

Bible Questions and Answers, Part 45

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 70-17

Well this is your time tonight and I look forward to this, I hope you do. And there's a microphone over there and a microphone back there, and a microphone over here and we're just going to ask you if you have a pertinent question that you make it very brief. This is...this is the thing we ask for so that we can cover as much ground as possible, just kind of a to-the-point question and we'll be glad to answer it. You can just kind of come up whenever you're ready and stand right by the mike and we'll...we'll go from there. Okay?

Great. Yes, sir, Vince.

VINCE: I'd like to know your personal viewpoint about the state of Israel with regard to the Benjamin Netanyahu and how he fits in to God's biblical clock?

JOHN: Okay, my personal viewpoint on the state of Israel, of course, from a theological standpoint, Israel is still to receive the promises of God. Israel, according to Romans 11:25 to 27, will be saved in the end and they will receive the kingdom promised to them. The fact that they are in the land, that they still exist is within the purposes of God, as He has His people still in existence, still identified as a national entity in their land. And that positions them, I think, for the coming salvation. Insofar as whether Benjamin Netanyahu, or for that matter any other leader in Israel, fits into the prophetic scheme, I don't think there's anyway that you can identify any current political leader in Israel in terms of the actual fulfillment of any prophecy. And the reason I say that is because the Scripture doesn't identify any leader in Israel by specific identification in the end time except for the fact that the Antichrist makes a pact with Israel. There is no...there is no identification of any leader in Israel.

Now as to what Netanyahu means politically or socially to the country of Israel, obviously he's a conservative, obviously he takes a hard line, a more hard line traditional Jewish viewpoint as over against conciliation with the Arabs. I don't know how that plays in terms of the future animosities and hostilities between the Arabs and the Jews, but I do believe Netanyahu, notwithstanding, he may come, he may go, others may come and go before the Lord does His work with Israel. But in the end Scripture is very clear that the Lord will gather His people not only to the land but He'll gather them to Himself. He'll purge out the two-thirds of the rebels, the prophet says, and then He'll save the remnant and then the kingdom will come in which they will participate in the fulfillment of Messianic blessing.

VINCE: Is there not one...some kind of movement with...from Netanyahu about nationalizing Israel and...

JOHN: Well...

VINCE: And does that not fit into that?

JOHN: Well as I said, Israel is already a nation. So Netanyahu is not going to contribute to the nationalization of Israel. He will contribute to the firmness and the rigidity and the solidarity of Israel as a nation, as over against any kind of blending with the Arab world. So it may be that he makes a contribution to the sustaining of the purity of that nation, although that runs so deep that even if Netanyahu was not there would be highly unlikely that they would ever decide to amalgamate or mingle with other Arabic cultures. Okay?

VINCE: Thank you.

QUESTIONER: Yes, could you please explain biblically for whom Christ died and whether or not or whether all of them will be saved. In other words, just for whom Christ died and whether all of them that He died for will be saved?

JOHN: Yes, the answer is in terms of Scripture that Christ died for the world. The Scripture talks about the world. But I think the way you have to define that is to define it as humanity, human kind. The question is...whose sins within humanity did He actually atone for? Right? Whose sins did He actually pay the price for? Whose sins did He actually expiate? Whose punishment did He actually bear and thus eliminate them from ever being judged?

And the answer is only those who believe. So Christ actually paid the penalty, suffered the wrath of God, expiated sin, was a...was a perfect and satisfactory atonement for the sins of all who would ever believe. Some people want to say that He actually paid the penalty for the sins of all who ever lived. Well you have some problems with that. You have a number of passages in the New Testament that indicate He died for His own, He purchased His own, He...with His own blood He purchased the church. And those kind of statements, I think, take the humanity, or the world, and narrow it down more specifically to who it is referring to. So in the end if He died and paid the actual penalty for the sins of all people who ever lived, then hell would be double jeopardy. Then how could you send people to hell when their sins have been paid for? So you can't really have a complete expiation of the sins of everybody or you're going to end up as a universalist. So in reality Christ actually expiated the sins of those who believe.

Now in the end, of course, as you study the elective and unfolding purposes of the decree of God, it is clear that those who believe believe because they were chosen before the foundation of the world.

Their names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. And the Spirit of God came and regenerated them by the sovereign purposes of God. Okay?

QUESTIONER: Yes, I have a question that I've been thinking about this for a couple of years and I read that Jesus has faith. Now maybe I'm not understanding this but if He has...He's omniscient why would He need faith?

JOHN: That's a good question, by the way. And the way it's articulated in the New Testament is that Jesus trusted His Father. Now that's all bound up in the incarnation. Let me see if I can define that for you. When Jesus was incarnate, when He took on humanity, according to Philippians chapter 2 prior to that He was equal with God but He...but He thought being equal with God was not something He had to grasp, Philippians 2 said, not something He had to hold on to. But He was willing to give up that complete equality with God.

What did that mean? Did it mean that He ceased to be God? No. What it means is He ceased to freely and independently exercise some of His attributes and submitted Himself to the Father. In other words, you have a statement like this where Jesus says, "No man knows the day or the hour, no not even the Son of Man." And Jesus was talking about the time when He would come and establish His kingdom. And at that point in His incarnation by the willing restriction of His own omniscience He didn't even know when the Second Coming would occur. Now I think that would have been limited to His incarnation. I think once the incarnation ceased and He went back to the fullness, as John 17 says, back to being face to face with God, and return to the glory that He had with God before He came into the world, He would have again had full exercise of His attributes, full omniscience and knows full well when the Second Coming will occur, when He will come and establish His kingdom. But in the time of His incarnation and in the expression of that incarnation, He turned Himself literally into being a servant and restricted the independent exercise of His attributes and limited Himself only to that which the Father willed. Consequently in those self-imposed limitations He had to entrust Himself to God because He didn't at that time by being willing, He didn't know everything that could be known. Consequently He had to operate in a mode of trust. Prior to incarnation and since His glorification that's not necessary because He is in full communion with the full omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence and immutability of the trinity. Okay?

