

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Bible Questions and Answers, Part 49

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 70-21

We have, as you know, planned for a little time of question and answer. This is kind of a family time, and it's good to do this just to come down from the preaching mode and share with you a little bit. We have three microphones, and I think we have three of our pastors who are going to be handy if they're not already there. They will be there to just kind of ask you what your question is and help you with it. And if it's one that I can't answer, they'll send you back to your seat, I think, or something like that. So if you have a question, particularly those who may have been with us a couple of weeks ago, and you were in line and didn't get your question answered. Please feel free to go to the front of the line. Other than you folks, we'll encourage anybody else who has a question you'd like to ask to just line up behind the microphones right now. And don't be shy about that. Just get right up there. That's great. And as we think of a question, and the line gets a little shorter, feel free to just get in line.

The intent of this is to help me to know kind of what's on your mind and your heart as well as to help you to have a good answer to those things that are concerning you. Okay? So I think we'll start over here on the right. Give me your name first so I know who I'm talking to.

David: Hi, John. My name's David.

John: Hi, David.

David: Which Jewish holidays, such as Purim, Passover, Hanukkah would be appropriate for a Jewish believer to still celebrate. And which, if any, would no longer be appropriate?

John: Well, essentially, from the vantage point of the New Testament, there are no Jewish holidays that are still a part of the Christian faith. There are certain holidays that don't have anything to do with the Old Testament. Hanukkah, the Jewish New Year, has nothing to do with the Old Testament. I think Purim has nothing to do with the Old Testament. The Feast of Lights is more of a traditional feast than an Old Testament biblical feast or festival.

But as far as the New Testament is concerned, all of the ceremonies were set aside. And we know that because Jesus indicated to us in His attitude with the scribes and the Pharisees a certain indifference to that. And, most particularly, Jesus made the transition from the Passover, which was the main celebration, to the Lord's Supper. It was at a Passover meal the night of His betrayal that Jesus took the bread, which had once been in reference to the Passover in Egypt, which was the

great historic indication of the power of God to deliver His people and became the basis of the Passover. It was to be a memorial, and God instituted it there in Egypt.

But Jesus took the elements, the bread and the cup, that were connected to the Passover and said, "From now on, this bread doesn't represent the unleavened bread of the Passover in Egypt; it represents my body. And this wine is no longer representative of deliverance in Egypt and the blood put on the door and the linel; it's representative of my blood shed for you." So Jesus Himself transitioned out of the Passover as such.

When you come into the book of Acts, in the Jerusalem Council, in the 15th chapter of Acts, the believers there were instructed, however, not to offend the Jewish people with regard to some of those remaining ceremonies. And in Romans 14 and 15, there's even some instruction about if people have certain, I suppose you could say, scruples. If they have certain convictions, and they're not free to violate those because they don't yet understand their freedom even as Christians. If they're still holding to, let's say, the Sabbath, or they're still holding to a certain dietary laws, the apostle Paul says, "Don't offend them. Don't force them into liberties which their conscience doesn't yet allow them to do. They need to be instructed, and they'll come to a point where they'll better understand the terms of the New Covenant, and they'll leave those things aside."

So the objective is Jesus ends the Old Testament ceremonial law, as such, and with the ceremonial law, go, essentially, all the feast and festivals that were a part of it. Then in the Book of Acts there is a gradual sort of disconnect with that, and we know that because as the church was being built under the leadership of, particularly, the Apostle Paul, those things were never instituted in the church. They were left to the past. When you get into the Epistles, it becomes very specific, and the texts that I would...well, one in the Book of Acts, Acts 10 where there is a vision that Peter has, and on this sheet that he sees, a sheet coming down from heaven, there's all kinds of animals, clean and unclean, you know, kosher and non-kosher, and Peter is told, "Rise, Peter, kill and eat." And he says, "I can't do that. I can't eat the unclean animals." And the Lord says to him, "Don't you call unclean what I have cleansed." So there is no more distinction between clean and unclean, and that's just an illustration of the break with the past.

When you come into the Epistles, and I would draw your attention to one particular Epistle, and that's Colossians, and the 2nd chapter of Colossians. The Apostle Paul is showing us how things have dramatically changed; he says this in verse 16, Colossians 2, "So let no one judge you in food," that is, in any dietary law, "Let no one judge you in drink. Let no one judge you regarding a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths." Now, no dietary regulations; no religious observances, and the festivals were essentially Pentecost, Passover, Feast of Tabernacles, all of those. "No new moon," and that was the point at which the monthly sacrifice was made...on the first day of each month...the new moon. "No Sabbaths," that's the weekly celebrations. So, annual celebrations, monthly celebrations, weekly celebrations...he says, "Don't let anybody hold you to those things," verse 17, "which are a

shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ." They were shadows, and now the substance has arrived, and the shadow has no more place.

And so, as far as we are concerned in the Church: Jewish Christian, Gentile Christian, there is no necessity to observe any of those things from the standpoint of our Christian faith. However, within the framework of tradition, within the family, there's nothing wrong with participating in those events, nothing wrong with the traditional family celebration of Passover; nothing wrong with other traditional Jewish celebrations: the Jewish New Year, Yom Kippur, whatever it is. And, in fact, as a Christian you can bring into that kind of celebration a much richer understanding of the reality of which those things were but a shadow. That's one of the reasons why it is problematic to have what we call, "Messianic Synagogues."

