

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

**Hot-Button Questions About the Bible and Christian Life**

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: GTY116

PHIL: Hi, I'm Phil Johnson, Executive Director of Grace to You and I'm in the studio today with Pastor and Bible teacher, John MacArthur. Hello, John.

JOHN: Phil, it's great to be with you again.

PHIL: John, this year Grace to You celebrates our fortieth anniversary. And, of course, that coincides with your fortieth anniversary as pastor of Grace Community Church here in Southern California. And what many listeners may not know is that before you became pastor of Grace Church in 1969 and before Grace to You launched that same year, you were already teaching and preaching even while you were preparing for ministry. So really, this year is actually your fiftieth anniversary as a Bible teacher.

JOHN: That is correct. I would hate to have to defend the early years of my Bible teaching based upon what I now know. I remember some of the frightening early sermons. But it is true, I actually began to teach and to speak at youth conferences when I was 19 years old...

PHIL: Wow!

JOHN: And that's 50 years ago.

PHIL: The earliest tape of yours I have is the first sermon you ever gave as pastor of Grace Community Church, and I think it's amazing that that sermon really incorporates practically every truth and every thing about your preaching that has made you distinctive.

JOHN: Yeah, it is interesting to think back to that. I think fortunately people didn't record things before that, so all those early sermons that ought not to have been recorded weren't. But when I came to Grace Church it struck me at the time, and I was just a kid in my late twenties, and I had been speaking for ten years at conferences and things like that. But it struck me that my grave concern was that the churches were filled with professing people who weren't real Christians. And in light of all the years that have gone on, Phil, you know, *The Gospel According To Jesus*, *Ashamed of the Gospel*, *The Gospel According to the Apostles*, *Hard to Believe*, *Truth War*, I've been hammering on that same issue. And of all the passages that I could have picked for my first Sunday at Grace, I picked Matthew 7, "Many will say, 'Lord, Lord,' and I will say to them, 'Depart from Me, I never knew you, you workers of iniquity.'" I mean, that was really pretty brash, as I think about it. You know, it's your first Sunday here, you think you'd want to give some kind of encouraging message.

PHIL: As a matter of fact John, I've heard that message, and you thought you said you could've

picked a more encouraging one. I think for a believer hearing that message, it is encouraging. I found it encouraging. It's a frightening passage.

JOHN: It was sort of, I guess it was previews of coming attractions for the next 40 years.

But as it turned out, the Elder Board, so-called Elder Board, at the church was full of men who were not Christians. There were people in the choir who were not Christians. There were people in the pews who were not Christians. There were people in places of leadership who were not Christians. And even at that early age, my understanding of Scripture was that the tares were going to be a very, very dominating element in the church and that we needed to make sure people really understood what it was to be a genuine Christian. And that's been a tone of my preaching ever since.

PHIL: Yeah, you know, another common thread that runs through your fifty years of studying and teaching the Bible is that you have always purposefully set aside time to answer questions. We often do that in the evening service at Grace Church, set aside the whole service for questions from the congregation. And, of course, we've aired some of those Q&A sessions on Grace to You, but today we're going to do something new. We've asked people from our Grace to You family, people from the listening audience to submit their questions. We've gotten some by phone, others we have received in writing, and we want you to answer as many of those questions as you can today. Let's get started, John, with a question phoned in by a listener named Patricia.

PATRICIA: Patricia from San Antonio, Texas. Pastor MacArthur, it's a privilege to have even to be able to ask a question and I really appreciate your ministry, Grace to You. My question is this, in the book of Revelation, Jesus says He will wipe away every tear, at that point the believers are with Him for eternity. And my question is, for those of us that may have loved ones that never knew Christ, and if all our tears are wiped away, do we have no recollection of them at all in their eternal state in hell, or is our understanding completely different so that we no longer weep over those loved ones that are lost forever? Anyway, that is my question. Thank you, bye-bye.

JOHN: Well, Patricia, that's a very, very good question. And, of course, we can only go to the Word of God and answer that question by looking at what Scripture has to say. Scripture doesn't tell us whether we forget all of those realities. And that's why we have no sorrow. Or whether the knowledge of that is so utterly and totally suppressed by the sheer joys of heaven that the knowledge of those things never rises to the conscious mind in eternity. But in either case, I don't know what the reality is in terms of whether those memories are in our glorified form or not. I do know this, that there will not be in heaven even the slightest hint of anything to make us sad, even the slightest hint of anything to bring us sorrow or grief, not even the slightest reflection of any reality that would cause us to have our joy diminished.