QUESTIONER: Thank you.

JOHN: Good question.

QUESTIONER: Okay, in Matthew 6 it talks about giving alms, or when you give alms, and in Matthew...and then further on down it says when you are praying, or when you pray...and then it says when you fast. It looks as though that fasting should be just as regular as praying and giving alms, and I was wondering how should we be applying fasting in today's day and age?

JOHN: Well I think fasting is a very important part of Christian experience. I...he's talking about verse 16 of Matthew 6, "Whenever you fast do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do." A couple of things to say about fasting. First of all, fasting is never commanded. Prayer is. Pray without ceasing, praying always with all prayer and supplication, watch and pray, repeatedly we are called to pray. We are commanded to pray. We are never commanded to fast. In fact, fasting is obviously identified with unique circumstances. And I...the best way to illustrate that is that when the disciples of Jesus were confronted by the Jewish leaders, the Jewish leaders said to Jesus, "Why don't Your disciples fast?"

Now it was typical of devout traditionalist Jews to fast twice a week. And you remember the publican in Luke 18 said, "I fast twice a week," so he was following not the biblical prescription but the traditional prescription that if you wanted to be spiritual you fasted twice a week, you deprived yourself of food twice a week. And to them that was emblematic of holiness. So He...so the Jews came to Jesus and they said, "Your disciples don't fast. Why?"

Well that's very interesting. Jesus' response was, "When the bridegroom is with you, you don't fast." In other words, this is not a time for fasting because this is a time for joy. And Jesus was telling us that fasting is a unique experience that's identified with times of grief and sorrow and pain and isolation, loneliness, fear, those kinds of times that would not exist while you were walking around in the presence of Jesus Christ. So the first thing to remember is that fasting, at least in the teaching of Jesus, was for those times of great concern and great sorrow, great anxiety, great prayer, all of that kind of issues in prayer and fasting is always associated with prayer. It's not isolated from prayer. It is a part and parcel of times of prayer. And so I think that the time to fast is, of course, those times when we are swept up in prayer to the degree that we are so somber, so serious, so engulfed that we have no desire to eat, no desire to satisfy any of the cravings of the flesh. And, in fact, in times like that it may be that the flesh doesn't have such cravings because one is so overwrought with prayerful concerns.

I think that's all that we can really say in the New Testament about fasting. That there are times when it wouldn't be appropriate to fast because you're enjoying the fullness of the presence of God and all of His blessing. There are times when it would be appropriate to fast and that would be associated with times of importunity which means time of relentless prayer and concern about those matters that are on our hearts.

I can give you some personal experiences from my own life when great crises come into my own life, fasting is a somewhat normal response to those kinds of exigencies. I can think back to the...to a...the longest time of fasting that I ever experienced in my life was a nine- or ten-day fast in which I ate nothing. That was a time when I was in great concern and prayer over the fact that my son Mark had been diagnosed as having brain tumor which could be fatal. And immediately, of course, he was in his last year of college at that time, I think it was his last year, and, of course, it was a tremendous

amount of concern over that. And there was just a very...sort of a very immediate response to fast and pray on behalf of that kind of serious situation and come before the Lord and God was so...so tremendously gracious during that time. I remember when the doctor told me, the neurosurgeon at Cedar Sinai, that it could be fatal, it was just immediate that I wanted to come into the presence of the Lord and beseech Him. First of all, naturally, you pray for the well being of your son, you ask the Lord...are You sure You've got the right kid, this is a good one, you know, he can...You could use him, you know, down the road. And I prayed and fasted and, of course, Patricia was aware and Mark was not aware of the seriousness of his tumor situation. But during that time I can honestly say I spent nine days taking him back and forth to the clinic while they were doing non-invasive techniques to determine what this tumor was before they drilled a hole in his skull and went in and actually got inside because the implications were so severe because it was near the optic nerve and the pituitary gland, and things like that. They didn't want to do any invasive things, and so those were times of intense prayer.

And you could see a flow going from...Lord, you know, spare his life...and so forth and so on, to a sort of a middle ground in a few days where you're saying...Lord, whatever Your will is, whatever Your will. And by the time I got to the end of it I was saying, "You know, this world isn't a fit place for anybody, he belongs to You, take him out." You know, you go through the whole process. And, you know, I conducted his funeral about a hundred times, you know, just going through the process of yielding up to the Lord this young man.

And I remember being up in my office on a Wednesday night, it was the ninth day, the next day the doctor was going to tell me the results of all the tests and they were done at the Frank Norris Clinic over at the USC Medical Center by the finest cancer specialists around and pediatric tumor specialists and all of that. And I was waiting for the next morning. For the first time I was actually hungry. It was the first time I actually felt any hunger pangs. And I actually got hungry sitting up there, it was on a Wednesday night, it was between the end of the kind of the day and the office is closed and Wednesday night services were going to start in an hour or so. And I was up there and everything was locked up and I was just praying and thanking the Lord for the perfect peace, that if He was going to take him to heaven, wonderful, glorious for him and we would rejoice in that.

And there was a knock on my door and I don't even know how anybody got in there because there are four sets of double doors you have to go through and they were all locked. And a lady was knocking on my door and I was so surprised because everything else was closed in the office and I went to the door and opened the door and there was a lady standing there who had been in the church for many years but had never been in my office ever. And I greeted her and said, "Hi, how are you?" And she said, "Well," she said, "Pastor I saw your light on up here as I was going by and I thought you might be hungry and I brought you a sandwich."

