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Election and Predestination: The Sovereignty of God in Salvation
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
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A Grace Bridge Panel Discussion
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John MacArthur, Phil Johnson, Richard Mayhue

Carey Hardy - Moderator

CAREYHARDY: I do want to thank each of you for coming tonight. This is a special edition of Grace Bridge. In fact, that's what we termed this, Grace Bridge Special Edition. This past Wednesday evening, we began a study of the book of Ephesians. That's what we're doing this year. And the very first Chapter Verse 4 introduces a wonderful, important doctrine in Scripture. It's the doctrine of election. The following verse then gives us the concept of predestination. It was wonderful. I can speak from personal experience in doing that study; it was wonderful to begin delving into those great truths. But to some people, these doctrines are confusing.

Tonight, we hope to bring clarity to these truths. And we're going to attempt to do this by way of a panel discussion, as you see, and some questions that I have accumulated that hopefully will stimulate that discussion. Our panel consists of our own Pastor here second to my right; you know our Pastor John MacArthur. It's a blessing to have him with us tonight. My immediate right, Dr. Dick Mayhue, is the Dean of the Master's Seminary. And on the far end, Phil Johnson, the Executive Director of Grace To You Radio.

We welcome each of you to jump in any time you want, regardless of what the question is. If you would like to answer that or add to it, augment it in any way, please feel free to do that, even though it's already been addressed.

I thought to begin our discussion, John, I would ask you perhaps to give us a summary or definition of what the doctrine of election is. What does that mean, and what is the relationship to predestination?

JOHNMACARTHUR: Well, the doctrine of election simply means that God, uninfluenced and before creation, predetermined certain people to be saved.

PASTOR HARDY: That implies that there was a larger group of people out of which He made that choice. What group of people is that?

PASTOR MACARTHUR: Humanity.

PASTOR HARDY: Humanity? Is there a relationship between that and the doctrine of predestination? Are they the same or are they different concepts?

PASTOR MACARTHUR: No, I think it's essentially the same. Predestination simply identifies the point prior to time when God determined that He would elect. In other words, the election is the actual choice. Predestination simply identifies this as something that happened preliminary to time.

PASTOR HARDY: That would be the meaning then of that phrase "before the foundation of the world," before time ever began.

PASTOR MACARTHUR: There's also more in it than that. The second half of the word -- the first is "pre." The second half of the word is "destined," and that sort of takes you to the end. And the end of it is I think best summed up in Romans 8 that we are: "Predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son." So that God's elective purpose was to the glorification, that is the full and final salvation, of those whom He chose.

PASTOR HARDY: Well, it sounds like then it's clearly taught in Scripture. But even though that's true, people attempt to explain it away. What are some things you have heard people attempt to do to attempt to explain these doctrines away? Any of you? Good. Someone else. It's your turn.

PHILJOHNSON: All right. I was going to sit up here, try to be quiet, and just look intelligent being in this company. Probably the most common evasion is from those who would see foreknowledge as something that figures into God's electing choice. And by that, they mean that He foreknew by looking ahead into the future to discover what was going to happen. And when He knew, when He learned through this foresight who was going to respond positively to the gospel, then He chose those people. And so, in effect, the choice is still theirs. But God saw it ahead of time and, therefore, He elected them because of the choice He knew they would make. That really evades the whole point, because it makes the choice the choice of the sinner, rather than the choice of God.

PASTOR HARDY: Well, you're saying then that that is not a biblical definition of foreknowledge.

PASTOR JOHNSON: Right.

PASTOR HARDY: It's a related issue, but it's not the biblical definition. What is foreknowledge then?

PASTOR JOHNSON: Dick, it's your turn.

DR. MAYHUE: Sure. Well, the word that's translated "foreknowledge" is the Greek verb "proginosko," which just literally means "to know before." And when it's talking about relationships, it's talking about something that occurred before something. And in this case, it goes back to the word "predestination." And that is that God had a predetermined relationship before time; that He had determined by unconditional election of those upon whom He would shower His grace, from a pool of those whom He knew would have fallen, and all were undeserving of anything that He might offer. And what Phil talked about is the classic Arminian view of election. They wouldn't deny God's foreknowledge of something. They just would redefine God's foreknowledge of something.

Basically, I think to get around two -- two stumbling blocks that people, I think, trip over all the time en route, trying to understand what the Bible says, which is frequent -- and I think we all would agree not only is it frequent, but it's really clear, if you just come to the Bible and ask what does it mean by what it says. And number one where I think a large majority of the people stumble, is over the total depravity of mankind. If you don't start with the total depravity of mankind, and understand that we are dead in our sins and trespasses, you'll never get unconditional election as the Bible teaches it. And it's one of the reasons, just as I was thinking through it today, some of the imagery that's used of salvation is, one, that we're born again; and two, that we've been resurrected. And how many dead people caused their own resurrection? And how many babies, before they were conceived, did something to lead to their birth? The answer is absolutely nothing. And I think that's why those analogies or pictures of life are used, because it points to all of humanity; dead in their sins and trespasses, personally culpable before God for their sins, deserving of nothing, and if God had only exercised His justice and His righteousness, only God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit and the angels that didn't fall would be in heaven. God could have done that if He wanted to.

But John's done a great job with the little passages before time in the Titus 1, and pointing out God's desire to redeem a portion of mankind for Himself. So people fall over the total depravity of man, and there are all kinds of varieties. And Phil, who's the best, I think, of the historic points, go back to Pelagianism and semi-Pelagianism, and all that could be involved in that.

The second one -- and it's really fresh in my mind 'cause I've been working on the openness of God issue in writing an article for our journal -- is we have a very hard time as human beings believing that we can't think on the same level as God. And it's deifying the human mind and humanizing the divine mind. And if we think we can understand everything that's in the mind of God, which we can't, we will then come to the conclusion that it's unfair, not right, for God to do what He does, because that makes Him a cosmic puppeteer, and all we are is people who go through life and everything we do and say and everything -- we have nothing to be involved in. And so the argument of free will issues -- and I could only find one passage in my New American Standard today -- where anything that has to

do with man's choice was translated "free will." And it was in the context of Philemon 14. And all it meant was Paul said I'd like you to do this not out of compulsion, not that I've sort of jammed this down your throat, but I'd rather you do this out of the kindness of your heart. And I would suggest, maybe for discussion among us or for your thinking, that nowhere in the Bible does it suggest that man has a free will and that he acts independent of outside sources, conditions, people, et cetera. Man has a will. But Luther said it was a "will in bondage." And the Bible says that our will is always a slave. It's either a slave to sin, or a slave to righteousness.

So we need to park our pride on our humanity -- the ability to think and see ourselves as sinners, lost forever apart from God's unmerited favor and His grace, unconditionally bestowed by election -- and see ourselves as Isaiah saw the mind of God in Isaiah 55 -- it's either 8 and 9 or 10 and 11 -- that just clearly says you don't need to know Hebrew to get the point; that God's thoughts are so far above our thoughts that it's the difference between the distance from heaven, which we can't measure on earth. So those, just to kind of kick it back on Phil, are some of the things that saved people stumble over, much less unsaved people.