There has been a movement for a number of years, and I have addressed it throughout the last, probably, fifteen years, where Jewish people, who are believers, have established, rather than Churches, what they call Messianic Synagogues, and they observe all of the Jewish customs, all of the Jewish traditions, whether it is the annual feasts like Pentecost, Passover, and so forth, whether it is the New Year, the Day of Atonement, the monthly New Moon Sabbath...they observe the weekly Sabbath. They observe it on Saturday. They go through all of that ritual. And, in a sense, they are like the Judaizers of the New Testament, who are running around, trying to impose Jewish custom, Jewish ceremony, Old Testament ritual on Christians. I think it is wrong to do that. I don't think that's what the New Testament intends. I think the flow of the New Testament is that is what you are trying to do is to teach those people who come out of that background that they no longer need to hold to those things, but that they can let them go because of their freedom in Christ.

So I think that is the best passage to take people to who are asking that kind of question. We are not under obligation to maintain any of those things, and the most notable of all of them is the Passover. You celebrate the Passover because of God's redemption. The Redeemer comes and the Passover is over and now you have you have the Lord's Supper. You celebrate Pentecost, which is "first fruits" and the last Pentecost, legitimately celebrated, was the Pentecost at which time the Holy Spirit came...remember it was the day of Pentecost the Spirit came...it was the great harvest feast and the Spirit came on that day, and in a sense put an end to the shadow, because now the Holy Spirit had come and the great harvest, as it were, of souls, began.

So I think that it is best to see no Biblical obligation at all for any of those things, but I think that it is wise, if you are in a Jewish context to graciously participate in those kinds of traditions understanding that they all point to the reality, who is Christ. Okay?

David: Thank you.

John: You're welcome.

Questioner: In Luke 1:15, John was filled with the Holy Spirit before he was born, but God said that no man was a Christian before he was born.

John: Right. Did you have a question? John was not a Christian, but he was filled with the Holy Spirit. What that means is that from the time that he was conceived, the Spirit of God, in a special way, was protecting that life and preparing that life for the work that God wanted him to do. John didn't become a believer...he couldn't believe as an infant. He couldn't be called, quote, unquote, "a Christian" because people weren't called Christians until after the resurrection. He couldn't have been a believer until he believed. He couldn't believe until he was old enough to believe.

But all that tells us is that there are certain people...and there have been people in God's plan...who had very important ministries that they were going to fulfill. And the Lord, from the time that they were conceived in their mom's womb, knew what He was going to do with them and prepared them to do it.

There's another point to be made, however, about that because here was John, and he was filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb. And if you go down in Luke 1 to verse 41, his mother, Elizabeth, meets Mary. And Mary has been told that she's going to be the mother of the Messiah. And Mary enters her house, comes to see Elizabeth because they're relatives. And Elizabeth has in her womb John the Baptist, and Mary's going to be the mother of Jesus. So they have in common that they both have miraculous children in their womb. Elizabeth was very, very old...70, maybe 80...had never been able to have children. But God, by a miracle, allowed her to have a child in her womb. And Mary was a virgin who'd never been married. And she too miraculously had a child.

So they came together, and it says in verse 41, "Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary. The babe leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit." That's very interesting. Why does the baby leap in the womb? Why does that happen? Well, the answer the babe in her womb is given Spirit-empowered movement as a sign from Heaven of the great prophecy that was being fulfilled in Mary. In other words, she hears Mary is coming. They meet. Mary's going to be the mother of Messiah. And the unborn baby, empowered by the Holy Spirit, leaps in the womb as a kind of a sign that, in fact, the miracle of God had occurred on behalf of Mary and that Elizabeth would be the mother of the forerunner, and Mary would be the mother of the Lord Himself.

So that's a very unique situation. Now, that is true of John and maybe nobody else because nobody else in the Bible is said to have been filled with the Holy Spirit from the mother's womb. In Jeremiah 1...Jeremiah was also a prophet...it says, "The Word of the Lord came to me: Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you. Before you were born, I sanctified you." What does that mean? Sanctified means set somebody apart, to set them apart for a purpose. And so God says to Jeremiah, "Before you were born, while you were still in your mother's womb, I set you apart to be a prophet." So there are

certain people, for God's purposes that, even when they're in their mother's womb, are the objects of special care, special attention. And in the case of John, he was able to kick at the right moment and to give his mother a jolt, which was a sort of a affirmation of the wonderful truth that Mary would be the mother of Messiah.

So that's a very unusual situation. It doesn't have anything to do with whether John was a Christian or not. At that particular point, he obviously wasn't. He wasn't born yet and had no ability to believe or not believe or even, perhaps, to reason those things out. Okay? Good question. Thank you.

Peggy: Hi, my name's Peggy, and I just wondered if there's any reference in the Bible to the age of the universe and also babies in Heaven if you think they'll ever mature.

John: Is there any Bible reference to the ancient universe?

Peggy: No, the age of the universe.

John: Oh, the age of the universe. Yes, there is. The universe is...I mean, I can't give you an exact amount of years. But if you follow the chronology of Genesis: so-and-so begat so-and-so begat so-and-so begat so-and-so and you add the years...and there's no reason not to do that because that's the divine record...you have the Creation, and about...I think it's 1,656 years later, you have the flood. So you have about 1,656 years from the Creation of the garden, which was done in six days. 1,656 years later you have the flood.

And then, if you follow the continual chronology from the flood on, you have about another 4,500 years would be the least. And it, perhaps, could expand 1,000 or so. So you probably would have...that would be, essentially, the age of the universe: six to eight...some might even say, "Well, we can throw in a little more time in there," but we don't really have any reason to do that or any particular numbers that lead us to do that. We would say that if you just take the chronology of the Bible and the genealogical records of the Bible, you have the Creation approximately 6 to 7,000 years ago. It could be as much as 8, could be as much as 10 according to some who might think that certain people were left out of the genealogy. So it's a very young planet, and it's a very young universe. And we know that the universe and the earth were all created in the same week, in the same week, because that's what Genesis says.

