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Christology & Trinity

We're going to try to finish the foundational period of Church History, the first 500 years and as we do we want to stress the doctrinal sequence in which the Holy Spirit matured the Church. There's a method to the Holy Spirit's teaching, it's not madness. The first thing in Church History is the Origin of the Church on the day of Pentecost, Acts 2. There is no Church in Acts 1. So Acts 2 is the Origin of the Church and that's positional truth. However, then comes the Recognition of the Church by men which did not occur on the day of Pentecost. That was gradually realized. So that's a function of the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. And the first thing the Holy Spirit had to teach the Church is that they are not Israel. And we studied that in the Book of Acts. So that's the first thing, the Church recognized it had a distinct identity from Israel.

The second thing is the Holy Spirit prodded the Church to deal with the issue of the Canon of Scripture. Now the canon was already there, that's positional truth again, when the last drop of ink dripped from the last inspired book the canon was in existence. But when did the church recognize the NT canon? Be careful here because not everybody agreed that the Scriptures were the final authority, some thought it was vested in the Church. And we'll get to that. But the central issue with the canon is authority. What is the final authority? And that's a big issue because whatever your authority is, that's what tells you how to live your life.

Now early on most Christians recognized that the Scriptures were the authority. But the issue then is what are the boundaries of the Scriptures? What books are canonical and which aren't? Early on that was a discussion. But pretty much men like Athanasius and others recognized that if a book had the marks of the apostles then it was canon and their list is our list.

However, later a further battle erupted when the Protestant Reformers started challenging Roman Catholic doctrine, things like indulgences, prayers for the dead and so forth. The Protestants said those doctrines aren't Scriptural so the Roman Catholic Church argued that the Apocrypha was canon because in the Apocrypha they found support for some of those strange doctrines. So while this issue of the canon was not settled entirely until the Reformation where you have the Protestant-Catholic split, the basic issue of the canon was discussed and resolved in the early church. But that Protestant-Catholic split is a discussion that comes down to our own day and the root of that discussion is whether authority is vested in Church tradition plus the Canon or the Canon alone? The Protestants said Canon alone, *sola Scriptura*. The Roman Catholics said the Church tradition plus the Canon.

I want to go to one passage, Gal 1, because this is a passage that reveals the proper relationship of those who wrote the Scriptures to the Scriptures themselves. How did those who wrote the Scriptures think of themselves when it came to Scripture? This will help you if you get involved in discussions over the Church and the role of tradition. Those in Roman Catholicism think that the Scriptures have to have the Church as an external authority to interpret them. And to them this follows logically because it was the Church that gave the Scriptures. It sounds very convincing. After all, the argument goes who produced the Scriptures? The apostles but weren't the apostles part of the Church? So the Church gave the Scriptures. So if the Church gave the Scriptures then shouldn't the Church be the one that authoritatively interprets the Scriptures? It sounds like a nice tight argument until you get in passages like Gal 1.

In Gal 1 Paul is dealing with this issue of what is the gospel? Clearly, if there's anything that's the heart of Christianity it's the gospel. That's why Gal 1 is such a powerful passage to remember and to use and to think about. Why is it we make such a big deal about the authority of Scripture over against, say, tradition? The answer is in Gal 1:6 Paul rebukes these people, and watch what he says, watch the logic; there's an argument here. Verse 6, "I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel." So what's the issue, right away? It's the content of the gospel. What is the content of the gospel that we are to believe? If we're to believe unto salvation we better believe the right content

of salvation, because if we believe something wrong you're not going to be saved. You're not saved by your faith; you're saved by the object of your faith. That's why the person and work of Christ have to be clear. So he says you have a different gospel; notice he's quite clear that any works make it a different gospel. That's pretty powerful language. Verse 7, "Which is really not another;" Protestantism and Roman Catholicism can't both be right, only one can be right on the gospel because they're preaching different gospels and yet there's only one, "only there are some who are disturbing you, and want to distort the gospel of Christ." Verse 8, now this is the argument, watch the argument, "But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed." It's a curse; Paul is calling down a curse against himself if he does this. What he is saying here is that I preached the gospel, the true gospel to you. Then he says, let's say later on sometime I change my mind about what the gospel is. So he comes preaching a different gospel than he originally taught. What's the logic of verse 8 if Paul does that? That they shouldn't listen to him. The second gospel he comes preaching is a false gospel and he is to be cursed.