So, the simple answer to the question is, all of those things which were a part of our fallenness, all of those things which were a part of our sinful experience in a sinful world will forever disappear from our conscious minds and we will be swept up in a joy that is in no way mitigated by any thought or any contemplation as long as we live forever in the presence of the Lord in the glory of heaven.

PHIL: Thanks, John. Here's a question from Tricia.

TRICIA: Tricia, Fort Lauderdale, Florida. I was just wondering, John MacArthur, exactly in the Old Testament when the saints die, where do they go?

JOHN: Well these kinds of questions come up a lot and I think the simple way to answer the question is this, that when a believer in the Lord, Old Testament saint, or a believer in the Lord, New Testament saint dies, they go into the presence of the Lord. Perhaps the best illustration of that is taken from the wonderful story that Jesus told in the gospel of Luke about the beggar that died and went into the presence of Abraham...went into the presence of the saints, went into the presence of those who are with the Lord. So I don't think there's any reason to believe in some kind of a holding ground, some kind of a neutral place, certainly there's no such thing as purgatory where you're in some kind of a trial situation to determine whether you're going to get out and get into heaven. But I don't even believe in a neutral place, a sort of holding ground. There are some who say when an Old Testament person died, they went into some kind of empty unfulfilled place until Christ died on the cross. And then they got taken to heaven. But I think David even understood that when he died, he would awake and he would awake in the presence of the Lord. Job understood that, that though worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God and he even anticipated the final resurrection which comes later.

But I think the hope of Old Testament saints was that when they left this world, they would enter into the presence of the Lord. They didn't have a full understanding of what that meant because there's no fullness of revelation in the Old Testament the way we have it in the New Testament with all that Jesus said about heaven and with all that's described there at the end of the book of Revelation. But I think to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord in any period of God's redemptive history.

PHIL: That's an amazing passage you quoted from Job. He's talking about bodily resurrection there which you occasionally hear people say, "Well that wasn't even an Old Testament idea," but clearly it was.

JOHN: Clearly it was. And David had it when he said, "I'll awake in His likeness." I think also we have to keep in mind that in the Old Testament, the saints who loved God and knew God lived with a hope, not some kind of fear or dread of where they're going to wind up. There was an anticipation of the presence of the Lord. I think that's all through the Psalms.

PHIL: John, another question we got in several forms, and so I'll sort of paraphrase it for you. You know, out there on the Internet there's probably as much disinformation floating around as there is truth. And one of the persistent rumors that goes around about you personally in your beliefs has to do with the blood of Christ. And there are people who I've seen...I've read what they've said on the Internet, saying that you don't believe it was necessary for Jesus to shed His blood for our salvation.

Now I know you've answered this question many, many times, but could you just give us one more time your view on the necessity of Christ's blood?

JOHN: Well, first of all, Phil, let me say that I have been completely misrepresented by people who said I do not believe that. Of course I believe Christ had to die.

PHIL: In fact, just a historical point, the first person who published that accusation against you later rescinded it and apologized for having misrepresented you.

JOHN: Yes, called me on the telephone and said, "I know you don't believe that." But he was a part of an institution that wanted to discredit me and so that's what they did.

Jesus died on the cross because that's what God predetermined He would do, that He would be lifted up, as we know the Old Testament pictures the serpent lifted up, and Christ even said, "As a serpent in the wilderness was lifted up, so the Son of Man being lifted up will draw all men to Himself," and all of that. I think the image of a bloody death is all over the Old Testament, every animal that was sacrificed was a blood bath. Priests were butchers who stood ankle deep in blood in the Temple. It was a slaughter house, the Temple was a slaughter house. It was bloody. And the image of that was to depict a violent death and I think when you look at the cross of Christ, you have the Passover Lamb dying a bloody violent death. And it's necessitated. It's all the imagery of the Old Testament that directs itself toward that.

