

# SESSION 6: CATHOLIC EPISTLES

## PREPARATION FOR THE SESSION

Read Hebrews 1; James 2; 1 Peter 1-3; 1 John 1-5; Jude.

## Summary of the Video: Module 6, Episode 6

The word “Catholic” doesn’t refer to the Roman Catholic Church but rather to letters that appear to have been written to “all” churches rather than an individual church (like Philippians). These letters include Hebrews, James, 1-2 Peter, 1, 2 & 3 John, and Jude. We take the God, Gospel, People, and Mission structure to look into these letters.

### ***GOD: THE SON IN HEBREWS AND 1 JOHN***

Hebrews emphasizes that Christ the son is fully God while John’s letters emphasize that the son is fully human (though both also explicitly teach the other truth as well).

### ***GOSPEL: THE ARGUMENT OF HEBREWS***

Hebrews declares the supremacy of Jesus over prophets, angels, Moses, etc., which calls us to turn away from certain ways and turn toward him.

*How should we understand differences between the OT quotations in Hebrews when they differ from what we find in the OT itself? If we trust the inspiration of the NT in general, then we begin with an assumption that nothing sinister has happened. It appears that Hebrews or the Greek translation of the Bible he used, tried to either bring the OT text back to its true meaning or the writer is using the difference in translation because it suits his purposes (similar to a pastor using a preferred translation).*

*How do we deal with the canonical status of Hebrews when we don’t know who wrote it? We can trust the Spirit’s guidance of the church’s adoption of books. The argument of the book is watertight so we would trust it regardless of authorship.*

### ***GOSPEL: JUSTIFICATION, FAITH AND WORKS; POWER OF NEW BIRTH***

As we get into the “Gospel” discussion, we compare and contrast James and Romans on the question of justification. In our groups we will do the exercise Andrew Wilson suggests. Perhaps on your own you can jot down your thoughts on how James and Paul define “faith”, “works”, and “justified”. Bring these thoughts to the discussion.

At the very least the language of “faith” is being used quite differently. Paul uses it in more concrete ways; faith connects you with Christ and results in transformation. James uses “faith” in a looser way, as a foil against works, i.e. a flimsy belief that doesn’t do anything in you. James would then use the word “works” to mean “works that spring from faith”. For Paul “justification” refers to a future declaration that’s brought into the present. James is not talking about God’s final verdict as much as the present validation that Abraham legitimately had genuine “faith.”

John's letters give us some of the strongest teaching on the new birth. Sprouting from this new birth are so many fruits of new life.

***PEOPLE: WARNINGS AND PERSEVERANCE; WISDOM OF JAMES; DANGER OF WOLVES***

The book of Hebrews contains several statements that warn Christians against falling away from their faith in Christ. Andrew Wilson poses several questions that expose the difficulty of the warnings.

James provides the most "ethics"-oriented letter in the NT. We look at an outline of the book and ask what modern applications we might draw from James' teaching.

Jude and 2 Peter launch a strong warning against false teaching.

*How do we warn our people in a godly, biblical way (following the example of the NT)? We should follow Scripture's example as we teach through books of the Bible. Warnings will prick the conscience of some and harden the hearts of others.*

***MISSION: EFFECTIVE EVANGELISM IN 1 PETER; SUFFERING AND PERSECUTION***

A picture of a pyramid shows us how Peter sees evangelism working: if we walk well with Christ, can speak his truth, and mix well with the lost, we are likely to see people get saved.

We end by seeing how each of these letters addresses a certain threat that faces the church and gives a Christ-exalting response to the threat.

*Who are the "elect exiles" Peter addresses? These are Christians who live in a land that's not their own. They are "citizens of heaven" but reside "on earth."*

*There's a lot about suffering in the NT. Should we talk more about it so that potential new converts know what they're getting into? We need to be wise. It's not always needed to warn of specific suffering since people don't know how God will prepare them. But we should always make people aware in a general way that the Christian life will be hard.*

*Since there's so much discussion of suffering everywhere in the NT, does this mean that the "pre-tribulational rapture" view is less likely (since it claims the church won't go through the final suffering before Christ's return)? This is a good argument against the pre-tribulational rapture view.*

## Terms You'll Need to Know:

Lectionary people—people who use a lectionary are those who have a Bible reading and preaching schedule that marks out which chapters they'll teach year after year (with some Scriptural chapters skipped).