Think about this. The issue is so clear if you think about Gal 1:8. Does the authority rest in the person of Paul, or does it rest in the original message? It's got to rest in the original message. So what's the standard even for Paul who gave the original message? The standard is the gospel that was once for all preached. So once the message comes the one who gave the message is no longer the authority, the Scriptures are the authority and therefore the Church is not the authority. So yeah, the Scriptures came through the Church, God working through the Church, but once the Scriptures come into existence they stand in authority over the Church, not the other way around. And it was the same way with the OT. The prophets knew this, they knew Scripture was coming through them, but they didn't reason therefore that they were in authority over the Scripture; once the Scriptures came the Scripture was over them.

Now for the problem of tradition. The problem is that you can't test it. How are you going to test a tradition about the immaculate conception of Mary? Mary being born without a sin nature, for example? If I can't find it in the Scriptures what am I going to test it against? Well, it's coming from oral tradition left from the apostles. How do I know that that tradition about

Mary is coming from the apostles? I certainly can't find it in the OT or the NT, so where is it coming from? How do I know that they left behind oral traditions? Well you just have to take it on authority. Aha, the moment you say that you have placed tradition alongside the Bible as the authority, so now we have an authority external to the Bible.

There are two other things we want to bring up during the foundational period, besides the Church recognizing it was not Israel, besides getting the issue of Canonicity and Authority settled - now the Church came to Christology and Theology Proper and that led to Trinity. Christology - you know that term - is the doctrine of Christ. Theology Proper may be a new term. What it refers to is the nature of God, who and what God is, the central core of theology and the central core of theology is the doctrine of the Trinity.

First let's look at Christology. Logically that came first;, when that was resolved and they had articulated clearly that Christ is God, notice I said articulated it clearly, I didn't say the early Christians didn't believe Jesus was God, they did, they just didn't have it clearly articulated until heretics came in and they were forced to say, wait a minute, we need to think this through. After that logically, when you have clarified that there is a multiplicity in the Godhead then comes the Trinity and how we state that. One of the criticisms of these doctrines is raised by both Muslims and Jehovah's Witnesses. The propaganda is that the Church got this from Greek Philosophy, that early Christianity was distorted by Greek ideas and went apostate. This is from the Jehovah's Witness book, *Should You Believe in the Trinity?* "Throughout the ancient world, as far back as Babylonia, the worship of pagan gods grouped threes, or triads, was common. That influence was also prevalent in Egypt, Greece, and Rome in the centuries before, during and after Christ. And after the death of the apostles, such pagan beliefs began to invade Christianity...While [Plato] did not teach the Trinity in its present form, his philosophy paved the way for it. Late, philosophical movements that included triadic beliefs sprang up, and these were influenced by Plato's ideas of God and nature." (Should You Believe in the Trinity? P 11). Now this is some of the worst analysis. Plato didn't believe in the God of the Bible at all. What he believed was that there was a dualism but the dualism was all part of the great One, so there's no resemblance at all. In fact, Plato's God, if there is one, is the exact opposite of the God of the Bible. What really happened was the early Church had heretics like this

come in and they went to the text of Scripture and carefully put all the Scriptural statements together. And what they came up with was brilliant. God is one in essence and three in person.

We've gone through some of this before, how the deity of Christ was handled; how the Trinity was handled. We've dealt with the hypostatic union, and let me review for you the subtleties of the argument. Let's go to a NT passage. This is a typical way the Church came to the conclusion that Jesus was God. What these clowns say, oh, show me a verse where Jesus is God. Well, I can show you several verses where Jesus is God, but those few verses here and there aren't the sum and substance of the argument. There's a more powerful argument. The verses are there by the way, in spite of Jehovah's Witnesses, who have two and a half days of Greek and they think they know what's going on in John 1. John 1 is clearly saying that Jesus is both distinct from God and God, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." And what became flesh and dwelt among us? The Word. So clearly John's talking about the deity of Christ.