Now, we have, today, of course, as I've been pointing out in the series on Genesis, a lot of people who don't believe Genesis 1 and 2, which is a very straightforward Creation account, very, very straightforward. It just says the first day He did this, and the second day He did this, and the third day He did this. And the seventh day, He stopped doing all that. One week went by. In Exodus chapter...is it chapter 20, verse 11...it refers to the fact that as the Lord created the world in six days and then He rested, so the Sabbath day is instituted. You work six days, and you rest. So there's an

affirmation that it was six literal days. If it wasn't literal, then how can it be an analogy for us to work six days and rest the seventh. It wouldn't make any sense for God to say you have to work 6 quadrillion millennia and then rest. So the analogy breaks down. So you have...simple chronology of Scripture would indicate to us that you get into the New Testament era about 4,000-some years after Creation. And then it's 2,000 years since Christ. Total would be, at the least, six, and then you can expand it a little bit. That's the age of the universe. And that's clearly the issue in the book of Genesis.

I'm almost finished with a book called "The Battle for the Beginning," which is going to be released in June, and it's going to deal with all of that. And the issue, folks, as I've been saying all along...the issue with that is not what is the scientific credibility of Jesus. The issue is what is the credibility of the Word of God, right? What does the Bible say? And as I've been saying all along, if you don't believe Genesis 1, when do you start believing? Do you kick in in Genesis 4 or Exodus 8? Or you don't come in 'til Nehemiah or whatever? And if you can get in and out wherever you want, what are you going to do when you read something you don't like in Isaiah or Revelation at the very end? You can't play fast and lose with the Scripture. And the intent of this book...a lot of books about evolution, a lot of books about Creation, but what this book is intended to do is corner people with no escape. And what you're going to have to do is say, "I don't believe Genesis." I mean, that's what I want to do. I wanna pin your ears to the wall. You're gonna say, "I don't believe Genesis is a true account." And if you don't believe that, then we have to determine what kind of authority you are and what gives you the right to do that. Okay?

Peggy: What about the babies?

John: You're asking about...will babies be babies in Heaven?

Peggy: Yeah, won't they ever grow up?

John: Yes, I think that babies will be fully matured human beings, glorified human beings. They won't think like babies. They won't act like babies. They'll think like and act like Christ, and they'll be mature. But I think they will maintain their characteristics. That is to say, they will be glorified humans, but they will be the glorified form of the person that they were. And so they will be that same person fully grown into maturity, which is the goal anyway, right? I mean, it would be a curse to be a baby all your life. I don't want to be a baby all my life. Sometimes we say to those little kids when they were so sweet and precious, "I wish you'd stay this way all your life," but that's retardation.

Peggy: So they're not going to physically mature. They'll just automatically be...

John: Boom. I finally got to the question. Yes, instantaneously. And by the way, I am going to give a message...I'm working on it now, but I'm gonna give a message in, I think, probably the best time is

Mother's Day. Isn't that coming up? Is it in May? I'm gonna give a message, I think, on Mother's Day on where are the babies who die because I really want to clear everybody up on what the Bible says about that so that...because that is a very, very consistent concern that people have...what happens to babies that die. So we'll...that's the plan now for Mother's Day. Maybe even sooner, we'll see.

Okay, who's next. Back over to the right. Yes, sir.

Daniel: My name's Daniel Lim. I am reading Deuteronomy 5:17, "Thou shalt not kill." In view of the wars that we have in the past and possible wars in the future, how are we to understand this verse?

John: Good question. The word here is murder. It's a distinct word. It's murder. And murder is an unjust, cruel act. The Bible does permit killing. Back in Genesis chapter 9, it tells us that if somebody takes a life, they should forfeit their life. God has given to human society the right of capital punishment. So there is such a thing as a just execution. In 9:6 of Genesis, "Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed. Genesis 9:6. That is where God instituted capital punishment.

And one of the more interesting elements of that discussion comes in the New Testament. Jesus was in the garden, and the Romans had come to capture Him, do you remember what Peter did? He grabbed his sword, you remember. And the first guy in was a servant of the high priest named Malkis. And Peter tried to cut off his head, and he ducked and lost his ear. And Jesus said to Peter, "If you live by the sword, you'll what? Die by the sword." What Jesus was doing was affirming Genesis 9:6. If you use that sword, then they have a right to take your life. The reason for that was to emphasize the value of human life made in the image of God. And so we learn from that that there is such a thing as a just execution. Not at all killing is sin. Some is a just retribution for a life taken.

Now, what you have in war is simply an expansion of that principle where you have, for example...and I went through this in a series of tapes I did, if you want some more detail, on...we had the Gulf War a few years ago. I did a series on what the Bible has to say about war and what's involved in it. You can get it from our tape ministry, from the bookstore or the tape center in the back. But what you have, then, is this. And this is a simply way to understand that. Where you have an evil, aggressive, murderous nation, you have a right to self-defense.

If I'm at home...take it at the criminal level...and a gang, a couple of criminals or three, come into my house, and they threaten the life of my wife and my children, and I have some way to protect them from evil aggressors, it may come to the point where it necessitates that it takes severe, perhaps deadly, action, I will take that action because that is my responsibility to protect the innocent from those who are perpetrators of deadly crimes. And that is what Romans 13 says. When you talk about the police in Romans 13, it says that they are servants of God who bear not the sword in vain.

They don't carry a weapon for nothing, and the sword is not meant to pat your bottom. A sword is meant to cut you with. And they're given the right in society to exercise, if need be, capital power, capital authority. That is the authority that takes a life in the protection of the innocent. And it says in Romans 13, the first few verses, that they are given to society by God for the protection of the innocent and the punishing of the guilty.