And I think I said something like, "Haba...haba...haba...haba." I don't think it was any more coherent than that. It might have been less coherent than that actually. And that woman had never given me a cookie. That woman had never done anything. She had never been in the office. I don't...I didn't even know she knew where my office was, but somehow the Lord had impressed upon her heart to make me a bologna sandwich. And I...I took that sandwich in a little bag and I went back to my desk and I said, "So, Lord, You're that involved in my prayer life that when the fast is over You deliver the sandwich." I mean, that was a pretty profound moment for somebody who is not every mystical. And I just rejoice that God had concluded the fast in a most appropriate and gracious way. I mean, I just couldn't bring myself to going down to In and Out, or something, it sort of seemed too carnal. It needed to be something more (laughter).

So I only say that, give you that little recitation to say that there are great times of fasting that come along with great times of prayer. And the next morning the doctor called me and he said, "We're happy to tell you this is a benign epidermoid, it's a piece of misplaced skin tissue, it is not any problem at all, it is not even anything to worry about. We're just rejoicing down here. We like really like your son and we're so happy for him and we just wanted to let you know that all of the news is good. And we don't think it's a problem and never will be a problem."

I was so thrilled, I went to the college where Mark was and I told him. And then I told him the whole story. And he hadn't known all the behind-the-scene details about the potential fatality that they had told me about. He said to me, "You know, why do you think the Lord put me through that?" And I said, "Put YOU through that. You didn't know what I knew. The question is, why did the Lord put me through that?" And, of course, the answer to that is in order that the Lord might accomplish His purposes in our hearts and draw us to Himself. So God put Himself on display and was gracious in that regard.

Three years ago you know Patricia had a car accident, broke her neck, gave her less than five percent chance to live. That was another time when prayer just kind of takes over your life. You just...you just go into instant communion, unrelenting communion with God and food has no place as other kinds of indulgences and things that entertain us don't.

So I think fasting needs to be associated with times of prayer. And I say that carefully because I think some people think that if you just arbitrarily don't eat that there's some spiritual virtue in that. The fact of the matter is we ought to fast more because we ought to be more concerned to pray more strongly about more things, right? So the real issue, I think, is in the prayer area. Okay? Thank you for that question.

QUESTIONER: My question, I have been thinking lately again to be reminded about an aspect of salvation for children and the whole concept of an age of accountability and where the scriptural basis is of that...??? to die young

JOHN: Well sure. I think the best way to answer that, John, is to say this, there is no age of accountability identified in Scripture as such. There is nothing in the Bible that says, "Here is the age and, you know, from here on you're responsible." And I think the reason for that is because children mature at different paces. That would be true from culture to culture and from age to age in history. So the Lord in His wisdom didn't identify a specific moment.

God knows when that soul is accountable. God knows when real rejection has taken place, when the love of sin exists in the heart, when enmity with God is conscious and willful. God alone knows when that takes place. Also, it is important to say this, there is no indication anywhere in Scripture of the salvation of a child. There is no illustration of it. There is no...and Jesus had an encounter with a child and led him to faith. He encountered a lot of people, preached to a lot of crowds and a lot of people believed, but there's never any indication about a child believing.

So consequently we have to assume then that a saving commitment to Jesus Christ comes only after a child has reached the conscious reality of rejection, and a conscious awareness of iniquity. As to when that is, as I say, it varies from child to child. The Jews, as you well remember, had identified about the age of twelve, and that's, you remember, when Jesus was taken by His parents to Jerusalem for the Passover and the feast and there was in the temple questioning the doctors. And I think you have a good illustration there. If there's anything...if Scripture says anything it sets that one...one illustration and Jesus was asking the kind of questions that were actually profound questions to the doctors. We can assume then that that was the age at which those kinds of questions begin to be personal.

So I've always felt that somewhere around that period of time, the transition from childhood to adulthood, takes place. It's probably not totally disassociated from puberty where there is a consciousness of one's own impulses, feelings, drives, desires and therefore sinful attitudes and passions and whatever else starts to emerge.

Now as to how you deal with that, and I was just talking to a parent about that the other day, I believe it is absolutely essential all the way along with a child that every time they desire to make a commitment to Jesus Christ at whatever age they're at, you encourage them to do that because you don't know, we can't know when that is a saving commitment. I mean, if I go into a class over here of the five- or six-year-olds or seven- or eight-year-olds, tell them the story of Jesus and ask how many want to put...want to ask Jesus into their heart, they'll all say we do because the story of Jesus is compelling, because that's what you want from them and if they love you and you're their mom and dad, obviously that's what's going to happen. So when a child, say at the age of six or seven, or whatever it might be, says I want to invite Christ into my life, you need to encourage them to do that. Every one of those I see as a step toward God. At what point that becomes saving faith, God knows, I don't know. But I also believe that up until that...that point of real saving faith God in His mercy would

save that child should that child die.

I've been doing some study on that very issue because when I was at a conference recently and that question was asked of a panel of various astute theologians, no one gave an adequate answer. And I thought how can we have theologians who don't know the answer to that question, what about the children before the age of accountability when they die do they go to heaven? And I think the answer is yes and I think it's a strong yes based upon the confidence of David who said when his little baby died, "He cannot come to me but I shall go to him." And David knew where he was going. David knew he was going to heaven, he knew that. There wasn't any question in his mind about that. And when he said, "I shall go to him," in those words was the anticipation and the hope and the joy of reunion. Some people have said, "Well all he meant was I'm going to be buried next to him." That wouldn't be any reason to say, "He can't come to me but oh I'm so glad I'm going to be buried next to him." There would be no joy in that. That wouldn't satisfy anything. So I think at that point he was expressing the confidence that he was going to heaven, he knew that, and that's exactly where he would find his son who had died before the age of accountability.

