

The Bible (Unmuted) Transcript**Episode 26****Theology and the Bible: An Interview with Dr. Andrew Hollingsworth****August 1, 2023****Teacher: Matthew Halsted****Episode Summary:**

What is theology? And what is the relationship between theology and the Bible? In this episode, Matt chats with Andrew Hollingsworth, a well-versed theologian who has a knack for these sorts of questions. Matt and Andrew discuss the role reason and tradition play in interpreting Scripture, as well as the ins and outs of theological method -- dabbling into hermeneutical and philosophical issues along the way.

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Transcript:

0:00 Welcome back to another episode of the Bible Unmuted. My name is Matt Halsted and it's a pleasure to be with you today. In this episode we're in for a treat because we have a special guest with us here today, Dr. Andrew Hollingsworth. Dr. Hollingsworth is a good friend of mine. We've known each other for a number of years and he's going to have some great things to say to us today. As a theologian he's going to offer some thoughts on theology proper and he's going to define theology for us. He's even going to talk about theological method and how all of that relates to biblical studies and reading and interpreting scripture. We have a fun conversation and it's something that I think -- there's a lot to take away from here. There are so many resources that are mentioned, so many names of scholars that are mentioned. There are so many books that are discussed and philosophers and theologians that we chat about that I think this is just an episode that is going to give all us listeners to consider down the road. Even after you've listened to this, you may want to come back and listen to it again. Andrew is such a keen, careful thinker and he has done a lot of work. He's published a couple books on theology and theological method. He's got about a billion peer reviewed articles that he's published in great journals. So, it's a treat to have him on the show.

This is a show that is about biblical studies. And in the bible, we exegete scripture, we pay attention to every verse and we are in the text a lot. So, this is a biblical studies podcast by and large. It's also a hermeneutics podcast. We talk a lot about hermeneutics and interpretation, interpretive theory and what not. But we also talk about coherent thinking. We have to think about scripture and the data of the text in a way that's coherent. And we've talked about that a lot. So, in light of that, I thought it would be beneficial to bring on a theologian who can offer some thoughts on how to take biblical data and construct it coherently and why we should even bother constructing scripture coherently.

We talk in this episode about other things as well. Namely, the role of tradition in interpreting scripture. We talk about the role of reason. What role does human reason play in our interpretation of scripture and formation of our theology? All of those are discussed. And I should say that Andrew and I don't agree on everything and you'll see some of that come through here. But at the end of the day, we hold very dear the essentials of the Christian faith. And we are really great friends, have been for a long time and will always be great friends as brothers in Christ. So, this is just such a fun discussion that we had. It was fun

for me to have it and I pray that this conversation is a blessing to you. I pray that it gives you yet further tools for your tool box as you go about yet studying scripture, reading scripture and honoring God with your life and with your ministry.

3:15 MH: What is theology? Have you ever thought about that question before? Theology, simply put, is basically just this: Thoughts about God. The word “theology” comes from *theos* (God) and *logos* (reason, words) – *theo-logos*, theology. I bet you have a theology – thoughts about God. What is your theology? Where do you get your theology? Many Christians say they get their theology from the Bible. But how does this work? After all, theology is not just something we get by ourselves, right? The churches and denominations we grew up in, the books and commentaries we read, and the families we grew up in—all of these are, in a sense, part of our tradition that shapes the way we read our Bible and, hence, the way we get our theology. To discuss this topic today, I’m joined with my friend and colleague, Dr. Andrew Hollingsworth, a professor at Brewton-Parker College, who has done a lot of work in theology and theological method so it’s a joy to have him on the show today. Welcome to the show, Andrew.

AH: Thanks for having me, Matt. It’s been a long time coming. I’m glad our schedules finally aligned for us to be able to do this. I’m excited.

MH: It’s going to be super fun and I’m stoked about the whole conversation we are going to have. If you would, tell us a little bit about yourself.

AH: So, as you said, my name is Andrew Hollingsworth. I am an assistant professor of theology and Christian philosophy at Brewton-Parker College and our seminary Temple Baptist Theological Seminary. I teach courses under the topics of systematic theology, philosophy of religion, and Christian philosophy. At the undergraduate level I also teach classes in the Old and New Testament and an historical Jesus course which I really enjoy. I’ve got a couple of books I’ve written. My first book was called *God in the Labyrinth, A Semiotic Approach to Christian Theology* and it’s a book version of my dissertation. I’ve done an edited collection with Fortress Academic on the enduring promise of Wolfhart Pannenberg’s theology and it’s called, *Theology for the Future*. I have a forthcoming edited book R.T. Mullins with University of Lucerne and Palm Beach Atlantic. This is a four views book and we are looking at the four views on the incarnation, the metaphysics of the incarnation. We have some great contributors with that. Tim Paul, Andrew Loke, C. Steven Evans, and Joseph Jedwab. I’ve published around sixteen papers now in peer reviewed journals, *Irish Theological Quarterly*, *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie*, *Philosophia Christi*. I have forth coming papers with *Faith and Philosophy* and the *Journal of Analytic Theology*. And I’ve had a couple of papers published now in *TheoLogica* which is an international journal of philosophy of religion and philosophical theology. I’m a member of First Baptist Church Mandeville and I mention that because I see that as very important to my teaching ministry. I teach a Sunday school class there and the very content that I teach there are the lectures for my graduate level systematic theology I & II courses. And when I’m done going through this material the people love it, they are hungry for it. So, if you’re listening and you’re wondering how to get more biblical or theological education into your church – Sunday schools. It’s a primary way to do that. It’s wonderful and the people love it, they are hungry. And after we’re done doing this, I think we’re going to do some biblical hermeneutics and after that some historical Jesus stuff. So that’s a little bit about me. And I did my PhD at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary under Rhyne Putman. It was a wonderful experience. I got such a good education there. I’ve become friends with you, Matt, for a few years now. We met at the Evangelical Theological Society through our interest in theology and hermeneutics. I guess that’s all there really is to know about me.

MH That’s great. I often tell people that you are my favorite theologian and I do mean that because we talk about all kinds of fun things. We’ve talked about everything it seems like through the years. So, it’s fun to have you on the show because it’s fun to introduce one friend to other friends.

AH Oh, one thing I forgot to mention. I am married to an incredible woman Katie, who is a nurse practitioner. And we have a beautiful and just incredible 14-month-old boy. His name is William Rex. These are definitely the two best things in my life apart from the Lord. I love being a professor, I love being a theologian and a philosopher, but they just don't compare to being a husband and a father.

MH That's so good. So good. This show is all about getting back to Scripture—digging deep into its original context, whether that be its ancient near eastern context, its Greco-Roman context, etc. That's what this show is all about. But I'm also a firm believer that Scripture must speak to our modern questions (hence, *The Bible Unmuted*). It has to speak to our present question and our world. So, to just start off with a question; how can theology do that? How can theology help in that endeavor?

AH: I think it can help in several ways. First and foremost, I think it's good for us to reflect on what exactly theology is as you mentioned already. It's our reasoning, our words about God. But, first and foremost in the academic context theology is a science. It comes from the German idea or *Wissenschaften*. It's not just a natural science. *Wissenschaften* is rational reflection and reasoning on some given topic or subject. It's systematically ordered. So, when we say that theology is a science, we mean specifically that it's the science about God. And it's the rational reflection and reasoning about God that are our attempts to somehow make the best sense of God, or what we believe to be God. And we do this so that we can with the important organizing principals that are intrinsic to theology. As Christians, especially as evangelical Christians, we believe that God has revealed himself to his creatures. He has done this in two ways. He has done this universally through creation—namely nature and human consciousness. Theologians love to call this God's general or universal revelation. And he has also revealed himself particular through unique events of history, such as the exodus event where he delivers Israel from Egypt. He has done this in the Christ event where he has become incarnate in Christ and raised him from the dead. We refer to this as a special or particular revelation. As Evangelicals, we like to add to this, scripture as part of a means of God's particular revelation. We believe that God inspired the Israelite prophets and Jesus' apostles to record his (God's) dealings with them, and we also believe that God was at work in the authors in such a way that the very texts they produced are also inspired of God, being his very words. And we believe that God has inspired these texts down to the very words and expressions the authors, namely Israel's prophets and Jesus' apostles, chose. Since God's written record of his revelation in history is itself a medium of revelation, it's important for us to look to it as much as we do the historical events themselves. So, if we want to discern what God has revealed about himself in the written record of his revelation in these historical events, such as the exodus and the Christ event, then this is going to require hermeneutics on our part. From the beginning to the end of the theological process of doing theology, the theology is always an endeavor in hermeneutics. Theology can actually help us think clearer about Scripture itself, since it is a theology of the nature of Scripture that leads us to want to take and read to begin with. Even our motivations for understanding Scripture correctly are both hermeneutical and theological motivations. So, I personally think that the better we are at theology then the better we will be at reading Scripture. We might say that the relationship between Scripture and theology is a kind of hermeneutic circle: As Scripture continues to inform our theology, so our theology helps us to better read and interpret Scripture, which then continues to reinform and reinforce our theology, and so on ad infinitum, until we meet Jesus and no longer see through the glass dimly. So, I think that's just one way that theology can help us be better readers of scripture.