PASTOR HARDY: It's an interesting point then that people who are struggling with this doctrine may very well be in reality struggling with a different doctrine, the doctrine of the depravity of man, and also the character of God, who He is.

PASTOR MACARTHUR: I also think that Americans have a specially difficult time with this, because we don't know what a monarchy feels like. We have never lived under a sovereign ruler. We don't have any concept of that. You would find people historically in a culture where they're ruled by a king, who have a very clear understanding, and willingly bend their minds to the fact that somebody can actually be in charge. Not everybody is an elected official. Some people have a divine right to sovereignty. This is a bigger problem in America, I think, than it is in Europe. I mean as I travel around in Europe -- Phil, you found this to be true, too -- reform theology has -- wherever you find evangelicalism, you almost always find reformed theology, don't you? You come to America and wherever you find evangelicalism, you find Arminianism in one form or another, with few exceptions.

And it has to do with, I think, as much culturally, we just really have a hard time understanding that somebody is the king, and the king does whatever the king wants to do. And the King of the universe does exactly what He wants to do, whenever He wants to do it. And to show you how far and wide this goes, I picked up yesterday an e-mail deal from a pastor out at the Saddleback Community Church trying to respond to the recent disaster. And one of the things he said in this was that, you know, this wasn't God's will. In fact, he said, God's will is rarely ever done. That is a really bizarre statement. Because what that does is turn God into a victim. You really only have two possibilities; either God determines who is redeemed, or man does. That's it. I mean it's not a real complex problem, not a lot of factors. There's just those two options. Now, if you believe that man does, then you have to answer what Dick just brought up: How does a person who doesn't exist birth himself? By

analogy, how does a person who's dead raise himself from the dead? Every imagery of the Scripture that defines a totally depraved person puts them in an impossible state. On the other hand, nothing in the Bible indicates that man determines his own salvation. Everything indicates that God does. So I think we have a bigger problem with that here. And we don't like the idea of not being free, you know. We want to have the freedom to choose whatever we want to choose. And that may be the American way, but that isn't the biblical way.

PASTOR JOHNSON: Just to piggyback on that and to add another answer to your original question: One of the ways I've seen people, particularly in America, avoid the doctrine of election is to turn it into a kind of democratic election. You've seen that tract that says: Here's election. God voted for you; Satan voted against you; you cast the deciding vote, you know; you determine your destiny. And all of these evasions of the --

PASTOR MACARTHUR: Well, that's a frightening thing; that God and Satan have an equal vote.

PASTOR JOHNSON: I thought the same thing.

PASTOR MACARTHUR: All are frightening than that you would have a vote.

PASTOR JOHNSON: The problem is knowing my own heart; that's right.

PASTOR MACARTHUR: Yes.

PASTOR JOHNSON: And if it depended on my vote, the vote I cast, I would have been doomed long ago. But all these evasions have this in common; that they end up making man the captain of his soul, you know, the master of his fate, the decider of his own destiny. If God looks into the future to see who's going to believe, you have two problems there. Number one, that means that the believer himself is the one who made the decisive choice, not God. And that goes against dozens of Scriptures that say God is the one who chooses. Jesus said to the disciples: You haven't chosen Me; I chose you. And in Thessalonians, Paul writes to the Thessalonians and emphasizes the fact that they are saved by God's choice, God's choice. And then the other problem with that is that ultimately, ultimately, if it's my choice, I'm going to make the wrong choice. It goes back to what Dick said about bondage and the total depravity, the bondage of the world.

PASTOR HARDY: Since the terms have been used, perhaps a little bit of a history lesson here is in order. The term "Arminian" has been used, and "Pelagian." What is "Arminianism" and what is "Pelagianism," and how does that relate to this? Phil, I know you love to study history. Help us with that.

PASTOR JOHNSON: "Pelagianism," to put it as simply as I know how, starts with the denial of the doctrine of original sin. It's a denial that Adam's sin in any way affects his progeny. So that all of us are born essentially blank slates, and we have -- we have the choice. And again, this all hinges on human choice; we have the choice to be good or evil. And we're evil by our own choice, not because of any sinful tendencies or guilt that we inherited from Adam. That's where Pelagianism starts. And out of that, you get a totally graceless theology. Because ultimately, if it's my choice, whether it be good or evil, then I can save myself. I can redeem myself, simply by choosing to be good. And hard core Pelagians, that's exactly what they teach. Charles Finney was a classic example who fell into this. Basically said: Look, you want to be saved, just choose not to sin; stop sinning and you can be saved. He even preached a sermon called "Make for Yourself a New Heart," where he taught that as an unredeemed person you could, by sheer force of your will, change your own heart, contrary to what Scripture teaches. And you could, therefore, redeem yourself. The problem with all this is it gives the sinner credit that he doesn't deserve. And also lays a burden on his back that he can't possibly bear because of his --

PASTOR MACARTHUR: It diminishes the glory of God.

PASTOR JOHNSON: And diminishes -- it eliminates the grace of God from the gospel. Pelagius, who was a contemporary of Augustine -- and Augustine was the chief one who wrote against him. Augustine said of Pelagius: He seems to mention grace in his writings only to avoid the embarrassment of having not mentioned it; it doesn't really have any role in his teaching. And I think that's -- that is the best refutation of Pelagianism that I've ever heard. It's graceless.

PASTOR HARDY: How does that relate to Arminianism?

PASTOR JOHNSON: Arminianism, I would classify most Arminianism as a kind of semi-Pelagianism. After Pelagius passed from the scene and his teaching was declared a heresy, there arose a new sort of modification of Pelagius' teachings -- semi-Pelagianism, that's the technical name for it -- that taught okay, well, we were damaged by Adam's sin, it did affect us, we did inherit sinful tendencies, but -- and different semi-Pelagians treat it different ways -- but the most common view is God just gives grace to all of humanity, and restores us to the place where we can make a free choice. And so again, like with Pelagianism, semi-Pelagianism puts all the emphasis on free will.

PASTOR HARDY: Just denies the doctrine of total depravity.

PASTOR JOHNSON: In effect, it does. They'll say, well, yes, we were born depraved, but common grace erases that depravity and gives us the ability to make a free will choice.

PASTOR HARDY: So his thinking is free to make that choice.

PASTOR JOHNSON: Yes.

DR. MAYHUE: Yes. As a matter of fact, the five points of Calvinism didn't come from Calvin's mind. It came from the five points of Jacob Arminius. That was the reverse image then. And the first point is total depravity --

PASTOR JOHNSON: That's right.

DR. MAYHUE: -- and the other side is semi-Pelagianism --

PASTOR JOHNSON: Calvin never systemized his doctrine into five points. That all came up after he died. And these Arminian remonstrants put together a document where they said we disagree on these five points. And so the five points really stemmed from the teaching the Arminians. And if you wanted to summarize Arminian teaching, it's the opposite of the five points of Calvinism.

PASTOR MACARTHUR: They got it all wrong, all five of those points.

