

Ask Jeff – The Trinity

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Preached On: Wednesday, January 22, 2014

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The box is here. The questions are in it. I'm going to mix it up and we'll just go ahead and get started and see what happens tonight.

Question number 1: I fully believe in the divine Trinity but in my simple human understanding and trying to explain nonbelievers of that, was Jesus in a way praying to himself when he prayed to his Father? And when the Holy Spirit came down as a dove at his baptism, separate but same, different manifestations of the same God. Okay, great question. This is dealing with the issue of the Trinity and I think the best place to go in Scripture is the book of Matthew 3. We'll be there in just a moment but Matthew 3, when we discuss the issue of the Trinity, let me describe to you what that means. Now the word "Trinity" is not in the Bible. The word "Trinity" is not but just because a specific word is not does not mean that a concept, a principle or an idea is not contained therein. When we speak of the Trinity, we are speaking of the fact that there is one God. "Here O Israel," Deuteronomy 6:4, "the Lord your God is one God." The Trinity is the fact that this one God manifests himself in 3 personas: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Now, before we go to what the actual Scripture says, please understand that there are a lot of illustrations that people have used throughout the time to try to help explain the Trinity. The problem is every one of these illustrations breaks down at some point. Why? Because you cannot use a finite, tangible illustration to describe an infinite, limitless God, but we can do to the best of our ability. Some of the more frequent ones that have been used throughout the ages are the illustration of an egg. You know, you've got the 3 parts of the it: you've got the shell, the yoke and whatever you call the creamy stuff that's in there. But you've got the 3 parts. It's one but yet there are 3 distinct elements. Some people try to use a football, that you've got the leather on the outside, you've got the rubber bladder and then you've got the air. The problem with all of those illustrations is not that there are 3 things wrapped in one, it's that when we discuss the concept of the Trinity, please understand that the Father in and of himself is God, the Holy Spirit in and of himself is God and Jesus in and of himself is God. If you use the football illustration and you take the rubber bladder out, that's not a football. If you take the air out, that's not a football. It's when you bring all 3 pieces together it becomes a football. So every tangible illustration eventually breaks down.

Now, my favorite illustration to use in this situation that eventually does break down is this: I'll use myself. You say, "Why would you use yourself?" Well, I am the son of Ron

Myers. I am the husband to Tracy Myers. And I am the dad to Marshall Myers. I can be in a room with all 3 of those people and never get my role confused or mixed up by yet I am one person. When I go and play golf with my dad, I am still the dad to Marshall and the husband to Tracy. My identity doesn't change. The problem with my illustration of using myself is that I cannot be with my dad on the golf course, my son at school and my wife at home all at the same time. I don't possess that ability and that's how that illustration breaks down.

Now, that being said, in Matthew 3, we have the baptism of Jesus. Now, in the question it alluded to when Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane. We find that in Matthew 26 specifically. Remember the 3 times when Jesus prayed, "Father, not my will be done but yours." We also find it in John 17 where Jesus very explicitly prays what we call the high heavenly prayer or the high priestly prayer. But I believe in Matthew 3 we have one of the most succinct illustrations of what we would call the Trinity in Scripture. I'll begin in verse 13 of Matthew 3 just for context. It says, "Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

In those little verses in verses 16 and 17, we have all 3 personas of the Trinity tangibly present in one geographical location, audibly and physically being seen. You have the person of Jesus Christ. You have the Father speaking. You have the Spirit descending like a dove. Now, before I give you an illustration on the board, please understand that one of the greatest theologians in the history of Christendom about 1500 years ago wrote a book entitled "On the Trinity." I have read the book. It's about 250 pages in length and on the very last page of the book he basically says, "If you feel like you can explain the Trinity, you did not adequately explain the Trinity." There is no way humanly possible that I can give you an illustration or anybody else can give you an illustration that can adequately describe the Trinity. It would be like saying, "Can you completely with the words out of your mouth describe who God is? Completely?" Now, you can do a pretty good job. You can be pretty descriptive but you cannot completely describe who God is.

So I want to give you one of the classic illustrations regarding the Trinity and hopefully I can explain this decently well. You have the Father, you have the Son and you have the Holy Spirit. I did not invent this and I don't know if I can even explain it properly but here's how it goes. You have the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Father is not the Son. The Son is not the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not the Father. But all 3 of them are God. That's the most simple, I guess, graphic that there is describing an Orthodox view of the Trinity but the thing that I think is critical when describing the Trinity is the Son is not the Holy Spirit but when the Son is "by himself" he is still completely God. You do not have to have "all 3 parts" to have God. One of them in and of themselves is completely God but all 3 are one God.