So you have on an individual level the possibility of capital punishment. You have the police and soldiers in Romans 13 who have the right to protect the innocent from vicious, murderous criminals who are going to take their lives. And then, on the larger scale, I've always put it this way...if there are people...we've seen this in the past, the murderous Communist people who come and massacre people, whether it's in Korea or whether it's in Vietnam or Cambodia or whether it's in Afghanistan or, in the case of Iraq, coming in and killing people in Kuwait or wherever else it is, there is a just way to step in and protect those innocent people from the evil aggressor even to the point where, if necessary, there needs to be the taking of life.

And, of course, in the Old Testament, this is illustrated. Because when God brought Israel into Canaan after they had wandered for 40 years in the wilderness and wound up at Kanish Barnea. And when God said, "You go in," what did He tell them to do? To destroy whom? The Canaanites, why? Because the Canaanites were a vicious, wicked, murderous people. I've read that among the Canaanites, there were those people who, when they built a building, buried a live baby in a jar in the wall as some kind of appeasement to their deities. They were a vicious people. We know that they offered their babies to the god Molach by incinerating them alive on a funeral pyre, on a sacrificial altar. So where there is wickedness and evil that is taking the life or threatening to take the life, the Bible is pretty clear about the right to defend.

However, there is no tolerance in Scripture for the evil aggressor who takes a life. That, at any level, whether singularly in a small group or nationally, that constitutes murder. Okay.

Daniel: Thank you.

John: Good question.

Carrie: My name is Carrie, and my question is in regard to those people in our lives who profess to know the Lord and who don't bear fruit. And just how we can go about talking to them about that. I say this with a heavy heart because many of these people are family members, and when I've talked with them, they feel threatened and condescended to. And I just wonder how you approach that, Pastor MacArthur.

John: Well, it's a very good question, and a very important question. And the Bible only knows one way to deal with that. And that's honesty. That is the only way you can deal with that.

I think it's a simple thing to understand. If a person doesn't think like a Christian, talk like a Christian and act like a Christian, they're probably not a Christian, whatever they say, whatever happened in the past, in some event when they prayed a prayer or went to church or, quote, "believed in Christ." There is a transformation that takes place. There is a new birth that takes place. And they're not the person they used to be. I mean, it's as simple as dog's bark and cow's moo and pig's oink and Christians act like Christians. That's just their nature.

That's what they are. That's what God has done in them. And it's not so much the perfection of that as the direction of it. That is to say they...I think of the telling things, and I've said this lately in my sermons, one of the telling things is they have an appetite for God's Word. They desire it. They don't come to Grace Church and say, "I don't like this church. It's not interesting. It's kind of boring. The music is...it's long, old hymns. And the sermons are really long." If a person is a Christian...there may be a bit of a curve to get over is their used to real, kind of, shallow Christian experience and instruction. But there's going to be something in them that resonates with truth, that longs for truth, that hungers for that. And when that's not there, and when there's not that desire for that, when there's not that desire not only to know the truth but to honor the Lord, when there's not that desire to love the brethren, to be with believers, when there's not that desire to become like Christ. If you say you're in Christ, then you ought to walk the way He walks. I mean, John outlines all of these things. If there's not that desire to see the sin in your life overcome and to live a godly life, then there's every reason to assume these people aren't Christians, and there's only one way to deal with that, and that is in a loving fashion to express that.

And I would express to you that it's sometimes very hard to do that in a conversation because as soon as you approach that, all the defenses go up. Learn something from God. God didn't give us a tape; He gave us a book. And this book is full of letters. And there's a reason for that. Print freezes truth. Right? It freezes it. And that's why you can look at the Bible, and you can think about it; you can analyze it; you can criticize it; you can evaluate it; you can synthesize it. It just sits there waiting for you to do all that. It's not like a music video or a movie that just moves past, and you can't recover what went by. God gave us a book, and I've suggested to people...if there's somebody in particular that you're concerned about, write them an epistle, okay?

You can say, "From me to you, this is my heart. This is my concern." And you're not there to argue with. You're not there to rebut. They may get...they may have to go through the thing kicking and screaming, but in the end, you've made your point, which may get interrupted. If you do it in a gracious way, in a kind way and, at the same time, an honest way, I think you gain ground that you perhaps can't gain in a conversation because they get defensive. Okay?

Carrie: Thank you.

Michael: Good evening, John. My name is Michael.

John: Hi, Michael.

Michael: My question is...how does the Bible define the difference between our spirit and our soul. And is it both of these that we'll have in the presence of God?

John: Yes, how does the Bible distinguish between the spirit and the soul, and I don't think it does. I think those are essentially two different words that refer to the same thing, the immaterial part of man. We, in the end, are only two parts. The material part goes into the grave, right, and decomposes. And the immaterial part goes to be with the Lord. That's all there is.

And since the physical part of us, that is, that's made up of earthly matter and components, disintegrates, and what is left is that immaterial part of us that was created by God, which is eternal. And I don't think there's any distinction to be made between spirit and soul. In the Old Testament, certainly, no much distinction is made. The word napheshin Hebrew, which is the most common word for the inner person, is translated in the English Bible probably 21 or 22 ways: soul, spirit, self, heart, mind, person, up to 21, 22 different words. But it always means the inner man, the inner man.

And so you really only have two parts. We call that dichotomy rather than trichotomy. There are some funny views that you are a soul and a body until you become a Christian, and then you get a spirit, but that's foreign to Scripture. And there are some people who say your spirit is what responds to God, and your soul is what responds to the world. Well, the Bible doesn't make that distinction. It doesn't make that clean division. And I could show you Scriptures in the New Testament where spirit and soul are using interchangeably. And I know in Hebrews and also, I think it's 1 Thessalonians, Paul in the same verse refers...in Thessalonians and the writer of Hebrews...to soul and spirit. But still there's no distinction made. And I think they're used as a broad, sort of, synonym to encompass all of the inner-persons. I don't think there's anyway that you can slice those two apart.