But we have to go back and grapple with how did a 1st century monotheistic Jew handle the fact that this human being, a guy from Nazareth, walking around on two feet like everybody else, was God? How did monotheistic Jews believe that and remain monotheistic? Do you see the problem? Of all places, that could have happened in India where they were polytheistic and it wouldn't have been a problem. Just add one more god to the pantheon. That could have happened in Greece and it wouldn't have been a problem. But to happen inside Israel with monotheistic Jews, shows something tremendous. One of the things it shows is that they didn't see a multiplicity in God as a denial of monotheism. They fully had a thought form that could incorporate a multiplicity in God. Boy, I wonder where they got that from? Well they got it from the OT. The OT allows for that. They had a word, in fact it's the word in the great Shema, pronounced by every orthodox Jew, "the Lord our God is one," The Hebrew has two words for "one" and the word used there in the Shema is the word for one with diversity in the one, not the other word that means an absolute one. So obviously the Jews who recognized Jesus as God were not violating anything that was already in their book.

Let's go to Eph 4, this is something we've handled before. We won't go back through all the arguments we did when we dealt with the hypostatic union

but Ephesians 4 is a classic example of this line of argument, and it's imbedded throughout the whole NT. Unfortunately this kind of argument revolves or depends for its effectiveness on the people who hear it knowing the OT. If you look at Ephesians 4 it talks about Christ giving gifts to the Church, verse 7, and if you have a study Bible you'll see this is a citation out of the OT text. Verse 8, "Therefore it says, 'When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men.'" And by the way, in verse 9, there's how Paul taught, that's expository preaching, that's exegesis. See what he's doing, he's going through each word in the text and explaining it. In verse 9 he says, "(Now this expression, 'He ascended,' what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth?)" So verses 9-10 is a sample of how Paul probably exegeted the OT; it gives you a feel for how he just would pick up a word and he'd explain that word and he'd go over that word and he'd contrast the word with its opposite until his hearers understood the meaning of that word. Then he'd go to the next important word and he'd explain it, verse by verse.

Hold the place here and let's go back where he got this quote, Ps 68. Let's go back there and see what we can see; clearly Paul saw something or he wouldn't have picked the Psalm. So let's go back to the Psalm and look at it from the standpoint of the OT, the standpoint of a monotheistic Jew. First of all, look at the title of the Psalm. In the OT the Psalms were not numbered in the Hebrew; they had titles, and the title is what you usually see in the small print. This Psalm title is "For the choir director. A Psalm of David. A song." Verse 1, "Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered," usually the first verse that's translated the first verse in English is actually the title in the Hebrew. That's why when Jesus was dying on the cross, the gospel writers report Jesus to have said on the cross while He was dying for our sins, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" It's true that He said that, but it's true that He said a lot more, because "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" is actually the title to Psalm 22. So what the Gospel writers are saying is He recited Psalm 22, the whole thing. He didn't just recite the verse. It would be like today saying yeah, Jesus was on the cross and while He was hanging there He recited How Great Thou Art. That's our title for the song and the first few words of a Psalm were their titles for their songs.

In Ps 68 the title is, "Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered; and let those who hate Him flee before Him." Clearly it's a military setting; clearly

it's talking about some future time when evil will be suppressed. If you go down through the Psalm, verse 4, "Sing to God, sing praises to His name." Verse 6, "God makes a home for the lonely...." Verse 7, "O God, when Thou didst go forth before Thy people, when Thou didst march through the wilderness, 8The earth quaked," what event is that? The Exodus, it's talking about a historical thing. Verse 11, "The Lord gives the command; the women who proclaim the good tidings are a great host. 12Kings of armies flee, they flee...." Now it comes to verse 17, "The chariots of God are myriads, thousands upon thousands; the Lord is among them as at Sinai, in holiness." So there's the comparison between the past event, Mount Sinai and some future event David sees in vision. "Thou hast ascended on high, Thou hast led captive Thy captives." Question: verse 18 starts with a pronoun, it's a singular second person pronoun, "Thou." A pronoun refers back to its antecedent noun. What is the antecedent noun of the pronoun in verse 18? It's God. Okay, if God is the antecedent noun behind the pronoun "Thou" in verse 18 and Paul is picking up this whole verse 18 and he's applying it to Jesus Christ in Eph 4, what does that make Christ? YHWH God of the OT. And I can show you case after case after case where this is done in the NT. This is what we call a Christ for YHWH substitution. The reason this doesn't hit most people hard is because most people just read it through, oh, that's an OT verse, well if they really did read their OT they'd be hit between the eyes here. This is a powerful, powerful argument.

