our living in the way that I'm trying to describe.

[ 26 : 18 ] And that's Christian existence. That's Christian experience. That's the real thing. That's what all the 27 books of the New Testament are written directly to induce and sustain.

And that's actually what the 39 books of the Old Testament are pointing to. And the beginning of fellowship with God in personal life is already there, and in some places there, in great fullness for those who have eyes to see.

Yes, this is what it's all about. the focus of the Bible, for Christian readers, is the Lord Jesus Christ and the reality of a life of fellowship with him.

The question is sometimes raised, can we be sure that we've got the right canon, that is, the right set of books in our Bibles?

There have been small relatively small disputes in Christian history about which books belong to the canon and which don't. Protestants believe that the Roman Catholics are mistaken to add to the 66-book canon the 12 books of the Apocrypha.

[ 27 : 41 ] There have, however, historically been errors in the opposite direction. From the second century onwards, there have been people who, one way or another, have insisted that the Old Testament would be better dropped and Christians would get on more happily with a Bible that doesn't contain the Old Testament.

And in our lifetime, as you know, alas, there have been those Christians in our churches, I trust they are Christians, who privately seem to have agreed with that because they never read the Old Testament.

their favorite passages of Scripture are all New Testament, and they leave the Old Testament to others. Well, this I believe to be bad news.

My answer to the question, anyway, which books belong to the canon, question which, of course, has recently popped up amongst wild men, wondering whether the gospel according to Judas belongs to the canon.

You've seen all that discussion, have you? People are always inventing some goofy thing to get excited about. My answer to the question, have we got the right books in the canon, is a three-word answer, taste and see.

[ 29 : 11 ] Work on the hypothesis, which we have in the words of Augustine. The New Testament is concealed in the Old Testament, the Old Testament is revealed in the New Testament.

In other words, put the Old and New Testaments together, taste them, read them together, and you will see that what they are both doing is pointing to the same relationship of faith, repentance, worship, and so forth, in and through Christ, which I've been trying to talk about so far.

You've got a great deal in the writings of the Apostles themselves that point to this. Have I got time to give you one or two examples? Just one or two, I think.

Paul's greatest letter, we would all agree, I think, is the letter to the Romans. And all that Paul has to say as he expounds his gospel in the letter to the Romans is by his back references to the Old Testament and is proclaimed as the fulfillment of that to which the Old Testament looked forward.

Here we are right at the beginning, Romans chapter 1, verse 1. Paul, a servant of Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures concerning his Son.

[ 30 : 52 ] Paul goes on, you see the perspective. Paul is proclaiming the fulfillment of what was promised in the Old Testament. when Paul signs off in Romans chapter 16 in verses 25 through 27, this is what he says, having expanded everything.

Now to him that is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages, but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations according to the command of the eternal God, so on, so on.

He's reminding them once again of this perspective and he states the perspective explicitly in words that are familiar to us because they're taken up into the collect for the second Sunday in Advent, we use it every year.

Romans chapter 15 and verse 4, whatever was written in former days, he's referring to the Old Testament, was written for our instruction that through endurance and through the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope.

Got it? With all that, compare what Paul says in 1 Corinthians chapter 10 and verse 11 where he's just been issuing a warning against irreverence to the Corinthian church by referring to the way in which God judged his people in the wilderness wanderings for their irreverence.

[ 32 : 44 ] Paul, having said that, declares, now, these things happen to them, that's the Israelites, fell under judgment in the wilderness, these things happen to them as an example.

And they were written down for our instruction, we on whom the end of the ages has come. We folk at the last era of world history, we are given the Old Testament, as we call it, written for our instruction.

the apostles, right from the start, claimed that what we call the Old Testament is a Christian book, not a Jewish book, a Christian book.

It belongs to Christians. The Jews were furious at that claim, and they still, of course, reject it. But that was the claim that was made, and the apostles were prepared to bear the brunt of dislike of the claim among certain persons.

And then, of course, we all of us could repeat almost in our sleep, Paul's words from 2 Timothy chapter 3 and verse 16, where, having reminded Timothy, to whom he's writing, that from childhood, Timothy has known the holy scriptures of course, he's talking about the Old Testament, known the holy scriptures that are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ.

[ 34 : 28 ] That's how Paul understood the message of the Old Testament. He then goes on to say, all scripture, and he's talking still about the Old Testament, though there are good reasons for extending what he says to the New Testament as well, all scripture is God breathed, a very striking word which he coins for the occasion, a product of God's creative breath in the same way that the world itself was the product of God's creative breath.

