

When Jesus Met A Genius

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[0 : 00] Well, as I said today, we are continuing our study in John's Gospel and we've come to the first part of chapter 3. We'll be looking at the whole section that Ian read for us, but we can read again verses 1 to 3. Now, there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do the signs that you do unless God is with him.

Jesus answered him, truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. This is a very, very famous passage. It's a very fascinating passage. It's got so much that we could look at. There's so much in this passage for us to learn. And today, we really will just scratch the surface of what is one of the most remarkable conversations that Jesus ever had. What makes this so remarkable? What is remarkable about this section? Well, there's lots of reasons, but I think one of them is that this was the night when Jesus met a genius. There we go. Now, you might say to yourself, well, how do we know that Nicodemus was a genius? Well, at one level, we don't know for certain. All we know about Nicodemus is what we're told in verses one and verse 10, that he was a Pharisee, he was a ruler of the Jews, and he was a teacher of Israel. And I'm sure there's lots of people who today would look at current politics and they'd say, well, you don't have to be a genius to be a leader. And I'm sure there are lots of people, lots of children in school who would say, you definitely don't have to be a genius to be a teacher.

All of that's true. And we don't know exactly what Nicodemus' IQ was. But it is the case that if you were just a normal, regular Jew in the first century, and you watched this conversation taking place, there is no doubt that if you had seen Nicodemus, you'd have looked at him and thought, that's a guy who knows his stuff. He's the expert. He is the teacher of Israel.

[2 : 32] He's the ruler of the people. And that phrase, the teacher of Israel, means that he may well have had a very, very high profile position in the nation. One commentary I read on this described him as Reverend Professor Dr. Nicodemus. And I thought that was quite a good description.

He's at the very top of religious knowledge and expertise. This chapter is telling us about the night when Jesus met a genius. And the conversation raises three crucial things that every single one of us needs to think about. They are necessity, mystery, and certainty. Now, before we unpack them, I want to start by asking, do you want these things? Do you want necessity? Do you want mystery? Do you want certainty? Now, the reason I'm asking those questions is because I think a lot of people today would say no to some or all of those questions because a lot of people today don't want necessity.

We don't want to be told that certain things do or do not have to happen in our lives. We don't like that imposition of the idea that this must or must not happen. A lot of people don't want necessity. A lot of people don't want mystery. Instead, we want clarity. We want explanations.

We want to be able to get our head around things. And I think it's even the case that there's people today who don't want certainty. We don't want to be dogmatic. We don't want to be definitive in our opinions. We don't want absolutes. We want to keep our options open. Do you want these things?

[4 : 30] Well, let's look at John 3 and we'll come back to these questions at the end. So, first of all, Nicodemus and Jesus are getting us to think about necessity. Nicodemus comes to Jesus with a lot of strong credentials. As we said, he's a Pharisee. He is a ruler. There he is, Pharisee. One of the Pharisees, ruler of the Jews, told it on he is teacher of Israel. He's recognizing that Jesus is a teacher come from God. You see that there? We know that you're a teacher come from God. And we also know that he has either seen Jesus as miracles for himself, or he's spoken to the people who were first hand witnesses. All of that sounds like ideal qualifications to come to God. And unlike many of the other religious leaders, it does seem to be the case that Nicodemus doesn't seem hostile to Jesus. He seems quite genuine in his approach.

Maybe he thought that, you know, that because he's a teacher of Israel, he'd come to Jesus and he would kind of get a welcome and a pat on the back. We don't know. But maybe that was the kind of thing that he was looking for. Whatever he was looking for, this is that's not what happens. When Nicodemus meets Jesus, the genius is told that there is something that he desperately needs. You see that in verses three to seven, Jesus says, truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Now, this passage here, these verses there are tricky for two reasons. They're tricky because, first of all, it's hard to understand all the details of what Jesus is saying. So we look at these verses and not everything is clear and not every aspect of it's easy to understand, especially verse five. Verse five here, there's lots of different opinions about what Jesus means here, especially the bit when he says about being born of water and of the spirit. And the challenge arises because you've got water mentioned here and spirit.