DR. MAYHUE: But you don't care. Even if you -- we go back to Calvin and Jacob Arminius and then back to the fourth century with Pelagian and Augustine, you go back to the gospels. And it's clear as a bell in John 6 that Jesus was saying: "For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it's been granted him from the Father." Just talking about election and predestination. Verse 66. "And as a result of this" teaching, "many of his disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore." It's -- it confronts the human being that thinks there's something good about him, or that in some way he can think at the level of God. I think it's at the point that you realize that you're bankrupt spiritually, and that you can't even be within the galaxy of God mentally and, like a child, come to the Scriptures. John's message from Matthew 10, unless you be like a child --

PASTOR MACARTHUR: I think the fallout of all this, too, is standard, typical American evangelism, which attempts to manipulate the man or the woman, soft-sell the gospel, take the offense out, entertain them, do whatever you need to do, because this is all about getting this person to make a decision. And that whole concept of decisions and invitations and, you know, umpteen verses of just-as-I-am, and all of the things that go with it, is an effort to manipulate, because it's based upon essentially a semi-Pelagian-Arminian view that man is the ultimate decider. And I mean Finney launched that entire thing, you know. He said the whole idea of evangelism is to manipulate people's minds to get them to the point where they make this decision; which, you know, is essentially how American evangelism is done, far and wide.

PASTOR HARDY: In fact, there's a statement in the book, The Purpose for the Church, that says something like this: In a worship service, their goal is to get people's muscles to relax, the unbelievers

to relax, so that they can somehow be in a better frame of mind.

PASTOR MACARTHUR: Well, more people get saved when their muscles are relaxed, than don't.

PASTOR HARDY: Yes. That was their argument.

PASTOR MACARTHUR: In fact, the author of the book says that he said if -- I don't remember the exact words, but something like this, pretty close -- if I can find a person's sort of felt needs, hot button, I can lead anyone to Christ. And that is essentially the view. And then when the same pastor says, you know, God didn't will this, in fact, God's will is rarely done, you have the huge theological context in which he operates. He, I guess, feels that the whole issue of salvation somehow is his engagement with the person. That is a very heavy responsibility. I mean if you really believed that the salvation of people depended upon your cleverness, be hard to sleep.

PASTOR HARDY: It's a tremendous burden to carry as a pastor.

PASTOR MACARTHUR: Yes.

DR. MAYHUE: Carey, can I come back to the stumbling blocks just a little bit? One of the things that people really want to stumble over in -- in all of this is trying to understand what Calvinism is and what Calvinism isn't. But Calvinism becomes kind of the target for everybody's objections. And -- but there's a brand of Calvinism that's called "double predestination." That means that God, by his decisive will, elected some to heaven and some to hell before the foundation of the world, and everything just takes its toll. As far as I know, none of us are double predestinarians.

PASTOR JOHNSON: I would ask you to define it more carefully than that before I would disassociate myself from it, but --

DR. MAYHUE: We might have a controversy tonight. We were thinking we wouldn't.

PASTOR JOHNSON: We've got to --

DR. MAYHUE: But to the mind, to say that somebody has been predestined to hell prior to the time that they ever lived their life -- rather than what the Bible says, and John's preached on this numerous times -- man is held responsible for his sins not because he's not elect, but because he's responsible for his sins. And it's on the basis of his sin, which hasn't been cared for by Christ, that he's consigned to hell; the Great White Throne Judgment of Revelation 20. But that's very, very annoying to lots and lots of people. But it's a caricature. It's not a true picture of either what Calvin taught or what the Bible taught. And I think Phil was just --

PASTOR JOHNSON: Just to clarify that: The error there I would call equal ultimacy; that God -- the idea that some people have is that God appoints some people to heaven, some people to hell, and then He is as active in making those people on their way to hell evil, as He is active in making those people on their way to heaven good. And obviously, Scripture doesn't teach that or wouldn't affirm it. That's a doctrine I would call equal ultimacy. There's a -- there's a sense in which, if God chose whom He would save and before the foundation of the world, left everyone else, passed over them, left them in their sins, then their destiny is determined as well. It's determined. But it isn't by any active effort on God's part that they are made evil. It's their own fault. I think what is --

DR. MAYHUE: Right. Phil and I are agreeing, but we're just coming at it from different angles. And the other thing that people stumble over: If God is sovereign, and He is, if He predestined, and He did, if He elected, and He did, and if man is responsible, and they are, then how do you reconcile that? And there's lots of bobbing heads out there. You haven't got any more clue than Phil, John or I --

PASTOR HARDY: But let me ask you this. Let me ask you --

DR. MAYHUE: -- how that's reconciled, because the Bible doesn't tell us this. It tells that God's sovereign, man is responsible, when we get to heaven he'll tell us something else that'll make sense. And, in the meantime, Clark Venik, Rick Boyd and others are trying to outthink God. And in the meantime, they're light years beyond the Arminians, and the heresy.

PASTOR HARDY: Yet, the Bible does say things like this: God, in some sense, loves the whole world. How do you reconcile that kind of teaching in Scripture with what we've said already about election?

PASTOR JOHNSON: How much longer do you want us to go with that? John wrote a whole book on that subject.

PASTOR HARDY: Well, let's let him answer it.

DR. MAYHUE: Good idea.

PASTOR JOHNSON: Can we leave?

PASTOR MACARTHUR: No, no, no. This'll be brief, 'cause I've been preaching all day today for about eight or nine hours, so I'm pretty well spent. But, you know, first of all, let me back up a little bit and say: Before you start debating all of the fall-out, you need to affirm that the Bible teaches election and predestination. You are turning a corner here fast on this. Because before we start, well, what-about-this, what-about-this, what-about-this, I think people are into the what-about-this before they've ever established the doctrine. And it has to start with an understanding that the Bible is clearly

teaching that. You have, well, start with Abraham, for example. God chose Abraham for no particular reason out of other people that He might have chosen, just picked him up, plucked him up, took him to the land of Canaan, and out of him came the people of Israel. He even calls Israel "mine elect." Chose Israel. Why? Richard Wolfe years ago said: "How odd of God to choose the Jews." And why did He do that? Well, why didn't He choose somebody else, like Moabites or Malakites or Mideonites or -- there's no answer to that. He didn't choose them because they were better than other people, 'cause they weren't. He didn't choose them, He says in Deuteronomy, because they were more than other people, because they weren't. He just determined to set His love on them.

You even have Christ "mine elect." And then the church is continually called "elect." And you have, as was commented on, John 6, where Jesus says: No one comes unto Me except the father draw him. "And all the Father gives to Me shall come to Me," and all of those. So you have to in your mind establish that doctrine unequivocally. Then on the other side, you have to also establish that the Scripture holds the sinner completely accountable and culpable for his sin. That's clear, too. I think before you start messing around in the middle, you need to establish those two things very, very clearly. The "soul that sins shall die," the "wages of sin is death." God, as Phil said, does not participate in the evil of the sinner. He doesn't generate it and He doesn't escalate it. And He doesn't like it. So the sinner operates out of fallenness, and is culpable and responsible for his sin.