Now, the Islamic faith as many others, would claim that we believe in multiple gods. This is not multiple gods. There are not 3 different ones, there is one God manifested in 3 personas. However, each of those personas is completely God. It makes perfect sense, doesn't it? Real easy-peasy, right? No, it is not easy and it will if you stay up tonight thinking about this, you will wake up needing ibuprofen. You will have a headache. I promise you. But that is the most simplistic way of illustrating.

Now, when Jesus Christ is in the garden of Gethsemane and it is alluded to in the question, when he prays to the Father, he is not praying to himself but he is a persona of the Godhead speaking to a persona of the Godhead. Now, if I were to give you descriptions of the personas in simplistic terms, I would say that the Father is what I would call administrative. Remember, Jesus said, "I don't know when I'm coming back, only my Father in heaven." So there is the administrative. Or in John 17 when he tells the Father in the garden of Gethsemane, "I have completed that which you have called me to do." So there is the administrative. I would say the Holy Spirit is what I would call communicative and I would say that the Son is redemptive or oftentimes the visual demonstration thereof.

So you see 3 different roles but yet it's all one God. Does your brain hurt yet? There is no absolute way to completely describe the Trinity in multiple hours, much less in one, but what we see is we see attributes, we see aspects, we see concepts. Here's the thing we must not forget: as we begin to delineate, "Well, that's how the Son manifests. Or that's how the Holy Spirit does," never get to the point where you begin to separate one of the personas from the Godhead. It is all one God manifested in what we call 3 personas.

Now, there is a belief system out there, I know it's not part of the question but I just want to address it, it's called modalism. Modalism is the belief that God only can manifest himself in one mode at a time. What that means is, before what we know as the incarnation, particularly the Old Testament, that God manifested himself as the Father. While Jesus Christ was on earth during his ministry, he manifested himself as the Son. And now since he has ascended into heaven, he manifests himself as the Holy Spirit. You say, "How do you distinguish, how do you know if someone believes that?" If all they ever talk about the Holy Spirit and they never mention Jesus, they're a modalist and that's a fancy theological term but it means they only believe that God manifests himself in one of the "modes" at a time.

So remember though what did Jesus say in John: 14? He said, "The Spirit will testify of me." When we speak of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit always points to Jesus. Notice that Jesus always pointed to the Father. And the Father always communicated through the Holy Spirit. You see how that goes in a circle?

Alright, I know there have got to be some thoughts, questions, concerns or what about in regards to this. It's the Trinity and it's not easy to talk about and/or explain. Anything about the Trinity? Yes ma'am.

Okay, that's a great question. When Jesus died on the cross, was the Father still alive? Understand at no point was Jesus as God ever dead. Jesus was crucified in the flesh. You see, he was 100% God, he was 100% man. At no point did he as the Godhead ever die but the flesh in which he inhabited to be a sacrifice for our sins was crucified and raised 3 days later. God never died no matter what Nietzsche, the philosopher, said. God never died but the incarnation of the Son was allowed to be sacrificed for the redemption of sins. Does that help at all? And I've heard people say and they don't mean it maliciously at all, "At the cross, God died." No, God didn't die. At no point did God die. Now, if you're a modalist, you struggle with that because a modalist would say God can only manifest as one mode at a time, then you've got an issue, what about those 3 days? I don't know if that helps your question at all?

Any other simple things to address? Yes Sir.

Great question. His question is what about the "knowledge" that the Father has that the Son does not? Let's go to Matthew 24 and we'll address this question. I don't know if you're alluding to this verse but if I'm going in the wrong direction just stop me. Matthew 24, a famous passage of Scripture as if any part of the Bible is not famous, but very famous, where Jesus is speaking of his second coming. He's speaking of the time when he will physically return to earth. You get to verse 36 of Matthew 24 and it says, "But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only." Jesus made it clear just days before his crucifixion that the date or the timing of his return according to this verse was known to the Father only, even withheld from himself. Now, go a few pages to the right to Matthew 28, to the end of Matthew 28, verse 18, "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth."

Now, the reason I use those 2 verses and we can shift gears a minute if this doesn't help your question, is what you see happening in Matthew 24 is what Philippians 2 talks about when Jesus said he humbled himself as the form of a servant. When Jesus was here in flesh, he could not be in 2 places at one time. It was impossible. There is this idea that in his earthly ministry the Father was privy to some information that even he was not but in Matthew 28 after the resurrection of Jesus and the soon ascension of Jesus, you get the idea that that which may have been limited in earthly ministry is now no longer limited.