And the question is, is that referring to two different things? Or is it two ways of describing the same thing? And that's something that people aren't quite clear about. So some people think, well, it's two different things. So you've got born of water, that's physical birth, born of the spirit, that's spiritual birth. Other people say born of water, no, that's baptism. And then you've got the new life that comes to faith in Jesus. It's two different things.

Other people think, no, no, no, it's two words describing the same thing that being born of water and of the spirit is kind of a collective way of referring to the same thing that happens to every single person who becomes a believer. Further down the passage, there's this talk about ascending and descending. There's the mention of the Son of Man. And then there's all this talk about Moses lifting up a serpent in the wilderness. There's lots of details here that are hard to understand.

So it's tricky because it's hard to understand the little details. It's also tricky because it's very easy to misunderstand the main point of what Jesus is saying. The main message, the phrase that this passage is famous for, let me rub out all my mess here. The phrase that this passage is famous for is this one, you must be born again. And that's a very familiar phrase.

[8 : 04] It's one that's associated with the Christian gospel and with preaching that's been delivered all across the world. And that phrase has been so emphasized that people have said, you must be born again. You must be born again, that we can very easily hear that and get the impression that it's something that we have to do. You must be born again. Therefore, it's something that you must do. Therefore, it's another way of saying you must believe in Jesus. Now, many preachers have given that impression. They'll stand up and say, you must be born again. And in doing that, the people listening get the impression they have got to do something. But that is not correct.

That is to misunderstand what Jesus is saying, because the whole point of this phrase is that being born again is not something that we do. It is something that is done to us.

In fact, it's something that has got to be done to us. It's something that's got to happen. Jesus is confronting Nicodemus with a fundamental necessity. He has got to be born again. And so do we. Now, what does all that mean? How does all that work? Well, this is this language of being born again is referring to what theologians called called regeneration. Now, that's a phrase you may have heard in sermons or you may have read in books. That phrase regenerate that word regeneration is describing a change that takes place in our being or we would say in our hearts, where we go from being spiritually dead to being spiritually alive. A change from being spiritually dead to being spiritually alive. And the reason that change has to take place is because sin has left us spiritually dead. Now, what that means is that is that when it comes to our spiritual state, everything that we think of in regard to being physically dead applies to us spiritually. So think of a dead body. A dead body is unresponsive. That's how sin has left us. So we don't see our need of God. We don't listen to him. We don't respond to his call. A dead body cannot perceive spiritually. We are the same. You only need to go out to work or to the community this week and you will see crowds and crowds of people who have no perception of the spiritual danger that they're in. A dead body is incapacitated. It can't do anything to revive itself. Sin has left us the same. We're incapable of doing anything that's going to restore a relationship with God. And a dead body is separated from the soul. So too, sin has separated us from God. That language of deadness is conveying the spiritual condition that sin has left us in. And the key point is that on its own, a dead body can do nothing except stay dead. And spiritually, that's the desperate situation that sin has left humanity in. Regeneration is when that spiritual deadness in our hearts is changed to spiritual life. A regeneration takes place. Spiritual deadness goes to spiritual life. And that life, that spiritual life, that spiritual life, that spiritual deadness goes to spiritual life. And that life, that awakening, that aliving,

it's not even a word, but you know what I mean? That awakening, that regeneration enables us to see our sin. It enables us to respond to God's call. It enables us to turn from sin and repentance to turn to God in faith. It enables us to be reunited with him in a life giving relationship. And the key point, the absolutely crucial point is that it's not us who does it. The person who does it is God. And that's why the language of being born again is so helpful and so powerful. Birth implies two things. One, it's passive. No one births themselves. It's something that happens to you. And you're born and that's completely and entirely because of what someone else has done. So birth is passive. Birth also brings life. Birth involves life. Birth brings life. The new birth that Jesus is talking about is one that brings spiritual life. Nicodemus comes to Jesus and he is a genius in a religious outlook that says, if you do this, that, the next thing, if you do this, you do that, you do the next thing, you will restore your relationship with God. And Jesus says to him, forget about what gets done by you. The key thing is what gets done to you. That's the necessity.