So you can see the NT authors don't have a problem at all saying Jesus is YHWH. And it's not just a verse here and there. It's all through the NT. And how do you explain that if this wasn't in their minds somehow consistent with OT monotheism? We're talking about a fundamental point at issue, Jesus is YHWH God. And it's cases like Eph 4 and Psalm 68 that you can put in your notes and remember if you want to show somebody this powerful way the NT writers had of stating that Jesus of Nazareth is indeed YHWH God. They weren't stupid, naïve people doing this. It's very carefully and deliberately done. And it took 500 years for the Church to mull this over, get challenged and get it right, hash out all the arguments.

Remember we said earlier in this series there were heresies. Remember what some of the heresies were? Let's talk about that because they had to get this trash out, they had to take out the trash and they had a lot of trash that they had to take out.

One of the heresies that prevented this was Monarchianism. Monarchianism is the belief that God is an absolute one, and if Jesus is distinct from God, then Jesus can't be that absolute God. So God must be distinct from Jesus and maybe Jesus we can explain by saying well, God sent His Spirit into a man named Jesus. That was one approach. It's still used today; Unitarians used that in New England. It's an error that keeps on going.

They had another idea called Modal Monarchianism, and Modal Monarchianism argued God is one, basic assumption. Then if we've got the Holy Spirit, the Father and the Son, what that really must be is God showing up with different masks. So here He puts His Father mask on and He shows up here; He puts the Son mask on and He shows up here; He puts the Holy Spirit mask on and He shows up there, but it's really God. The problem with that Modal Monarchianism is if the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are only masks, what is the real God like? That was Athanasius' argument; if they are only masks and I only know God in His masks I don't know Him and I'm not saved. Athanasius was a bishop, he came out of Alexandria, he was brilliant, and he got fed up with Arius and all the other people trying these screwy ideas to explain who Jesus was and who God was, and he nailed both of them. You read in church history you'll see that Athanasius blasted the anti-Trinitarians, and he blasted the people who denied the full deity and humanity of Jesus. His argument methodology always went the same way: Athanasius said if knowing God is salvation and you know a Jesus Christ who isn't God then you are not saved because you don't know God. See, how can you be saved if knowing God means salvation and Jesus isn't God? That's how they ended Modal Monarchianism. If it's only masks and it's not the real God then I don't know the real God and I'm not saved.

Another approach they used takes you directly to Scripture. They answered the Modal Monarchianism and said hey, you guys think you've got the answer, tell me, who was Jesus talking to in the Garden of Gethsemane? Was he doing this number, first He was putting on His Jesus mask, and then He stepped over here and was talking from His Father mask? And then He switches back to His Jesus mask? I mean was this just a conversation with Himself? Or, are there two persons that were talking. You say, boy, this is really hard. Yeah, it's a hard, we're talking about God.

Now do we wonder why it's hard when we start talking about God? We haven't figured out the creation yet, let alone God. So yes, there's difficulties here, but there's nothing illogical...there is nothing illogical, there's a difference and let me define some terms here. There's rational and irrational. Rational means something is logically consistent. Irrational means it's not logically consistent. Remember back when you studied algebra in high school and the teacher talked about something called an irrational number, and today we talk about that, we just go on about an irrational number. Do you know why it's called an irrational number? Because the Greeks could not logically get hold of that, they weren't sure they existed. And there are mathematicians to this day who hold that non-rational numbers don't exist, it's just a figment of people's imagination. If you think about it they've got kind of an interesting argument because computers can only use a certain type of number and you can say on the real number scale... there's a whole bunch of stuff associated with number theory.