Another interesting thing, and this occurs numerous times in the Old Testament, is the children who die are referred to, or children are referred to and those who die as well, as innocent. And the Hebrew word that is used for "innocent" is used in numerous times in the Old Testament to refer to not being guilty, literally to being taken to court and found not guilty. In fact, you remember that it refers to the babies that were passed through the fire to Moloch as the innocents. So I believe that God prior to the age of accountability treats them as innocents. It doesn't mean they're not fallen, it doesn't mean they're not sinful, it does mean that God mercifully treats them as innocent in spite of that and He has to exercise grace to do that, just as He exercises grace to save those who believe. But that age of accountability is not clearly identified. I just think it's up to parents...every time a child wants to respond and open the heart to Christ, you need to encourage that all the way along until they come to that point where it's genuine and the Lord knows that and you may not know that. Okay?

QUESTIONER: Mr. MacArthur, I guess as I'm standing I already answered my question, but I'm going to try again. About two weeks ago, I think, you taught that the purpose of the church was to reach the unsaved.

JOHN: Right.

QUESTIONER: My recollection was since I've been in the church, the purpose of the church, you're going teaching, that is the equipping of the saints. I'm going to pretend I'm in a room alone with you now, I've been here for about fifteen years and I did not know how to reach the unsaved. I did not know how to really give a reason for the hope that was within me and I was thinking, I know that our church is very involved being missions and trying to reach the lost, but I always thought our church was to be equipping ourselves. And in all these times that I've been here I've been involved in just

about every ministry that is available here and it's only in the past year and a half that I've been involved in D.E. that now I can give an answer for the hope that is within me. Now if that is our main purpose, reaching the lost, why isn't that we don't have a more emphasis on evangelism that way?

JOHN: That's an excellent question and I'm glad you asked it. Let me answer it this way. The edification of the church, the building up of the saints is so they can be more effective in evangelism. The edification of the saints is not the end, it's the means to the end.

Now, evangelism doesn't occur in a vacuum. Effective evangelism occurs out of a transformed life. I mean, it's back to that same old idea that if I'm going to make the transforming power of Jesus Christ convincing, I've got to demonstrate how He transformed my life, right? So the most effective evangelistic weapon apart from just simply speaking the gospel, the most effective evangelistic tool that we have is a transformed life. That is our testimony. So the purpose of the church then is to edify the believer to build him up toward Christ likeness so that he manifests the product that he's going to promote. Nothing is more ineffective in Christian evangelism than somebody proclaiming the transforming gospel of Jesus Christ and living as if Christ couldn't transform anybody, or hadn't transformed him.

So, we are built up in the faith so that our testimony is strong and that there's credibility in the gospel that we preach that Jesus Christ indeed can change a life. Now, let me tell you something else, sometimes we overestimate what is necessary in the specifics of the proclamation and sometimes we think, "Well I've never known how to share to the gospel until I finally learned this little formula, this little D.E. formula or some other formula," when the fact of the matter is that's not true. First of all, your transformed life, your mature Christian walk, the evidence of God at work in your life, your spiritual attitudes, your love for people, your genuine devotion to Jesus Christ into the life of the church lays a tremendous groundwork with the people that know you. And the simplest word such as "Jesus Christ died for me and He changed my life and He can change your life," is a proclamation of the gospel. It's a starting proclamation.

I think it's one of the sad realities in the church that everybody doesn't know how to present the gospel clearly and fully, but it's also one of the sad realities of the church that we sometimes underestimate the capability that we do have. It may take us a little longer to get to the point but if you're in Christ and you know Christ then you know how you came to know Christ. You may not be able to say it as well as if you've been refined and trained to say it, but keep in mind that's really kind of the icing on the top. Jesus never sat His disciples down and said, "Here is a little tract, I want you to memorize it." And the apostle Paul never anywhere in the New Testament in any of his thirteen epistles said, "Here is the formula that I want you guys to use. Here are the five steps to being a Christian." He doesn't do that either. Rather the whole of the New Testament unfolds the sweeping reality of redemption through Jesus Christ. And we who are saved know why we're saved. and you don't want to underestimate your ability to articulate that. You may not have it as refined as you would

like, but listen carefully, it is not necessarily the refinement or the formula that God uses, it is the truth that He uses. Somebody may go out and give a very simple and maybe a not chronologically organized presentation of the gospel, but it hits the good soil, the person's converted. You can go out and have the slickest memorized presentation of the gospel and if God isn't working in the heart of that individual it's falling on hard ground. So don't underestimate that.

Well I know that's a...that's sort of a long answer but first of all, we must build up the saints to make our message credible. "Let your light so shine before men that they may...what?...see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven." And that was Paul was doing. The reason we preach all the time edification is because we preach the New Testament and that's what it is. But the goal of that edification is to build up the saints to proclaim the truth. I wish more people would get involved in D.E. because I think it's so helpful to have a concise way to articulate the gospel. But don't underestimate your ability to do that and realize that the credibility of your life lays the platform on which individual testimony becomes believable. Okay?

QUESTIONER: Thank you.

JOHN: Good question. Who's next? Well I think you already asked a question, didn't you?

QUESTIONER: He did.

JOHN: Oh, he did. Okay, you're next. Good.

QUESTIONER: Today there are many groups that present the gospel very well but it seems to me that what they ask to the hearer to do once they have heard the gospel gets very cloudy. Many times when people are told who have said, "I believe the gospel," they're told to do something else to receive Christ, as if it is a two-step process where you believe the facts and then you receive Christ and receiving Christ is often explained as a personal invitation to have Christ indwell you. John 1:12 they'll go to and Revelation 3:20. I don't see John explaining receiving Christ in his gospel as someone personally inviting Christ to indwell them. Could you talk about the proper place for the sinner's prayer? Perhaps...I guess I understand it of a demonstration of faith but not equal to faith and could you explain the dangers and the misleading use of the sinner's prayer and receiving Christ and perhaps touching on Revelation 3:20 as well?