[13:12] He needs to be born again. And this is actually made very clear if you go back to the original language. So the New Testament was written in Greek. I've often said this, they always say, never show Greek to people in church. But as I said, you're all very intelligent. So you'll be absolutely fine. This is the Greek phrase, you must be born again. That's what's translated.

It says, *Dei humas genetha nai anothen*. Literally, that translates, it is necessary is what that word means. It is necessary. And then that word there for you. Then this word means to be born. And then that word means again. It is necessary for you to be born again. That leaves you in absolutely no doubt that it's not something you do. It's something that has to happen to you. And that's exactly what the language of birth is talking about. It's an absolute necessity for Nicodemus and for us. Now, all of this comes as a huge surprise to Nicodemus. He's like, what are you talking about Jesus? But it shouldn't have come as a surprise to Jesus, because the Old Testament has already said that this is how it works. And the key passage is the one that we read for our call to worship is Ezekiel 36. It speaks about this. Jesus, God says, as he prophesies through Ezekiel, I'll take you from the nations, gather you from the countries, bring you into your own land. I'll sprinkle clean water on you. You shall be clean from all your uncleanness, from all your idols I will cleanse you. I'll give you a new heart, a new spirit I'll put within you. I'll remove the heart of stone from your flesh, give you a heart of flesh, I'll put my spirit within you. That language of from stone, a heart of stone to a heart of flesh, is talking about that transition from deadness to life, a new heart. And this is also helping us understand what Jesus says in verse five, because you've got the mention of water, you've got the mention of spirit. It looks as though in verse five, when Jesus is talking about being born of water and born of the spirit, he appears, we think, to be echoing the words of Ezekiel.

And the key point in it all is that the emphasis is that it's all about what God does. Look at the verse again. This is God talking, I will, I will, I will, I will, I will, I will is all what God does. And so in John three, Jesus is speaking about what Ezekiel prophesied, the fact that if we're going to be saved, we need God to change your hearts, we need him to cleanse us, to take us from darkness into light, to bring life where sin has left us dead. And the rest of the New Testament repeats it. You can see the language of going from death to life in Ephesians two, the language of being born again is used by Peter. In fact, John has already told us that this is how it works, because in chapter one, he speaks about those who did receive Jesus, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God who were born not of blood, so it wasn't to do with their natural birth, not of the will of the flesh. In other words, it wasn't to do with their own efforts, not of the will of man, it wasn't because of what anybody else was saying, they were born because of God. He's the one who does it. For anyone to come in faith, to come to faith in Jesus, it's only ever possible if God acts. When Jesus says you must be born again, he's not telling you to do something. He's telling you that you desperately need something. Now, there are two massive pitfalls that we can fall into here, one on that side, one on that side. The pitfall on this side that we can fall into is to think it's not a necessity. I don't have to do this, or I don't have to be, it doesn't have to be for this, this doesn't have to happen to me. It's not necessary. It's so easy to think like that, it's so easy to think, well, you know, all that talk of spiritual deadness, spiritual life, that seems a bit OTT. I don't think it's that bad. I don't think this is so much of an issue. This seems way too intense, way too over the top. It's so easy to think like that, half the world thinks like that around us in Scotland today, but any thoughts like that are a massive underestimation of just how much sin has damaged us because sin has completely jiggered us.

[18:11] Sin leaves humanity helpless, utterly helpless. So if we think to ourselves, you know, I'm not too bad, I can work myself back up to God, I can be good enough, I'm sure God will be happy enough with the kind of person that I am at the end of the day. If you think like that, if you're asking the question, can I save myself with my own efforts? That is exactly the same as asking, can you burn yourself? So that's the danger on this side to think this isn't a necessity. The other danger though, on this side, and this is the one that I think that you are all far more likely to fall into the one on this side says, yes, I, I can see that it's a necessity.