All scripture is breathed out by God and, this is an inference, so I'll insert the word therefore, and therefore, is profitable for what?

Well, for teaching and correction, that is, applying teaching to people's lives to put them straight, and instruction in righteousness, that the man of God, that's you, Timothy, and equally it's you and me and everyone else who reads the letter, that the man of God, woman of God, may be thoroughly equipped for all good works, because you know the will of God, and through the knowledge of God in the scriptures, you find the strength of God, it's all through faith in Christ Jesus.

Verse 15. Well, this is familiar ground, but this is the moment to deploy some of these passages, because they are so fundamental to apostolic thinking and apostolic teaching.

What the apostles are proclaiming is the fulfillment of Old Testament hopes and prophecies, and it's all on the, what shall I call it, the Old Testament trajectory.

[ 36 : 19 ] It's leading people into the fullness of the faith and the life of faith and discipleship, which the Old Testament already was seeking to lead people into. And if you look, I'm not going to spend time on this because there are other things I want to say, but if you look at the 24th chapter of Luke's Gospel, you find a big deal in the words of the risen Jesus.

First of all, to the two disciples on the Emmaus road, where he opens to them the scriptures, and their hearts burn within them as he tells them about the way in which the scriptures foretold the suffering and the rising and the ministry of the Lord Jesus himself, Son of God.

And then before the end of the chapter, I've got it open now, so I'll tell you, the reference in the Emmaus story is verses 25 through 27 plus 32.

Didn't our hearts burn within us? Well, he opened to us the scriptures. And then you have verses 44 through 47 where Jesus now is with the disciples as a body on the evening of resurrection day.

And what he says to them straight away, it seems, after he's convinced them that it really is he, he's eaten a bit of fish, you remember, to show them that they aren't seeing a ghost.

[ 38 : 02 ] This is the real Jesus. Then he said to them, so we read in verse 44, these are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms, that's the three sections into which what we call the Old Testament was divided by the teachers of those days.

Now the Psalms was shorthand for what in other contexts were called the writings. That's really all of the Old Testament that isn't the five books of Moses and isn't the books of the prophets.

Jesus is referring to that third section of the Old Testament scriptures. Everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms, he says, must be fulfilled.

Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures and said to them, thus it is written that the Christ should suffer and rise, that repentance and forgiveness be proclaimed in his name to all nations and so forth.

Well, there's the Lord Jesus himself establishing the link of anticipation and fulfillment as the truth of the relation between the Old and the New Testaments.

[ 39 : 32 ] So, we'll have to leave it there. There are plenty of other scriptures that I would have quoted if I had time, but I don't. Leave it there, summarizing it this way.

For every Christian and for the whole Christian church, church, the Bible exhibits a Christ-centered coherence.

And those who taste and see find it and indeed are not able to doubt or deny it or miss it.

And the Christ-centered coherence of the Bible, the result of the ministry of the Holy Spirit inspiring the Word and now illuminating God's people so that they understand it, that is the unshakable third strand of the unity of the Bible, the thing that we're talking about now.

So, that's the line of thought that I deploy when people ask me, do you think the right books are in the canon? And then the corollary is, books that are not numbered among the 66 don't have this same effect of meshing in with all the rest of the books in the way that books numbered among the 66 actually do.

[ 41 : 09 ] And there's no book within the 66 that doesn't mesh in one way or another with the Bible's overall purpose of bringing us to faith in Christ and repentance and discipleship and the life in which the presence of Christ is reality and the horizon is filled with Christ and his ministry and God's purposes in him and his purposes for us and service.

So I said, this Christ-centered coherence of scripture is the most compelling proof that the canon we have is the right canon that I or anyone else could ask of.

And friend, if you have doubts about this, well, taste a little more deeply and you too will see. If you're open to be taught, the Holy Spirit will show you and then you won't be in doubt anymore.

There are two specific claims that are built into the overall affirmation that I am now making. Let me round off by telling you just what they are.

Claim number one, Jesus Christ, our Lord, is central in world history. And that means not simply that after the fall, God began to reveal his plan for restoration through the coming of a Savior who would bruise the serpent's head even as the serpent snapped at his heel.

[ 43 : 21 ] There's more to it than that. What the New Testament tells us is that the Lord Jesus Christ, none other, is the incarnate person through whom everything came to be in the first instance.

The Son of God is the co-creator with the Father. Remember the prologue to John's gospel? Everything was made by him. Apart from him, nothing that was made came into being.