Does that help at all? That that limitedness, and I hate to use that term when referring to Jesus. That makes me a little nervous that lightning could strike. I don't mean it that way but that's the best word I can come up with. Obviously he was 100% man, he was 100% God. I do not believe that and I'm going to use our terminology, I do not believe that when he was 5 years of age and Jesus went to Hebrew kindergarten, I don't think he knew how to do higher level geometry. Why? Because the book of Hebrews talks about that he learned through obedience. He was 100% God, he was 100% man and that tension, that balance, that's the struggle that we have now but what we do know now is in his ascended state, I don't get any idea of a lack of knowledge as much as it is the Father who directs and he will enact the knowledge. For example, we sing the song, "At the midnight cry." Do you know the famous verse where it says, "Son, go and get my children"? You don't

get any idea now in the book of Revelation that Jesus is like, "I don't know when I'm going back." You get the idea he knows but he goes when the Father directs.

Does that help at all? I don't know if it does but I'm trying. A little bit? A little bit is better than none. I'll take it. I told you, the Trinity question, it's not easy to discuss. It's not easy to understand but it is important to understand as much as we can because of questions that people have. Any other Trinity? We could go literally for days. Yes Sir.

As water, that's a good illustration. Thank you, I forgot about that. The illustration he's using and I forgot about that one, it's a good one, thank you. It's the concept of H₂O or water that can be in a gas, a solid or a liquid form but the similarity is that when it is in a gas form it is water, when it is in a solid form it is water but now understand I am not a physical scientist, I don't think one H₂O molecule can be all 3 states at one time, can it? But if you took one and understand, I'm not the physical scientist but if you took just one H₂O molecule of water, just one, can it be a solid, a liquid and a gas all at the same time?

Once again, whether it's a water molecule, an egg, a football or a human being, there are lots of illustrations, I think they're all important to use because it depends who you are talking to. If I'm talking to a big NCC football fan and he doesn't believe in the Trinity, I'm going to use the illustration of a football. You know, I mean, I am. I'm going to use that illustration to him and say, "Hey, kind of look at it this way," knowing that the illustration does break down.

When I was in seminary, one of my theology courses, we had a question on one of our tests and here is how the question was phrased: in the best way you know how, illustrate the Trinity. I mean, we wrote and we wrote and we wrote and we wrote and we wrote. Everybody got it wrong and so when we came back to class, we're all scratching our heads saying, "Man, we gave it all we had," and the professor said, "If you even tried to write it, I gave it to you as wrong because nobody can fully describe it." It works on a seminary test but it doesn't work when you're talking to somebody in a coffee shop so feel free to use illustrations knowing that some illustration is a little better based on who you're talking to. They all will break down at some point. This, to me, works well and doesn't break down but you've got to be able to write it out and explain it. But I forgot about the water one. I'm glad you brought that up. And they're all kinds of good illustrations of anything 3 in one. I've heard of lightning used. The different rays of light, some are visible and you can't feel some, some you can feel and you can't see. Kind of like the Holy Spirit, you know, sunlight. There are all kinds of good illustrations.

Anybody else? Trinity stuff? We solved the Trinity in 20 minutes. No, we just realized we can't solve it which makes us wise. So please understand me, just because we cannot fully adequately explain it does not mean we do not attempt to understand it or attempt to discuss it because there is no way we can fully describe but at the same time.... Yes ma'am.

The question she has asked and it's a great question is: you've got these passages, one of which is in Acts 8, which you alluded to, of Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father.

When it says that he ascended, it says that he ascended to sit at the right hand of the Father. Turn to the book of Revelation 5 and as you turn to Revelation 5, I think verse 6 will help us in this and I'm going to read all verses 1 through 6 of Revelation 5. This is the story, if you're not familiar with the book of Revelation, this is the part where there is a book sealed with 7 seals. It says there is going to be one who says, "Who can open it up?" These are those final judgments that we see in the book of Revelation. We're going to see ultimately that it is Jesus that takes the book. All right, I'm going to read up to it but I want you, when we get to verse 6, really hone in. "And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals. And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof? And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon. And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon. And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof." Now, listen to verse 6, "And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain."

Now, the reason I bring that up is it does say very implicitly he's at the right hand of the Father, but it also says he's in the midst of the throne and when you go back to verse 1, the right hand of him that sat on the throne. So much like the Trinitarian illustration that's up here, the idea of the right hand is not so much geographical positioning as much as it is the carrying forth of the purposes of God. Here you have in this illustration, you have the Father with the book and then you have the Son who takes the book and enacts it. But yet it says that he is seated on the throne and he is in the midst of the throne but yet he is at the right hand of the one on the throne. So what's critical about that is because he is God, he can be both whereas we are limited and cannot. I cannot both be on the throne and on the right hand of a throne because that would require 2 cushions. I can't pull that one off. I'm getting wider the more I live in south Louisiana but I'm not there yet. Can't do that. Yet Jesus can be in the midst and at the right hand all in the same place.