There's another thing you have to understand, and that is -- now we're where you brought up the question -- God does say he loves humanity, and there is a universal love of God that manifests itself in common grace, manifests itself in temporal, physical deliverance from death; the sinners live and enjoy life. It manifests itself in a universal call of the gospel; it manifests itself in the tears of Jesus; it manifests itself in the compassion of God; weeping through the eyes of Jeremiah. That's a real love.

So God elects those that are saved; those that perish do so without any help from God. He is, as Phil said, passive. And you see that in Romans 9 where God is fitting vessels unto salvation. But vessels are being fitted unto damnation, and God is passive in that. It is also true that God does love humanity, and manifests that in common grace, as I said. Now, having said that you believe all of that, you now have a problem. And that is that your brain can't handle all of that information and bring complete resolution. But that's okay; because if you could, you wouldn't be human. There are things that only God can understand. And I really do believe that. I'm very content with that. That's one of the reasons I know the Bible is written by God, because men would fix it. If I wrote a book that had those contradictions, Phil would edit them all out. One of the bench marks of divine inspiration is the fact that you're dealing with transcendence. And an element of transcendence is the inability to grasp fully everything. So you're content to believe what the Scripture clearly reveals. And yet, we're told to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. And so there is a universal offer that, from the standpoint of God is a legitimate offer, and which, sad to say, even heightens the culpability of the sinner, because if he treads under his feet the covenant and counts the -- Christ as an unholy thing, his punishment is even greater. So God doesn't have a problem harmonizing all that. Man,

playing God, coming up with his concoctions in the middle, tends to destroy that all.

PASTOR JOHNSON: Carey, just to answer your question further, too, about the love of God. I think it's important to make a distinction that the love of God for His elect, His people, is of a different nature than His love for humanity. His love for humanity is a real love. It's a genuine compassion. And just to illustrate: You're my neighbor; you're my fellow pastor; I love you. But I also love my wife, and I love her with a totally different quality and intensity of love than the love with which I love you. It's two different kinds of love all together. And yet, that's not to minimize the type of love with which I love my neighbor. It's a real love; it's a genuine love; it's a heartfelt compassion. But it's not of the same kind of love as I love my wife. And it's that way with God. He loves the whole world, yes. He's a God of compassion; and his mercies are over all his works. Scripture says over and over again: If you want to be like God, Matthew 5, "love your enemies," because God is good to everyone. He loves everyone. But, His love for His elect is a whole different level of love. It's a superior kind of love. That's what makes salvation so special. That's what makes our relationship with Him so unique.

PASTOR HARDY: In what sense is He, as the Scriptures say, the Savior of all men, but yet, especially to the elect, He is a Savior?

PASTOR MACARTHUR: Yeah. Well, all that means is that He's the Savior of all men in a physical, temporal sense. All you have to do is look at the fact that the world is full of unbelievers who live, to know that God by nature is a Savior. I mean it's His nature not to destroy the sinner, when the sinner deserved destruction. I mean Adam sinned. Should have died on the spot, and that would have been a just act. But he didn't. He lived, what, 960 years? I mean that's grace. And that tells us that God, even on a temporal, physical level, is a Savior. The world is full of unconverted people. And there's every reason to think and to be right in thinking that the justice of God demands death; that death could come the first time anybody sins. But that's what Romans 2 calls the patience and forbearance of God. He is so patient and forbearing that He lets the sinner live and live and live and live. And the Psalmist even gets to the point where he says not only do they live, but they prosper. And the question is, you know: Why do the wicked prosper, and why are the righteous oppressed? So the fact is that God, by nature, is a Savior. And He shows that by giving people life. Tried to point that out when we were doing the message a couple Sunday nights ago. So the real question, as I said then, is not, you know, why do certain people die, but why do most people live? Because that's an evidence that God, it's just His nature to save. And with regard to believers, the little adverb melista, something on the same order, but especially of believers. He's our Savior not physically and temporally, but spiritually and eternally. But then, that's where He manifests the ultimate nature as a Savior.

PASTOR HARDY: How does this doctrine fit with verses that also teach it is man's responsibility to believe and to repent? It's a command from God to do that. Man is expected to obey that command. How does this doctrine fit with that?

PASTOR JOHNSON: Well, you have to understand that our responsibility is not limited by our ability. Scripture commands us to do a lot of things that we are morally incapable of doing. One that come to mind preeminently is "Be perfect the way God is perfect." I can't obey that command. And yet, is it my duty to do that? Yes, absolutely. So the fact that our ability is limited does not limit our responsibility. That's the error of both Arminianism and hyper-Calvinism; they assume that if our ability is limited, then so must our responsibility be limited. But Scripture doesn't teach that. Scripture calls us to many duties that we cannot possibly fulfill. And it is the duty of all to believe, to trust Christ, to repent. And yet, they don't have the moral ability unless God gives it to them, which is the very thing that ought to drive us constantly to dependence on the grace of God. There's so many things God commands of us that we simply cannot do, that our entire lives ought to be lived just simply depending on His grace, because that's only the power that supplies the ability to do these things. And we can't do it.

DR. MAYHUE: Carey, I think that brings it right back to the thing that John and I were talking about. Theologians would call it an antonymy; two seemingly irreconcilable ideas, God's sovereignty, man's responsibility. But irreconcilable only if we don't have additional data. And the point that John made was a good one. And that is you can read anywhere in the old, you can read anywhere in the new, John talked about individuals, talked about nations.

I once did a study of all of the verbs in the New Testament that are used outside of God "elected" and God "predestined." And here's a little bit of them: God wills, God draws, He grants, He calls, He appoints, He prepares, He causes, He chooses, purposes, delivers, transfers, saves, makes alive, brings us forth, justifies, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. And if you just read right through the New Testament looking for verbs, the only thing you could conclude is however God fits into salvation, He is the initiator and He is determinative, regardless of what humanity does or doesn't do.

PASTOR JOHNSON: He's the author and finisher.

DR. MAYHUE: And my own opinion would be that all we can do is go to the Bible. And it says that God is sovereign; and it says that man is responsible. And maybe I could just show one passage to shed a little light of the word on it from the teaching of our Lord. You go back to the gospels. Jesus said in Matthew 11:28: "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me," and so on. And that's a great Arminian verse, because it talks about human responsibility. But just immediately prior to that in Verse 27, which is a part of the same speech, He says: "All things have been handed over to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him." And if it wasn't God's will to reveal the Son as the Savior, and the Father as the provider of the deliverer, no one then could come. And the most significant thing is Jesus didn't footnote his message by explaining how to reconcile those two apparently irreconcilable ideas. Paul in Philippians 2 -- it would be the same idea -- and I'll let my colleagues take over from there. But in

Verse 13 it says: "For it is God who is at work in you, both the will and to work for His good pleasure." And we say we can just sit back and do nothing in our Christian life, if we haven't read Verse 12, that says you're to "work out your salvation with fear and trembling." No matter where you go, God is sovereign, God's determinative; man is responsible, and man participates with his will. But he doesn't have free will to determine, and he doesn't have free will to override.

PASTOR MACARTHUR: So that even a believer is responsible for his own failures and sins, but gets no credit for doing what is right.

DR. MAYHUE: Exactly.