Paul hammers away at that in Colossians chapter 1 also, you probably know the words, but let me read them. By him, verse 16, all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things were created through him and for him.

And he is, that is, he exists before all things, and in him all things hold together. Got it? It's a breathtaking thing for Paul to say almost in a throwaway line.

But he means what he says. If it wasn't for the constant upholding ministry of the Son of God, you and I and this room in which I am talking and the world around us, John Shaughnessy, everything and everybody, simply wouldn't exist anymore.

[ 45 : 02 ] All things hold together in Christ. Without that upholding action, there wouldn't be anything, so we wouldn't be here.

It's a breathtaking thought, but that's what Paul is expressing when he says, in him all things hold together. So he is, in very truth, the cosmic Christ, Christ, as well as being within that frame, the incarnate Savior, who died for our sins, and now is risen to bring to us the reality of pardon and life from God.

And, on the texts, again, I would love to quote them, but I haven't time for them. texts that I wanted to use which highlight the love of this divine person in the cross.

How low he went in order to put away our sins and open the life gate, as the Corvus puts it, so that you and I might go in. And I've already pointed out, in the very last book of the New Testament, well, we are reminded how things are right now.

Christ is on the throne, and there's spiritual warfare going on, and the cosmos is increasingly in convulsion as a result.

[ 46 : 35 ] That's certainly what the visionary chapters of Revelation are telling us, and there's no expectation that that state of affairs will change prior to the Lord's own triumphant return.

Whatever arguments we may have about the details of the meaning of those visionary chapters, there can surely be no doubt that that's the overall perspective that they're presenting, and then within that and against that background, the Lord of the Church watches over the Church, as I said earlier, for admonition and encouragement and correction and promise and, in the broadest sense, ministry.

We serve him, and he, in ministry, serves us. Those who overcome do so in his strength. Well, that's Jesus Christ central in world history.

And that leads on to the second thing that I wanted to highlight as I close, second specific claim built into what I've been saying about the Christ-centered coherence of the Bible.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

[ 48 : 38 ] And the Christian missionary movement has always understood that, and it's a clear biblical insight that we're hanging through today.

True religion is Christ-centered religion, and so Christ must be made known. Jesus Christ is the mediatorial Messiah.

Messiah means that he is the one whom God has anointed to be king. Mediatorial is the word that means that it's through the Lord Jesus that all the blessings of life and salvation are given.

He is the mediatorial Messiah. There is one particular book of the Old Testament, which, sorry, of the New Testament, which highlights this at great length, in great detail, and with great, really overwhelming majesty and power.

And that is the letter to the Hebrews, where first of all, the Son of God is introduced as the divine person that he is, that's chapter one, and then the fullness of his humanity, his sharing in flesh and blood, is celebrated in chapter two, and then there are words of application in the next two chapters, and then you get to chapter five, where the thread of the person and place of Jesus Christ is picked up again, and the writer says, now, he is our great high priest, according to the order of Melchizedek.

[ 50 : 27 ] What does that mean? Well, you have to move into chapter seven before you realize, chapter seven celebrates the fact that in Christ we have a better priest than the Old Testament order of things new.

In chapter eight, we have a better covenant through the ministry of this priest than the Old Testament believers new.

In chapter nine, we have a better worship place, a better tabernacle, a reproaching God than ever the Old Testament believers knew. And in chapter ten, we have a better sacrifice to rely on for our access to God, one sacrifice for sins forever.

And that's spelled out with tremendous emphasis and vividness. It's a wonderful letter. translation. The point about the contrast is the contrast between Old and New Testament is a point that has to be focused like this.

It's within a single trajectory, the trajectory of people coming in response to God's revelation to faith and repentance and discipleship, that these contrasts are being drawn.

[ 51 : 58 ] The trajectory is constant, the details change. The Old Testament order of mediation was temporary and incomplete, as if one should pour a concrete foundation that's meant to last and then erect on it a temporary wooden structure which is not meant to last and is in due course going to be replaced by a building in concrete which will last as long as the foundations do.

That's the point of the contrast. If people think that what's in view here is a total rejection of Old Testament religion as not a religion of faith and repentance and discipleship and obedience, well think again and read chapter 11, the Heroes Gallery chapter, in which you're confronted with all the Old Testament heroes of faith who lived by faith responding to the word of God and brought honor to him by their faithfulness.