Does that help at all? I've told you it hurts your head, did I? It really does. I hope that helps. Anything else on Trinitarian theology? Oh, here we go. Go for it.

What he's referring to is the fact that we are born or that humanity was conceived in the image of God, that he is 3 in one, and that the Bible declares that we are as well. In fact, one of the old illustrations is that God is 3 in one, one in 3 and the one in the middle died for me. I don't know if you've ever heard that. Well, it's kind of an easy one to help you remember. But I'm glad you brought that up. That goes all the way back to the book of Genesis. You see, I'm telling you, if you're going to go to Revelation, eventually you're going to get to Genesis. You get to Genesis, you're going to get to Revelation and sometimes we'll stop somewhere in between. But you get to Genesis 1 and verse 26 of chapter 1 and it says, "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion." There you have, now this is before sin so let's not get into all that, that you have mankind in the image of God. Once again, we have one God with 3 personas.

Now, fast-forward all the way to the book of 1 Thessalonians 5. I know we're kind of moving quickly here. In verse 23 it says, "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." So I think, once again, there is a good connection there that because he is one God in 3 personas, that we when he created us in his image, we are one but we have 3 parts to us. The difference is if you were to separate my body from my soul, please don't do that to me tonight but if you were going to, that my body lying on the ground alone is not completely Jeff. I am not completely me unless I'm all here, versus here where Jesus walking from Jericho to Bethlehem was completely God in and of himself. But, once again, great point that we are in his image.

Notice then it says after his likeness, that because we were made as he is, we behaved as he is. When you get to Genesis 5 when sin has entered, Adam and Eve have fallen, it says that Seth was born to them and it says that he was born after their likeness after their image. It reverses the 2 words which is kind of interesting. Last time I checked, we're all pretty much like our parents whether we want to admit it or not, aren't we? We have their same mannerisms, same behaviors, same appearances, hairlines. Whatever. Hey, all I know is when I go back to see my family, you are all going to be shocked, I'm the tallest one in the room. God was so good to me and that's all I've got to say. I'm grateful. My dad is an inch shorter than me and my mom is 4'11". My grandfather is 5'2". I'm grateful I hit 5'6", I just want you all to know. God was good to me.

I don't know if that helps back on your question, sir. Forgive me for that little diatribe. Anything else on Trinity before we go back to the box? Yes ma'am. Here we go.

That's a great question. She said: when we get to heaven and we see Jesus face-to-face, we read this verse last week, 1 John 3:2, when we see him we shall be as he is. It makes it very clear, we're going to see him. Will we see the Father? I do not know.

He does and that's in John 1:18. She's saying that Jesus said, "If you've seen me, you've seen the Father." So I'll be honest with you, I really don't know. I do know this though: we're going to be glad to be there and we're going to be having a good time and I don't mean to sound too simplistic there but if the Father allows us to see him or not, I'm going to be good either way. I mean, I'm just being honest. I really am. But that's a great question. It really is. A fabulous question.

Then Jesus described in John 3, the Spirit is like the wind. You can't see where it comes from, you can't see where it's going, but you can see the effects as it goes, that it's not that which we can tangibly see.

Anything else on Trinity? Here we go.

What he's speaking about there and I know you may not be able to hear him, Genesis 1:26 says that humanity before our sinful state in the image of God. There in Ephesians 4:24, it says that as a believer in Jesus Christ put on the new man. So that being said, let

me answer that with Ephesians 2, if you'll back up a few pages there. Ephesians 2 begins with, "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." Well, according to 1 Corinthians 6, as a believer, what now indwells with me, the Holy Spirit of God but before I was saved, the old man was the spirit that worketh disobedience.

Now, this is back where those illustrations of the Trinity kind of come in handy. Let's take that old football. You've got a leather cover and you've got a bladder but if it doesn't have air in it, it doesn't serve much purpose, does it? As soon as the air is infused, you've got a good situation. You can actually use it for what it was created for. I think the picture you have in here, sir, is when we are sinful, fallen humanity, we have our leather cover or our body, we have our soul, our bladder, but because we have the spirit of disobedience in us, we don't have the air capacity to function as God created us to be. Only when the Holy Spirit is put in us, we're using the illustration, does it inflate us to be designed as God designed us to be. Do you see how you can kind of work those illustrations in a little bit? Does that help at all? But he talks about the new man and the old man. He's referring to the spirit that used to be guiding us versus the one that is now guiding us. Thank the Lord for the new man. Absolutely.

All right, we've got the Trinity solved. Oh no, we don't. Go ahead.