Now having said that, you have to stop short of saying that we are saved by the blood of Jesus in the sense that there's some efficacy in the fluid that poured out of His body. And I have tried to make that distinction that when the New Testament refers to salvation by His blood, it is not talking about salvation by His fluid. It uses blood as a metaphor or a synonym for death because it conveys the violence of it. And we don't want to get caught into this bizarre notion that somehow in the actual fluid that came out of the body of Jesus, there is saving power or saving efficacy. And some people have done that and have actually gone so far as to say the blood that came out of His body was collected at the foot of the cross, put in vials, taken into heaven and it's up there being poured out again and again on some heavenly mercy seat to effect the salvation of sinners. This is an absolutely bizarre concept.

PHIL: Yeah, there's an element of that, isn't there, in the Roman Catholic view of transubstantiation?

JOHN: Yes, and the repetition of the Mass as if Jesus needs to shed His blood again and again and again and again cause there's some efficacy in the blood. When the New Testament talks about the blood of Christ, it is talking about the death of Christ but it uses blood because that's a metaphor that speaks of the violence of His death. We are saved by His death. It wouldn't have done any good if He had bled and lived...He had to die. And I think we want to make sure we understand that. Could He have died another way, by blunt trauma? Could He have died another way by a heart attack? Could He have died another way by a disease? Could He have died another way by drowning? Of course not...of course not. He would die in a way that was depicted by all the sacrifices that were made in the whole sacrificial system. He would die in a violent death, pouring out His blood which demonstrates more graphically than any other way that life is leaving because the life of the flesh is in the blood, as the Old Testament said, and as His blood poured out, of course, it cost Him His life.

PHIL: Scripture talks about cleansing properties in the blood, that our consciences are washed by the blood of Christ, our sins are washed away by His blood. How do you explain that sort of symbol? That sort of language?

JOHN: Yeah, and again those are the times in the New Testament when references to His blood have to do with His death. But the New Testament writers are not at all hesitant to use blood as a euphemism for His death, as a metonym, if you will, as just another way to refer to His death because it's graphic, because it fits the sacrificial system imagery, because it depicts the violence of it. Another footnote to this, Jesus though He shed His blood and His blood was violently shed in the wounds that were inflicted upon Him, didn't bleed to death. He died of asphyxiation. We know that because that's how crucified victims die. They die because they can't breathe any longer. They can't pull themselves up on their wounds to get a breath. So He didn't bleed to death. He did bleed and He bled profusely and there was blood covering His entire body as He was wounded in those great wounds.

So you just want to be biblical about it. Yes, He needed to die the way He did because that's the way God planned it. That's the way God designed it. It needed to be violent. It needed to be bloody because that was depicted in all of the preliminary imagery of sacrifice. But He didn't bleed to death and there's nothing in the fluid in His body that in any way in itself could save us. He could only save us by dying.

PHIL: All right, here's another question that came to us in several forms, and so I'll paraphrase it for you. It's one that comes up a lot. In the context of Christ's death at Calvary, what does it mean for the Father to forsake the Son at the cross? Does this mean there was some kind of temporary separation of the Trinity?

JOHN: Well, that is a mystery of all mysteries. I'm in the middle right now of trying to understand that. There are some very thoughtful ways to approach that. Let me give you one that maybe you never thought of. When Jesus is on the cross, and it reaches noon and He was crucified at nine in the morning, it reaches noon, darkness falls everywhere. And the question is, what was going on in the darkness? Some through the years have said, "Well God was absent, God disappeared." That might not be the right answer. The right answer might be that it is at precisely that point that God shows up and that the darkness, rather than representing the absence of God represents the presence of God. If you remember Sinai, you remember that God came down in darkness and threatening darkness. If you remember the covenant that God made with Abraham, God was depicted in darkness. There are a number of Old Testament places where darkness is symbolic of God's presence in judgment. And it may be that what happened in the darkness was God was pouring out His fury. You remember now, Jesus said things before the darkness, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," and a couple of other of His sayings and He said things at the very end of the darkness, but He said nothing during the darkness.

So in my thinking about that, perhaps that darkness was the actual period of time in which He suffered infinitely the wrath of God poured out in the darkness. We tend to associate God with light,

but if you want to talk about judgment and you ask about hell, for example, hell is not light, hell is darkness and it is the darkness of divine wrath. It is God who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. And it is the darkness of hell that pictures the wrath of God. It may well be that on the cross Jesus experienced an infinite hell in the darkness, that it is the darkness of divine wrath felt infinitely and that perhaps it is when the darkness ends that Jesus then says, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Maybe it is at that moment, having felt the fury of God's wrath for those three hours, maybe then God moved away. And Jesus is now feeling the total absence of God. I mean, who knows precisely, but it seems to me that He endured an infinite hell for all for whom He died and that that infinite hell manifests the full presence of God in His wrath so that it was after that that God is not there for maybe a moment.