MH: In the academic world, there's a difference between biblical studies and theology. And sometimes scholars in one can become so entrenched in their field that they forget to dialogue with someone in the other area. So, a biblical scholar may not always be in dialog with a theologian and vice a versa. So, in your mind what's the danger of doing that in biblical studies on the one hand and theology on the other?

12:55 AH: Well, the phenomenon that you've acknowledged is not an unnoticed phenomenon. As you've all noted Joel Green is one New Testament scholar who has seen the problem here. It's one of the reasons of what motivated him to help start the Two Horizons commentary series where you have biblical material on the front – like strict biblical commentary and theological implications on the back end. But having said

that, I think it's helpful for us to recall something very important that the late theologian John Webster. He said: The highest form of theology is biblical exegesis. Any theology that is not informed for the bible is really not going to be worth our time. So, one would think that, especially for us Evangelicals, that biblical exegesis and biblical studies would always be informing our theology and even our theological method. However, theology is always informing our exegesis too, whether we realize it or not. One thing that the great hermeneutic thinkers, namely Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur, have really taught us as we think about nature of interpretation and understanding is that all readers bring pre-understandings and pre-judgements with them to the interpretative task. Anytime we read any text we have a host of pre-judgements and pre-understandings about the world, about the text itself, about what we've been told this text means, we bring to this. And we always read scripture, or any texts, through that lens. The question then becomes whether or not we are bringing good theology or bad theology with us because knowledge and understandings are theological pre-understandings. For example, I remember when I came to know Christ and I wanted to get serious about reading my bible. Well, I brought this pre-understanding of the bible as God's inspired and inerrant word of God. And I still believe that, obviously, the bible teaches that it's those things. But I brought that to the bible and that theological understanding was really helping guide how I read the scriptures. So, we are always bring theology to the tasks, but we need to stop and ask the question: are we bring good or bad theology to the task of exegesis?

I think that good theology results from a continuous dialogue between Scripture, philosophy (especially logic and philosophy), and the church's dogmatic traditions. Contrary to what some biblical scholars may think, the study of the Bible didn't begin with us, nor did it begin with the Enlightenment. And I don't just say that to poke fun at the biblical scholars. I think a lot of Christians read the bible thinking they are the first to read this, or get this insight, but that's not necessarily true. Though I personally think the Enlightenment might have done more good than bad for the study of hermeneutics in general, modernist philosophers and thinkers weren't the first ones to read the Bible and/or think about God. Schleiermacher wasn't the first person to read and think about the bible. Neither was Jonathan Edwards, neither were any of these people during the enlightenment period. So, I think it did more good than it did bad for us. I also think it's important to note that the bible was read and interpreted critically and theologically for many generations before the enlightenment. This happened for many, many centuries before them, with the pre-Christian Jewish scholars and readers, the apostles themselves, the patristic Christians, and the medieval Christians. The more informed we are on the basic principles of philosophy, namely logic, and historical theology, the more we know about the history of our doctrine and how they developed, the more prepared we are to interpret scripture well when we approach the task of reading scripture. Those who have read Scripture before us can serve as a guide for us as to which pitfalls to avoid. This is one reason we study Arianism or historical theology and church history. So, we know not to make the same mistakes with the bible that Arians made.

Now, this doesn't mean that all those church fathers before us always interpreted Scripture correctly. Otherwise, we wouldn't be Protestants. We would remain Roman Catholics, if we thought they got everything right beforehand. I have many differences with hermeneutics and exegetical strategies, as well as exegetical conclusions, of the early Christians. For example, I disagree with how Augustine interprets the bible about original sin and predestination and such. Nothing against you Augustine lovers. Augustine is great. I read Augustine regularly and I am going to encourage my son to read Augustine once he's old enough to know that he exists and can read words.

However, being unaware of the work of these thinkers though, that will ultimately make us ill-prepared to the task of reading Scripture. Because if we aren't aware of the mistakes that have been made in the past and the successes that we've had in the past, we're not going to be able to approach scripture really well. And we're not going to be able to approach it humbly, I think. At the same time, there are a lot of theologians today who love to read the Bible with Origen, Augustine, the Cappadocians, Athanasius, Thomas Aquinas and the so-called great tradition, (and it is a great tradition), but they are near ignorant of the insights rendered by contemporary biblical scholars and biblical theologians. Systematic

theologians who fail to engage modern biblical scholarship and biblical theology run a high risk of neglecting a large portion of the church's tradition (I mean, isn't the so-called great tradition supposed to be a living and continuing tradition?) And even I matter as a part of that tradition as much as St. Augustine and the Cappadocians were. Not saying that we are as smart as them, though clearly Matt is...I'm definitely not.

MH Laughs...and I'm not. In case there is confusion, I am not as smart as Aquinas, but go ahead....

AH But we are a part of this tradition as well. And as a result, many of these theologians who love to read the bible with the church fathers, with the reformers, with the Medievals, they love to read the bible with them but they are ignorant of key and important aspects of the grammatical and historical contexts apart from which the biblical texts cannot be properly or rightly interpreted. And that's because as smart as the patristics were and as smart as the Medievals were, they didn't always think in terms of what we do now with grammatical and historical exegesis. Which is not sufficient all on its own to read the bible but I think we need to at least begin there. So, there definitely needs to be an on-going and continuous dialectic between biblical studies, biblical theology, historical theology, and philosophy, philosophy of religion, philosophical theology, and systematic theology. I think if we are really going to be good interpreters of scripture, we've got to read the bible on its own terms using good grammatical and historical exegesis, but we've also got to read it with the tradition. And we also need to read it using the best tools we have from contemporary philosophy. And this might be the most controversial thing I say today. That I think the best philosophical tools are going to come from our Christian analytic philosophers. There are good things from continental philosophers. I've mentioned a lot of continental philosophers already, but I really do find there is a lot of value that is often need by the continental thinkers in the analytic tradition. That's my longwinded answer to your question.

MH: I think that's really good. I think most listeners to this show are going to be familiar you're your discussion about preunderstanding. We have talked a lot about that. We are currently going through a series on Romans. One thing I've written about in my Romans book and I talk a lot about is Paul's own pre-understandings and the way he reads the Old Testament. So, I think Paul would get along with what you're saying in a number of respects. At least in the core of it all. So, I definitely think that modern evangelicals need to think very deeply about this whole concept about pre-understandings and what Gadamer would call pre-judgments or prejudice. I think there is so much more to be said.

I think as evangelicals we have this idea that it's just me and my bible. That's sort of the idea. I have my "quiet time" we used to say growing up. One on one with God. And it kind of gives the impression when it comes to interpretation and hermeneutics is that all that matters is me and Jesus. When in fact, that's not all that matters. Even if you grabbed your bible, moved out to the desert and lived in a tent the rest of your life, it's not just you and your bible. It's you, your bible, the translators who gave you that bible, and the text critics who gave you that bible. And the rich tradition that passed on those texts and the copies of those texts throughout the ages. And all of that involves interpretive choices, as you know, translation is interpretation. So, it's never just you and your bible. It's you, your bible, and a whole host of translators through history. And so, I think we need to come back and to steal words from Gadamer is to s rehabilitate the idea of the fact that there can be helpful prejudice or pre-judgement is a better word. I mean obviously there are some prejudices that are by definition, evil. But pre-judgements as themselves is just a thing. It's just a reality. We always read scripture from a standpoint of....

AH One of the most important aspects of the hermeneutic text is what Jauss referred to as hermeneutics of reception or the hidden reception of the text. Now I know Gadamer talks about the history of the text or the interpretation. Well, Jauss talks about the history of reception. And that's really what historical theology is. We are studying how the bible has been received and how it's been interpreted through the ages. But Jauss doesn't just say we need to take that and let that be all of it, right? To say, "Oh, whatever has been received is the best way." Because Jauss also talks a lot about that we still need to engage the text on their own. We need to have our own horizons of understanding interrupted.

Sometimes, even though we need to look at the reception, sometimes studying the reception of the text and we can take what has been received, but sometimes we need to have those horizons of expectations interrupted a little bit. And that's why that even though we study the reception of the text, we still engage the text on their own terms, on their own turf.

MH Yeah – and I think that's super helpful on that front.

24:00 MH Let's talk about coherence and theology and all that. We have this idea Theology is all about coherence. In a sense, theology aims to bring together all the bits and pieces of biblical data and coherently organize it. This is why theology shouldn't be viewed as pulling someone away from the Bible; after all, theology in this sense assumes the Bible is organizable. Do you have anything to add to that?