Okay, there goes the can. The question that he's asking is that when Moses was on the mount and he was receiving what we now know as the 10 Commandments, remember the Lord made it very clear that he was not to see his face. But he was allowed to see the shadow; he was allowed to see some physical manifestation but not the person of. Y'all remember that story, right? Of course, obviously it comes down and it burns the top of the mountain and such. There are and I know that my wife in her women's Bible study, I think they've already addressed this somewhat in the book of Revelation, if not I apologize if I steal your thunder, baby, but what we have in the Bible are what we call theophanies which is the seeing of God by humanity but none of those theophanies are actually like you and I sitting across the table from each other and we go, "Oh, there is God. We've got it covered." What you are seeing is a very visible presence of God but not the totality of God. For example, when you've got the famous battle in the book of Judges, I believe it is, where he sees the captain of the Lord of the host and realizes later, "I've been in the presence of God." You've got the book of Ezekiel where you see the chariot coming down with all the wheels and such and you get the idea of the presence of God. You see those very things that God is present and at some level tangibly visible but not in entirety. Does that help? Moses didn't have the privilege of seeing God face-to-face as, "Hey, you and I, let's sit down and have a cup of coffee." But he was allowed to be in his physical presence that was manifested in a very God-like fashion. Does that work?

By the way, that theophany means an appearance of God. A Christophany is where we see a theophany or the Lord appearing and he has the attributes of Jesus prior to the incarnation. For example, the book of Zechariah 3, it says that Joshua, the high priest, is standing before the angel of the Lord and Satan is at the right hand condemning him and

at one point the angel of the Lord forgives him of his sins. Well, who can only forgive sins? Jesus and so we look at that and say it's obviously a Christophany. It wasn't Jesus Christ of Nazareth but you have an appearance. You have God moving in a way with attributes of God but not the completeness of. Does that help at all?

Okay, who needs ibuprofen? Are you ready? Heads hurting? Spinning? All right, are we done with the Trinity? Okay, we're done. Here we go. Mix it up and go again. Excuse me. Hurry? Before a hand comes up.

This is a really good question, not as if any are not good but: do you believe church membership is commanded in Scriptures? If so, where? Let's go to the book of Acts 2. Now, let me define for you what the word "church" really means. The simple word "church" means "an assembly." That's what it means. A called out assembly. We have the church of Jesus Christ. You could now, please, do not throw anything at me when I say this, okay? You can have and a lot of people do worship there, you can have the church of football fans. You can have a called out assembly of people who are all about football. The word "church" is not exclusive to believers in Jesus Christ. That is why you will see in the letters of the Apostle Paul, "To the saints of the church of God at Corinth." He's describing. He uses "church" as a description of, not a complete separate entity. If that communicates.

In Acts 2, to the question at hand, beginning in verse 42. This is after the famous Pentecost event. Actually, let me back up into verse 40. It says, "And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation." Verse 41, "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart," listen to verse 47, "Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." In that context, it is speaking to the church, for lack of better terms, universal, okay?

Now, fast-forward to the book of 1 Corinthians 1. It begins in verse 1, "Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, Unto the church of God which is at Corinth." Okay, keep going to the right. We go past 2 Corinthians because it's the same group of people. The book of Galatians 1:1 and 2, "Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead;) And all the brethren which are with me, unto the churches of Galatia." Keep going. Let's go to Philippians. I'm not against Ephesians but we'll just go to Philippians, verse 1, "Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi." He described them without even using

the word "church," but they were the saints that were collected at Philippi and then later on in verse 5, it says, "For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now."

You say, "Where are you going with this?" I believe what you see is you have what we call the church universal and we have what we call the church local. The church universal is anybody, anybody who comes to an understanding that they are a sinner and Jesus is Savior and according to Romans 10:13, they have called out unto him and he has saved them. That's the church universal. However, we also see evidence in Scripture that there is the church local. Let's just take the ones that we have described in the letters of Paul. We have Corinth. We have Ephesus. We have the churches at Galatia. By the way, what we know as the book of Galatians was not written to just one congregation, it's multiple churches. We have the church at Philippi. We have the church at Colossae. We have the church at Thessalonica. You get in the book of Revelation and you can add Sardis and Philadelphia and Laodicea, Pergamus and Thyatira. You have all of these different situations. You say, "Why is that so important?" Because every one of them had different issues. Every one of them had different struggles. Every one of them had different highlights.

So you see that there is a church universal that goes beyond the walls but there is also a church local. You say, "Well, why is that so important?" If we're just to take a broad brush on the subject matter, I think the importance of the church local is it for fellowship? Of course. Is it for, as it says, as doctrine? Absolutely. But here is the word that church local provides that church universal does not: accountability. That would be like saying, "Well I'm just a human being. I'm a part of the human race." I'm not accountable to anybody but if I'm a part of the Myers family, then I am then accountable to a selective group of people to operate in a certain way. So therefore I am a believer in Jesus Christ. I am a part of the church of Jesus Christ universal, but locally I am a part of Greenville Springs Baptist Church and am accountable as a believer and as a member to the body of believers here in this specific entity. I don't know if that communicates, whomever asked the question.