And what does that mean? Well He was there in the fullness of His presence in judgment. Up to that point, He had always been there in the fullness of His presence in fellowship, but for a moment He was not there, either in judgment or in fellowship. What that means? I think it's a real separation which our Lord experienced, but it's not the dissolution of the Trinity.

PHIL: Is it...would you say it's a separation between God the Father and Christ in His humanity, but not really a breach in the ontological Trinity?

JOHN: No, there can be no breach in the Trinity, the Trinity is eternal life. It's essentially eternal life. It's an eternal nature that can never be breached. Yeah, it's a....

PHIL: A mystery.

JOHN: It is a mystery but it is, as you put it, it is a breach between God and the man, Jesus, and Jesus in His incarnate humanity. There's no way to understand it other than to realize that in some real way Jesus experienced the sense of God's absence. He had always known His presence in righteous fellowship and then He knew His presence, I think, in the judgment of the darkness. And then He's gone. The judgment ends. The infinite judgment has been exhausted and the comfort hasn't come yet. And then He says, in the sense of absence, "Into Your hands I commit My Spirit." I have nowhere else to go but to trust Myself to You, even though there's a sense in which I can't sense...I can't feel Your presence.

PHIL: Wow.

Alright, he's a question that we get frequently from listeners, and I'll paraphrase this one for you. It came in from a listener named Lisa and several other listeners who want to know. Regarding election, does that mean that God chooses people not to be saved?

JOHN: Well technically no. God doesn't choose people not to be saved. Everybody's born with that potential already. You know, at this particular point we get trapped in our human thinking and our human reasoning and driving everything to what we think is its logical conclusion. The bottom line is this, the Bible does not teach that God chooses people to be damned. It only teaches that He chooses people to be saved. That's explicit in Scripture. He fits vessels unto honor and glory, but

vessels are fitted to destruction. He distances Himself...that's Romans 9...He distances Himself from damnation. And this is what is very important because if you err in this point, then you come up with the hyper Calvinistic double predestination where God says, "You go to heaven...You go to hell...You go to heaven...You go to hell." God does not take personal responsibility for the damnation of the lost. He takes responsibility for their judgment but their guilt and their culpability and their sin is a responsibility they bear themselves.

I know that's a mysterious thing to consider and human reason isn't going to be able to resolve that. But being faithful to Scripture, God finds no pleasure in the death of the wicked, Scripture says. But at the same time, no one can be saved unless God purposely chooses them.

So the way to understand it is the whole human race is headed to hell. God in His mercy and grace, uninfluenced by anyone, chooses some from those that are headed to hell by their own sinfulness for salvation.

PHIL: You know, there's even a technical theological term for that, preterition(???), and it means "God passes over." In the language of most of the creeds, He chooses those, His elect, for salvation and the rest He passes over.

JOHN: Right. And I think that's a good way to view it. He chooses not to choose them.

PHIL: Another question we receive on the same subject, how does divine election then mesh with human responsibility? You've sort of referred to that to say we bear the responsibility for the bad things we do. How does that work then if God is sovereign?

JOHN: Look, this is the greatest mystery to people. You know, I've been doing this for a long time, 40 years of teaching the Bible, this is the question of all questions that you get asked in every single question and answer session you do no matter where you are on the planet. How can we be held responsible for our sin and our judgment when God chooses who is going to be saved? And the answer is...I don't know. All I know is what the Bible says. Man is responsible for his own sin, he is held responsible for his own unbelief. He is therefore culpable, he is condemned because he will not believe. That's what Jesus said. You're condemned because you believe not. Jesus even said, "You will not come to Me that you might have life." Now how that resolves rationally is a great challenge because I've never been able to resolve that in my mind. All I know is, God holds all sinners responsible and they are judged as culpable and guilty and condemned because they refuse to believe the gospel.