But the point I'm trying to make here is yes, it's difficult, but it's not illogical; it's hard to understand how the Father can be this and that, but you can't show there's a contradiction there. Jehovah's Witnesses like to say well God can't be one and can't be three. Well yes He can, in one sense He's one, that's His essence, in another sense He's three, that's His person. That's not just hedging. God has a oneness to Him and He has a threeness to Him. The church fathers used two different words there, nature or substance and person. If you read what was going on during these 500 years you realize these guys were careful with the Scripture. The level of intense debate and thinking that went in during these years, during these centuries, was tremendous. If somebody is serious about it they really need to read what happened back then, and see the conclusions.

My point is to say that between Pentecost and about AD500 there were brilliant believers, and there were brilliant unbelievers and they went at it council after council, year after year, until they finally nailed this thing down. And when somebody came up with some new fangled idea somebody would quote Scripture and shoot it down. That's the process. So understand that the doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of the hypostatic union of Jesus are the result of over 300-500 years of intense debate. Every possible answer was given. People say oh well, they should have stated it this way; they already did that dodo, they considered that and the problem with that view is that it

didn't pan out, it didn't fit the Scriptures, it got shot down in the councils, it doesn't fit this verse, this verse and this verse. So stop trying to make square wheels, we already have round ones and they roll the best.

Alright, Christology was nailed down by AD325 at the Council of Nicea, it's called Nicene Theology and that's a council you want to remember. This is where it was stated that Jesus Christ was undiminished deity and true humanity united in *one person* without confusion or mixture forever. That's the Nicene Christology. Both Roman Catholics and Protestants agree on that Nicene statement of Jesus Christ. On *that* both Catholics and Protestants, now I mean faithful Catholics, not the American kind, but Catholics that really know their Catholic dogma agree to the Nicene Christ.

Theology proper, the doctrine of the Trinity, that was stated and it was stated clearly by AD451 at the Council of Chalcedon and the arguments were both logical and Scriptural. And if you doubt me get a good book on church history and read about what was going on then, don't take my word for it, go read. They tried every conceivable answer. The Unitarian answer was tried and it was found wanting. The other kinds of answers were tried, they were discussed, they were debated and they were found wanting.

And then finally the Trinity was clarified, that's the Council of Chalcedon. That's another one to note, sometimes it's pronounced Cal-sa-don, sometimes it's pronounced Cal-see-don, I've heard it both ways by scholars who study it so it beats me which one. The Council of Chalcedon was the council that clarified how the Father could be God and Jesus could be both God and man and yet there not be more than one God. This was debated. For example they saw Jesus' humanity, He ate, He drank, He got tired, no problem, but they also saw Jesus' deity, what He sometimes did, His works. How did a mere man do the kinds of works Jesus did? Do you remember that one of the most dramatic works that He did was on the Sea of Galilee. It was in the middle of a storm. We can read that story and think of it as sort of a magic story, one of the great world magicians happened to do this thing, pulled it off, David Copperfield or something, that it was just a David Copperfield thing? No! Again read it as a Jew would have experienced it on that Sea; when that ocean did its thing, and Jesus said according to the Gospel, "Be still," and what happened? What was the report? It took five hours for the storm to kind of calm down after He said "Be still"? No, look at the text. He said "Be still"

and boom, it stopped. Where did all the momentum go? That's a lot of motion and energy just to dissipate like that. What the heck did He do with all that momentum? In one instant of time it just vanished. He just destroyed it; He sucked the energy right out of it with a word. Now that word that sucked the energy out of the storm instantly is the same word that created the universe. It's that word, that spoken Word of God. When He said "Let there be light" He's talking about the light of the whole cosmos, and it was that word.