Now, is it commanded? There is no place in the New Testament where it says, "Thou shalt walk the aisle and join the church." Did I hear an, "Oh, man"? But it does say, "And the Lord added unto." Well, you can't add unto unless you know who they are. So at some point, at some level, you have evidence of them becoming a part of the local church.

Now, let's go back in history because whether you know it and I've talked to people who say, "Man, I tell you what, I'm nervous about joining the church." Let me dismiss some things. Sometimes people come to me and this has happened everywhere I have served, it has even happened here, and they say, "I really, really want to join the church. I want to be a part of it. I want to be official but I can't bear to tell my old church I'm leaving." You don't have to. That's what we do. We do it for you and it's amazing, people go, "Okay, let's do it." Why? Because there is an emotional attachment. There is an upbringing. If you've ever had that experience in life where you've gone from church A to church B for

whatever reason, it's not easy. There is a lot of struggle there. Why? Because it's called the body of Christ both universal and local.

So that idea. Now, the idea about, walk an aisle, join the church, make it official, sign the card, that whole bit, what is critical is this: there are a lot of things in life I'm interested in but when I put my name on a piece of paper I'm committed to it. Think about that for a moment. There are a lot of things you see advertised or maybe you can be a part of it, "Boy, I like that. I believe that. That's good stuff right there." But when you sign your name on the dotted line, you are now accountable in the relationship to whatever that entity is. For example, when we sign up our boys to play sports, there's a big difference in going in the backyard and shooting hoops. When you put your name on the dotted line, you're accountable to come to practice, you're accountable to show up to the games and to buy the uniforms. Let me ask you an important question: what is more satisfying, shooting hoops in the backyard or playing an actual game of basketball? You see, to get the greater reward, you have to make the greater commitment.

I think one of the struggles we see today of people, they don't want to be accountable to and so it's just easier to shoot hoops in the driveway and say, "Well, I'm a basketball player." Yes, you're playing the game of basketball. Let me translate that: you're still a believer in Jesus Christ if you're not a member of a local church, absolutely. Being a part of a local church, a local congregation, does not get you to heaven, okay? But it sure helps you in life along the way.

So are we commanded, "Thou shalt walk down and go in the church"? No, but you do see designations all throughout the New Testament of those who were officially connected to. For example, 1 Corinthians 5, there is an individual that is committing a sin. It is so grave that it's tearing the church in Corinth up. What does the Apostle Paul say in chapter 5 of 1 Corinthians? He says, "Remove him from the church," local, "so that by Satan having his body, his spirit might be saved." Once again, there is that accountability action that's taking place there. It's for his betterment, the church's betterment, but his being removed from did not eliminate him from the church universal, just dealing with him with the church local.

Now, is there any commandment to join a local church? No. Is there great evidence of believers in the New Testament being a part of a local church? Yes. I hope that's clear. I don't know who wrote the question and we can talk about it all night long. Any offshoots? Yes Sir.

The passage he's referring to in Hebrews 10, I believe, says, "Do not forsake the assembly of the believers," and it's a great verse because it says we should not think that we are a church in and of our own. That passage, I think, gives great evidence to what you're saying, sir, yes, that we're to be together as believers, but it doesn't specifically deal with local church membership but it says that we are not to be isolated in our faith. Do you know the problem about being isolated in your faith is you think that you're always right and everybody else is always wrong. Seriously. If you're the only...I call it the ranch mentality. Being from Texas, this is kind of, not how I grew up, per se, but kind

of what I'm familiar with. Let's say you've got a piece of land and let's just say this whole whiteboard here is going to be our ranch. This is our big ranch here. We've got 1/1000 of an acre right here. Whatever it is. This is our ranch. Now, in most cases scenarios, where are you going to build your house on the ranch? In the middle? Wrong, try again. Front? Wrong. Highest point. The highest point is where you put the house. Why? So that when people come to try to take your ranch, you've got the highest elevation.

So this is our ranch and it doesn't matter where we put our house so let's just pick the highest point and our highest point is going to be up here. It doesn't matter but here it is. That's where our house is going to be. Do you know what the problem with the ranch is? You put your house in a place that just by its very location is to deter anybody from interacting and so that you have total control. The ranch mentality that happens when believers don't gather together is they isolate themselves usually on some high place of something and they make sure that nobody can come and interact with them, nobody can come and be different than them and guess what? They spend all day by themselves and they have all the answers and nobody else is right. That's the problem with Lone Ranger Christianity or ranch mentality Christianity. What do ranches have around them? Fences. What's the purpose of fences? Keeping people out and keeping the cattle in but there is no cattle in this illustration. What do they have at the front gate? A gate. What's the purpose? You control who is in, you control who is out and when we get into the ranch mentality like you said about that passage in Hebrews, we get to this point where it's all about, I don't want have anybody that I'm accountable to. I don't want anybody that might disagree with me and so if I'm on my ranch mentality, then I'm good.