On the other hand, people who are saved are saved because of the sovereign power of God. Now perhaps the best way to help people with the question is to simply say, "This is a mystery that is consistent with trying to mesh human thinking with the divine mind." And I like to illustrate it by saying this. If I asked you who wrote the book of Romans? What are you going to say? Well you're going to say, "Paul wrote the book of Romans." And then you're going to stop and say, "Well wait a minute, the Holy Spirit wrote the book of Romans."

Well, so who is responsible for the book of Romans? Is it Paul who is responsible for it? Well yes, every word came out of his mind, his vocabulary. But yet it's inspired by God, every word is inspired by the Holy Spirit. You have this same dilemma. You have a fully responsible and accountable Paul who is not a mechanic but who is writing out of his own heart, his own mind. And yet you have every word coming from the Holy Spirit. How can it be all Paul and all the Holy Spirit? It's...it's...it's a mystery again.

Or I ask the question, "Who lives your Christian life?" And that's a simple question and when I ask people that question, they just stop in their tracks like...what? "Who lives your Christian life? Well, I do." And then you say, "Wait a minute. I can't...I can't take the credit for my Christian life, Christ does." Well how can it be your responsibility and your obedience and your faithfulness that God demands and yet in your flesh dwells no good thing and for me to live is Christ, and I live yet not I but Christ lives in me...you have the same exact mystery.

On the other hand, you could say, "I believe in eternal security. I believe that if I am once saved, I'm going to be kept saved until I get to glory." And yet the Bible talks about the perseverance of the saints. You will be saved if you endure. You will be saved if you continue. So you have this same kind of very difficult apparent paradox in all major doctrines that relate us to the divine. And that's the way it is in this matter of election. We have full human responsibility regarding our sin and are called to believe the gospel. And yet at the same time, salvation is a sovereign work of God.

I can't resolve that. I can be content to accept what Scripture says and leave the resolution to God.

PHIL: It's important to maintain that tension too, isn't it? Even practically in the Christian life, Scripture is full of it. Paul says, "Work out your own salvation," then he turns right around and says, "But it's God who works in you."

JOHN: But it's God who works in you to will and to do His own good pleasure, Philippians.

PHIL: That's the key to practical Christian living. So it isn't just a theoretical....

JOHN: Well actually I love the mystery of it. I fully embrace the mystery because otherwise I'm going to be able to figure everything out and then I'm going to be sure that this is a man-made religion. The fact that this is such a dominating reality on the pages of Scripture is to me one of the great evidences of its divine authorship.

PHIL: Here's a question that maybe isn't so mysterious. This comes from a listener named Gary who asks, "What is the Book of Life referred to in Scripture? And when the biblical writers write about blotting names out of the book, is that a reference to people losing their salvation?"

JOHN: First of all, the Book of Life is simply the record, the heavenly record, it's not an actual book with pages, the heavenly record of the elect. It's the names of the people who are chosen by God who come to faith and salvation. The Bible never says that someone's name will be blotted out of that book. The Bible says the opposite. And this is where people get confused. In the book of Revelation it says, the Lord says, "I will never blot your name out of the Book of Life." It is a very



strong negative. And the point is this, in the ancient world you lived in a city, state and you were a citizen of that city or city/state, and if you did your duty as a citizen, you could remain a citizen. But it was very common when someone dishonored their city or someone violated the law or the social mores of their city, their name would be blotted out of the city record.

And our Lord is saying, you may get blotted out of earthly books, you may be eliminated from earthly records and privileges...I will never blot your name out of the Book of Life. It is the opposite. Some people say, "Well doesn't that mean you can lose your salvation?" It means you can't lose your salvation because it's presented as a negative, I'll never do it.

PHIL: Humph....all right, here's a question from a listener named Laurie.

LAURIE: Hi, John, this is Laurie from Paulding, Ohio. My question for you is, "How does someone come to terms with perhaps their child not being one of God's elect?" I totally believe in God's sovereign election, and yet the idea of the child He blessed us with not being a part of that plan can overwhelm me. I would appreciate some type of answer on that. Thank you very much. Bye.

JOHN: Well thank you, Laurie. You never, ever, ever want to come to that conclusion since you have no idea who is elect. You just have no right to that. It would mitigate against your prayers. It would mitigate against your passionate calls, gospel calls to the child. You don't ever want to entertain that thought.