AH: Yeah. I'm speaking from my experience here. I'm not making an absolute claim. Biblical scholars don't hate me. Still buy my books so that I can keep a roof over my family's head. In my experience, theologians tend to be more engaged with the disciplines of philosophy, especially formal logic, than do biblical scholars. Biblical scholars have so much time you have to dedicate to keeping your Hebrew, your Greek, and your Aramaic polished. And an Old Testament scholar is studying Ugaritic, and Acadian. You're studying so many things. I get it, logic just isn't always the forefront of what you can do. But also, us theologians, it's just more accessible to us and we aren't spending as much time as we should be studying Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek Ugaritic, Acadian and Latin. If we do believe, and evangelicals we do believe, that all 66 of the biblical books are God's very word to his covenant people, and if we believe that God is a perfect being who does not communicate or believe falsehoods as the bible itself does teach us, then his word must be coherent with itself. This is where a healthy dose of canonical criticism, or as Brevard Childs preferred to call it, the canonical approach, to biblical theology can be helpful. Yes, we believe that the Bible is a library of 66 books that were all written over the course of many centuries. But we also believe that the Bible as a whole, functions as a single book that has an overarching story, or worldview narrative, that is held in common by the various biblical authors – both Israel's prophets and Jesus' apostles. If we do believe this, then it is essential that biblical scholars be well versed in philosophy, especially logic, and systematic theology, because these disciplines help us to pay more attention to the coherence not just of our theology that derives from our exegesis, but to the bible itself. Also, and this is something that is widely agreed upon by contemporary biblical theologians: it is best that we attempt to organize Scripture by what appear to be Scripture's own organizing principles, or anchors, if you will. For those of you who don't know, Dr. Halsted here has a great discussion of various anchors in an episode he did over on the Naked Bible Podcast. You should go listen to that. It's great.

MH By the way...I didn't pay Andrew to say that (laughing). I will say though, you're right. I just want to make a quick comment here. We do need to pay attention to those biblical anchors. In fact, was that one of the words I used when I was....?

AH That is the word you used.

MH I did? Okay. Yeah, it sounds like it.

AH I listened to that episode while mowing my yard one day. I was sweating a lot because it's really hot down here in New Orleans in the summer. And I thought, yeah, I really like that word anchor.

MH Yeah, it does anchor the text. And you finding the narrative in the story. And that's something N.T. Wright talks a lot about – the storied approach to scripture and all that.

AH And John Walton and Goldingay, too. Now, I want to be clear that this is not to say that there is a single thematic motif or anchor that can provide coherence to all of the biblical texts in the canon. I think if there is one area where some evangelical theologians waste too much time at is in trying to find what

the central motif of the Old Testament is. Or *the* central motif of New Testament. Or *the* central motif of the entire bible. I'm just not convinced that there is a single motif that provides the united story of the bible. I think it's much more helpful to think of the bible as Wright and Goldingay and as Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen do, as this overarching drama of scripture. Of both thematic divisions of different acts, like you would a theater drama. Like Act One is God creates, Act Two is humanity sins and falls, and Act Three is God initiates redemption with the call of Israel. Act Four is God accomplishes redemption in the person of Jesus. Act Five is the mission of the church and Act Six is God consummates his kingdom. So, I think that could be a helpful way to think about it. And I think it's helpful to say that there is not a single central motif to the Bible but there are central thematic motifs (plural) like a web per say that hold the rest of the web together.

MH That's good. I can get on board with that.

AH So saying that there are these central thematic motifs, or anchors (plural), that can help us do this, this can really help us to do this and unlock the overarching story unites the biblical canon. So, while it's helpful to see maybe those six acts by Bartholomew and Goheen, to help us unite the overarching story of the bible. Yeah – I think that's right, but they only came up with those six acts because they see these are the various biblical anchors and motifs that are in the texts themselves and are uniting the Old and the New Testaments. So, I think that's one way we can try to find the coherence of the bible and I think biblical scholars are doing a great job of that. Systematic theologians care a lot about coherence but sometimes we need to do a much better job of – I don't want to say studying our bibles, that sounds pejorative, but being aware of what's going on with contemporary biblical theology. That way we can see what's being done there and that way we can learn from biblical scholars and biblical theologians so that we can adapt the content from them and work it, mold it and shape it into something that's better and healthy for our systematic theology. But at the same time, biblical scholars will be good to learn all the important tools of logic and coherence, especially internal coherence that can help them think more coherently about how they are interpreting the bible too. Sometimes biblical scholars can just get lost in the ancient Near Eastern context or in the First Century context and they tend to read so much into that they are not always thinking that this has to make sense with itself. If we think that it is a united word of God then it does need to make sense with itself somehow. It needs to cohere with itself. Because if you have something that is internally inconsistent then just by definition the totality of it cannot holistically be true.

38:17 MH: I think a lot of times, this is true for me and I think it's true for a lot of people, sometimes we can have knee-jerk reactions to labels. We want to avoid labels because labels or systems can be paralyzing. And I think we should be suspicious of them sometimes. But coherence is clearly a virtue. And we need theology and we should admit a need for theology. So, how do we organize the biblical data into something coherent? And you kind of already answered that question I suppose, but when we think about coherence, do we mean agreement? Or can you have variations within the data and still have coherence? Because it seems to me that you don't need to have complete agreement. You don't have to do it with variations in order to have coherence. In other words, variations don't imply inconsistencies. Does that make sense?

AH: Yeah. So, usually when philosophers talk about coherence were talking about the fit of propositions. For example, suppose I make the statement all grass is green. Suppose I make that statement. But then suppose later I make the statement that no plant is colored. Now even though I haven't explicitly said that grass is not green in the second statement that is an entailed proposition. Grass is not green if any plant does not have color. So, when we talk about coherence that's what we're talking about. There cannot be any kind of entailed or implicit contradiction.

MH Contradiction or logical contradiction.

AH Yes. Or, contrariness. For example if we do think that Paul's theology is coherent with Peter's, not only will Paul's not contradict Peter, it's not going to be to the contrary of Peter. And that's not going to be contrary or contradicting of what Moses has taught, or the Psalmist, or the gospel writers. So that's what we mean by coherence is that kind of logical fit.

But if we want to talk about how we want to organize biblical data as coherent, I think it's important that at first, we need, as best we can, to be aware of the theological pre-understandings that we are bringing to the Bible when we read it. I know many logicians might be screaming that I'm bringing in continental philosophy with insights, but I think this is what...

MH Hey, I'm okay with it. Just for the record.

AH Well, I'm not saying that logic is a subsidiary to hermeneutics. I'm not saying that. But when we think about how to organize the biblical data, I think we first need to be aware as much as possible about our theological pre-understandings. And we also need to be aware, too, that pre-understandings aren't intrinsically negative meaning in the enlightenment thought. In fact, interpretation and understanding, as Gadamer records, it would be shown to be impossible without them. And we need that frame of reference to be aware of to make sense of new phenomena that we encounter, including texts that we encounter. But we need to be aware of them so that we can, at times, be ready to suspend our theological pre-understandings in order to read Scripture with new eyes. I think that's really important because sometimes, perhaps even oftentimes, a high level of commitment to our theological pre-understandings or pre-judgements can cause us to miss something that the original audiences of Scripture would have found to be obvious. This is one of the reasons we need to be learning Aramaic, Hebrew and Greek because as I'm reading my English bible, I can sometimes just miss something. Like for example, Paul might be using a similar word multiple times. He might be connecting some themes back in Philippians, for example. In English I may not catch it, but if I'm working slowly with the Greek text and I'm translating something I might think, wait a second Paul is using this Greek term here several times. Usually when an author does that, they are after something. They are wanting me to notice this. But again, when we are reading slowly and we are looking for those things, if we are reading the bible in light of our pre-understandings and we are not suspending or being aware of them, we might miss. They might cause us to miss an important detail or repetition or something that is in the biblical text that the biblical authors want us to see. So, we need to be willing at times to suspend our theology and read Scripture from a different vantage point to see what sort of coherence and explanatory power arises from this new hermeneutical vantage point. Having said this, I would reiterate what I just said in the previous question: we begin by trying to do this – once we are aware of our pre-understandings, we don't need to suspend them just yet, but we need to be aware that I know that I am bringing the BFM 2000 to this text. Or you being Anglican, I know I'm bringing the 39 articles with me to this text. If you are Presbyterian, I know I am bringing the Westminster Confession with me to this text. As Orthodox Christian, I know I am bringing the Apostles and Nicene and Athanasian Creed with me to this text. I know this, right? But once we are aware of this, then maybe we won't need to suspend them quite yet, but we really need to start paying attention in trying to discern from the text itself its central themes, or anchors, to the Bible and its overarching story, and we use those themes, or anchors—such as promise, covenant, offspring, kingship, the kingdom of God, etc.—we take these themes or anchors and we use these to try to help us make sense of Scripture and organize a theology from it. I then think it's helpful to bring our interpretations of Scripture into dialogue with the major historical voices in church history to see how our interpretations cohere with theirs. In other words, we need to take our interpretations of scripture in light of noticing these motif and anchors and then we bring this into dialogue with what we have received in the reception history of the text. To see how it's fitting with that. How it might diverge from that. And this is going to lead us to ask important self-critical questions.