I want to take you to the OT again to show you the force of that argument, why there are subtleties to the argument that only believers whose heart is warm to the Scriptures can sense. Turn to Psalm 29; good Jews would have remembered this. Good Jews would have seen Jesus doing His thing and immediately perceived Psalm 29, why, that's the work of Jehovah; I remember that from my Torah class or my writings class, the Kethubim, that's Yahweh. Look at Psalm 29, "Ascribe to the LORD, O sons of the mighty; ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. 2Ascribe to the LORD the glory due to His name, worship the LORD in holy array. 3The voice of the LORD is upon the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD upon many waters. 4The voice of the LORD is powerful, the voice of the LORD is majestic." Verse 10, "The LORD sat as King at the flood; Yes, the LORD sits as King forever."

Suppose you were a Jew and you know Psalm 29, and you see this man, Jesus, who claims to be the Messiah, and He goes out on the Sea of Galilee and you know the Sea of Galilee because you've been across it time and time again, you've seen hundreds of storms on the Sea of Galilee and you never ever saw something like this, the guy says "Be still," knock it off, and it stops. Can you imagine how you would have interpreted that knowing Psalm 29; it's a work of God. So that's why there are divine works.

What's another thing you see in the NT? Did you ever see Jesus permit Himself to be worshipped? Sure you do. Do you ever see angels accepting human worship? What do you notice in Bible stories when men go to worship an angel? What do the angels usually do? Stop, don't do that; angels do not permit men to worship them, the good angels. Did Jesus let people worship Him? You bet He did. He accepted worship. That's an act of blasphemy if He isn't God. So that's why all these arguments and we've dealt with them before, we're not going to review all the details, all I'm doing is taking you on

a quick tour of the fact that there were many, many arguments that went on, all of them finally concluding that Jesus Christ was God and man and that the Trinity is true.

Here's how Chalcedon put it. "...following the holy fathers," so first of all, did they see themselves as promoting something new or clarifying their belief? Clarifying their belief. "we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, consisting also of a reasonable soul and body; of one substance with the Father as regards his Godhead," alright, so that's a statement of the unity of essence, they share the same attributes or essence, "and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his manhood; like us in all respects, apart from sin; as regards his Godhead, begotten of the Father before the ages, but yet as regards his manhood begotten, for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin, the God-bearer; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation;" they're keeping the Creator-creature distinction, "the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person" not two people, that was the Nestorian error, "and subsistence, not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ; even as the prophets from earliest times spoke of him, and our Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us, and the creed of the fathers has handed down to us." So they link back to the OT, to the NT and on into the earlier fathers. They're saying there's continuity here, this is the line of true apostolicity, this is the line of truth that can be tested against the Scriptures.

That concludes the foundational era of the Church. If you want more details you can go back to the lessons 117-125 where we dealt with Christology and the Trinity in detail. Next time we're going to go and deal with the Middle Ages, what you'll hear sometimes referred to as the Dark Ages. They're not dark and you'll see why. And when we go into it we'll be dealing with the next things. So far we've dealt with the Church-Israel distinction, the Canon and Authority, Christ and Trinity. What do you suppose will be the next thing? See the Holy Spirit teaching the Church down through the centuries? There is a logical progress to how the Holy Spirit has taught the Church. And once you're getting a clear picture of God, what's the next thing that strikes you?

How can I be saved? So lo and behold, the next era is going to clarify what redemption is all about, and that was the argument of the Middle Ages and the Protestant Reformation. What did Jesus really do on the cross? Now that we understand who He is, now let's spend the next 500 years figuring out what He did on the cross in detail. And that's exactly what... if you look at a systematic theology here's an observation that's fascinating to me.

Systematic theology is all the doctrines in a certain sequence Do you know that today you can go to systematic theology, and you know what? The sequence of the doctrines in a systematic theology correspond to the way they were articulated in church history, because the way these doctrines were hardened and fastened into place... eschatology, for example, is always the last volume in a systematic theology. Do you know what the first volume is? Theology proper, Bibliology, that's the way they're organized because men think that way. There's a logical consistency that the Holy Spirit is a logical teacher. So we'll move on to the next section of Church History which deals with redemption and what that's all about. This stuff wasn't just understood, Christians today take all this for granted, it should not be taken for granted, it took centuries and centuries of God the Holy Spirit teaching men to clarify and get the Scriptures together.

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