JOHN: Uh huh.

JOHN: Let me start with Revelation 3:20. In the technical sense Revelation 3:20, "Behold I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear My voice and open, I will come into him and sup with him and he with Me." The context of Revelation 3:20 is that Jesus is knocking on the door of the church. It's not really...it's not really a specific illustration of how to evangelize somebody. Jesus is speaking to the

church. He is concerned about the character or, if you will, the lack of character of this church.

Just to put the context together for you so you'll remember, I'm sure, the church at Laodicea, lukewarm, I'll spit you out of My mouth, you say you're rich and you have wealth and don't need anything and you're wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked and all of that. And then He says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." I want to get in the church...is what He's saying. I want you to receive Me as Lord of the church. He wants to come into the church and work there. It's not really the human heart that is the issue there. And that...although I think you can extrapolate and say the Lord wants entrance into the life of a sinner, He wants to come in and cleanse that sinner, He wants to come in and wash that sinner. And that does take you to John 1:12.

And John 1:12 is a very clear verse, it says, "As many as received Him to them He gave the right to become the children of God." What does it mean to receive Christ?

Well, when you talk about saving faith you're basically talking about three things. There are three components. First is to comprehend the facts, the truth of the gospel. Second is to believe that they are true. And third is to engage yourself in appropriating them for your life. So it would be to say I understand the gospel, I understand Jesus died, I understand He rose again. I understand that what I said this morning, He is a member of the trinity who came into the world through the virgin birth, lived a sinless life, died a substitutionary death, rose from the dead and the Father approved of His work so perfectly He raised Him, gave Him a name, Lord, seated Him at His right hand from which He now reigns over His church interceding for them and will return and establish His kingdom. I believe that, that's true.

You say, "I understand that. I comprehend that." Secondly you say, "I believe that, I believe that is fact, that is spiritual reality." Third, "I place my life and my eternity on the reality of those facts by acknowledging Jesus Christ as my Savior and Lord."

I think there is an element of reception at that point. It's a receiving of the truth as the truth, it is believing it, and it is appropriating it in a personal way. I don't think it's inappropriate to say, "I want Christ, I want You to come and take command of my life. I want You to be my Savior. I want You to forgive my sin. I acknowledge You. I confess You as my Lord. I want You to save me. I want You to come indwell me." Because you have the promise of Acts 2:38 that when someone hears the gospel and when they repent, it says you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, or the Spirit of Christ. So you could pray and say, "Lord, I want You to save me. I confess You as my Lord. I believe in the gospel. I believe You are the Christ who died for me. I acknowledge that. I want You to save me. I want You to be the Lord of my life and I want the Spirit of God to take up residence in my life."

But all of that must be cast in a very important perspective. And this is, I think, maybe the best answer I can give to your question as to how you approach someone. In the end salvation is a work of God, is

it not? And I think the best illustration in the New Testament of a sinner coming and praying the sinner's prayer is the publican, again in Luke 18, who said, "God be...what?...merciful to me a sinner." And I think we always have to understand that salvation is God's prerogative. It is not automatically mine because I articulate a formula with my lips. It is mine because God graciously grants it to me. And in the end I must ask for that gift to be given.

What I do when I'm talking to someone about Christ and when I want to lead them to not only understanding the truth but believing the truth is the truth and then making a personal commitment to it, to receiving Christ, to appropriating it, to confessing Him as Lord is at that point to say to them, "I encourage you if you believe the gospel and you believe it is the truth and you're ready to put your life in the hands of the Savior, that you ask Him now to save you. Rather than telling Him you're qualified. That you ask Him to save you."

Pray...that to me is the sinner's prayer. I remember when I was called down to this little Riverside Hospital down south of here one night and it was late and I was going home and it was like seven o'clock and I thought, "Well I better go right away." And I went into this hospital room and there was a guy in the bed and I could see immediately he was dying of AIDS. And, of course, there were other homosexuals in the room. In fact there was a homosexual aide from the Hollywood AIDS Center, whatever it is, and there was a homosexual male nurse there and then there was one of this guy's consorts or lovers there. And I walked in the room and walked over to the bed and introduced myself to David Chastain(?) who had called and left his name and said, "I'm dying, please, somebody told me you could help me prepare for death." And so I went.

I walked in the room and the other three were gone very fast. And I said, "David, I want to know why you called me."

He said, "Because I'm dying and I'm going to go to hell." He said, "I know it because I know the gospel." He said, "I was raised in a Christian family. I went two years to a Bible college. But for the last twenty years I've lived as a homosexual." And he said, "Every minute of it I've known it's wrong, I've known it's sin." And he said, "I've known that I dishonor God. I don't deserve to be saved. I have defied God. I have denied the gospel my parents taught me and now I'm on the brink of death and I want God to save me. But I need some help."

So I took his hand and I said, "I want you to tell me what you understand about Christ." And he articulated the gospel clearly. And I said, "Do you believe that? Do you believe that Jesus Christ actually died on the cross as a sacrifice for sin to satisfy the justice of God on behalf of sinners who believe? Do you believe that He rose from the dead literally and that God therefore affirmed the perfect sacrifice by the resurrection? Do you believe that?"

He said, "I believe that."

I said, "Then you know the truth, you've heard it and you believe it. Only one thing remains and that is to cast yourself on the mercy of God. God is not bound to save you. You have defined Him. But Jesus said this, 'Whoever comes to Me I will in no wise...what?...cast out.'" I reminded him of that and I said, "All I can tell you to do is to plead with God to save you and I'll plead with you."