Are we organizing Scripture in similar ways as those before us? If not, then why not? What did they see in the Scriptures that we didn't? What might we have seen that they didn't because we are trying to go back and pay closer attention to the scriptures on the themes and anchors?

Typical of contemporary systematic theology is an organizational schema that attempts to follow the major elements of the overarching biblical story: And I think these main overarching elements are the drama of scripture that we mentioned earlier. We have God, creation, fall, redemption (includes God's call of Israel and the Incarnation), and eschatology. The various theological loci that we find in a typical systematic theology such as Millard Erickson's are going to reflect this. We are going to have revelation, divine attributes, the Trinity (which all tie back to the doctrine of God), creation, humanity, sin and the fall, person of Christ, work of Christ, the Holy Spirit, the work of the Holy Spirit, the church, and eschatology. These different loci all follow these major narrative arcs of the Bible itself. So again, here are just some of these systematic theologians who are trying to do that. It's a short one volume undergraduate level systematic theology, but Christopher Morgan's *Christian Theology* that he's published at B H Academic, I used it for my undergraduate students, does a great job of showing how various doctrine and these loci fit into the overarching biblical story which he breaks up into these similar narrative arcs. So, I think this is one way we can attempt to organize the biblical material coherently. And again, what we see is that the system patrician can do that as Erickson and Morgan, and Michael Horton and Michael Bird to me may do it all a little differently but they do try and organize their doctrines in systematic theology according to these overarching arcs of the biblical narrative. In that way they are still trying to let the bible itself set out its own organizing schema.

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40:50 MH: Let's take the Trinity as a case study. If we look at all the biblical data, we see some interesting things said about Jesus. On the one hand, we read how Jesus says "The Father is greater than I" (John 14:28) and there are instances where Jesus expresses ignorance about the timing of his return (Matt 24:36). But on the other hand, Jesus says things like "I and the Father are one" (Jn 10:30). Other passages speak clearly about Jesus' divinity, as well. So how can we take these bits of data and organize them into something coherent? What does a theologian do....?

AH: So, theologians are going to differ on how they choose to do this. So, in talking about the trinity, really what we're getting at with this is that it's as much Christology as it is the trinity. You can't do the trinity without Christology, right? Because all of these doctrines are interlocking with one another just like biblical narrative does. Some take an approach to this – to the trinity and to Christology – they are going to take an approach that was popular with patristic medieval thinkers and their information. And it's probably the dominate approach throughout the history of the church and it is often referred to as a Christology from above approach. This tends to begin with a more articulate doctrine of the Trinity such as what we find in the Nicene or Athanasian Creeds and then it tries to work its way down. So, we start up here real high with this worked out doctrine of the trinity and then we kind of work our way down to interpreting the scriptures about Jesus in light of that. So, we have this doctrine from the Athanasian and the Nicene Creeds, well then, we are going to go back and interpret passages such as the "The Father is greater than I", in light of that creedal dogma. Passages like Jesus being ignorant of his return or "I and the Father are one", we are going to interpret those in light of that dogma. It's kind of like how Christology from above works. And that is one way to get at the trinity.

Such a Christology from above and its entailed doctrine of the Trinity usually comes from the 7 ecumenical councils of the church and their creeds. The other major approach, and the one that I favor, is often referred to as a Christology from below. So rather than beginning with the Jesus of the creeds or the trinity of the creeds and the ecumenical councils, I like to begin with the Jesus of history, or the historical Jesus if you will, as attested to by the New Testament authors, examines his teachings and deeds in the gospels, including his resurrection from the dead, from there attempt to develop a theory, or theology, of Jesus' divinity. So, I look at the historical Jesus and I also try to develop a theology of his humanity. I try and look at these things and this title he wore like, Messiah, Son of Man, Son of God, Curios. I look at these titles Jesus is wearing that he is allowing people to call him, and from there I try to build a theology out of that.

At this point, this approach typically goes something like this: Ok, so Jesus is divine and he is seen to be divine in these ways. But the Old Testament and the 1st-century Jewish world were emphatic monotheists, and monolatry was essential to the right worship of YHWH, the one true God, and the God of Israel in the Old Testament. And we know this is the case for 1st-century Judaism. We know that the Jewish people were thinking this way. But Jesus is also God, i.e., he somehow participates in the divine identity of YHWH himself, as Richard Bauckham would say. And we also have this other guy that Luke and Paul are very emphatic about, namely the Holy Spirit. Jesus calls him the Holy Spirit. So, we have these three persons that they are talking about in these divine terms. And they are worshipping them. Yes, they worship the one who Jesus calls Father, but we also see in the New Testament that they are worshipping Jesus. They are worshipping the Holy Spirit, but the Old Testament is very clear in the Shema, "*Hark O' Israel. YHWH is your God. YHWH alone. There are no other Gods before me.*" This explicit forbiddingness of idolatry. But somehow these Jewish people who are convinced Jesus is YHWH's Messiah...they are not just convinced that Jesus is the messiah, they are convinced that they should worship him, and the one Jesus calls Father, and the one Jesus and the Father send to them, the Holy Spirit.

So, how do we make sense of these three persons being truly divine, and also this monolatrist claim, that there is only one God and YHWH is his name? At this point, the systematician, in dialogue with historical theology and philosophy, will attempt to develop some sort of model of the Trinity, or some other model of God, to make sense of these phenomena. Examples of this are what we would call Latin or Classical Trinitarianism. There is social Trinitarians who are trying to do this. There is Relative Identity Trinitarians, Material Constitutional Trinitarians, etc. There are all kinds of Trinitarians. That's what systematician try to do. They take this biblical data and they say let me get all my tools – sentential logic, predicate logic, modal logic, counterfactual logic, probability logic...all the logic. Let me get these together and let me see what the best that we know from metaphysics that philosophers study, and let's see if we can work out. Because the bible, while it affirms that these three persons are divine, and while it affirms that there is only one God, it doesn't give us more than that. Pretty much the bible says there is exactly one God, and there are precisely three persons properly called God. That's really all the bible gives us. It doesn't tell us how to work it out. The systematician is going to take that and look at how the church has tried to work it out and then is going to look at the best tools to in contemporary philosophy and metaphysics and say, "Okay, how can we develop a coherent model to make sense of all of this so that we as worshipers today can have a clear understanding of who this one God, who this three persons is and how we ought to relate to him and properly worship him." And again, as you've rightly highlighted, we are going to stress coherence. And the model we've developed to make sense of this has to be coherent. And the reason for this is that though coherence may not be by itself a sufficient condition for a statement about God and the Trinity to be true, it is a necessary one. Coherence is necessary, but not sufficient. But it is necessary.

MH: That makes sense. You've mentioned logic. So, reason plays a role definitely in all of this. What is the role of reason in crafting theology? Can you say a little bit more about that?

47:50 AH: I am very emphatic about the importance of reason. If Scripture is our ultimate authority, I personally am going to put reason beneath that. And when I say reason, I don't mean a particular philosophical system, I simply am referring to the laws and rules of formal logic (including but not limited to sentential logic, predicate logic, modal logic, counterfactual logic, and probability theory). Logic just is the laws of truth. It's all the things. Logic doesn't make something true, but logic is going to preserve what is true. In other words, logic is going to teach us proper ways of reasoning and thinking. That way if we begin with truth and follow the laws and rules of logic we will end with truth. If we begin with truth, we will always end with truth. Now, we are going to use these tools to determine whether or not the distinct features of our theology are coherent or not. So, when I say reason, that's what I'm talking about. I'm not talking about a particular metaphysic, a particular epistemology, or a particular ethical theory or aesthetic. I'm not talking about those things. I'm not even talking about a particular hermeneutic per say. Just the bare minimum - the laws and rules of formal logic.

The reason this is important is because theologians don't just like to say true things about God. They want to say powerful things about God. You'll read theologians like Robert Jenson who will say these incredibly beautiful, powerful and pious statements about the Triune God. But just because they may sound nice and pious doesn't make them coherent. Like some people will like to say, "Well, in a sense God doesn't even exist at all because God is just beyond being. And only being exists. Well, if God is beyond being then we can't even properly say that God exists." I just think that kind of stuff is nonsense. It sounds great and pious, that yes God is beyond being, but it doesn't really make any sense. It's not coherent to say those kinds of things.

Coherence, like I said earlier, is a necessary condition for a statement to be true. It's necessary. It's not sufficient. In order for it to be sufficient we need it to correspond to reality, the fact of the matter, the way the world really is. But it is a necessary condition. So, when we say it must be coherent, what we mean is that it has to be coherent with every other true statement that there is. Because in the same way that the universe and that reality is a unified reality, and since coherence is something that maps on to statements about reality, if reality is united, then any true statement about reality is likewise going to be united which is why we have to have coherence.