And that messes up some people's cute little outlines where they split you up into three parts and stick certain things in certain categories, okay. Good question. And by the way, that has been debated extensively in the history of theology. And there's plenty of material to read on that, much of which I've read through the years and find my comfort in the fact that whatever is going to be in Heaven forever is the immaterial part of us. And since the whole immaterial part of us is going to be in glory with the Lord, it seems impossible from a theological viewpoint to split those two. And I don't think there's anywhere in Scripture where you can prove that they aren't terms referring to the same spiritual entity, the inner person, okay?

Palonia: Hi, Pastor John. My name is Palonia. Last week I was hosting some pastor that came for the pastor conference, and they were greatly blessed to see how strong our church is. And one of them asked me who's going to replace Pastor MacArthur when the Lord decides to take him home so the church can continue as strong as it is right now? I say, "I don't know." So -

John: That's a good question. And I'm with you...I don't know either. But I think maybe there's some people who are working on that. I don't know. The Lord buries his servants, but his work goes on. He buries his workers, but his work goes on, right? I'm not indispensable. I don't know what the future holds for Grace Church. I don't know what the Lord has in the future. But I can kind of give you a profile of who it might be without naming an individual.

I think it would have to be somebody from this church, either currently in the church or having been a part of the church, a part of the ministry here who's gone out to pastor somewhere else and would come back. I think it'd be very, very difficult for somebody on the outside to just come in from the outside. And the reason I say that is because our theology and our ministry is so defined. And that's one of the problems of being in a church a long time. If a pastor stays three or four years and goes, he doesn't leave such a large imprint. But after 32 years, the philosophy of ministry, how we do things, the leadership, theology, how we preach...just everything in this church is so defined that if you were to bring somebody from the outside who, maybe, was 75% in agreement and 25% in disagreement with the way we did things, that person would have a difficult time surviving because that 25% would become a problem because we have worked through so many issues through the years, and we see them so much the same.

So my guess would be that it would be someone who is a part of this church's ministry through the years, whether they're here now or out pasturing and would come back or whether they would come from within and just rise to take over the main preaching and the role that I have taken. I don't know. When people ask me, "Who would you pick?" it's not that I don't want to think about it. I don't mind thinking about it. I'm going to be dead, and that's not a problem. And I almost died a few years ago. And I know the Lord will find the right person. I just haven't scripted that for the Lord.

But I really do believe that the Lord has...the Lord...how can I say this? The Lord has poured into this church special blessings, special grace. And if we can borrow the phrase we heard earlier from John Piper, I don't think it's all past and present grace. I think there's plenty of future grace. The Lord knows how important this church is to His Kingdom. He knows this church is not me. This church is you people, and He knows what He has in mind for this church's future. And I'm sure that He has plans for the good and the blessing of this church. So I don't think you need to fear that. When the transition time comes, the Lord, if you are faithful to Him, will take you to the next step. And one thing the Lord doesn't want to do...the Lord doesn't want to slow down or hinder his own work. So He will provide.

Now, I want to come short of asking you to go out and pray that the Lord will provide my successor because I don't want him here until I'm gone because I don't want to be fighting anybody for this pulpit. Okay?

Palonia: Thank you.

Holly: Pastor MacArthur, my name is Holly. And my question is regarding how far technology has come and life support, actually. And I'm wondering, actually, how we know, or if we do know, when the human spirit actually leaves the body. And how do we go about making a decision like that with a loved one?

John: I think clinically, most people would say, Holly, that when you get a flat line on an EEG, an Electroencephalogram, that indicates that the brain is dead. And the brain is, I guess you could say this in a sort of simplistic sense, is where the soul resides. It's not in our arms or legs or in the midsection. The soul functions through the brain, right? And when the brain is dead...when you have a flat line on an EEG, then the brain is not functioning, you can assume the spirit is gone. That's different than an EKG, which is an Electrocardiogram, which deals with the heart. You can have a heart that's no longer functioning that can be sustained, and the person's mind is still functioning. And as long as the mind is there, as long as there is some level of reason, as long there is some personal connection being made, then I think that person...the spirit is still there.

Now, that would even be true in a person who was in a condition of paralysis. We often talk about people being a vegetable. If you can still find a measurable EEG, then the brain still has some activity. I suppose there's a point at which it's purely clinical activity, and there's no person there, but I wouldn't know where exactly that point would be. I think if the person is a nonbeliever, you would hold on as long as you could, continually communicating the Gospel, until all vestiges of hope were gone, and there was a flat line in the EEG. For somebody who's a Christian, I think that any point in time when you get to the level where you're making a heroic effort, last ditch, to save this person, you have to ask the question, "For what? For what?" I mean, if this is a Christian, let them go to the glories of Heaven. You don't want to keep them here in the condition endlessly. Why? What's the point? So, again, I think that's a personal thing that you have to make in your own family. But it has to be made on the condition of that person spiritually, not so much medically, you know what I'm saying?

If you have a Christian...I've said this...when my brain doesn't function anymore, get me out of here. I want to go to Heaven. That's what makes things like Alzheimer's and those kinds of related diseases...they talk about dementia, Pics disease, things like that, that affect people where they're not...that they lose their ability to make any kind of rational sense out of life. That's really kind of a sad situation. And the Lord may have his purposes, and you want to preserve those people because

you may not know all that's going on and all the purposes of God still unfolding in that person's life. But I think for a Christian, when you reach the place where you're making some heroic effort to save this person, who, essentially, is right on the brink of death, you have to ask whether that makes any sense because even if you can hold onto the person, why would you want them to have that kind of life when eternal life awaits them? Okay?