PASTOR MACARTHUR: Now, if I look at my own life, that's the most intimate view of Christianity I have. I don't understand it. I mean in my own life -- I think I understand the Bible pretty well, you know, the theology of it. But as it operates in my own life, it is absolutely beyond my comprehension. I just know that if anything right happens, the Lord strengthened me to that end. If anything wrong happens, it's my fault. I can't blame it on His failure.

I think a verse that comes to mind just, you know, I throw a lot of things in this verse, Romans 11:33: "Oh, the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" In other words, you start talking about the "wisdom and knowledge of God," you're getting in too deep to swim. "How unsearchable are his judgments, and His ways past finding out." At some point, you just say: Look, I can't find out. Sorry. I'd like to get a -- people come to me and ask me could you answer this? And sometimes, I'll say: I'm not sure what the answer is, but I'll find out.

But when they ask me how do you resolve predestination and human volition, I say that's past finding out. That isn't even in the MacArthur Study Bible. I don't know the answer to that. But I do know this. Verse 36: "For of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things: To whom be glory forever. Amen." I mean so you end up worshipping His transcendence. You end up worshipping His unsearchable nature.

DR. MAYHUE: And that would be why, John, in Ephesians Chapter 1 Verses 3 to 14, which might be the greatest single compact --

PASTOR MACARTHUR: Longest sentence --

DR. MAYHUE: -- talking about the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit; what they did with regard to our salvation. Every one of them ends with a little phrase in various forms in Verse 6; what the Father did was "to the praise of the glory of His grace," what He did through the Son, Verse 12, was "to the praise of His glory," and Verse 14, what He did through the Spirit was "to the praise of His glory." And if man had anything to do with it, it would rob God of His glory, whom He said in Isaiah: "To no one

will I give my glory." So no matter where you look -- what verbs, what words, what passage, Old or New Testament -- it comes back to there's a truth that God's sovereign; there's a truth that man's responsible. And in the Scriptures, God has not given us the revelation to make the bridge between the two, so that we could cognitive, philosophically, logically rectify it all and reconcile it all, and answer every human question that'd ever come. And I -- my own take of that, He's done it, because it forces us then to be people of faith, and to recognize that God's mind is galaxies beyond our own.

PASTOR JOHNSON: We have to embrace both sides of that truth. You find it right throughout Scripture. I mean Paul says work out your own salvation "with fear and trembling." You hear Arminians who love to quote that verse. But what's the next verse? Remember? "For it's God Who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." So, yeah, work out your salvation. But just remember, it's God in you doing that.

PASTOR MACARTHUR: But all the commands of the New Testament are to me --

PASTOR JOHNSON: That's right.

PASTOR MACARTHUR: -- not to God, to me.

PASTOR JOHNSON: So the responsibility is your --

PASTOR MACARTHUR: And I'm told to keep my body into subjection.

PASTOR JOHNSON: The responsibility is yours. And the only source of ability is from Him.

DR. MAYHUE: And in that passage, it's like Matthew 11, Paul didn't take the next verse, Verse 14, and try to explain what seems to be a contradiction, because in his mind there was no contradiction. They both are true. You just accept it by faith.

PASTOR MACARTHUR: I think a verse that comes back to mind -- it just adds another dimension to this -- is in Matthew, I think it is 22, where Jesus weeps over Jerusalem, and actually says: "How oft I would have gathered you ... as a hen gathereth her brood, but you would not." That is really amazing. How many times I wanted to embrace you, but you never allowed me to do that. I mean that's talking about the sinner's unwillingness, the raw resistance to the love of God that is characteristic of the sinner. And that makes Jesus weep. And He's God. So, you know, when Scripture says in the Old Testament that "I find no pleasure in the death of the wicked," that's the same kind of attitude. So, I think you have to add that fact there. You can't turn God into some cold, unfeeling entity. It's just, you know, like deterministic without any compassion. That's not the case. So when you put all of this together, remember, Jesus said: I wanted to draw you in, but you wouldn't let Me, which is an amazing statement. And again points up the fact that the sinner has to be willing to respond. And

when they're not, it's a grief to the heart of God.

PASTOR HARDY: The broader subject that we are really discussing is the sovereignty of God in salvation, God's role in salvation, every aspect of it. It's not just election and predestination. God did that, but He did more. And with that in mind, how would you answer this objection: That there will be people who desperately want to be saved, but since they're not elect, they can't be. And there will be people who don't want to be saved, who will be drug screaming and kicking, into heaven. What's a further explanation of God's total role in salvation?

PASTOR MACARTHUR: What verse is that, Carey?

PASTOR JOHNSON: Yeah. See if you go back --

PASTOR HARDY: Question number 10.

PASTOR JOHNSON: -- what Dick said at the outset is exactly right here. It -- all this hinges on and stems from the doctrine of total depravity, and a person who understood human depravity wouldn't raise that objection, because he would understand that there are no depraved people who really want to know God. The thing is they hate God. Romans 8 Verses 7 and 8 says they can't -- they're not capable of loving God or pleasing Him or even obeying Him. They cannot do it. It's impossible for them, because their hearts are so fixed against Him. So there's no possibility that anyone would ever say well, I wish I could know God, but He didn't choose me. And on the other hand, it's also not true that anyone who would resist salvation would be dragged kicking and screaming against his will into it, because what God does in His regenerating work is give us a new heart, a heart of love for Him. And so he changes that animosity that we are born with towards God into a love for Him. That's what we mean by irresistible grace. That's another -- that's the eye in the tulip. And it's not irresistible in the sense that God forces his grace upon us. I use this illustration. It's irresistible in the same sense that my wife is irresistible to me. I find her charms, her beauty, irresistible. And that's what God does when He is drawing someone to Christ. He makes Christ irresistible to us in that sense. So that it's not by force; it's not by compulsion.

PASTOR MACARTHUR: And yet, there are people -- and this has happened to me many times -- who say: I guess I'm just not chosen. And that comes from people who, for the most part, make some kind of commitment to Christ, but just can't live a life that serves the Lord. They just can't get over some besetting sin. They just -- they can't, you know, get out of some bad relationship or over some pornography or -- I don't know what it is; it's varying things. There are sins that beleaguer certain people. And, you know, they make this confession; I want to be saved and I -- so they finally get to the point where they're just absolutely exhausted with this battle that they're fighting. And they'll say, you know, maybe I'm just not chosen. In fact, there's a guy in the church here who probably said that to me 25 times over a period of years: I must not be chosen; I must not be chosen. And the truth of

the matter was, you know, I would drive him back to Romans 7 and have him read what Paul said: The things I want to do I don't do; the things I don't want to do, I do. Oh, poor me, I'm not chosen. No. I mean it's only a question of degree. We're all in the same battle. I mean we could all come to the conclusion: I must not be chosen, I must not be chosen, I can't get over this proverbial hump here. When do I -- when do I hit the slide? You know, when do I stop climbing this thing and start sliding? Well, isn't going to happen.