Coherence alone is not sufficient to make a statement true, but it is a necessary condition. So, reason helps us to do this and it is essential for the task of theology. When we go back and read the theologians of the past, even in the Old and New Testaments, we should also be reading them to determine whether or not their theological moorings were coherent or not. Moses would've never thought God contradicted himself. And he never would've said that the law contradicted itself. No Jew is going to say that the Torah is self-contradictory. No Jew is going to do that. No Orthodox Jew anyway. None of the apostles thought that Jesus contradicted himself in his teachings. And you never hear Paul saying, "Well, Jesus was close, but he really was a little incoherent here." No, he would never do that. They always presume it's coherent. Paul is a very coherent thinker.

Now, another reason that I stress importance to reason and why I want to elevate reason slightly slightly higher than the church's tradition is because as we stood back and study the church's thinkers of the past as a historical theologian and we go back and read these theologians, we should be reading them to determine whether or not their theological moorings were coherent or not. Because sometimes we have this tendency to just accept whatever Thomas Aquinas says, or whatever John Calvin says, or whatever Jacobus Arminius says, or Luis de Molina, Augustin, or whoever. Whoever our favorite dead guys are. We have this bad habit out of almost a kind of weird reverence for them to just take wholesale whatever they said and just accept it. Well, if Augustin said it, it must be true because he is really smart. He is really smart and we probably should give an edge of grace to him if we have a hard time understanding. But if Augustine says something that is downright incoherent, then we shouldn't believe it. If Molina says something that is incoherent, we shouldn't believe it. Arminius, Calvin, Aquinas, whoever, N.T. Wright, whoever. If anyone says anything that is downright incoherent, we should not believe it. Because if it is incoherent, then by definition it cannot be true. Because if these thinkers and their theological statements aren't coherent, then we know at least one item in their system is false. And once we start tinkering with the beliefs to a system, especially if they are central beliefs to a particular system, we are going to have to start tweaking and reorganizing our net or web of belief of all these other doctrines. Or if you want to take a different metaphor and think of it like a Jenga tower, if you move too many of the Jenga blocks at the bottom of the tower, you risk more of your tower of belief falling than if you make the ones closer to the top come out.

So, reason serves both a normative and regulative role in theological systems building. Again, that's a long-winded answer, but that's what I think about that.

53:25 MH: I definitely think that reason is important. You can't... Well, it's crazy to think that you could have a theology that is incoherent. That just makes zero sense.

AH And to add to that. Some people will talk about the difference between propositional and narrative logics. That is such an overblown dichotomy. It infuriates me when I hear people say, "Well, biblical authors aren't concerned with propositional coherence, just narrative coherence. Just narrative logic..." That doesn't make sense. The laws of logic are like the laws of mathematics. They are universal. There is no possible world where two plus two is anything but four. There is no possible world where we have married bachelors. There is no possible world where the statements "God exists, God does not exist." are coherent with one another.

MH And this doesn't do away with mystery or paradox, I guess you could say.

AH No it doesn't. This is why I err on the more conservative side of model building. Like for example, think about the trinity. I tend to favor social models of the Trinity. I'm not saying that this is the model. Because even within social trinity, you have various arguments about which model is right. I tend to take a more conservative approach. While I tend to lean that way, my hope isn't in the model. I don't rely on the model. For example, if the social model fails, I have a classical model, I have a relative identity model, I've got a material constitute. I've got other options. So again, what I think is important for theologians is to think about, (and this I get from hermeneutics), is our limitedness as finite and fallen thinkers, to realize that though the laws of logic are somewhat infallible, our use of those laws is not. Kind of like how the scriptures are infallible, but our interpretations are not. The same with the laws of logic. Just because we know the laws of logic, doesn't mean that we always use them properly. That's why we always disagree with one another. So, I like to think of it in that we are not going to know exactly how God is Triune. We aren't going to know that exactly. But when we see non-believers, atheists and sceptics say that the trinity is incoherent, these models serve to say, "Here's one plausible story to make sense of God." And if all of that doesn't work, then here is another plausible story. Here's another...it's about showing the plausibility of it. And they give us ways to make sense of it. If it turns out that social Trinitarianism is false, so much the worse. I still have a classical view of the trinity. I still have other tools. If my particular view of the incarnation turns out not to be the right one, my worldview hasn't changed. I just go to the next model on offer. Because again, these are ways to make sense of scripture. They are not making scripture true, but they are ways for us to make sense of it. So, I take a little more conservative approach to model building.

56:15 Again, when I would say my model of the trinity that I'm working on with Joshua Ferris on a paper, neither of us are saying this is the right model of the trinity. We are just saying this is another story we could tell that does make sense of the biblical data. This could work.

MH You are after possibility and if something is possible then it's not...

AH I would even say were after plausibility - here's a plausible story. I might say sometimes that this model of the trinity is probably true. But again, if it's not my biblical worldview is not going to shift. My view of the bible is not going shift.

MH And again by reason – you are incorporating reason into a theological method is just to say no contradiction is allowed. Right?

AH No contradictions and no contrary statements.

MH No contrary statements. Yeah. You mentioned that earlier too.

AH Yeas, we are going to rule both of those out.

MH And you mentioned even critiquing tradition. So, I'm an Anglican (I used to be Baptist). And Andrew, you and I would have some differences on a few things.

AH I'm pretty sure we do, Matt. Based on our conversations, I'm pretty sure we do.

MH Yeah, but you could still be my friend though (laughing). And this is why I think this is a good discussion. I just want to hear from you on these thoughts. I know what my own thoughts are, but that's boring if all I have is the echo chamber. But I want to hear your thoughts: What in your mind is the role of tradition in forming theology? You mentioned we could critique tradition and in Anglicanism, tradition is important. The creeds are said in every service. But Anglicanism is the middle way. It's the middle way between Roman Catholic tradition and Protestantism in a sense, right? Reformed and Catholic – that's the mantra.

AH: Fun fact, I'm not sure if its Cranmer, but an Anglican theologian who was talking about it, calling it the via media. They actually are calling it the middle way between the Catholic church and the reformed church. It was a middle way between the reformed church and the Lutherine church.

MH Oh yeah. I gotcha. Yeah. That's fun.

AH So I recently learned that from an Anglican theologian friend of mine.

MH Sure. And there is a sense in which of. Being able to critique tradition and yet allow it to be part of the discussion. This idea of the middle way, the via media, that's where my bread is buttered for sure. But I want to hear from you. What in your mind is the role of tradition in forming theology?

59:26 AH Well, this depends on who you ask, right? By God's good, glorious and blessed grace I'm a Baptist. I am a Baptist with a lot of Anglican sympathies. For those of you listening, *The Book of Common Prayer* has just been transformative for my prayer life. I pray the Nicene Creed; I recite the Apostles Creed with the daily office. I pray the daily office on a regular basis. I am still a Baptist, but I find lots of benefit in the symbolism and rich meaning of the Anglican traditions. And I love Anglican liturgy. Matt and I have more in common than we do difference. And we do worship the same Lord. But I am Baptist and so my answer to this question is going to be very different than say, an Anglican, a Roman Catholic, an Eastern Orthodox, a Lutheran, a Presbyterian, or even a Methodist. And because I am Baptist it's going to be very different from what other Baptists are going to say, right? For example, we have some really sharp Baptist theologians like Matt Emerson and Luke Stamps and Brandon Smith who are with the Center for Baptist Renewal. Who are very big on Baptists being engaged with the great tradition and learning a lot from the great tradition. Again, the great tradition in forms a lot of our theology – being creedal, being pushed for that. And I think there is merit to that. While I have great respect for the tradition and I always want tradition to be a part of the conversation with the Bible I'm having, I'm not going to be quite as persuaded by things in the tradition that they are.

These other more confessional Christian traditions that I mentioned earlier like Anglicanism, Catholicism, Lutheranism, etc., tend to place a higher level of dogmatic authority on the church's tradition. And again, by tradition in particular – I just want to keep it minimalist. The Seven Ecumenical Councils and the Ecumenical Creeds (the Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed. So, I'm just going to keep it in the middle. I'll play the Anglican game here. In these traditions they are going to see this Ecumenical Church Tradition and they are often going to treat it with what they often refer to it as the Norma normata to Scripture's being the Norma normans. What we mean by that is that when we set up Scripture as our Norma normans it is the norming norm for our theology. It is where the buck stops. It has the final say over everything pertaining to spiritual, religious, and theological life. And when theologians want to talk about the tradition being Norma normans they mean the norm that is normed. So, Scripture is the number one authority and tradition is going to be the number two authority for them. And then usually something like reason will come beneath that and then experience if you are a Wesleyan.