Holly: Yeah, thank you.

April: Hi, I'm April. And my question is two parts. And it's from Hebrews 6. Starting in verse 4, it's talking about people who have tasted of the glory of God, and then they reject it and walk away. And then it says it's impossible to bring them back to repentance. So my first question is why is that impossible? And then my second is it's talking about it brings open shame to God. And I'm wondering what that's referring to.

John: That's a very good question, April. And this is a very troublesome passage to a lot of folks. You might want to turn to Hebrews 6. I'll make this quick. You have a context in Hebrews. Okay, let me give you the big picture. Okay, you have to understand to whom the letter's written about what. And it's easy to put that together if you study the epistle. There's a group of Jews who come to faith in Christ. We don't know where they are because no location is given. But we know they were brothers in Christ. There was a community of Jewish people who had come to believe Jesus was the Messiah. This letter was written to them. That's why it's called to the Hebrews. They are Hebrew believers.

Also, associated with the Hebrew believers were a group of Jews who believed the Gospel to be true in their heads but wouldn't make the commitment to Christ. And the reason they wouldn't make the commitment to Christ is because they knew there was such a high price to pay. They would be thrown out of their families. They would be unsynagogued, is what they use to say. That would be like...well, the Catholic Church has done that, when they've literally put people out of the Church, excommunicated them is what they called it. So they knew there was a price to pay.

And so here they are. There on the fringes of this Christian church. They won't come to Christ. And so you have this letter written to explain how that Jesus is much better than the Old Testament, much better than the angels, much better than the prophets, much better than Moses, much better than the priesthood, that His covenant is much better than the old covenant, that His sacrifice is much better than the old sacrifices. "Please," it's saying, "Jesus is better than everything you're holding onto." And then, periodically, come these warnings. "Don't neglect. Don't reject. Don't harden your heart," chapter 4. And here, "Don't fall away. Don't...you've come all the way to the edge. You've been enlightened, Verse 4:6. What's does that mean? It does not mean saved. There's no words in here that are ever used in the Bible anywhere for salvation...none. Enlightened means you have information. You've tasted the heavenly gift.

Obviously the heavenly gift is either Christ or the Holy Spirit, and here were these Jews who tasted Christ. You've had a taste of the Spirit's power. You've seen, it says in Chapter 2, signs and wonders and gifts of the Holy Spirit through the Apostles, as well as Christ. You've tasted it all. You've even been a partaker of the Holy Spirit, which means they were probably were in on some miracles that the Holy Spirit did. You've tasted the good word of God. You've tasted the powers of the age to come. What that has to do again is the power of miracles, which will come back in the Kingdom to come.

So what he's saying is you've been ministered by, perhaps, Jesus. You've been for sure ministered to by the Apostles. You've seen their miracles, their healings, their casting out of demons. You've tasted the good word of God that they preached, and you've come all the way to that point. Now he says, if you turn around and fall away, it's impossible for you to be renewed to repentance and saved. Why? Because you can't have any more life. You can't have any more proof, and if your settled and final conclusion is to turn your back and walk away, that's it because he can't give you any more proof.

And essentially that is exactly what we've been saying on Sunday mornings. That is exactly what the scribes and Pharisees did...exactly what the Jews did. They came to this conclusion, according to Matthew 12, that what Jesus did and what he said, he did by the power of whom? The devil. They concluded exactly the opposite truth because they were so hard-hearted. And so the writer of Hebrews is saying, "Look...if you come all this way, and you have seen the power of God, hear the word God, seen the miracles, tasted all of this, and you turn and go away, you will never be renewed to repentance." In fact, what you have done is to crucify again the Son of God and put him to an open shame.

What does that mean? You have taken your stand with those who wanted Jesus dead and wanted to put him to shame on a cross. You only have those two choices, right? You either embrace him as Savior, or you stand with the crucifiers and cry, "Crucify him. Crucify him. We'll not have this man to reign over us." So that's essentially what he's saying. He's telling these Jewish people who are on the edges of the Church, please don't go the other direction. In Chapter 2 he says, "How shall we escape the wrath of God, if we neglect so great a salvation? Don't neglect. You're this close...come." In Chapter 4, "Don't, at this point, harden your hearts and not enter into this salvation rest." Chapter 10, "Now that you know the Gospel, don't reject the Gospel or a more severe punishment will await you in eternity, because you've known the truth and rejected the truth."

So this is one of those warning passages. And if you look at Verse 7, he illustrates this in Verse 7. "The earth, which drinks in the rain that often comes on it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God." So the rain is like the Gospel. It comes down, and in those who believe, it brings forth herbs. It brings forth useful produce. But if it bears thorns and

briars, it is rejected and near to being cursed, and is to be burned. And he focuses on the same issue. If you will hear the Gospel, believe the Gospel, when it comes down like rain, it'll produce blessing. If you don't, it'll produce the briars and the thorns, and you'll be cursed, and all of that will be taken out to be burned. And that's a picture of hell.

So he's addressing these people with this decision. Then in Verse 9, he turns in Verse 9, and he says, "But," what's the next word? Beloved...and he talks to the believers. We are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation. You see the difference? Now, he's turning to the believers, and we are confident that you are saved. So you go from a warning passage, the word "but" makes a transition, and he speaks to the true believers. Okay?

April: Thanks.

John: You're welcome.