In fact, I have a very good friend who said to me one day at dinner. "I have a son who is not elect." I was shocked. And I said, "What in the world are you talking about?" Well that son is now a partner with that man in ministry. It turns out that God saved him. You don't want to come to that conclusion, you don't know the secret decree of God. You don't want to assume that for your child. What you want to do is follow the biblical mandate, first of all, to pray faithfully for the salvation of your child, to evangelize passionately and consistently and live with the constant hope that the effectual prayer of a righteous man can avail much. I just think that's something that is outside our knowledge. And you don't want to draw that conclusion.

And I think even in the case of, you know, you've prayed for this person, they're now 22, 23...look, life can go on a lot longer than that. You don't want to assume anything like that to be true. I think you want to be concerned, you want to be prayerful. You want to use every gospel opportunity you can. The truth is, you don't know that, you don't know when God may do the actual saving and prove that this child is among the elect. So you don't want to give up on that at all.

PHIL: Here's a question from grace who notes that with the onset of even gender or non-specific Bibles and all of that, it's becoming more and more common to hear people who are religious, not necessarily Christians but often people who profess to be Christians referring to God in feminine pronouns...God as she. What are the implications of that?

JOHN: First of all, that's not what the Bible says. God refers to Himself in male terms. And that's consistent with headship. That's consistent with authority. That's 1 Corinthians 11, God is the head

of Christ, Christ is the head of the man, the man is the head of the woman. Male authority is in the fabric of the universe because God Himself is the ultimate authority and maleness reflects that authority. God makes man, He makes Adam. He makes Adam in His own image and then He gives him a helper. And Adam in a sense is the image of God in terms of authority in that family relationship. So it is never an honest approach to Scripture to turn God into a female figure. It is always a feminist attempt to overturn male headship.

In other words, you just couldn't do it legitimately in Scripture. God is always in a male figure when He presents Himself on the pages of Scripture. Now there are occasions when God presents Himself like a woman. For example, in the parable that Jesus told about the woman who lost a coin, the woman is a picture of Christ to whom someone has lost of value and he sweeps the house, she does, and finds the coin and then it says that heaven rejoices when a sinner is found. The shepherd was a man. The shepherd who lost the sheep was a man, the woman who lost the coin was obviously a woman. And so there might be figures, sometimes God is seen as an eagle, or a bird hovering like a mother bird over her chicks. So there are images of God that draw on the feminine side, but God is clearly the one in ultimate and final authority and is always presented in all parts of the Trinity in a male form. And any effort otherwise is simply a twisting of Scripture based on an agenda which is usually....well always a feminist agenda to overturn male leadership.

PHIL: Here's a question from Richard.

RICHARD: Hi, my name is Richard and I live in Massachusetts and the reason I was calling was, I wanted to get an idea regarding divorce and remarriage, whether it is acceptable for a believer to marry another believer who was divorced while she was an unbeliever. And so any way, that's pretty much the question. Thanks very much.

JOHN: Well, just to give you a simple answer, Richard. Yes, for a believer to marry another believer who was divorced as a non-believer, I don't see any prohibition in Scripture. What a person does as a non-believer is going to be consistent with the way non-believers act and non-believers live. And if you're in Christ, you're a new creation. I think that's pretty clear in Scripture.

You know, when you talk about any of the virtues or characteristics or standards for Christian conduct, Christian living, Christian marriage, they are in the Christian experience. You can't expect someone to have met all the criteria for a Christian marriage before they were a Christian. So the Bible says that divorce is acceptable under certain circumstances. If a non-believer departs, let him depart. That's a believer being divorced. Or if adultery takes place, sort of the unrepentant adultery, then you're free to remarry. So in the case for a believer, let's say, in the case of a believer, if you have an adulterous partner who violates and breaches the covenant, or if you have an unbelieving partner who leaves, in those cases you would be free to remarry.

It is also very possible that a sinning partner who will not repent of that sin and is being treated as a non-believer frees up a believer to be remarried. Once you become a believer, then I think the only basis for divorce would be adultery. And even then, if the person repented and wanted to keep the marriage together, I think you'd be best served and God would be honored if you forgave that sin and

embraced that person because I think that's the heart of God who embraces us even in our sin, continues to be a faithful husband to us.

PHIL: Here's a related question, then. Is there ever any scenario or case you can envision where a new believer comes to you, suppose she's a woman who has been divorced maybe a couple of years, her previous husband is not remarried, he's not a believer. Would you counsel her to seek reconciliation.