Now many in these traditions will say that the church's tradition holds a higher authority than "individual reason," i.e., reason as exercised by an individual. Some people will use the term individual reason. And the analytic philosopher in me will ask, "what do you mean by that? Give me a definition. Where are the necessary and sufficient conditions for being an individual reasoner?" But I find this claim, even if they just mean an individual use of reason, to be quite problematic. First off, the only reason that someone would elevate the tradition to this level of dogmatic authority is because it seems reasonable to them to do so. In order to give the tradition a higher level than dogmatic authority, they have to use reason to do that. So already, I think this is a self-defeating position. Also, I'm not sure why we should think that the church, over the course of 2,000 years, got everything right. Maybe they gotten some details or some features about the fundamentals wrong. I don't know. Maybe they did, maybe they didn't. But it just seems to me that even if the church is forever and always constituted by fallible individuals, then there is nothing intrinsic to them, per se, that makes their statements more authoritative than yours or mine. Some would say that it's the consensus of the tradition that grants this level of authority as well. But that's false too, and it's really just another version of the fallacy that we call ad populum. It's an appeal to the populous. Its just a theological populous. And while yes, consensus plays an important role in all scientific theorizing, we see consensus playing a role. That doesn't stop for example, the consensus that the traditional singularity big bang origins of the universe are the consensus view. But that doesn't stop there from being string theorists, or quantum loop gravity theorists or something like that. But we can still say that I think my view has more data and more reasons supporting it. So, consensus doesn't make something true. It might give us reasons for siding with it in the absence of more evidence, but it does not make it true.

1:04:32 The vast majority of the intelligent world thought the world was flat; that didn't make that belief any less false. Look also at the incident with Galileo and the Roman Catholic Church. The Roman Catholic Church excommunicated Galileo for teaching that the sun was the center of the solar system. And I know you and I have talked about some think there is more going on there like political issues. It's not simply this, but the alleged reason was for his saying that the sun was at the center of the universe. Clearly the Roman Catholic Church thought this was considered an important dogma not just a doctrine, because you don't excommunicate someone over a belief that's inconsequential. But now we know that the church and its tradition was wrong on this point. Also, if God is willing to permit the church to be wrong on issues such as the Galileo incident, not to mention if God is going to allow the church to perform and perpetuate the evils of the crusades and the renaissance papacy. And I'm not just trying to dump on the Catholic Church. I'm not doing that at all. I'm thinking of Christians universally in this case. If God is going to allow for example mid-20th-century Baptists perform acts racism to the extent that they did, then why would I think that God would allow his church in the name of Jesus to do those things. Why would God allow people to do those things in the name of Jesus with the authority of Scripture to say African-Americans lack the image of God? Why would he allow that, but he's not going to let us get the Trinity wrong? He's not going to let us get the incarnation wrong? There is just something about that which seems inconsistent to me. I can't really make too much sense of that.

So, I think studying the tradition, or traditions, and historical theology are extremely valuable. And I would even say they are essential to theology. I am hesitant to give them that much authority. Studying the traditions and the Councils and such really help us know which paths have been traversed before and how we can avoid their pitfalls. But studying historical theology and the traditions can also help us see the mistakes the church has made, not just heretics, but the church herself, has made in the past that we still need to recover from. So, though I think tradition is helpful in doing theology, I don't rank it as authoritative as Scripture or reason, for that matter. Again, I think to say that tradition has authority over reason – well, you only arrived at that conclusion because of reason. So, it seems that even though you are saying that tradition has more authority, functionally you are giving reason the higher thing. And also, if even you're a person committed to the tradition, if the tradition ever came out and said that squares and circles can be the same shape, no one is going to believe them on that. Because reason is going to say that can't be true. So, if I had to give a ranking, I would say my ranking is Scripture, then reason, then tradition. Now again, often times when I am thinking through a particular theological difficulty that seems

to arise from the Bible and I look at the tradition, and I might say, “well, I’m not really satisfied with how the tradition has handled this.” But I’m also not convinced that I can come up with a better answer to it. So, I’ll go with tradition until some more evidence arises. But if there are some cases where I think reason gives us good reason or evidences to go against the tradition, and I look around and see that there are others in the field of biblical studies, of theology, and philosophies who are seeing the same tensions and going that way, and if the arguments in favor what seems to be the problem with tradition seems to be more compelling, then I am going to go that direction. An I’m not doing this because I’m a Baptist. I’m a Baptist because this its more my instinct to do this. So that’s the role I think tradition has, tradition does have a role. And I think we should always punt to tradition in the lack of better evidence or reasons for going against it.

And again, I think I try to model this pretty well in my classes. Even in my Sunday school class, I tell my class to go read Augustine, Irenaeus, read Athanasius, the Cappadocians. In my undergraduate classes I try to find ways to fit the sources from our patristic fathers into their syllabi so they are required to read these. Even though they might have some conclusions that I might differ with. But again, go with tradition until you are given good reasons not to. But once we say that there are good reasons not to, we have already implicitly elevated reason above the tradition.

1:09:40 MH: As you are talking I have probably a million things I want to ask. Specifically, about Scripture and tradition, and reason too, I guess. Because we employ reason to establish Scripture. I guess I could imagine somebody objecting and saying, yeah but don’t you use reason to establish scripture as God’s word? And so, would that elevate reason above scripture? Or are they more like partners? Anyway, there’s a million other things I could say...

AH: I think that’s a really great question. I ask that question a lot. I would say what really happens with scripture is not quite the same. Because first off, no one has yet to show where there are explicit contradictions in Scripture, or any kind of incoherence. Any kind of alleged contradictions or contrary teaching – guess what, there are plausible explanations for why they are not contradictions. And they are not farfetched. They are even on the basis of the historical and grammatical context of the scriptures themselves as to how to explain those tensions. But having said that, I would say that what’s really going on is that reason is not establishing scripture, reason is recognizing the authority of scripture.

MH And even tradition, like when we say scripture...I’m just trying to think of objections here. What somebody might say is, if you have scripture as the highest authority...I suppose somebody could say, yeah but there is no scripture apart from interpreting scripture and there is no interpreting scripture apart from one’s tradition... you get the point. What would you say to that?

AH I would say that if I wrote a letter...suppose I was on a ship and the ship wrecked and it was going down. But before the ship went down, I wrote a letter to Katie and hoped that one day it would make it to her. I put it in a bottle and threw it in the ocean. Suppose a shark eats the bottle and she never gets the letter. That letter still meant something. It still had meaning in that text even if it was never read. So, when people say there is no meaning without interpretation, I just think that’s false. If they mean there is no significance in it, maybe. But again, it depends on what someone means by that word meaning. What is the meaning of meaning, right? So, if we are talking about that, we use that word in different ways and sometimes we equivocate on it. For example, if you said to me, “Andrew, you’ve got to kick a cocker spaniel and kick a purple mouse.” I’m going to be like, “Matt, what do you mean by that?”

MH And I think meaning, for the person reading and interpreting – because like in your example, it would have meaning for Katie, but it would have meaning for you because you have read it. Do you know what I mean?

AH That’s significance you are talking about. The text itself means something even if no one reads it. The text coded with meaning even if no one is decoding it.

MH Yeah...this is going to take us way too far afield here (laughing). I have a million things I want to say about *that*. (laughing)

AH A question came up in my Sunday school class recently....

MH Sure. Meaning and significance this is a Gadamer....

AH Well, I think significance is part of meaning. And I get that from Pannenberg, actually. Let's think about this for a second. Let's chase this rabbit for a second. Because I think it's a good rabbit. What do Christians do with the book of Leviticus? That was a question in my Sunday school class. We were talking about that. What do Christians do with that? Because clearly it meant something for ancient Israel, that it doesn't seem to mean for us today. And I said, "Ah, well it was significant for ancient Israel in a way that it isn't significant for us today. It's significant for us today, but in a different way." Now, whether you are part of the church today or whether you are part of 8th-century Israel, the words of Moses mean what Moses intended them to mean. That never changes. What Moses encoded in that text, never changes. Now, the context of the reader or the reading community, that changes. So, the significance takes on new meaning. So, for believers, for Christians, we believe that Jesus is the fulfillment of what God told Moses, right? We believe that he is not just the means by which we are made righteous. We believe that Jesus is the means by which he makes us holy and sanctifies us. The means by which God has made us holy and sanctifies us. So much more it goes. So as a result, to that, we don't need the Levitical sacrificial system anymore. Because of this. Because Jesus being the High Priest, being the sacrifice itself, both for the scapegoat offering, the sanctifying offering of Israel's sin, being the Passover Lamb. And by his being the temple itself, he is fulfilled, being the **πλήροο (πληρώω)** the Greek for this, he has fulfilled the it to the brim. Completed it. He is those things for us. We do not need these anymore. Now for those who don't need that anymore, does the book of Leviticus still have meaning for us? Well, yes. We still need to read and interpret Moses' words for what he trying to tell us. And what is he trying to tell us in Leviticus? God's holiness as to this extent, here is what you have to do for his presence to remain with you in the camp, in the midst of you. Now as New Testament believers we believe that has been accomplished with what Jesus has done for us. Now what Moses has intended is to the same. That because our context has changed, the significance it has for us has changed. This tells us, well, if it took all of that, because of God's holiness was to such an extent, it took all of that for him to remain in the camp with his people. And Jesus is able to satisfy that in a once for all way for us, then how holy and set apart is Jesus? And so we have to remember that. In light of that, that even though Jesus has made us holy, it doesn't stop Paul and Peter from telling us *be holy as the Lord your God is holy*. And to be a holy, set apart nation of priests to the world. So, the book of Leviticus has a different significance for us, but what Moses has encoded in it has not changed at all. So that's a way we can talk about that.