But I don't think it's going to happen. I think I know I need this, but, but God's just not going to want to do it for me. It is so easy to think like that. So easy to think Thomas, if all of this is true, then I am snookered. And you know, that's how we can find ourselves thinking, we can think, well, you know, if God's got to do it, what if he doesn't do it? What if it's not going to happen?

Well, if you are worrying that, and I am, I am 100% certain that somebody in here or somebody online is going to be worrying that right now. If you are worrying that the question you need to ask yourself is, what is the first sign that God is doing this kind of work? What's the sign that tells you that God is doing this kind of work? Well, is it that you recognize success in the sense that you start saying, yeah, I know I'm born again. I'm confident I'm born again. I'm confident that God's done this in my life. It's a success. Is it that you recognize success? I don't think it is.

The first sign is not recognizing success. The first sign is recognizing necessity. It's when you start saying, I know I need this. I know that I need to be born again. One of the very first signs of spiritual life in your heart is being able to see that being born again is an absolute necessity. The second thing that Nicodemus gets us thinking about is mystery. Now, the second two points will be quicker. That was the longer one. Nicodemus struggles to understand what Jesus is saying. And there's this really interesting contrast in verse one, verse two, where Nicodemus, the expert, the genius comes up and says, we know. And then in verse nine, he says, how can this be? And just incidentally, that is evidence, confirmation that Nicodemus is a genius, because the smartest people you will ever meet are not the people who never ask questions. The smartest people you'll ever meet are the people who constantly ask questions. And the fact that that Nicodemus is very ready to ask questions doesn't show his ignorance. It actually shows signs of great wisdom. But he does struggle to understand what Jesus is saying. And that's because there is an element of mystery around what Jesus is teaching. And that mystery is reinforced by Jesus's words in verse eight, where he says, the wind blows what it wishes, you hear it sound, but you don't know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who's born of the spirit. Now here, Jesus is presenting us with a reality that is often hard to accept, but one that actually makes perfect sense. The reality he's confronting us with is the fact that when it comes to God, we will always have to embrace mystery. We are always going to have to embrace mystery. And the reason that makes perfect sense is because the only way to avoid mystery in regard to God is to be God. Jesus uses the wind as his illustration for this. He points to the fact that when it comes to the wind, we can't explain it. We can only observe its effect. Now today, we might say, well, we understand wind. We understand high and low pressure. We understand the way the wind works. In fact, we can even predict the way that the wind is going to blow and the strength at which it will blow. And that's not the point. This isn't a lesson in meteorology from Jesus. And he's just using an illustration that was relevant to his audience, because they didn't have the level of understanding about the wind and the weather that we have today. If Jesus was speaking to us today, he would have probably chosen something else. He might have chosen gravity, where he said, you know, we can see its effect, but we can't explain its source. When it comes to being born again, when it comes to that great work of God, where he changes us from being spiritually dead to being spiritually alive, there's a lot that's a mystery. So precisely how that happens in someone, precisely when it happens in someone, I can't give you an explanation for that. I can't explain how all of that works, but we can see its effect in your life as a Christian, in the lives of others, in the history of humanity. There is absolutely no doubt that an amazing change has taken place.

That's why when it comes to being born again, please, please do not waste time trying to explain every aspect of the source. Please instead just look for the effect. And this is so important for anybody here who is not yet sure if they're a Christian or not, or for anybody here who is a Christian, but who is kind of regularly plagued with the doubt. Oh, I don't actually know if I ever was saved. I can't, can't be certain. If you have those kind of doubts, all of this is incredibly important. For a few people, conversion is sudden. And so the change from darkness to light is like a switch

instant. But for most people, it's not like that. For most people, it's a very gradual process over time. The change from darkness to light is not a switch, it's a dawn.

[24 : 48] But for the gradual ones of which I am one, and I think most people here are the same, there's always that question, how do I know what's happened? How do I know I'm saved?