JOHN: No, I wouldn't counsel her to seek reconciliation because that would be to marry a non-believer. And I think Scripture is clear about that. First Corinthians 7, we are to marry only in the Lord.

By the way, I just finished a new book on this subject, on divorce, which soon should be available through this ministry.

PHIL: That's right. I think it will be out later this year, around May or so.

JOHN: And there's a lot of issues, a lot of complex ones that I hope the book will be helpful.

PHIL: John, here's another totally unrelated question. How would you advise people to witness to their Mormon friends?

JOHN: Here's the thing you need to understand to start with. Mormons are on their way to hell. It is a damning religious system. It is so far from Christianity as to be more like paganism than Christianity. There are so many gods in Mormonism that they don't even know how many gods there are. In fact, there are more gods all the time because they make gods. When Mormons die, according to Mormon theology, the Mormon couples that have been baptized in the temple in Salt Lake and have been faithful Mormons, done what they're supposed to do, they get their own planet and they just make gods with some kind of strange celestial sex forever and ever and ever. That part of it, folks, is very much like the seventy virgins that the Jihadists terrorist think they're going to meet when they blow themselves up along with the infidels. There are elements of Muslim religion in Mormonism. Worst of all, they believe that the God who created the universe is Himself a created being. And they believe that Jesus, the eternal God, is a created being. They believe that God had sex with a mother and they had baby Jesus born to them as a god in heaven.

This thing is so polluted and convoluted, it is idolatry of the rankest kind. It is polytheism of the worst kind. There's millions of gods all over everywhere. It is deviant...it is deviant in the sense that it has all these sexual overtones. And that ought to be clear to anybody who has got his eyes wide open because Joseph Smith's big deal was polygamy. You know, have sex with as many women as you can possibly have. Brigham Young, you know, turned that into epic proportions. And, of course, recently the Mormons have tried to back away from that.

Now you have to understand this about Mormonism. Mormonism believes the Bible is corrupt by their own statements. The Bible is corrupt. The Bible is filled with error. The Bible is not trustworthy. And

the Bible has to be corrected and the correct interpretation of the Bible comes through all the writings of Joseph Smith, and The Pearl of Great Price, The Doctrines and Covenants, all of that kind of stuff is designed to correct the Bible and give added revelation. So what you have is a denial then of the Trinity, they don't believe in the Trinity, a denial of the nature of God as the eternal One, a denial of the person of Jesus Christ as the eternal Son of God. There's even a denial of the Holy Spirit, the biblical teaching of the Holy Spirit, a denial of the veracity and the truthfulness of the Bible. And then you add to this, this sexual deviancy where you want to have multiple wives and end up on a planet somewhere making spiritual children forever. And you can see that there's some really...some really perverse things at the core of this.

I think, and the reason I'm saying that because I know the question was about evangelizing, I think you have to understand that you're snatching a branch out of the burning. This is a very, very, very pagan religious system. They have managed to do enough public relations to convince people that we ought to accept them as Christians. They even talk about salvation by grace. Now you've got to understand what they're saying. They believe in three heavens, for example, okay? And the first heaven is going to be the deprived. And you know what the deprivation of the first heaven is? You're single. Okay. That's where you go if you're a non-Mormon, you've got to be single forever and like that's the worst imaginable thing to be single forever. That will tell you what their perceptions are.

Then they have a second heaven which is a little bit better for people, but they're also single forever. And then they have the highest heaven where you get to be married and make your children forever. The low heaven is sort of where everybody goes, the non-Mormons. They're stuck, single forever, and it's not a happy place and it's really sort of a version of hell.

So all of their theology is skewed, all of it is warped. So when they talk about a salvation by grace, they're talking about getting you into that first heaven where you're single and you suffer and it's not a happy place, that's where the grace will take you. God's just nice and let's you go there, but if you want to get to the big heaven, you earn your way there.

PHIL: There is, as you say, a concerted public relations effort under way right now to get evangelicals to accept Mormons as mainstream Christianity.

JOHN: Right.

PHIL: And I encountered some of that literature recently. They actually quote from your books.

JOHN: Well, I have met with the leaders of that Movement. There are a couple of guys, one of them is Robert Millet(?) who is the main teacher of Mormon theology...