And so he launched into this prayer, and it was an amazing prayer. And he went through the recitation of his wickedness and his evil, not specifically but generally, and how he had defied God and ignored the gospel of his youth and how he had defied his parents and how he remembered how his mother had prayed for him so long and here he was having come to the end of this horrible, wicked life style and now he was crying out to God to save him and he knew he wasn't worthy and he just prayed with tears and passion and all the time he was just wringing my hand as I stood by the bed. Then I prayed and I just said, "God, be merciful to him a sinner. He comes, you know his heart, it must be that the Father is drawing him, at least it seems such, if indeed this is the work of the Father to draw this penitent than save him." And that's what I prayed. And probably the prayers of both of us took twenty minutes.

At the end of that time we said "amen" and his rather rigid body sort of relaxed after the prayer and he just looked off at the wall. And I said, "What are you looking at, David?"

He said, "I'm looking at the calendar."

I said, "Why?"

He said, "Because I never want to forget the day of my new beginning." That's a quote. He said, "I really believe the Lord has forgiven me."

He had five days to live as it turned out. He spent those five days witnessing to everybody around him. And I spent a portion of those five days hauling material down to him which was like a cram course for heaven, you know. I kept saying, "You know, you're going to get all of this in a few days, you know, what's the hurry?"

He said, "I just want to know, I just want to know." He just had a hungry, hungry heart for the truth.

That's how I approach that rather than saying to somebody, "Here's a little prayer on this page, pray it and you're in." I really...it's not like, "Okay, I prayed the prayer, I'm qualified." It's like, "God, be merciful to me a sinner," isn't it? And I think that's the way you approach it. Okay?

QUESTIONER: I'm thinking of a minister here in the United States that when he preaches a gospel message, especially on crucifixion with Christ, he does an excellent job. You sit there and you can

say "amen" to everything he has to say on that subject and preaches on a lot of other doctrines that are wonderful to hear the man preach on. Yet the man is an antinomianist. Also this week, or last week I received a tape from Grace To You about the ecumenical ??? tape that you were in an interview with. On that tape you...you made the statement that anybody that says that they can get to heaven other than any other way that the Bible says or through Jesus Christ really doesn't understand the gospel.

JOHN: Right.

QUESTIONER: Then the subject of ECT came in and you made another statement and you said, "Of those men that were arguing from ETC's side," you said, "these men understand the gospel but what they are really not willing to commit to is the fact that Jesus Christ is the only to get to God, or heaven." My question to you is these men who in the past we have considered great theologians, I know you, as I, wring our hands and say, "What's going on here?" But I would like you to give me your thoughts on what is the bottom line when it comes to some of these men, other than the fact that we are...the fellowship is going to have to be broken there, but as far as the pronouncements of Scripture against these men, and...

JOHN: This is a big question and I'm not sure...I'm not sure I can answer every aspect of it concisely. But let me say it this way.

When I was talking...some of you know what we're talking about, these guys that are coming along saying, "We...we're Christians, we're evangelicals, but we also think that all the Catholics are saved and the Greek Orthodox are saved, and then in this book, The Ecumenical Jihad, you know, we may...we all get to heaven we may find the Muslims, the Buddhists, the Confucianists, the atheists who sought for truth and the Jews, and they're all going to be there. And what they didn't know about Jesus down here got sorted out when they got there."

And the question is, and it's a very legitimate question and it's a question I battle in my own mind...the question is, are these people Christians who advocate this kind of thing? I mean, if somebody says a Muslim might get to heaven, does that mean they're not a Christian? That's the real question. If somebody says if...that a Catholic might get to heaven, does that mean they're not a Christian? And at this particular point I can't go so far as to say that.

And the point that I was trying to make on the tape is this, I know these men and I know they believe the gospel and they understand the gospel and they can articulate the gospel. What I don't understand is they believe the gospel, they believe the gospel is the means of salvation. They understand justification by grace through faith alone. They can articulate it better than I can. They've written books on it. I don't understand...and I know that if you believe that you're saved, and they believe that. What I don't understand is how they can have this other category of people and say

about them, "Well, I know they don't believe that but they might make it anyway." And that's really your question.

QUESTIONER: Well isn't that another gospel?

JOHN: Well, there is no other gospel and they wouldn't preach...they wouldn't say the Muslim way is the gospel or the...or any other thing is the gospel. It's sort of like those people who say, "I believe the gospel, I'm saved, I've heard the gospel, I believe it, I commit my life to Christ by grace through faith," but I've heard people say this through the years, "but those people over there in Africa who never heard anything, surely God has some way to deal with them differently because they've never heard about Jesus Christ." It's sort of like that kind of mentality.

And I guess the ultimate question is...can a person understand the gospel, be saved and have bad theology elsewhere? Answer, yes, unfortunately that's true. It's very...when I ask these men, and I asked them personally, and you know the doctrine of justification by grace through faith alone, do you believe that? Yes we believe that, absolutely. Do you believe that that is God's means of salvation and that alone is God's means of salvation? Well yes we believe that. Well then how can you make this other statement? What is the...how can you dichotomize your thinking and create this other possibility over here? It just seems to me like it's a kind of schizophrenia and I don't want to deny them the salvation that they personally affirm, but at the same time it's incomprehensible to me that if you say salvation is by grace through faith alone, you can turn right around and say something else to some other group.

I don't know whether they feel some emotional pressure to do this that causes them to compromise the gospel on that front which in their heart they believe. Maybe it's not a lot different than somebody who believes the gospel is the gospel but--but maybe in a conversation with somebody they don't want to offend mitigates the real gospel a little bit so as not to offend their friend. Maybe it's just that gone mad, I'm not sure what it is.

But again, that's all in God's...God has to sort all that out and God knows the heart and I don't know the heart. I just know we need to be faithful to the gospel as it's revealed in Scripture. But it's very disappointing, it's extremely disappointing to all of us. And I got a letter from one of those men who said all those kinds of things about jihad and he said, "MacArthur has got the wrong end of the stick." Well I don't know what that means but it's the only end I got handed because if you read that thing, if there was another end I would have taken it. But that stick had one end and that's the end they gave me...so I don't know what that means. Anyway, thank you.