Well, one of the ways to address that question is to ask yourself, if you can think back to a time in your life when you understood very little about the gospel, or a time in your life when you had very, very little interest in the gospel, whenever that was, it may be a long, long time ago, look back to that time and look at yourself now and ask the question, am I different?

Not the question, am I perfect? I'm not saying that you're going to see everything sorted in your life, everything that's the way you wish it was. I'm not saying that at all. I'm just saying, are you different? Are you drawn towards Jesus? Do you know that you need Him? Do you wish that you could say, I'm a Christian? Do you look at other Christians that you know and love and think, I wish I had what they had, I wish I was more like them? Do you pray more now? Does God's word speak to you now in a way that once it didn't? Do you understand that more than anything else you need Jesus? If the answer to any of those questions is yes, even if it's just a yes that still has got a long, long way to go, if the answer is yes, then it tells you that God's wind is blowing in your heart. And if you're still doubting that, then this is going to sound arrogant, but I can prove that I'm right. Dead people don't even think about those questions.

All of this is reminding us that when it comes to God, to creation, to salvation, to the new birth, to the interactions of time and eternity, to the disclosure of God's revelation, scripture, to the outworking of God's purposes across history and across your life, in all of these things, I cannot explain everything. None of us can. None of us can. None of us can. None of us can. None of us can.

[27 : 08] None of us can. There is unavoidable mystery in all of these things and rightly so because God is bigger than us. He always will be. He's always meant to be. But this is where we need to recognize that the alternatives to mystery are rubbish. Sometimes we think I don't want mystery, but the alternatives to mystery are awful. And when it comes to God, I can actually only think of three.

And if you want to see if you can think of more, I would love you to come back to me with them. But I can only think of three. One alternative to mystery with God is blasphemy, where we basically dictate to God and say, you can and can't do this. You can and cannot be this. We put God into a box where we can explain everything. That's blasphemy. The other is idolatry, where we take something else, something that's not God, and make that the explanation for everything.

And the third option is blindness, where we aimlessly wonder without any answer. Mystery is unavoidable. It actually makes perfect sense. But does mystery mean that everything is a guess for us in our faith? Well, that brings us to our last point. The third thing that Nicodemus reveals to us is this conversation Nicodemus reveals is certainty. Now, all of this culminates in bringing us to one of the biggest mistakes that people can fall into. And this is a mistake that leads people to frequently reject Christianity. The mistake is when we think that mystery and certainty are incompatible. And so when people think like that, they'll tend to say, well, if you can prove that God exists, I'll believe. If you can prove everything in the Bible scientifically, then I'll believe. If you eliminate all mystery, then I will believe.

Lots of people think like that. That kind of thinking is based on the assumption that mystery and certainty are incompatible. It's not true. Mystery does not have to result in doubt and skepticism. And that makes perfect sense because in every area of knowledge, this is true, not just in terms of faith. A fantastic example is science. It's full of mystery.

And if you want to confirm that, just go and talk to a genius. They will soon tell you, I remember having a cup of tea with one, somebody who works in high energy physics, and she was talking away and she was, I was, you know, I'm not an expert and I was asking about all the stuff that she was working on. And she was talking about atoms and electrons and positrons. And she was saying that mathematically, a positron is an electron that is traveling backwards in time. And then she just smiled. Something like that.

[30 : 11] She's saying it's full of mystery. James Clack Maxwell didn't know everything that Einstein went on to discover. Einstein wouldn't have made his discoveries if it wasn't for James Maxwell's research. I am a hundred percent sure that neither of them would stand here today and say there's no mystery in physics.

Does that mean that we doubt everything that Maxwell and Einstein discovered? Of course it doesn't. Mystery is unavoidable in every area of knowledge, even in relationships. Why does you love me? Maybe you're saying, well, that is a mystery. But it is in everything in love. It's a mystery. Physics is a mystery. DNA is a mystery.

But in all those mysteries, we can still have certainty. And that's absolutely true when it comes to faith. There are always going to be mysteries about God. There has to be. But does that mean that there can be no certainty? Not at all. We can still have certainty.