1:16:02 MH Would Gadamer agree with you? (laughing)

AH I hope he would. I think he would. I do. I think Gadamer – he's interesting. Now if you want to talk about a via media, he is it.

MH Oh, that's a good way to put it. Yeah.

AH He is not giving what determines the meaning of a text. He is not giving that to the readers, but he also wants to allow the text to mean more. Here's the thing. I don't think Gadamer would deny – at least with the way he says in *Truth and Method*, he is not going to deny the reader that authors have some sort of control factor over their meaning. Like...

MH Right, I agree with that.

AH Like for example, if Paul says God is good. The tradition is never going to legitimized in saying God is not good. Clearly Paul didn't mean it...clearly the tradition is never going to be able to say, "well,

Paul uses the words God is good, but he means God is not good.” That’s not going to work. Gadamer is not going to let that happen. People just don’t get to control that. There is some sort of regulative principal that the author of the text has.

MH Yeah. The text has its own horizon of understanding and it cannot be muted. It cannot be silenced for Gadamer.

AH Now this is where I think Ricœur might be a little more helpful. I think Ricœur wants to give a little more edge. He’s still going to give a place for readers because Ricœur is going to talk about the speech act aspect of text as discourse. He’s going to give a little more to speakers and authors than Gadamer might.

MH See, I feel like we need to have another episode just about this topic – tradition, reason, scripture, meaning. I have a million things I want to say. I have other questions that I want to get to though. But I appreciate your thoughts. I really do. I think...

AH Some rabbits are worth chasing.

MH Oh, they are. They are definitely worth chasing and this is a good rabbit to chase, but ummm. But, lets shelve some of this for a later day because I have a million thoughts. and if I’m not careful, we’ll chase a lot of rabbits out of state and we’ll get lost....so...(laughing)

MH It sounds like you like tradition. It’s not like you are anti-tradition by any means. What would you say to those Christians who have an allergy of sorts against the use of reason and tradition?

AH: Honestly...these are my thoughts. Get over it. (MH laughs). Here’s the thing, you are using reason and tradition anyway. You might as well learn how to use them well and properly. And you can never not use them. It’s simply impossible. You are always going to be reading scripture in light of some tradition. You’re always going to be making sense of scripture using reason. You are always going to be ranking your authorities using reason in scripture. You’re already doing it. Just get over it and learn how to do it well. Maybe that seems harsh....

MH Ummm. Well, I think it hits on something that’s true.

AH I just get tired of some people saying, well maybe we shouldn’t use reason, sola scripture only. That’s what Luther was. Well, Luther used a lot of reason and philosophy. He was more influenced by Ockham than he wants to acknowledge. So, when we read Tertullian – what hath Athens to do with Jerusalem? Well, Tertullian used a lot of philosophy to make sense of the scripture, to articulate a doctrinal trinity. So to the Tertullianites, and I love Tertullian, he’s great. To all the Tertullianites, get over it. I love you, but get over it.

MH You do hit on a good point here. And I think that...it’s like.... well, what I was saying earlier. You can’t get away from tradition. You can’t get away from tradition. You can’t get away from your tradition. You are embedded in your tradition. Well, Gadamer...we were talking about Gadamer a lot. One of Gadamer’s famous quotes was, “history does not belong to us, we belong to it.” That’s his way of saying we are thrown, tossed into, embedded within a culture, tradition, that has shaping power over us. And there are traditions that hate tradition (laughing). Right? I mean that is a tradition. So, I do think you hit on a good point here.

AH Gadamer does go one place though where I am not willing to follow him and that is when he wants to say that even reason itself is conditioned by history. And now depending upon what he means by that word *reason*, which is funny... Its funny because he cannot even escape the importance of what he means by the word reason from which his readers are going to get from it. Because if by reason he just

means the laws of logic, like what I do, those aren't conditioned by history. We might have discovered them in history, but there's also no possible world where modus ponens is not a valid argument.

The laws of reason universal. They are not conditioned by history. The importance we assign them in our thinking might be conditioned by history. *But*, that's like saying the rules and laws of mathematics are shaped by history. That's not true. They transcend history. But regardless of your culture and place in history, two plus two is four.

1:21:13 MH He also says when he is talking about the rehabilitation of tradition and in that section, he says something about sometimes its reasonable to appeal to authority, to appeal to a tradition. He does say that.

AH Oh absolutely. And that's where I follow him. In the absence of better reason or evidence, go with what the church tradition has said about scripture.

MH I think that's a respectable position for sure.

AH But we also have sometimes good evidence and reasons to not go with them

MH Yeah, again. We really need to have a whole other episode on this. (Both laughing). My wheels are spinning here, but I'm showing considerable restraint not to chase that rabbit there, and this rabbit here, and that rabbit way over there.

AH Matt and I can usually never have a...they are good conversations on the phone, but we've never had a successful conversation on the phone because one of us will chase a rabbit until that rabbit has died of an asthma attack. (Both laughing)

MH That's a pretty good way to put it, I think. So good, so good. Okay so let's just suppose, this is sort of an elephant in the room as we are talking about all of these things. But just because somebody has a high view of Scripture, and just because someone employs reason, and rightly considers the Great Tradition, that does not guarantee everyone will agree. In fact, Christians disagree all the time. Why do you think this is? Why do you think they disagree even if they have all their marbles in the same place.

AH: Even though Scripture is infallible and, yes, I'm going to say this, even the laws of logic are infallible (there's no possible world wherein modus ponens or the laws of logic are false or an invalid argument), our interpretations of Scripture and our uses of reason are not infallible. We all approach the tasks of hermeneutics and reasoning from a horizon of understanding, (as Gadamer would say), and those horizons are like us, fallible and fallen. We often see the world very differently from one another because of our experiences of the world. Someone who lost a loved one who was too young for it to be their time, they may not see the rational principles of justice at work in the universe as you or I do. And they say no. There is no good reason for why child should've died in this way. There is no good reason why the universe is clearly just a chaotic place. There are no rules of reason governing the universe. They might see that; they might not see the universe the way you and I do.

And by the way, for those listening who like literature and want to see a great example of this...just think to Ivan Karamazov's examples to Alexie Karamazov and *The Brothers Karamazov* not only in the Great Inquisitor chapter but also the chapter proceeding that. Also, another takeaway from this discussion, read Dostoyevsky.

MH So what you're saying is that sometimes we, (and I know this is true of me and everybody I know), when we see injustice and heartbreak and pain, you might employ your reason, but for whatever reason you don't quite get the full picture. So, what you're saying is that even though we have full access to logic

and reasoning ability doesn't mean that our reasoning ability isn't, at the end of the day, creaturely. We are finite in our understanding. Is that what you're saying?

AH Yeah. I've studied logic. I've even taught logic at graduate levels. But there are sometimes, say I'm in a debate with my wife, Katie, (who always wins because she's smarter than me), but suppose just because I'm getting frustrated or I'm not thinking and I deny the antecedent in an argument. If A then B. Not A therefore B. Well, that's an invalid argument. I have broken one of the rules of logic which is don't think this way. Because if we deny the antecedent, its fallible. We can make a mistake, it's not foolproof. Its an invalid way of thinking. For example, we say if Matt is an Anglican therefore Matt is a Christian. Matt is not an Anglican therefore Matt is not a Christian. Well, that's obviously conclusion that is not true. He could be a Methodist and be a Christian, or a Baptist and be a Christian. And so sometimes even though I have the reason and the tools of logic, I don't always use them right. Sometimes I might think a particular argument form works, but I've forgotten, "oh wait, this is counterfactual logic, this is counterfactual reasoning". Modus ponens don't always work the same in counterfactual logic as it does in sentential logic. It works, but there's a different way it works. So sometimes we might just use reason improperly.

There has actually been a lot of discussion on this and a lot of recent work done on this. And this is what's been called by philosophers and epistemologists as the epistemology of disagreement on this issue. Now I don't know a whole of epistemologists of disagreement, but I do know a couple of theologians who have surveyed that literature at nauseum. And they have shown how helpful it is for thinking theologically. And speaking of that, I just cannot recommend enough on this issue the book written by Rhyne Putman, my Doktorvater. It was his second book called, *When Doctrine Divides the People of God: An Evangelical Approach to Theological Diversity*. (Published by Crossway) And he talks a lot about epistemology of disagreement and why it is that people such as you and I who are committed to the infallibility of the scriptures, the inerrancy of the scriptures, the need for reason, the need for tradition; why we can both do those things and you still be Anglican and I still be Baptist. And I really can't recommend that book enough. I actually require for my undergraduate students in my Christian theology course to read it. And I'm going to be requiring it for my Systematic Theology II students in the spring to read that book.