You don't want to second-guess your salvation, which manifests itself in a love for Christ and a longing to be what you can't be to some degree. You see, you need to see some fruit. But as I tell the kids at the college all the time, you know: People say to me, well, am I ever going to get over sin? Am I ever going to -- is there ever going to be a decreasing frequency of sin? And, of course, I say: Sure. As you mature in Christ, there'll be a decreasing frequency of sin. You'll sin less. But because of your spiritual maturity, you'll hate sin more. So you'll sin less and feel worse. That's how it is. I mean only a very mature believer could make the statements that Paul made in Romans Chapter 7. An immature believer wouldn't even understand that.

PASTOR HARDY: What if somebody said well, based upon my understanding of election, it seems like you are encouraging sin. If I am elect, if my eternal destination is secure, what does holiness matter? I can do whatever I want; I'm secure.

PASTOR JOHNSON: That's your question.

PASTOR HARDY: Or --

PASTOR MACARTHUR: I mean that fails to understand the new creation. If there's anything that defines a regenerated believer, it's that they don't think like that.

DR. MAYHUE: That's what the book of 1st John's all about.

PASTOR MACARTHUR: Yes. If you, you know, if any man continues in sin, you know, he doesn't know the Lord. That's the whole 1st John; that's the whole thing. I mean if you're still -- if you think salvation is some kind of a license for you to sin without impunity and judgment, you're not saved. Because the person who is converted has a new heart. Ezekiel 36: "A new heart ... and a new spirit..." New longings, new aspirations, new desires. And that's not the perfection of their life, but it is the direction of it.

PASTOR JOHNSON: Carey, if somebody asked me that question, I would hand them a copy of The Gospel According to Jesus.

PASTOR HARDY: Which was my answer, of course.

PASTOR JOHNSON: Yes.

PASTOR HARDY: So I'm glad you said that. I can't help but think of Paul's words, too, in Romans as he talked about grace. And then he says, well, if that be true, then we can sin all we want so that grace can abound. And he says in a very strong language in a negative way: In no way; may it never be -- that a Christian wouldn't do that.

PASTOR MACARTHUR: Let me tell you something. Somebody who doesn't believe in the doctrine of election, somebody who doesn't understand sovereign grace, somebody who comes through some Arminian approach and gets manipulated into salvation, is the kind of person -- whether they were saved or not, gets manipulated into a decision -- is precisely the kind of person that would think like that. That's why you preach the sovereignty of God. You know, people say oh, you don't want to tell non-believers that; you don't want to preach that heavy stuff to people. Oh, yes, you do. Because then they can know when they've genuinely been converted, because they've grasped the deep truths. They've counted the cost. They understand what's at stake. But that is a typical, typical kind of response where there's no particular love for holiness; there's no particular concern for obedience. It's just a continued worldly, fleshly life. And that's because people were manipulated into a decision that they think they made. And once they made the decision, that's the end of it. I mean everything's all settled. They can live any way they want. God really isn't that involved to start with; so what do they owe Him?

PASTOR JOHNSON: If you carry that too far, Carey, you're right back to the point where you're putting the entire burden for salvation right back on the sinner's shoulders. It's his job then to perform well, to stay faithful. And hard core Arminians believe that, you know, every time you sin, you lose your salvation, which really in practice is no different from Pelagian theology. Ultimately, it's --

PASTOR MACARTHUR: But the new deal is -- the new deal is you're eternally secure; you can just do whatever you want.

PASTOR JOHNSON: Yeah.

PASTOR HARDY: Once saved, always saved.

PASTOR JOHNSON: Oh, once saved, always saved. That theology --

PASTOR MACARTHUR: Once saved, always saved, and never sanctified.

PASTOR JOHNSON: You can get yourself in --

PASTOR MACARTHUR: You just get saved and glorified.

PASTOR JOHNSON: You can get yourself in by this Arminian view, but you can't do anything to get yourself out. Once you're saved, you're in. You get the credit for having got there, and you can't do anything to lose it.

PASTOR MACARTHUR: Let me tell you: This country is literally filling up with those kind of converts under this seeker-friendly approach in churches. Because the whole idea of seeker-friendly ministry is basically to appeal to people's fleshly lusts. Bottom line: What do they want? They want what makes them feel good. Felt needs. That's the flesh. Has nothing to do with the spirit; has nothing to do with the soul; has nothing to do with God. So as soon as you gear your ministry to fleshly lusts, you're on the wrong wavelength to start with. And then you give 'em an Arminian kind of gospel, where they save themselves by making a decision, and there's really -- now what you've got them basically convinced of is that the church is all about hey, whatever feels good to me, that's what it is. And so that's the way they live their lives. And the church fills up with, you know, the unconverted living in a deception.

DR. MAYHUE: That was the church I grew up in was the United Methodist Church. They had a lot of Arminianism in it.

PASTOR MACARTHUR: How did you ever get your job here?

DR. MAYHUE: I've come a long way.

PASTOR JOHNSON: I grew up as a United Methodist, too.

PASTOR MACARTHUR: Oh, unh, good.

PASTOR HARDY: Just want you to know I didn't, John.

DR. MAYHUE: And my dad and mom always thought I was saved, because they had me on the front row of the church. And when I got converted in 1970 in California, they thought I had joined a cult with the land of fruit and nuts out here. And it was a wonderful thing to be able to tell them, although it irritated them, that God had saved me; the Methodist church hadn't saved me. And that they needed to be saved, because the Methodist church hadn't saved them. It's a damning, deadening doctrine, if you don't believe in the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. But the night I got saved, it was a five-point message. And I went to church to get some people off of my back who insisted I go to church. And it was Monday night in a Baptist church. And the guy that was preaching wasn't -- I wouldn't call him a deep preacher, but he did preach the truth. And John knows who it was. And he got to point three. And point three was: You're a sinner. And at that point, my whole world, my whole

life, my whole thinking totally changed. And it was like I was in darkness, and all of a sudden, I was in light. And it was obvious I was going to go to hell without whatever God was going to do to save me. And I think it would be safe to say that without regeneration, there is no true repentance. But with true repentance, there will be a diminishing appetite for sin, period. Because it's the Spirit of God at work in us who's given as a part of the gift of salvation.

PASTOR MACARTHUR: I would think you have to humble yourself before all these doctrines, right? I mean you just have to bow your knee and just humble yourself before these things, and don't demand that God explain every iota of every issue to you so you can understand it. You're not that important in the big scheme of things; neither am I; any of us.

PASTOR HARDY: Doesn't this doctrine eliminate the place and the motivation for evangelism and prayer, the doctrine of election?

PASTOR JOHNSON: I would say quite the opposite. In fact, I remember very clearly my first year as Christian. I went to a Southern Baptist church, training union. You know, you know how that is, because you came out of the Southern Baptist background. We were sitting around discussing evangelism and the sovereignty of God. And one of the girls said, well, you know -- and the teacher was, by the way, saying that God is not sovereign; it's totally up to human free will; it's the individual's choice. And she said if that's the case, why do we pray for people to be saved? If God's already done everything He can do to save them, and now it's all up to them, what's the point in talking to God about it? Shouldn't we be pleading with the person instead? And this trainer union leader said yeah, I never thought about that, but you're right. There's no point in praying for the lost, he said, because God's already done everything He can do to save them. So, you know, I mean that's just -- that appalled me. And that was one of the first things that got me started thinking about the sovereignty of God; that Scripture teaches us to pray for the lost. Paul prays for the lost. And that, in and of itself, is proof that God is sovereign over who is saved. And that's also an encouragement to evangelism.