Mark: Hi, Pastor John. It's Mark. A couple of questions ago, a gentleman asked you about the...technically what's called the dichotomous or the trichotomous view of human ontology or human nature. And I wanted you, because I know that there's some certain things at stake right now in the Christian world. I know that you've been hammering very much...that I have been thinking about this particular issue of relationship with some of the things that you've been preaching on. But I wanted to see if you'd address it in two different areas.

I know that there's some very, very righteous men that hold to...and very, very good scholars...that hold to our trichotomous view of God, and I know you studied under one of them in the early '60s at Biola and respect him very much.

John: Actually, I didn't go to Biola, but I did go to Talbot Seminary.

Mark: Okay, well at Talbot...that's what I meant...Talbot and Biola, same location.

John: Sorry.

Mark: But what I wanted to see if you could affirm to the congregation, just the fact that that's not a major heresy if somebody holds that particular view.

John: Right.

Mark: Although, you can't really support it Biblically, as you well said. But on the same level, do you believe that some of the things that are going on with Billy Graham and some of this other stuff as far as the subconscious, knowing Christ in a non-conscious manner...do you believe that a lot of that is the result of this, of a particular trichotomous view of human nature? Because we know that theology

has repercussions in other matters of faith.

John: Well, that's good, Mark. That's helpful to bring that up. Whether you're a trichotomist or a dichotomist, it's not an issue of orthodoxy or heresy at all. It's merely a way to explain human nature. That's all. It doesn't do anything to explain the divine nature, which is the issue in orthodoxy, right? How you view man, apart from the fact that would view him as a sinner, how you split him up is not a matter of orthodoxy. So I want to make that clear. There are many very, very honorable and excellent theologians, Bible commentators, who would take a trichotomous view. And that's not a question of orthodoxy whatsoever. It's just, it's an issue, that if you study, you'll come to a conclusion. And I've come to a conclusion I think it says this in the Scripture.

And I'm not really sure that trichotomy is a potent enough thing in itself to influence one's Gospel understanding. I suppose there would be ways that people could somehow create some understanding of trichotomy that fit into their inclusivism. If they do, I'm not aware of that. I've never really followed that path to inclusivism, nor have I gone from inclusivism back to finding that in the foundations of it. So I don't know that there's any particular connection between whether you're a trichotomist or a dichotomist and whether or not you believe in some salvation, without the Gospel and without the Bible. I don't know of any connection.

Mark: Well, I just...from my personal study I know that my understanding of what the trichotomist view is is that the soul or the middle between the body and the Spirit is essentially the matter where the thinking takes place and all of these other issues. And then there's a deeper level where the Spirit of God dwells and there's some unconscious areas going on and so forth. And as I thought this one through, I thought, "Okay, well maybe Bill Graham and some of this stuff that's going on..."

John: Yeah, I don't really think so. And I don't think Billy would be that sophisticated in that kind of theology. Plus, you could still be a dichotomist and have the Holy Spirit down in some deep part of your immaterial nature doing things. So I don't think the distinction itself necessitates...is necessary to come up with that kind of view. I think that view exists purely out of an unwillingness...can't find it in the Bible. It comes out of an unwillingness to deal with the judgment of God. Some people just can't accept the doctrine of eternal punishment, and they get around that emotional issue by creating a scenario in which hell is depopulated by a tolerance of varying religions. Okay?

Mark: Great. Thanks.

John: Thanks you.

Mark: Hello, John. It's John. My name's John. I've dealing with a Mormon friend, and we've been talking back and forth. And he brought up Enoch...and I know they kind of quote it out of context...and brought up how Enoch was perfect, and that's why God took him up. And I look up in

the Bible, and I study it a little bit, and I still wasn't really clear what was the purpose of Enoch and why God took him up.

John: Well, Enoch was a righteous man. He was a godly man, the Lord just gave him a private rapture. As to why he did that, I don't know. It was, I think some people would say, it was sort picture, an illustration, of what's going to happen to the righteous in the end when God gathers them into glory. It does show us that there can be exceptions to the principle that everybody dies. Here is an illustration that not everybody dies. He took a walk with God once and was not because God took him. So when God wants to suspend the natural course of things, He can do it. He took a righteous man to Heaven. In that case, He took a righteous man to Heaven. In the case of Elijah, who went to Heaven, apparently without dying, and in the future, at the time of the rapture, he will take the righteous into glory as well.

To say that Enoch was perfect in the sense that he was sinless, is to deny what the Bible say. Because the Bible says all of have sinned. There is none righteous. No, not one. It wasn't that his sinless perfection allowed God to take him to Heaven. It was rather that his true godliness was rewarded for purposes that God knows by taking him to Heaven. What the Mormons are trying say is that you can become like a god. You can become so perfect and so holy and so righteous that you're sort of, I guess, swept into Heaven, and this is part of their doctrine of perfection. But that is certainly not the case with Enoch, because that flies in the face of everything the Bible teaches. "That which is born of flesh," Jesus said, is what? "Is flesh." And flesh is fallen, and that which is born of flesh is fallen.

And Enoch was fallen flesh, because he was born of Adam and Eve, who were fallen flesh. And corruption had entered into Adam and Eve, because in the day they ate of the fruit of the tree, the corruption set in. Didn't it? And we know it set in because they were aware of their nakedness. They were in shame, and the death principle operated. And when they gave birth to Enoch, they gave birth to one who was sinful, one who bore their nature, one who was headed for death, and one who was a sinner. But he, like Noah, about whom it also says he was a blameless man. It says he was a righteous man. He walked with God, and God saved him in the Ark. And he came of the Ark and committed gross sin.

So we don't want to say too much about Enoch. We want to just know that for whatever reason, God took him to Heaven because he was a godly man, as godly as men can be, which is certainly not as perfect as a God. Okay? Thank you.