So how do we get it? The answer is that we listen to what God reveals. And that's exactly what Jesus tells Nicodemus in verses 13 and 14. He speaks about the fact that we bear witness to what we receive, to what we've seen. You do not receive our testimony. Just to know that you is plural. [31 : 37] So it's not just Nicodemus, it's aimed at. If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how would you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one's ascended into heaven except the one who has descended from heaven the Son of Man. The great principle that Jesus is reinforcing here is that nobody can give answers about God unless they're qualified to do so. Just like in physics, medicine, geology, history, everything else. But the person qualified to give answer to God is not a religious genius like Nicodemus. The only person qualified to reveal God is God. No one can ascend up to heaven to tell everyone else what God is like. Instead, God has to descend to reveal himself.

And in Jesus, the Son of Man, that's exactly what he's done. And he reveals to us a message of salvation. I don't have time to go through it. Jesus uses the illustration from Numbers 21 about the plague of snakes and the bronze serpent. You can read Numbers 21 and it'll make perfect sense to you why Jesus is saying that. He's telling us that that salvation in the Old Testament, that incident of salvation was a shadow pointing to the fact that Jesus is going to be raised up and nailed to a cross so that whoever looks at him might be saved. Now, that message of salvation, that work of salvation contains mystery, but that mystery doesn't mean that you can't have certainty.

Jesus' message is absolutely clear. Whoever believes in him will have eternal life. Now, there's one final thing here that I want to highlight, which is, I think, amazing. When we speaking about regeneration, about being born again, we were saying that there's uncertainty about the how. There's mystery about that. We cannot be completely sure about exactly how it happens as God's amazing work. There's mystery about the how. There's mystery about the when.

When exactly does it happen in someone's life? When did it happen in my life? I don't know. When it happened. It happened sometime. I don't know when. There's mystery about how it happens. There is mystery about when it happens. There is absolutely no mystery about why it happens. Why does it happen?

[34 : 17] Because God loves you. God loves you. That's why it happens. It happens because of how much God loves you.

And ultimately, that is the certainty that the gospel offers you. Not certainty about all the details of every massive question about life and physics and origins and destinies and space and time and all that kind of stuff. We're not big enough to know and understand all of that anyway. We don't need to understand all of that. In other words, you don't need to be a genius because ultimately before God, no one is a genius. But what we do need to know is what God wants us to know and what he wants to know. What he wants you to know more than anything else is how much he loves you, that he gave his son for you, that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

So let's come back to our questions. Do you want certainty? Do you want mystery? I said that the wrong way around. Anyway, you can see them. Necessity. Do you want necessity?

Do you want mystery? Do you want certainty? Maybe it'll help if we put these questions negatively. Put them the other way around. Do you want to build your life on stuff that isn't really necessary?

Do you want a worldview or a universe or a God in whom there's no mystery? Instead, one that just fits into the parameters of your own mind?

[35 : 58] Do you want a life with no certainty? Or do you want the gospel?

Because the gospel will tell you what the most urgent necessity in life is. The gospel will point you to the God who is magnificent but in whom there's an eternity of mystery to discover and the gospel will give you certainty, certainty about God's incredible, immeasurable love for you.

Amen. Let's pray. Father, we acknowledge that we desperately need you, that necessity of being saved and we pray, Father, that you would be doing that work among us.

We marvel and delight in the reality of mystery, the fact that we can't fit you into our own minds but that you are bigger, way bigger than we can ever grasp. And we thank you so, so much for the certainty that you give us in the gospel, for the certainty that you give us through your Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus. Help us all to see and understand these things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. We are going to just spend just a couple of minutes now preparing, doing the section of the service where we will admit Phil to eldership. So I'm going to just go through a couple of stages that we have to go through and explain all the things that we're going to do and in a moment I'll ask Phil to come forward. So there's three main things that we're going to do.