PASTOR HARDY: In what way?

PASTOR JOHNSON: Because we know that God has His elect out there. You know, He has many people in this city. And all we have to do is throw the seed, and it will bear fruit.

PASTOR MACARTHUR: Well, that's what they criticized Spurgeon, you know, for believing in election. And they said, you know, if you believe in election, why are you preaching to all these people? And he said well, if you'll pull up their shirts and see if they have an "E" stamped on their back, you know, maybe I won't. But, I mean, you don't know who the elect are. So the command to us is not to determine who's elect. The command to us is to preach the gospel to every creature. That's a -- that's obedience. And, you know, the thing that's so wonderful about believing in the sovereignty of God -- and I say this as a preacher -- I don't really care about manipulating anybody. I just care

about being faithful to the truth of God, so that God through His truth can save whom He will. If I believe that people are saved by their own sovereign will, that totally creates a different paradigm for ministry. So for me, the great joy of all joys is that God would use me to call out the bride for his Son. That's a great, great privilege.

PASTOR HARDY: That makes evangelism exciting; to know that the final verdict is not on my shoulders.

PASTOR MACARTHUR: Right.

PASTOR HARDY: That is God's job, to save. It is my job to be faithful. And if I'm faithful to spread the seed, in God's appointed times, He will actually use that along the way to call the elect to salvation.

PASTOR MACARTHUR: Well, just imagine, Carey, that you really were an Arminian, and you believed that as a preacher you were responsible for the eternal souls of people. I'd get out of the ministry.

PASTOR HARDY: Be a lot of sleepless nights.

PASTOR MACARTHUR: Oh, I'd be a mental case. Because I mean there's no way you could ever live with that kind of reality, if you were honest about it; if you took people's eternal destiny seriously. I mean I take things seriously as it is; I mean, you know I do. But if I actually believed that people would go to hell if, one, I didn't preach the kind of sermon that could manipulate them to make a decision or, two, if I didn't reach them, I'd be a frenetic person, running around button-holing everybody that crossed my path, living some kind of a bizarre and outrageous life, trying to make sure that people didn't go to hell because of me.

PASTOR HARDY: I heard so many sermons growing up from preachers who were manipulating the members of the church to evangelize with this kind of thinking; these people's blood are going to be on your hands, they could die on the way tonight going somewhere in a car wreck, and that's going to be on your shoulders, their eternal destiny. And so the guilt trip, as we call it, was placed upon people who try to motivate them to do the Lord's work. And it has actually the opposite effect.

PASTOR MACARTHUR: Oh, sure.

PASTOR HARDY: Can people who hold to another view of election -- let's go back to maybe one of those errant views, some sort of definition of foreknowledge that God looks ahead, He chooses some, et cetera, runs the tape back and then makes His choice. Can a person who holds another view of election actually be saved?

PASTOR JOHNSON: I don't think there are many people who spring full-blown into understanding these doctrines the moment they're saved. A lot of people entertain these wrong ideas for some time. I think it's a mistake to think that these particular doctrines, these difficult doctrines about divine sovereignty, are so much the essence of the gospel that if someone rejects them he's not saved. The heart of the gospel is justification by faith. And what I want to know is what a person believes is the grounds for his justification: Is it Christ's righteousness, or his own? And I think if you say it's Christ's righteousness and not mine, and that you just work out the ramifications of that theology, you're going to understand the sovereignty of God and all these other doctrines as well. But the starting point for the gospel and the starting point, I think, for an understanding of the sovereignty of God is a solid understanding of justification by faith. That's the heart of the gospel. That's what I want to know, to really understand, whether I think this person I'm talking to is a believer or not. I know people who -- who would just flatly tell you no, if a person is an Arminian, he can't be a true Christian. They regard all Arminians as hell-bound heretics. I think that's a kind of hyper-Calvinistic tendency that some people fall into, a hyper-judgmentalism. On the other hand, I do think there are some varieties of Arminianism that do corrupt the heart of the gospel, because they put the burden of salvation completely on the back of the sinner and, therefore, teach people that it's not Christ who saves you; it's your own choice, it's your own work.

PASTOR HARDY: Is it at that point that this becomes heresy?

PASTOR JOHNSON: I believe it is.

PASTOR MACARTHUR: That would be Catholicism.

PASTOR JOHNSON: It would In fact, some kinds of Arminianism are very similar to Roman Catholicism. You know, read the life of Wesley. He was a classic, flaming Arminian. I deplore his theology. And yet, we read about his conversion. It was the doctrine of justification. When he came to understand that -- somebody was reading through the introduction to Luther's Commentary on Romans, which is a great treatise on justification by faith -- it opened his eyes to those truths and he saw it. And for the rest of his life when he preached the gospel, he preached justification by faith as -- as well and as soundly as any Calvinist I've ever heard. I would expect to see him in heaven, with his theology all straightened out.

PASTOR MACARTHUR: The truth of the matter is preaching the sovereignty of God won't save anybody. Preaching the doctrine of election won't save anybody. Preaching sin and justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, saves.

PASTOR JOHNSON: Good point.

PASTOR HARDY: You've already hinted at some practical implications of affirming this doctrine. But, at the same time, if the view we hold on it doesn't determine our salvation -- let's press this a little more here in the time we have left -- then does this doctrine really matter?

PASTOR JOHNSON: I'd say absolutely.

PASTOR HARDY: What are the implications for daily life, let's say?

PASTOR JOHNSON: Well, just the way you look at your -- all of your duties. As I said, at the heart of this doctrine of the sovereignty of God is a constant reminder to us that we have to depend on divine grace for every duty that Scripture sets before us. And if you take your eyes off that fact -- if you lose sight of the sovereignty of God, you will take your eyes off that fact -- you'll forget to depend on grace, you'll begin to try to live in the flesh, and you will go astray. It is, I believe, detrimental to sanctification; detrimental to your Christian walk. And the proof of that is seen in the fruits of Arminian theology. Wesley again, I would say, he went off into this kind of perfectionism that so corrupted his view of sanctification. And if you read some of the discourses he wrote, he was an angry and arrogant man. He wasn't the model of Christian grace. And I believe part of his attitude problem was -- stemmed from his theology.

PASTOR MACARTHUR: And from the fact that he was always irritated at his brother.

PASTOR JOHNSON: That, too. I think he had a wife that drove him --

PASTOR MACARTHUR: Yeah, he did. His wife, she was a challenge.