## Watch Video

Watch Module 6 Episode 6 (1hr 17 minutes).

## The Church Age

- I. The Story So Far
- II. Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria (Acts 1-9)
- III. The Ends of the Earth (Acts 10-28; Galatians; 1&2 Thessalonians)
- IV. Romans
- V. 1&2 Corinthians
- VI. The Prison Letters
- VII. The Catholic Epistles**
- VIII. Revelation

56

## God: The Son in Hebrews and 1 John

### Hebrews: Affirming the Divinity of Christ

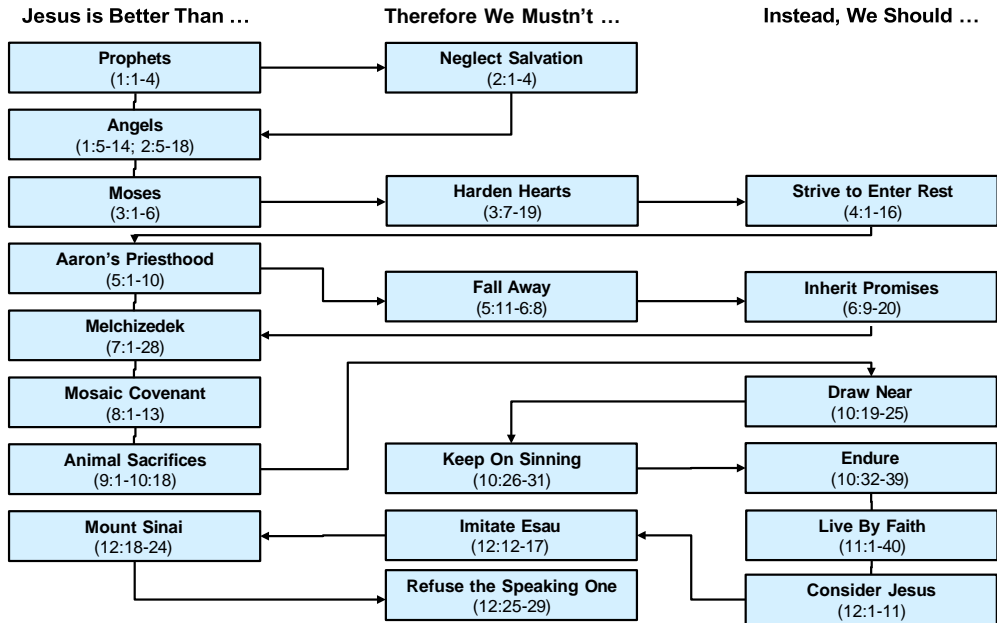
- Hebrews 1 is arguably the chapter in Scripture with the clearest teaching on the divinity of Jesus
  - Heir of all things, through whom he also (!) created the world (2)
  - Radiance of the glory of God, and exact imprint of his nature (3)
  - Sat down at the right hand of the Majesty, after making purification for sins (3)
  - Vastly superior to angels, as is his name (4)
  - Begotten of the Father (5)
  - Worshipped by angels, who are mere servants (6-7, 13-14)
  - God, on the throne (8), but distinct from God, who anoints him with the oil of gladness (9)
  - Eternal and unchanging (10-12)
- God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, begotten not made ...

### 1 John: Affirming the Humanity of Christ

- False teachers are denying the full humanity of Jesus: "many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist" (2 John 7)
- John, however, strongly emphasises the divinity of Jesus ("That which was from the beginning," "concerning the word of life", "the eternal life, which was with the Father", and so on) ...
- ... as well as his humanity ("which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands," "the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it") ...
- ... and John pulls no punches on the dangers of denying it ("every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist")

57

## Gospel: The Argument of Hebrews



58

## Gospel: Justification, Faith and Works

Word	How Does James Use and Illustrate It (James 2)?	How Does Paul Use and Illustrate It (Romans 3-4 etc)?
"Faith"		
"Works"		
"Justified"		

Should we, as Protestants, affirm "justification by faith alone", even though it is explicitly denied in the New Testament?