We have quick questions, and then we'll finish here. Over here? There? Yeah.

Cheryl: Hi, John. Cheryl.

John: Hi.

Cheryl: I just recently came back from Colorado Springs, and one of the things that is huge in Christianity, outside of grace is a Strength in God by Blackaby. And I've been wanting to ask this question for four years, actually, which would be what would your response be to that? I personally have problems with it, but I'd like to hear.

John: There is a series of books, and I mean, they've got everything from bumper stickers and every imaginable kind of curriculum has come out of this series by Henry Blackaby. Who's the other guy? There are two writers. I can't remember the other name. It's called experiencing God. There's much in it that's good. There really is. There's much in it that's very good. It gives honor to Christ. It gives honor Scripture. It gives honor to the Holy Spirit, but there's an insidious flaw in the middle of it. The material is designed to teach a person how to listen for the voice of God and to some how be able to hear the voice of God.

Now, this is very dangerous. If you want to hear the voice of God, read the Bible. I'll never forget reading some years ago a book written by somebody who was into hearing the voice of God and into prophecies and all of the manifestation of that in the Church. It was a pastor of a church in the Midwest, and he said, "When somebody stands up in our church service and says, 'Thus sayeth the Lord,' and then rattles off something from God, we know that it's either from God or it's not." And frankly, that is not helpful. That is not helpful.

God doesn't speak in such unclear fashion. If God wants to say something, there won't be any question about whether He said it or didn't say it. The problem with that is you've got people being engulfed in this mystical thing, listening for the voice of God, and then whatever pops into their head, becomes divine as to its source. "Well, the Lord told me to do this, and the Lord told me to do that." I have to tell you honestly folks, the Lord has never said a word to me in my entire life that didn't come out of the Bible. They say, "Well, don't you think he impresses things on your heart?" Yeah, but I don't know if it's Him. I have a strong impression. I don't have a red light on my head that turns on and goes around and around when it's Him. I don't know that. There's no way I can know that.

Sure I feel things, and so forth. You say, "Well, don't you believe God leads you?" Of course, I look back in retrospect, and I see it. But at the time, I don't have any sense, feeling that is clearly defined as the voice of God. And so what you're setting people up for is serious problems, because they're gonna follow their impressions. They're gonna follow, who know where those impressions may be coming from, as if that's the voice of God. And with good intentions, it takes people off the word and onto their own intuition, which is pretty dangerous. And I have a problem with that entire movement because of that.

And again, I go back and say you can read some of those books, which I have read through the years and critiqued and all, and you're gonna find many, many things in there that are very good. They honor the word. They honor God. They honor Christ. They honor the Holy Spirit, but having done all of that, then you tell people, "Learn to listen for the voice of God, and God will tell you what to do." You set them up for disaster, because there's no indication in Scripture that they can ever know the voice of God, especially if it's not audible. If it's some kind of impression, you don't know where that impression came from. Okay?

Okay, quickly we'll cover the last...

Questioner: Who do you believe Melchizedek was?

John: I believe Melchizedek was Melchizedek. I believe he was a guy; he was a guy who was a priest unto the most high God. He was just...I don't believe it was a pre-incarnation of Christ, a Christophany, as some would teach, that this is Christ who appeared in the Old Testament. I believe if that were true, then the Bible would tell us that. There's no reason to hide it if that's who it was. I believe that the incarnation was unique. Okay? Unique. I don't think there was an Old Testament incarnation, and if you have got Melchizedek as a pre-incarnate incarnation of Christ, then now you've got a problem, because you've got Christ being incarnated twice. How can He be incarnated twice? And what is the meaning of Melchizedek? And if He incarnated in Melchizedek, then is Melchizedek still around? And if he's not, did he go out of existence?

So I don't think it makes any sense. I think the Bible says he was a king of Salem, and he was a priest under the most high God. And that's exactly who he was and nothing more than that. But he serves as a very good illustration that you can be a true priest outside the Aaronic Priesthood. And Christ is a priest after the order of Melchizedek, because Christ is God's priest apart from the Aaronic Priesthood. Okay?

Questioner: All right.

John: All right.

Rob: Hello, Pastor MacArthur. My name is Rob, and my question to you is the dating of the Book of Revelation and how important is on the premiel or any of the other escatological views, whether it's the '60s or the '90s.

John: It's critical, because one is right and one is wrong.

Rob: Do we have any substantial evidence...

John: Yes, there is ample evidence for the year '96 for around '95, '96 for John writing the Revelation, and there...only one reason exists to push it into the '60s, and that is the preterits view that wants to say that the Book of Revelation isn't about the future. It's not about a millennium. It's not about a tribulation. It's not about something escatalogical, but it is about the destruction of Jerusalem. And if you're gonna take the view that it's not prophetic, but that it's talking about the destruction of Jerusalem, which occurred in '70 A.D., then you've got to put it into '60-somewhere, so that it can be talking about what's gonna happen. And I don't see any real critical reason to accept an early date of the Book of Revelation. I think...there are many, many reasons. One would be, all of those churches, had reached not only their maturity, in Revelation 2 and 3, the seven churches, they not only had reached their maturity, but five of them had gone past their maturity into apathy, into heresy, into inequity, and that took time for that to happen. And those churches were only being founded in the '60s, and so I just think there is ample...that's just one of many, many reasons. Okay?

Rob: Is this internal evidence that you get the '96...

John: Sure. Sure.

Rob: Okay.

John: There is no internal evidence for the '60s. There isn't any. To turn those prophecies into the prophecies of the destruction of Jerusalem is a fantasy because it doesn't say there that it has to do with the destruction of Jerusalem. So if you say that's what it means, then it's arbitrary. Okay?

Okay, so we end it at the end.

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