[37 : 54] First thing is that I just give what's called a narrative of steps which have been taken and their results. That's just to record for you exactly what's brought us to this point and to ensure that all the right steps have been followed. Then I'll ask Phil to come forward and I'll ask him some questions that he has to answer in order to be admitted as an elder. And then last of all, Phil has to what's called sign the formula. And the formula is just a paragraph summarizing the questions that he's answered and he has to sign it basically to confirm his answer to these things.

So first of all, let me read the narrative of steps that have been taken and their results. Following a resolution by the church session of Carly Weave Free Church on 29th August 2022 to add one new elder to the church session by way of congregational ballot, a vote took place during the month of September 22 2022 which resulted in the name of Mr. Phil Pickett being duly elected and approved by the church session. Being qualified and having agreed to accept the office of elder and with no objections to his life or doctrine having been offered after a dictal intimation that in the absence of such objections substantiated the admission of Mr.

Pickett would this day be proceeded with. And so the church session have opened this morning and we are now prepared to admit Phil as an elder in our congregation. So I'm going to ask Phil to come forward and I am going to ask you six questions that you need to be asked regarding this. So if I plunk you over there Phil and I will ask these questions now. As I go through the questions I'm going to just explain to you what the questions mean because some of the questions can seem a bit complicated and so I'll explain the question then I'll ask the question then we'll go to the next one explain it ask it explain it ask it so that we all know what's going on as well. Okay so first question is do you believe the scriptures are the old and new testament to be the word of God and the only rule of faith and manners? Now the reason we have that question is to confirm that we are a biblical church that we recognize the authority of the Bible in our denomination. So Phil do you believe the scriptures of the old and new testaments to be the word of God and the only rule of faith and manners? Thank you. Second question is related to the Westminster Confession of Faith. So as you will know the Bible is one book but the Bible is understood and interpreted in lots and lots and lots of different ways and so people can take the same book and they can have lots of different opinions as to what stuff means. The Westminster Confession of Faith is a short document that was written 400 years ago and it's 350 years ago, 270 years ago, so a while ago and it basically summarizes the teaching of scripture and by saying that we're a confessional church we are saying we believe that the Westminster Confession accurately summarizes the key teaching of scripture. So this is to confirm that we're a confessional church and that our elders adhere to that confession. So let me read this. Do you sincerely own and declare the confession of faith approved by former general assemblies of this church to be the confession of your faith and do you own the doctrine therein contained to be the true doctrine which you will constantly adhere to?

Thank you. Third question is to do with Presbyterianism. So again this is kind of narrowing it down a little bit more. Presbyterianism is all to do with the way the church is organized and so we have elders in our local church, we have a Presbytery in a local area and once upon a time when we were much bigger we had synods in a region but we're too small to have them at the moment and then you have a general assembly meeting once a year. So there's that hierarchical structure of courts, not a structure of individuals. Some churches have a structure of individuals, Minister, Bishop, Archbishop. We have a structure of courts, Kirk Session, Presbytery, Synod, General Assembly.

This question is confirming that Phil believes that that is appropriate. Do you own and acknowledge the Presbyterian church government of this church by Kirk Sessions, Presbyteries, Provincial Synods and General Assemblies to be the only government of this church and do you engage to submit there to, concur therewith and not to endeavor directly or indirectly the prejudice or subversion thereof?

[42 : 19] I do. Thank you. Excellent. Okay so question one was are we biblical? Question two was are we confessional? Question three was are we Presbyterian? Question four is are we free? And this is the question that that identifies us as the free church and this whole question which is very long and which can at first reading make no sense to anybody is all rooted in the events that took place in the lead up to 1843 when the free church was formed. So you can see how the questions are being narrowed. Are we biblical? One, two, are we confessional? Are we three? Are we Presbyterian?