PASTOR HARDY: Some raise that with the whole concept of trust; that affirming this doctrine and growing in your understanding of it actually builds and increases your trust in God instead of trusting --

PASTOR MACARTHUR: I think there's even something greater. The greatest thing that a believer can do above and beyond everything is worship. That is the highest responsibility. The sovereignty of God is the single most glorious reality about God. Even His grace would lose its luster if He weren't really in control of it. His mercy would be diminished. It is His sovereignty that overarches everything. And, you know, when I worship the Lord just as a way of life, it doesn't matter what happens. It doesn't matter if I'm well or sick; it doesn't matter if I live or die; it doesn't matter if things go well or don't go well. It just never interrupts my confidence in the sovereignty of God. So, you know, I think that's the key to my -- to just living life on the same high level of joy, come whatever comes, because you know that this is all fitting into His perfect plan. I remember -- this is a good illustration. I remember a few years ago we had some people come here from another church. And, of course,

that's not uncommon. But they came from a church where their families were in leadership in the church, pastoral leadership. And so coming here was a big thing. And they came from a charismatic church. And they came here, if I understand the story right, they came here one time when I preached on the sovereignty of God. And they never went back. And what they said to me was we've lived our whole life under the sovereignty of Satan. This is absolutely transforming. Satan makes you sick; Satan messes with your babies; check the kids at night, 3 o'clock in the morning Satan might kill your baby with SIDS, sudden infant death syndrome; pray Satan out of your bedroom, bathroom, dining room, Satan's liable to do -- I mean, you know, Satan made the planes crash into the Towers, Satan does -- everything's -- and poor God, you know, is -- (Pastor indicates by wringing His hands.) And this caused paroxysms of fear, heart palpitation, panic attacks; really unbelievable kind of things.

I mean who could possibly worship God in that kind of environment? Then you get the people together, and you whip them into some kind of emotional frenzy; call it worship. But down underneath it is a theology that literally makes it impossible to worship God, because God's not in charge. The opposite of that, of course, is to understand that everything works within the framework of God's purpose and will. And no matter what happens, you know, even the worst of things, are intended for your good and His ultimate glory.

PASTOR HARDY: One last question in that regard, and each of you can answer this if you desire. Do you struggle with assurance of your salvation? And, if not, why? Even as it relates to your understanding of the sovereignty of God.

PASTOR JOHNSON: Do you want to us each to answer that?

PASTOR HARDY: Sure.

PASTOR JOHNSON: I don't. I did for quite some time when I was first a believer, struggled with assurance, and I think that was by God's design and His purpose; to sort of drive me to see that the source of my assurance, the source of my security, the source of my salvation, the source of everything that I need to put my trust in, is not inside me. It's in Christ. And when I understood that, got out of a hyper-analytical mode, you know, then I began to put my trust in Him. And so I would say to a large degree, my confidence in the sovereignty of God is one of the reasons why I have assurance, because I've learned to look to Him not only as the author, but also the finisher of my faith. He gave me faith. He promises to keep me in the faith. And -- and so I'm confident in that.

PASTOR MACARTHUR: I think I could say when I was a very, very young Christian, I don't know that I really doubted it. I just sort of checked in to -- just in case, you know. And I'd say Lord, I think I'm saved. But if I'm not, would you please save me, because I really don't like this lingering doubt in my mind. You know, I think I probably did that as a teenager; just sort of making sure. And at that time I don't think I was really taught a good, sound theology. I was still under this -- the reign of decisionism

that was going on all around me. And I wanted to make sure that my decision was the real deal.

PASTOR HARDY: That you prayed the prayer correctly.

PASTOR MACARTHUR: Yeah. Or we'd go to camp, you know, and kids would cry and throw pine cones in the fire and, you know. And if you didn't go up there and do that, you might not have the real deal; you know, it might not be the real thing. I mean I wasn't trying to get in -- I wasn't even dealing with what was going on in my heart. I was trying to deal with what I did, or what I prayed or, you know, did I get through; rather than recognizing the work of God in my heart, which was driving me to, you know, even as a junior high kid, to read things that would expand my spiritual understanding, and that appetite was already growing. But I wasn't looking at that. I was in such an environment of the external that I was constantly checking to make sure the deal I did was okay. But, you know, you definitely grow out of that. And what grows you out of that is sound doctrine. And you understand the work of your heart, because you have a love for the Lord and a desire do what pleases Him and obey Him, and to run from sin. And you know that's God's work.

PASTOR HARDY: You know that did not come from yourself.

PASTOR MACARTHUR: Yes.

PASTOR HARDY: Dr. Mayhue, you shared just a little bit of your testimony. You came to Christ in a dramatic way as an adult. Did you ever --

DR. MAYHUE: I was a young adult. My wife and I were ready to get a divorce. And I walked into that church, and my life was as dark as dark could get. And when I walked out, it was as light as light could get. And I've never questioned my salvation for a second. Because I instantly had a hunger for the word of God, I would have been like a guy who hadn't had a drink of water in his whole life. And would never have found it, no matter how close I got to it, because I was blind. And then God showed me the water, and gave me the sight to go to it. So in my case, and I think it's because as an adult and there was such darkness, and then there was such light, and I had such a hunger for the word. And God gave me a new love for my wife, and her a new love for me that --

PASTOR MACARTHUR: How long were you a Christian when you went to seminary? Did you go right to seminary?

DR. MAYHUE: I got saved in April, and went to seminary a year later, August, so about 15 months.

PASTOR MACARTHUR: So you were a year-old Christian in seminary.

DR. MAYHUE: Yes.

PASTOR MACARTHUR: That must've been fun.

DR. MAYHUE: Yes. I studied the dictionary more than I did the Bible to figure out what they were talking about. I learned the Joseph story in Hebrew class, 'cause I didn't have any kind of a background. So I'm not sure my experience would be a fair standard for everybody. But I've never, ever questioned my salvation based on what the Bible teaches.

PASTOR HARDY: Last question is this: What resources might be helpful in strengthening someone's understanding of these tremendous doctrines; any particular books that come to mind, references that you might suggest to us tonight? The word of God, obviously.

PASTOR MACARTHUR: You know, there's a good little book; I think it's been a classic through the years, Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God by J. I. Packer. It's just -- what is it -- 75 pages, 80 pages, and it's a little paperback, Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God; very helpful, very concise, to the point; just something you can get your arms around relatively clearly. There are, of course, you know, endless other options. But that's a really good place to start.

PASTOR JOHNSON: I like R. C. Sproul's book Chosen by God. We already recommended John's book On the Love of God, which I think is very helpful with a lot of these questions and the difficult side of some of these questions.

PASTOR HARDY: Great. I want to thank each of you for participating in the discussion tonight. It's been thrilling to me to hear your answers. Thank you for being here and listening. And by your being here, stating that you will continue to be here every Wednesday night at this time to be part of our study. I do want to thank you for coming.

I want to ask our Pastor John to dismiss us in prayer with, of course, an invitation to you. If you have further questions, I'll be hanging around here at the front. If you have some things you'd like for us to pray about, don't hesitate to write us a little note on that. And seriously, I do invite you to come back and be with us on Wednesday nights. John.

PASTOR MACARTHUR: Father, thank you for Your word. We return there every day to find the truth about everything. And we know that divine truth matters more than anything else. And we thank you so much that you have allowed us to see things exactly the way they are, and you have given us reality on all matters that are important to us. We thank you for the wonderful time we've had tonight, considering the truth that's revealed in Your Scripture. We pray that You'll bless each who are here. May this be a time of encouragement and blessing and enrichment for us all. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

PASTOR HARDY: You're dismissed.

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