We have time maybe for just a couple more questions so you all...I'm sorry we don't get to everybody but maybe we'll just go right across and you guys can negotiate as to who gets to ask their question of the remaining ones. Kind of talk to each other. All right, over here.

QUESTIONER: In Romans 8, excuse me, Romans 13 and in 1 Peter, I believe it's 2, we're commanded to obey the government and to submit ourselves to the authority of the government.

JOHN: Right.

QUESTIONER: Where does that become legalistic? A classic example is the speed limit, you know. (Laughter) I mean, as a Christian...as a Christian is it...I mean, to follow the law...

JOHN: Sure.

QUESTIONER: You know, where does that become legalistic?

JOHN: Well, the bottom line is if you go the speed limit you don't have to ask the question, right?

QUESTIONER: Right. (laughter)

JOHN: But...

QUESTIONER: What I'm asking is where would you call somebody else who doesn't obey the speed limit, or another form of the law...I mean..?

JOHN: Yeah, well look...

QUESTIONER: Is that legalistic or...?

JOHN: Speed limit...speed limit is not a moral issue in and of itself, okay. So we're sort of outside the law of God. All we're in is the general sense that we have to obey the law of the land. Now, I'm not here to...I'm not going to stand here and tell you some standard that you need to uphold. The bottom line is if you keep the speed limit you shouldn't have a problem. But we all know if you keep the speed limit on the freeways in California you could die for doing that. (Laughter) You could even get shot by some truck that wants to get around you, as we all know. I have...so I think...I think there's a rational...I think there's a rational approach to this that says if I...if I am observant of the general flow of things and if I'm in the general flow and driving carefully and safely, I think the police are sensible enough to realize that there is a safe way to drive and to accommodate what's around you without putting people in danger or yourself in danger by foolishness. I don't want to...I don't want to say what the police will or will not do but it's been generally my experience in talking to them that they're more concerned about...they're more concerned about people who are out of synch with the normal flow. They become a danger. So I think it's important for you...I mean, if you want to drive 55 or 65 or whatever, just get over there in the right and poke along. The problem is you're going to eat the fumes of the semis, you know, in front of you, so you can find your equilibrium. But I think if you're in the

general flow of the traffic and you're driving in a safe way, they're very understanding about that.

QUESTIONER: That was just an example, I mean, generally though where does that become legalistic?

JOHN: Well I think for...I think you...it's never legalistic, it's the right thing to do to obey the law. But within the law there are some...there are some rational latitude that the law understands. There are...there are times, for example, you're not allowed legally to inflict harm on somebody else, but the law understands if you feel you're in jeopardy and you engage in some physical acts toward somebody because you feel threatened that there's a certain reasonableness to that. Maybe that that comes into play. But I think in general as Christians we just keep the law, we just do what the law says...when it comes to the IRS, when it comes to the how we conduct ourselves in the community, when it comes to any of the standards that our government puts upon us...we simply respond to that.

Frankly, I don't think we live in a legalistic society at all because the laws that our country makes are primarily laws that have to do with criminal behavior. I mean, our country doesn't make laws like you have to go to bed at 8 o'clock, you know, you can't walk down the street and go around the block, or you know, you can't...you can't...people in this town can't go to that town. We don't have that kind of confinement that you might have in a dictatorship or in a communist kind of totalitarian state. We enjoy immense freedom, if anything our government could crack down a little bit and tighten up on some things. And in some cities they do that when people get out of hand. But most of the laws that our country makes have to do with violations of some...of something that is in some way I think even reflective of the laws of God...has to do with criminal kind of behavior. And certainly we want to fall into obedience to that.

You know, if you're talking about like going to school because they tell you you need to be there every day at 9:30 and go home and 3, and five days a week, should you do that? I think again that is responding to those that are in authority over that and you need to do that, you need to comply with that again I think for the sake of Christian testimony. But I think the standard is you just keep the law basically and with reasonable latitude, I think people would understand that. Okay.

All right, two more questions, right here.

QUESTIONER: I'll try to keep it short I know the fellow earlier asked a question about the atonement...

JOHN: Sure.

QUESTIONER: And I...the first thing, just a real quick question, are we understanding, I just want to make sure for the benefit of myself and also some of the seminary students who seem to be very

confused, like are you holding to limited atonement? Are you saying clearly that Jesus Christ did not suffer substitutionary on the cross for the sins of the whole world?

JOHN: Yes.

QUESTIONER: Yeah, okay, I just wanted to ask that because among the...because among the seminary...among the seminary students there seems to be a lot of and has been for quite a while a lot of question about that.

JOHN: Well look, that's the nature of seminary cause you're all wrangling over those kinds of issues. But don't go out of here and say I advocate limited atonement, because I don't. And I'll tell you why...(laughter)...I'll tell you why because I don't like that term because it's not biblical. It is obvious when something is not explicitly stated in Scripture and when you're dealing with the inscrutable nature of God and the mysteries of redemption and the mysteries of the unfolding divine purpose and the mind of God, there will always be grappling with these issues. Whatever it is that you believe about the inherent nature of the atonement, okay, whatever it is you believe about the limits of the atonement, whether they're there or not there, whatever it is that you believe about the actual efficaciousness of the death of Christ and to whom it is applied, whatever nuances of that discussion you particularly believe, in the end the atonement will only have value to those who believe...whatever it is that you believe.

My point is, arguing about that really is pointless in a sense. I mean, I understand the debate and I certainly engage in it heartily. But in the end we make our best shot. It's like trying to define the trinity, it's like trying to unscrew the unscrutable, it's like trying to figure out things that are beyond our capacity whether you're talking about the security of the believer measured against the perseverance of the saints, or whether you're talking about volition and divine election, whether you're talking about any of those kinds of issues, you always are going to be in the dilemma. And that's why theological debates like this have gone on always.