Four, are we free? Are we the free church of Scotland? Now let me explain what all of this means. I'll read through it all in a moment but the key phrases are in the middle. See what it says claim declaration and protest. Okay now the claim declaration and protest was the culmination of all the controversy that that led to the formation of the free church in 1843. In 1843 a third of ministers and most and a big and most of their congregations and some others left the Church of Scotland to become the free Church of Scotland and the reason they did that was because in the years previous to that the government had been imposing ministers on congregations against the congregations will. Okay so there was a system called patronage where the landowner could impose the minister. So I don't know who the chairman of the Carlyway Trust is at the moment. Any idea who that is? I don't know but anyway imagine who they whoever they were coming in here and saying you have to have so-and-so as your minister. They were deciding you'd be like no you don't get to choose our minister. We do and so that was what the whole thing was about. The whole thing culminated it's a long so it's a fascinating story and if you want to find out about it I'll gladly tell you the story but it culminated in the claim declaration and protest. The claim was a claim to spiritual independence so the Church is saying to the government you cannot interfere with spiritual matters. We claim our spiritual independence. The protest was to say you've done it all this years and you shouldn't have. Forcing ministers on us that's wrong. We're declaring that that was wrong so we're claiming our spiritual independence. We're declaring that the imposition of ministers on us that we didn't want was wrong and the protest was against any laws that had been made in the land that reinforced that position. So claiming spiritual independence, declaring that patronage and interference and spiritual matters was wrong and protesting against any laws that had been made to support that position. So make sense? Well I hope so. If not ask me afterwards. I shall read this question. Do you believe that the Lord Jesus Christ as king and head of the church has therein appointed a government in the hands of church officers distinct from and not subordinate to it's in its own province to civil government and that the civil magistrate does not possess jurisdiction or authoritative control over the regulation of the affairs of Christ's church.

That's just all talking about being independent. And do you approve of the general principles embodied in the claim declaration and protest adopted by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1842 and the protest of ministers and elders commissioners from presbyteries to the General Assembly read in presence of the Royal Commissioner on 18th May 1843 as declaring the views which are sanctioned by the word of God and the standards of this church with respect to the spirituality and freedom of the Church of Christ and her subjection to him as her only head and to his word as her only standard. Thank you. Good. And then the last two questions are shorter. Question five. Well I can just ask you this because it's quite clear. Do you promise to observe uniformity of worship and of the administration of all public ordinances within this church as the same are at present performed and allowed? Thank you. And then the last question is related to us as a congregation. This is Phil accepting his role as an elder in our church. Do you accept the office of elder of this congregation and promise through grace faithfully, diligently and cheerfully to discharge all the duties thereof? Thank you. Okay. I'm going to pray. Let's pray together. Father, we thank you so much for this moment. We thank you so much for the ways in which you have provided for your church, provided us with instructions in your word, provided us with leaders and leadership structures in order to be well organized and that you've provided us with men to serve as elders, with men to serve as deacons, with men and women to lead in different ways in the life of the congregation. We thank you for that so much. And we thank you so much for Phil. It's been such a joy to have Phil and Helen with us these past six months. And as we look forward to the next two years together, God willing, we pray, Father, that you would bless him in his role, help him as he serves as elder, help him to shepherd and care for the flock that you've placed under his care and help him as he studies and trains. May he be prepared for many years of wonderful gospel work, wherever you will take him and Helen to be. Bless them as a family. We

pray for Phil as a husband that you would uphold him, that he be wise and faithful and caring and kind.

[48 : 14] We pray for Helen as a wife that you would uphold and strengthen her, that she would be a rock of support and encouragement and wisdom to Phil, that you'd bless them in their marriage, that you'd bless their baby and keep them safe as we look forward with great excitement to them becoming parents. And we pray, Father, that you would just guard and protect them and watch over them. We thank you for your goodness to us. We thank you for the gifts you've given us to us in our church.

We thank you for all our elders and deacons. We pray your blessing upon them all. And we pray that you'd lead and guide us in your ways in all that we do. In Jesus' name, amen. Thank you, thank you. Last thing, Phil, is I'm going to get you to sign the formula which is here. Now, as I said, the formula is just a summary of the, it's a shortened summary of the questions that I asked and Phil just needs to place the signature here. And then I give that to Donnie and Donnie puts it in our Kirk Session book and it's recorded for time and eternity that Phil is now an elder in Carlyle Free Church. Thank you very much indeed.