MH I need to read that book. In fact, I think I have that book. In fact, I think he signed it for me a long time ago.

AH It's a great book. I got to read it before he published it.

1:27:50 MH So what I'm hearing you say here is that the pluralities of views within the wider Christian family are probably a good thing.

AH Yes, I think it can be. Sure. I think so. And I want to emphasize here that I really care a lot as Paul did about the unity of the church. And I want us to be united in as many things as we possibly can. Especially on essentials and fundamentals. The problem is that often as Christians we are not even agreed upon what are the fundamentals. So, we can't even agree there, much less the fundamentals if we can't even agree as to what they are. But I do want to say this. None of us have any more claim to the truth than the other does. Now, you and I have the same access to the truth, as one another. You do not have a privileged viewpoint. I would even say that not even the great fathers of the past are not privileged to know the truth any more than we are. It doesn't belong to one tradition or denomination to be the ultimate authority on God's revelation in history and Scripture. I think our differences help us to become more aware of our own horizons of understandings by my thinking, "Matt is a smart guy. He's even smarter than I am. Why is he an Anglican and I'm not? Why is that he...

MH I'm not smarter than you, dude. Just so people know. Andrew is way smarter than me.

AH That's not true. In fact, just don't listen to any more of Matt's podcast (both laughing). He's just a liar. He is smarter than me.

But my point though is this, by being aware of our differences and focusing on why we differ and where we differ, this can help us become more aware of our horizons of understandings. Our own pre-judgments, our own pre-understandings. And being aware of this can help us better navigate the hermeneutic circle of Scripture and theology. Plurality can be good in a sense. So, in some ways, the diversity of traditions could help us all move forward towards more unity. And I really want to emphasize this. I think it works better for us Baptists than you confessional thinkers like you Anglicans (friendly jab). But I think it's very important to remember that unity isn't the same as uniformity, and Paul's emphasis is on unity not uniformity.

MH That's so good.

AH Yeah. And I think us Baptists are positioned better to facilitate that than you treacherous Anglicans (MH laughs). Again, I say that, but I might be one of those Baptists who is most sympathetic to Anglicanism as anyone else.

MH Come to church anytime and we can share the Eucharist together.

AH You go to church?! I'm just kidding.

MH Yes, I do go to church. It's a new thing (laughing). No... You know I think its so important to keep in mind what you said about uniformity. You are right, God calls us to unity. We cannot compromise that. He does not call us to uniformity. It's totally fine with me if someone has a totally different view of eschatology than I do. Now, I'm going to quibble and squabble in a good debate. I enjoy a good debate as anybody does, but its okay to have different viewpoints and we want to be kind to one another and charitable. Now of course, this doesn't mean anything goes. If somebody has a view of eschatology that is damaging or harmful to somebody, and there are views that are very damaging I think, then we want to say something and stand up against that. If here are views of the doctrine of God that can genuinely lead people astray, we have to stand against that. But within the Christian tradition itself, there is a lot of room for movement. There is a lot of room for exploration. Kind of like you were talking about the different models earlier, we put together ideas and we try to present coherent ideas, and we have to have many tools in our tool box that we can draw from. So, I guess I just want...well, this is why I like this. Being called to unity doesn't mean that we come together for Kumbaya moments, but that we also come together to have growth, education and even disagreement. We have to allow room for the other voice. And we have to allow room for other people to say their spiel and we have to have time to respond to that. So, this idea of a conversation is very important to developing that unity, I think. And so, disagreement can actually, contrary to what people might think, facilitate unity if it's done well.

1:32:50 AH This is why I think one of the reasons that the most fundamental unit of society according to the bible that we see is the family. And I know I'm going to be a little eisegetical here, but bear with me. I'm just a philosopher. But I think the idea of the family table really captures the idea of unity, not uniformity. When my family comes together at Christmas and we sit around the dinner table, we are going to differ on certain issues about what the bible says. We are going to disagree on issues of politics. We're going to disagree on issues of ethics...maybe, not usually. We are going to disagree on which Christmas movie we should watch that night. We are going to disagree over a lot of things. But we are still together united around the table as a family in love for one another. And I think that, the family is a great picture of unity in diversity. To kidnap James Dunn's phrase, "Unity and diversity". And as a church we are a family. We are the family of YHWH. We are God's family. So, when we come to this table, and it's a big table – sometimes bigger than we may prefer it to be, but we come to the table despite our differences.

MH: Before we wrap up here, maybe toss out a good book. What is a good book/resource you would recommend for folks who are listening to this who are thinking, “Man, I listen to this and I’m in nothing but biblical studies because all I do is listen to Matt’s podcast, but I’m really interested after listening to Andrew to read theology.” What is a good book, a good intro to read theology and theological method? What would you recommend?

1:34:40 AH For a great introductory text, I’m going to shout out to my Doktorvater, Rhyne Putman again. He has published with B&H Academic. It’s a very helpful little textbook called, *The Method of Christian Theology*. I require it for my Systematic Theology I students. It’s a very helpful book. I really recommend that. And then I also on the dialogue of scripture and tradition and the role scripture and the highest authority, I would have to recommend (and this might be a little bit more advanced, but it’s still a great book), John Peckham’s book *Canonical Theology*. It’s a really helpful book. I think John and I are very much on the same page as far as when we talk about how the biblical canon has the role of authority in a very pragmatic way. That book is super helpful. And I would give out a third book because I tend to be more of an analytic theologian. Thomas McCall has a very helpful little invitation to analytic theology and it’s called, *An Analytic Invitation to Christian Theology* with IVP Academic. So those three books.

MH: Tom McCall – I’ve met him once. I actually have that book and have not read it yet. I met him at a Tyndale conference in Cambridge. It was a lot of fun. And he is such a great thinker, a churchman. Everybody should follow him on Facebook and Twitter. He probably doesn’t remember but we had a fun conversation about some stuff. It was me and our mutual friend Chandler Warren were there at that conference. It was a few years ago, but it was a lot of fun being in such an historic place – Cambridge University for the Tyndale conference and sitting around and talking to a wonderful Christian theologian. Hey I’ve got a book I want to recommend to you.

AH Oh, one second. There’s one more that I want to recommend. This is one I really enjoyed when I was a doctoral student. Its actually an edited book by Joel Green and Max Turner called, *Between Two Horizons: Spanning New Testament Studies and Systematic Theology*. It’s a really, really good book.

MH Hey the book I want to recommend to you is called, *Simply Anglican* (laughing). You need to read that. I’m going to buy that book and send it to you.

AH Actually – so my son, I mentioned that he is 14 months old, I actually do intend to baptize him when he is: a.) old enough to know that he exists and b.) speak words. But you know, I was looking at catechisms and Baptists don’t really have good catechisms. The best one we have is Benjamin Keach’s that went with the 1689 confession. But I’m just not that reformed. So, I actually found what is arguably, and I have differences with it and I’ll teach William some different things. But the one that I found was the one that J.I. Packer oversaw and its an Anglican catechism called, *To Be a Christian*.

MH *To Be a Christian* is free online folks if you want to check it out. It’s a PDF online. Just print it out, or get the hardback. The book is good too.

AH That’s kind of like *Simply Anglican*, I guess.

MH Yeah for sure. Well, Andrew, thanks again for your time. We’ve known each other for years, and it’s always fun to chat. I learn something every time we talk. Because you’re smarter than me. Throw that one back at you. Thanks for taking time to chat about all things theology. And we got into Christology, tradition, reason and theology proper, and so anyway, thanks for being on the show.

AH Thanks for having me on. As it’s been a real pleasure being on. I always enjoy talking to people smarter than me.

MH (laughing), We'll never get over this. Maybe we're both just dumb. Maybe we need to both just get over calling each other smarter. That's the truth, we are both dumb.

AH That's very plausible. You know what. Let's use logic here. It's either a.) Matthew is smarter than Andrew, or b) Andrew is smarter than Matthew, or c) Neither of them are smart at all, but they both can't be smarter than each other.

MH Maybe we can agree on this. Are you ready? Alvin Plantinga is the smartest. How's that?

AH That's very possibly true. He is really smart.

MH Oh, its necessarily true. Maybe not necessarily

AH Alright Matt, this is not an episode on modality (both laughing).

MH In the spirit of Alvin – we'll talk about modal logic. You guys need to read Alvin Plantinga, too. He's another great, great Christian philosopher. Alright, well thanks again for being on the show. Appreciate you.

1:40:00 That's the end of today's episode. And thanks again for listening to The Bible Unmuted. If you like this podcast, consider rating it on your podcast platform, subscribing to it, and sharing with your friends. You can also support the podcast by becoming a patreon member. Go to: <https://www.patreon.com/TheBibleUnmuted> - or simply find the link in the description of this episode. Thanks for listening. Until next time, friends.