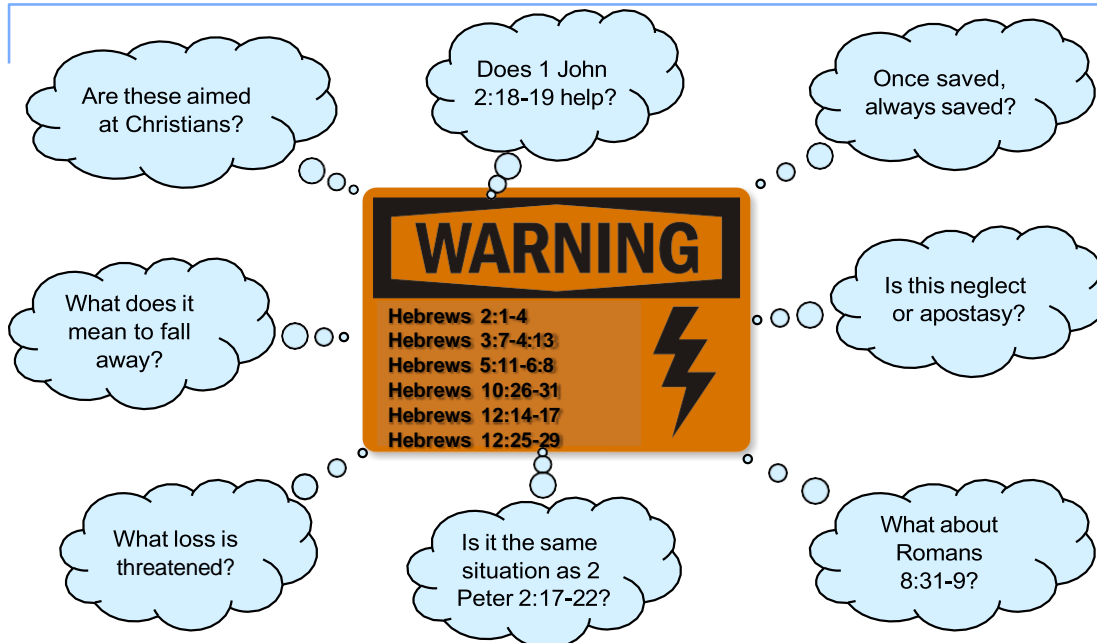
59

## Gospel: The Power of the New Birth

- John's epistles identify certain characteristics which mark out someone truly born of God. By implication, this helps us to spot a false teacher/false believer and especially to be on the lookout for the former
  - They walk in the light (1 John 1:7)
  - They confess their sins rather than deny them (1 John 1:8-10)
  - They keep Jesus' commandments and walk like him (1 John 2:3-6; 3:24; 5:2)
  - They love other Christians (1 John 2:9-11; 3:10; 4:7-8, 11, 20-21)
  - They do not love the world (1 John 2:15-17)
  - They confess the son (1 John 2:23)
  - They hold fast to the Gospel they heard (1 John 2:24)
  - They do righteousness (1 John 2:29; 3:7, 10)
  - They do not sin (!) (1 John 3:6, 9; 5:18)
  - They should offer up their lives for their brothers (1 John 3:1)
  - They have been given the Spirit (1 John 3:24; 4:13)
  - They confess and believe in Jesus as the Christ/son of God (1 John 4:15; 5:1, 10)
  - They love God (1 John 5:1-2). 1/3 of all NT uses of *agapāō* (to love) and *agapē* (love) are in 1-3 John!
  - They confess Jesus Christ as having come in the flesh (2 John 7)
  - They remain in the teaching of Christ (2 John 9-11)
  - They walk in the truth (3 John 3-4)