You see, when you get the body of Christ together in a local situation, we're called a body for a reason. You've got feet, you've got hands, you've got torsos, you've got noses, you've got ears, you've got everything and the great thing about that is that not everybody is just like you and the bad thing about that is, not everybody is like you. If you were to build your church and you were an elbow, you'd have a whole church of elbows. Here's the problem: how is a whole church of elbows ever going to cook dinner? They don't have any hands and so the body of Christ, to your point, sir, needs all these parts to function as a body and the deal with the parts of your body is you've got to learn to operate together and not isolated from. I have heard every conceivable excuse on why somebody should not be a part of the local church and I'll just be honest, my baseball coach was right: excuses are like armpits, we've all got them and they all stink. But I believe, to your point, sir, as a believer in Jesus Christ, when you look at Corinth, when you look at Philippi, I need other believers in my life to encourage me when I'm down and to challenge me when I'm wrong as a believer. So when it says do not forsake the assembly, yes, we are commissioned to be together but that "local church" physical, geographical location, is never actually commanded but highly encouraged.

I don't know if that helps at all in that, but I'm obviously a big believer. Yes Sir.

That's a great point. The meal that we ate tonight was not cooked by one person and we want to thank the wonderful animals who gave their life for that. Hey, I just believe in the

doctrine of Peter: rise up, kill and eat, brother. Absolutely. But he's right, the number of people that it takes to be a body.

You know, oftentimes when we talk about the church local, people will quote Matthew 18, "Where 2 or 3 are gathered, there I am in the midst of them." You know, the only problem with that is even if you're all by yourself, you are still the church. Do you know that passage in Matthew 18 isn't dealing with worship, it's actually dealing with church discipline and it's saying that where there are 2 or 3 people who have all been violated by this other believer in a way that the Lord stands with them in the correcting of the one who is wrong. We quote that passage all the time, "Where 2 or 3 are gathered, there I am in the midst of them." The Bible says that in the context of discipline but if you are imprisoned all by yourself in a Third World country for believing in Jesus Christ, sitting in a cold dark cell 24 hours a day, never seeing another human being, you are still the church by yourself. You do not have to have 2 to 3 to be a church.

Does that make sense? But yes, to your point, sir, it helps to have a gathering because the bigger the body the greater it can be. But there is no true, "Thou shalt join a local church." That's not the 11th commandment. It's not there.

Any other church membership questions, concepts, ideas? We've got it. We're going to get to 3 questions tonight. Okay, I'm hurrying. I'm sorry. Here we go.

This is really good. I say that about every question, don't I? Y'all are the ones that write them, not me. Y'all are doing very well. In studying Scripture, that's the good point, number 1 we're spreading Scripture, the "context" can completely change your theology regarding a passage. Most of us don't have extensive schooling in the word. There are thousands of resources on context. What advice would you give to make efficient and wise use of time in studying, specifically the context? What resources do you recommend? That's a good question.

Now, we'll make this succinct, so to speak, and quick. The idea of context, what that means is you can take any single verse in the Bible and take it out of wherever it is in the Bible and make it say anything you want. The context is within the story of which it is contained. Therefore the best advice that I would give to you to discover context is to read the verse before and to read the verse after. If you can do that, then you're going to get a better context of what you're dealing with and the one thing that we do when we teach our boys, when we're doing Bible study with them, one of the questions that we'll ask them when we're doing a Bible study question about a specific verse, is we'll say, "Okay, what book of the Bible is it in?" And they'll tell us it's in the in the book of John. Well, the book of John, one of the 4 Gospels telling us who Jesus is, right? What testament is John in? New Testament. In other words, what we are teaching them is to take the one verse that you're dealing with and to expand out. Don't look at it just in light of verse 10, but verse 9 and verse 11, the chapter, the book, the testament and then the Bible in totality because what happens when you take one verse out of context and you do not put it in context, what you become is a cult because you build what you want around that verse instead of what God put before it and what God put after it.