And when you've read chapter 11 you will think differently about the contrast that's being drawn in these earlier chapters. I fear I may have said that too briefly for the full impact of it to come across, but my time is gone and so I must draw to an end.

I have, I know, packed it in and maybe I've just overwhelmed you by trying to say too many things at the same time. So let me come back again to the big thing that I've been trying to illustrate.

namely, that a Christ-centered concentration is what you have in all the teaching of the Bible, that the way to enter into this is quite simply to taste, ask for the help of the Holy Spirit and soak yourself in Scripture and you will see that it is so.

[ 54 : 16 ] And the effect of it, the fruit of it, should be, and by God's grace will be, that Jesus Christ our Lord, in all his glory, all his graciousness, will fill our horizons also and we shall see ourselves as his disciples first and foremost.

That will be the deepest element in the identity which we recognize ourselves as having. And so we shall become, in the true sense, biblical believers, whose lives show forth God's praise and who rejoice in the unique life-giving relationship that the gospel, which is the heart of the Bible, which is the pointer to the Christ of the Bible, takes us into.

I don't know how I can make it more simple, straightforward, and pointed than that. So thank you, friends, for listening. Now let's give ourselves a little time for dialogue and, if as I say, I muddled you up in any way, this is the moment to say so and I'll try to remove the muddance.

Tell me how you have reacted to the things you felt and said. Did I say, no, a hand went up, a hand went down, like this like that, yes, please.

Why could I think the right answer is as follows.

[ 56 : 40 ] What you have in the decisions of councils is a recognition of what is the case, an expression of a corporate certainty that the people in the council shared, the councils don't legislate, but they testify.

And what they're testifying to is a consensus that the Holy Spirit has given. All the councils took place because there were disputes that had to be resolved.

The precise contents of the New Testament canon are not expressed by any council that claims to be a general council until you get to the Roman Catholic Council of Trent.

But they are expressed in... Let me see. There's a letter from Athanasius, who's a bishop. There's a letter from Augustine. And there is the decision of a North African council in 397, and I can't remember exactly where it met.

But the point is that the consensus was established, and these people are now testifying to it.

[ 57 : 59 ] They aren't, as I said, legislating. They are simply recording that this, as a matter of fact, is what the... This is the list of books that the Christian believers add to the existing Old Testament canon, which was fixed.

Actually, of course, scholars dispute this, but I don't think there's any doubt, that it was fixed in Christ's day and had been fixed for generations. In the second century, there were a lot of very tense discussions because heretical gospels and epistles and acts were being fed into the church by people called Gnostics.

I'm not going to go into the essence of Gnosticism. I'm going to say simply it's a label for a kind of heresy which was very prevalent in those days. And so the church had to do a lot of homework in discussing which books should be received as the authentic New Testament.

And in fact, nearly all the books, all the important books in the New Testament canon were verified at that time. How did they do it? Well, they said, is it certain that the books were written by apostles?

So you do a historical inquiry. Do the books contain doctrine that fits in with the teaching of the undoubted books?

[ 59 : 40 ] And that was, for practical purposes, the letters of Paul and the four gospels. If the books in question don't teach in line with them, well, they're out.

And then thirdly, have the books been used in the church for public reading and instruction? And have they proved their usefulness in what I've been speaking of?

As means of grace to people, whereby they taste and see the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, have the books established themselves in the church as being useful in that way.

And if all those three tests came out on the same side, well, the church has agreed that this book, that book, is most certainly part of the God-given canon of Scripture.

I started something where you can talk for quite some time, but it's still, this is still a matter of dispute among the scholars, as well as being, as you rightly say, a matter of dispute at popular level, where, oh, you know, people love to generate scandals of one sort or another.

[ 60 : 58 ] So that's Da Vinci and that's Judas. My answer in formula terms is more yes than no.

Let me try and say something clear. I have been talking, as Christians regularly do talk, as the Bible, as the New Testament regularly thinks, in terms of the Trinity.

Now, the Trinity is the doctrine, implicit all the way through the New Testament, that there are three divine persons without there being three gods.

Tritheism, the doctrine of three gods, would be a mistake. And Unitarianism, the doctrine that there's only one divine person, would also be a mistake.

The truth of the Trinity is that God is as truly three as he is one, and as truly one as he is three. Now, the Lord Jesus Christ has as his fundamental identity divine sonship.

[ 62 : 13 ] You say, what does that mean? The Trinity is what it is. And within the Trinity, there is an ongoing relational pattern, according to which one person initiates, and the Lord Jesus teaches us to call that person Father.