60

## People: Warnings and Perseverance



61

## People: The Wisdom of James

- I. Address and Greeting (1:1)
- II. The Pursuit of Spiritual Wholeness: The Opportunity Afforded by Trials (1:2-18)
- III. The Evidence of Spiritual Wholeness: Obedience to the Word (1:19-2:26)
  - I. Hasty Speech and Anger Do Not Please God (1:19-20)
  - II. Obedience to the Word is the Mark of Genuine Christianity (1:21-27)
  - III. Discrimination Against the Poor Violates Kingdom Law (2:1-13)
  - IV. Saving Faith Reveals Itself in Works (2:14-26)
- IV. The Community Dimension of Spiritual Wholeness: Pure Speech and Peace (3:1-4:12)
  - I. Control of the Tongue Manifests the Transformed Heart (3:1-12)
  - II. True Wisdom Brings Peace (3:13-4:3)
  - III. Summons to Spiritual Wholeness (4:4-10)
  - IV. Critical Speech is a Presumptuous Violation of the Law (4:11-12)
- V. The Worldview of Spiritual Wholeness: Understanding Time and Eternity (4:13-5:11)
  - I. Arrogant Planning Ignores God's Providence (4:13-17)
  - II. Misusing Wealth and Power Brings God's Judgment (5:1-6)
  - III. Patiently Enduring Trials Earns God's Reward (5:7-11)
- VI. Concluding Exhortations (5:12-20)
  - I. Avoid Oaths (5:12)
  - II. Prayer and Healing (5:13-18)
  - III. A Concluding Summons to Action (5:19-20)

What do we mean by "religion"? What does James mean? Does it matter?

What modern applications might James require here ...?

... or here?

What is the link between sickness and sin (if any)?

Source: Douglas Moo, *The Letter of James* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), vi-vii.