So if I were studying Scripture and I want to encourage you on how to do it and you come across a verse that may be somebody gives you, emails you and says, "Check out this verse," or maybe you saw it on a sign. I would read that verse and then I would read the verse before it and the verse after it and then if time would allow I would read the entire chapter in which it is in. Get the whole story. When you get the whole story, then if you have had time over your life or in that situation, read the book of the Bible that it is contained in. Read the verse in front, the verse behind, the whole chapter, the chapter before, the chapter behind, the book that it is in. Do you see how you're taking that little thing and you're just expanding it out? Now, as you study more and more and you know what the book of John is basically about, the book of Romans, you can kind of go at it kind of the reverse methodology. But that's where I would start in context is don't just take it isolated.

Now, what about resources? This is where you may be surprised at my utter simplicity. Do you know what the best resource you can have for Bible study? Yes, a Bible, not that simple. A little more complex and it's going to surprise you: a dictionary. Get a dictionary. Not even a Bible dictionary. They're great. A dictionary because the Bible contains words and those words have meanings and when you look up what those meanings are, yes, you can dig into Greek and yes, you can dig into Hebrew but who's got time to do that before going to work?

Now, you're going to say, dictionary? Let me give you a little something that we practice at the Meyers house. I have one in my office here and we have one at our house at home: Noah Webster's 1828 dictionary. Go and grab one. You say, "Why would I do that?" Number 1, because Noah Webster was believed to be a believer. Number 2, in 1828 we were definitely more of a Christian culture than we are today. And you would be shocked when you look up words in Noah's dictionary how many of those definitions give Bible verses beside them. Yes, Noah's 1828 dictionary. When you look up the word "regeneration," it says "to be born again," and then it will give the illustration of Nicodemus in John 3. A dictionary is a wonderful, simple tool to help you study.

Now, are there resources like Bible dictionaries? Absolutely. Are there commentaries? Yes, and thanks to the internet there are all kinds of stuff out there but be careful because you don't know really sometimes what kind of stuff you're getting because you don't know necessarily what the sources are, per se. But my advice is: start with the Bible, before and after, kind of get bigger and bigger and bigger. Then next if there are words or concepts or ideas you don't quite grasp, get a dictionary out. What does the word "regeneration" mean? What does that word, "propitiation." That's a word that's used in 1 John. You go, "What is propitiation?" You go and look it up in the dictionary, not necessarily a theological dictionary and you know what it's going to say? It's going to say "one who gives themselves as a punishment for another." It said that Jesus Christ is the propitiation of our sins. It's saying that he gave himself for us because we could not. It's just a simple dictionary.

Are there great tools out there? Absolutely. Bible dictionaries are great. Commentaries are fabulous. Here's what I'm going to offer you: if you're saying, "You know what, I want to go digging and I want to go dig deep. I don't want to stay on the surface, I want to go down. I want some commentaries. I want some critical books. I want some stuff out there about whatever it is." If you will email me, if you will call me and if you will contact me and say, "Hey, I'm studying the book of Romans, what do you suggest to go and get?" I will help you but in the context of tonight, we cannot start with Genesis and end with Revelation with all the tools that are out there. But just like my toolbox at home, I have one of those stand up toolboxes that you roll around. It's got 4 or 5 different drawers. They are all organized at some level. I kind of work with the pile system, not the file system. But even the guys in here that are really mechanical and more so than me, wouldn't you admit that in your tool chest there are certain tools that you just use for a lot of different things? That's kind of how I see my dictionary.

Now, the second thing I would suggest is this: a study Bible. A study Bible has a concordance in the back. I don't know if you've ever seen one before. If you're not familiar with them but a concordance is where, for example, the word "regeneration," and you look up the word and it will show you all the verses where it is used. There are only 2 in all the New Testament: Matthew 19 and Titus 3. Those are the only ones. You look up the word "flood," and it will tell you the verses where "flood" is used. You look at the word "salvation," you look up all those different words. A lot of study Bibles have those concordances in the back that will help you connect the dots, so to speak.

So I'm just convinced that if you will read it in context, find you a decent dictionary and if desired a study Bible, you're really in a good ways down as far as being able to do this thing called Bible study. You see, the problem is there are groups out there that say unless you read the Bible alongside their material you, you can't really understand what it says. Those groups are cults. You can read what it says and understand what it says because according to the Bible, the guide that you have is the Holy Spirit that resides within you and if you will do what is called comparing Scripture with Scripture which means where the word "regeneration" says here, versus where it says there, you will get a long ways down the road in a very quick amount of time.

I'm just going to go ahead and play my cards: I think sometimes we make Bible study too hard. Folks, let me tell you something about Bible study: it's simpler than they are telling you it is. Read it. This is one of the things I want to tell people all the time, do you know the best advice I give people to reading the Bible and understanding it? Read it like a third grader. You say, "Read it like a third grader?" Don't read too much into it. It says what it says and it means what it says. Take what it says and don't try to make it do gymnastics, just take what it says. Read it and then connect it to what something else says, connect the dots and say, "I've got that."