And a second person obeys, as in Scripture, sons are expected to do. And Jesus identifies himself as the Son, which is a way of saying, as he says explicitly, actually, in many places, that he is here in us to do his Father's will, not to do his own will.

And there's a real sense in which he has no will of his own because he's doing the Father's will all the time. That's the relational reality of his divine sonship.

And then there's a third person who comes into the story, that's the Holy Spirit, who is Jesus' successor here on earth, continuing the ministry to people that Jesus began.

Jesus talks in detail about that in the Farewell Discourse in John 14, 15, and 16, as I guess we all know. Well now, focus on the Lord Jesus in that Trinitarian frame.

[ 63 : 45 ] Is he God? Yes, but not to the exclusion of the Father and the Spirit. Is he Lord? Well now, in the New Testament, that word Lord, it's *kourios* in the Greek, carries two levels of meaning.

They're both there. One is the meaning of dominion, and the second is the meaning of divinity. In relation to dominion, to say that Jesus is Lord means that he is the appointed ruler of the cosmos, to whom all authority has been given, and whom all people in the world ought to be acknowledging as their master, and obeying accordingly.

In Christian mission, in evangelism, in seeking to help people into discipleship, we Christians are meant to highlight that constantly.

Jesus is the rightful Lord of the world, and if you become a Christian, and I become a Christian, well, he must be our personal Lord also.

That's the dominion level, and then the divinity level results from the fact that this word *kourios* was used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament to signify, or represent, the Greek *Yahweh*, or *Jehovah*, the divine name.

[ 65 : 27 ] So that in the Old Testament, when Jesus is called Lord, the word regularly has the overtones of divine identity.

This Jesus is God. And, well, you'll remember how Thomas, on the evening, the week after the resurrection, when Jesus met him, Thomas ended the interview by saying to Jesus, my Lord, there's dominion, and my God, there's divinity.

And you and I, reading the New Testament, and witnessing of Christ to others, need always to remember that in the word Lord, as we have it in our Bible, the thoughts of divinity and dominion are joined.

Now again, that's a longer answer than the question, but I hope it clarifies something. Okay? In the Old Testament period, God, from time to time, used his people as his executioners when he brought temporal judgment on folk whose sin merited temporal judgment.

In the New Testament order of things, Christians of the church are not called on to act as God's executioners.

[ 67 : 08 ] Indeed, we're forbidden to. You've got that in Romans 12 where Paul says, Beloved, don't avenge your sins. Leave it to the wrath of God.

The Old Testament order at this point no longer applies. This is one of the temporary things in the Old Testament order which is cancelled when you get to the New Testament order.

I say that and I don't think I need to say any more unless there's going to be a supplementary question. I would simply say scripture shows that capital punishment is appropriate when human life is being taken.

but I think it's going beyond anything that is written to say that capital punishment is necessary in those situations. I'm not going to say more than that because as you know very well this is a discussion that once you open the can of worms can go on for a long time.

We, none of us, need question the principle that if we can find a pattern of restorative and reformatory justice which not only deals with people as they deserve for their crimes but also helps them into what as Christians we recognize as repentance and a new way of life we should be thankful and we should embrace that pattern.

[ 68 : 54 ] The area where life where human life has been taken is a crunch area in that discussion and that as I said is not what I'm going into but in our social thinking about penal a penal code as about everything else our concern should always be to find the way of doing the maximum of good while not dishonoring denying or minimizing the honoring of God in community as what should be the central cultural activity in any civilization.

You see what I'm doing I'm pussy putting my way round the question in order to try and say as clearly as I can what I think the question is but I'm not tipping my hand as to what should be done starting from where we are with the Canadian penal system.

How oh I shouldn't say it I was going to comment on how disappointed some people were looking when I said that.

Let it go. Bill I think just by standing has another question one more I think that fits in very well with all that I've been saying about the Christ centered coherence and focus of the whole of New Testament for the whole of the biblical teaching.

Yes I do. The sad thing about good Jewish theology is that it lacks that central focus on Christ which it needs.

[ 70 : 50 ] But well I did say did I not giving the talk that there are non-Christian faiths faiths which nonetheless have a great deal of wisdom and truth which as Christians we should acknowledge and actually claim as our own because it's only in a Christ centered frame of reference that really it all belongs.

But yes I have no problem with that idea but in God's providence you have both things happening. And I believe that that is the way to read human history right from the start up to the present and it will continue so in the future.

God will judge in history and God will show mercy in history. And so we go on. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.