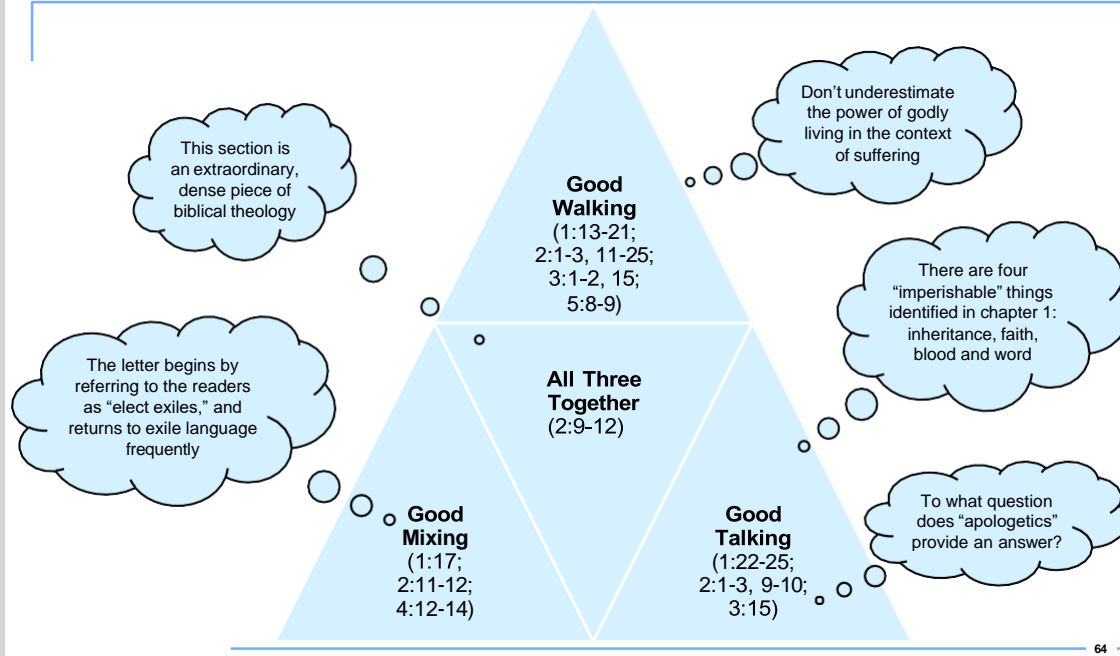
62

## People: The Danger of Wolves

- Although Jude and 2 Peter address different specific situations, they contain a lot of similar material designed to warn God's people against false teachers, and to appeal to the saints to contend for the faith
  - These are not letters warning the saints against listening to particular podcasts: the false teachers themselves, and not just their teachings, had infiltrated/would infiltrate the churches (2 Pet 2:1; Jude 4)
- The exact message of the false teachers is not completely clear, but Jude and Peter warn that these people do and promote certain ideas and behaviour
  - The main problem is that they promoted sensuality (*aselgeia*)
    - "For, speaking loud boasts of folly, they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error" (2 Peter 2:18)
    - "Who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord" (Jude 4)
    - It is interesting that they seek money, sex and/or power (2 Pet 2; Jude 7, 11). False teachers still do
  - They slandered angels
    - "Bold and willful, they do not tremble as they slander the glorious ones" (2 Peter 2:10)
    - "In like manner these people ... slander the glorious ones" (Jude 8)
  - In 2 Peter, they (or possibly a separate group) scoffed at the idea of Jesus returning: "They will say: Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation" (2 Peter 3:4)
- Jude and 2 Peter predict that the false teachers will incur incredibly harsh judgment
  - Both draw on OT stories of judgment, and Jewish expansions (e.g. that of Genesis 6 in 1 Enoch) to show that God will judge wrongdoers, but also save his own people (cf. 2 Peter 2:3-10, 17; Jude 4-7, 14-15)

63

## Mission: Effective Evangelism in 1 Peter



64

## Mission: Suffering and Persecution

	Nature of Threat	What To Do About It
Hebrews	Social exclusion Shame Removal of property (Not loss of life)	Heed warnings Pursue rest / inheritance / reward Consider the supremacy (and suffering) of Jesus Christ Do not forget the purpose of divine discipline
James (e.g. 1:1-18)	"Trials of various kinds"	Count it all joy Know that testing produces steadfastness Ask for wisdom, in faith
1 Peter (e.g. 2:13-3:17; 4:13-17)	Oppression as a result of station in life (under emperor, master or husband)	Submit and continue to do good (but ...) Imitate Christ, who suffered for you Do not be surprised Rejoice as you share Christ's sufferings
2 Peter / Jude (e.g. 2 Pet 1:3-8; Jude 3, 17-23)	False teachers	Make your calling and election sure Contend for the faith Wait, keeping yourselves in God's love Have mercy on doubters and save others
1-3 John (e.g. 1 Jn 3:13-4:6)	The world's hatred Antichrists / Deceivers Self-promoting leaders	Don't be surprised, but love one another Test the spirits Watch yourselves and the teaching

65

## GROUP MEETING:

### Discussion Questions

Before getting into these specific questions, spend a few minutes discussing what struck you or stuck with you from the video. What were some of the main points? Did any of Andrew's comments or questions open up the Bible in a profound way to you? Also, ask if anything was confusing or needs clarification.

1. Which aspects of Christ's nature do people in your small group or church fail to understand, underappreciate, or have a mistaken knowledge of? How might you help them?

2. Look at the chart in "Gospel: Justification, Faith and Works". Read James 2 and Romans 3-4 and try to define each of the three terms according to each author. How would you communicate the apparent differences?

3. Take one of the warning passages in Hebrews. For just that passage, answer the eight cloud questions Andrew Wilson has given. Based on what you discover, what factors would you need to consider if a person from your church came to you with questions about "losing their salvation"?

4. Which of the four application questions from James' letter seems most pressing in your culture? How would you apply that specific text in your context?

5. Identify similarities between the threat of false teaching Jude and Peter faced and what people in your church face. Feel free to be quite specific where it will help your people.

6. In the effective evangelism slide, which of the three aspects (walking, talking, mixing) do you excel at and which do you struggle in?

7. Which of the threats in the “Mission: Suffering and Persecution” slide is most prominent in your life, church or culture? Describe what a biblical response would look like.

## Meditation on Scripture

Hebrews 1:1-4

James 2:17-18, 26

Jude 3-4

1 Peter 3:15

## Putting This Session into Practice

Each church faces threats from the inside and from the outside. Pray this week that God would give you discernment to see what threatens your church. Ask him as well to give you wisdom about you might be involved in protecting against that threat.