In the end, however, we don't need to separate, we don't need to become divisive, we don't need to sort of break fellowship over what exactly is the inherent innate character of the atonement because in the end the death of Jesus Christ is only efficacious for those who believe. And in the end whatever was going on on the cross, it has no application to those who don't believe, right? So whatever you want to say about its inherent limits or non-limits, in the end you come to the same place. It's like the argument about predestination. People always say, "Well, I just can't handle that God predestined. I can't handle that He elected. I just think He knew what was going to happen." Okay, let's take that view. God just knew what was going to happen. When did He know it? Well He always knew it. Well then, if He always knew it why did He create the people to whom it would happen if He didn't want it to happen? He had to have...if even if He knew it was going to happen and nothing more and went ahead and created the people He knew it was going to happen to, He acted sovereignly in doing that,

did He not? You can't escape these issues.

I'm certainly not going to say all truth resides with me. I believe in a gospel offer that is universal. I understand the exegesis of 1 John 2:2 that He's the propitiation for our sins and not for ours only but for the sins of the whole world. I understand that. I understand John 3:16, "God so loved the world he gave His only begotten Son that whosoever..." I understand all of that. I understand the call to go to preach the gospel to every creature on the face of the earth which means you have to have an honorable legitimate call to salvation or you're illegitimate in that. I wrote a lot of this in the book on The Love of God, tried to cover a lot of these things. In the end these things are very difficult for us to grasp because they're things in the divine mind and we are not capable.

Suffice it to say, I've always been content to fellowship with those who would...who would take an unlimited view and those who would take a limited view because in the end as long as you believe that people who are putting their faith in Christ go to heaven and those who don't go to hell, you're orthodox. And that's the issue. But it's the nature of seminary, it's the nature of grappling day in and day out, hour in and hour out, as I do constantly in my life, with these kinds of issues and reading widely on these things to sort of pick and choose where you...where you feel the weight of evidence. And it's usually related to how much you respect the scholar of choice or the author of choice, and that's fine. That's all about establishing trust and confidence in those that God has given to us as teachers.

And the very fact that we're still discussing this issue is pretty good indication that it's not crystal clear so that we could all rally around it, such as we are able to rally around some things in Scripture for which there really is little discussion because they're so explicit. But anytime you're crawling into the mind of infinite God and trying to sort out those matters, you have to stand with a bit of humility and a sort of a soft dogmatism. And I'm happy to be softly dogmatic on this point, understanding as best I can what the Word of God has to say. And I have such a strong view of the atonement that I would have to believe that if Jesus on the cross actually paid the penalty for the sins of somebody, they wouldn't go to hell because that would be double jeopardy. So there is that issue theologically to deal with. And I...I know how those passages are dealt with as well. But I think in the end we want to maintain some humility. It seems like the younger you are, the harder you hold to these views. And as you grow in your understanding of Scripture you're more comfortable with allowing yourself to leave the real hard questions to the Lord. As I say, what matters in the end is who believes and who doesn't.

Okay, the last question, right over here.

QUESTIONER: Understanding that we don't have too much time left...

JOHN: No, like none...so do it quick.

QUESTIONER: Okay. Understanding that Christ was God and man and that He limited Himself, what was the role of the Holy Spirit in His life and ministry?

JOHN: Well that too is a very good question. Thank you. The Holy Spirit, just very briefly, functioned in a number of ways in the ministry of Christ and all that we know is what's revealed in Scripture. First of all, it was the Holy Spirit, you remember, who was the agency, the divine agency of the trinity that basically planted the seed for the incarnate Son of God in Mary. So the Holy Spirit was the agent of the birth of Jesus Christ. It is also clear that during the ministry of Jesus Christ He attributed His deeds and His works to the Holy Spirit so that in some way, and again this is...you're in to the trinity again and the inscrutability of the trinity...in some way Jesus in His incarnation limited the independence exercise of His attributes to the will of the Father and the power of the Spirit. That's why in Matthew chapter 12 when the Jews concluded that He was of Beelzebub the devil, you know, they had heard all of His teaching, they had seen His miracles and they...they watched everything He had done, and their conclusion was, "You are of the devil." And He called that blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. And the reason that was blasphemy of the Holy Spirit was because He had yielded Himself to the Father's will and to the Spirit's power.

You remember at His baptism the Spirit of God descended like a dove and came upon Him, and I think therein was the emblem of the empowering of Jesus for His ministry so that part of His self-emptying, part of His incarnation, part of His voluntary self-imposed restriction was giving Himself over to let the Spirit of God work through Him in way that's beyond our ability to understand, so that one denied that the work of Christ was the work of God, one was blaspheming the Holy Spirit who was doing that work through Him.

And then additionally when raised from the dead, the apostle Paul says He was raised by the Spirit. So the Spirit was involved in the incarnation, involved in the life and ministry of Christ and involved in His resurrection. Okay? Great.

Let's stand. Now, folks, you see, we gave you a little taste of all the stuff you can find in the study Bible and the...hopefully you'll find some of these kinds of answers that will be helpful for you. Well, it's been a great evening. Sorry to keep you long, but we didn't even get to all the questions we had. Thank you for being here tonight. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for this evening. I thank You for these precious friends and the questions on their hearts, especially for the young man who asked questions, the young lady, who are grappling with issues in their life as they try to come to an understanding of Your Word. Lord, we praise You and we thank You for Your goodness to us in giving us Your Word. And yet we are humbled before it. We don't proudly exalt ourselves as those who know all truth, we rather humbly bow before the

Scripture endeavoring the best we can to understand what You have said. And we do so with thankful hearts. And we pray, Lord, that Your Word may be more than known, it may be lived and applied for Your glory in Christ's name. Amen.

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