PHIL: Teaches at Brigham Young, right?

JOHN: Yeah...yeah, he's the head of that department. But you have to understand, they don't have any Bible interpreters. They don't have any interpreters of Mormonism. They can't interpret any of it. The presiding president apostle is, he has the final say on what is true. So all they can do is affirm

these things. And they came to meet with me, invited me to Brigham Young, invited me...they wanted me to come into the city, they wanted me to talk to the faculty, talk to students. I tried to be as gracious as I could. I said, "You've got a different God, a different Christ, a different gospel, different source material and you've got a false religion. What am I going to gain by going there and having you pat me on the back like I'm some kind of co-belligerent here."

So I have not gone and I've continued to correspond with these people. But to me this is a deeply insidious issue. Now what do you do to evangelize these people? First you realize there are two things you've got to say to a Mormon, one is this, "The Bible is the Word of God and the Bible alone is the Word of God." Joseph Smith is a false prophet.

Let me just take a digression. Many years ago I read a book called Seth Speaks, written by Jane Roberts, you remember that name. Jane Roberts is a medium. Jane Roberts is a woman who goes into a trance and contacts demons. I had no idea what this really could produce. Through Jane Roberts comes this book called Seth Speaks, this very deep mystical musings from a demon. She goes into...her face gets contorted and out comes all this stuff that she writes down, that's so complicated and so mystical and so wicked that no one human being could come up with it, this is demonic and it produces this book which you can buy, it's in print. That's a model for the Book of Mormon. That's a model for the Doctrine and Covenants. That's a model for The Pearl of Great Price, it's demon stuff. It's very sophisticated. It's very clever. It's not human, but it's not from God.

So what you want to say to a Mormon is, "The Bible is the only truth and until you believe that, there's no hope. And Jesus Christ is the one true God and the only Savior and salvation is by grace through faith." You've got to go to the jugular on this issue with Mormons. And I think you need to tell them that what they are caught up in is a damning system of lies. There's so many lies that have been exposed in Mormonism. You know, Joseph Smith supposedly translated those...some of those documents that he wrote from some language. Well they now know that language didn't exist. He said that he was translating something from Egyptian. They found those documents, they're in museums now. And his translation has nothing to do with what was said in the original. There's just so many lies. It was fraud from the beginning but it was demonic fraud. So I think you have to understand the seriousness of this.

PHIL: Kind of neo-Gnosticism, isn't it?

JOHN: Well that too, along with...you know, it's the amalgam of every foul kind of thing. Sure, they're the secret knowledge people.

PHIL: Yeah.

JOHN: But when you think about America, in our history. It came out of the burned over area in the Finney revivals in upstate New York out of the twisted experiences that people were having there. That's where it got its beginning. It was such a threat to people that they actually killed Joseph Smith. He got murdered one day and they made him move all the time, get out of town because he was so bizarre. But it found a place in America. And can you imagine, it grew so powerful that it actually

took over one of the states in the United States? And now has gained this kind of acceptance, it's a very, very successful satanic movement.

PHIL: It's still growing, too. And I recently read a book that compared, made a similar comparison to what you just did, saying that the growth...the founding and growth of Mormonism is a pretty close parallel to what happened with Islam.

JOHN: Yeah, and there's many elements...you know, the demons can only come up with so much stuff. And their lies are going to be the same in any religion. You see the duplication of these things.

PHIL: All right, let me just change subjects here. And here's a question from William. He doesn't give us many details, but he says, "I've walked away from the Lord, how do I get back?"

JOHN: Well, the first thing to ask is what do you mean you walked away from the Lord? First John 2:19 says, "They went out from us because they were not of us. If they had been of us, they would have remained with us. But they went out from us that it might be made manifest that they never were of us." Pretty clear.

If you walked away from the Lord, you mean that you think you once believed and now you don't? Or did you say you believed and you were in the church and you decided to go off and live an ungodly, unholy, unrighteous life?

I think...you don't need to think about coming back. I think you need to think about coming for real. I would say to someone, "If you think you've walked away from the Lord, you were never there. You need salvation. You need to repent of your sin. You need to confess your sin and you need to call on the Lord to save you by His grace through the sacrifice of Christ." You need to believe the gospel, confess your sin and repent.

PHIL: You know, we hear this a lot even in the baptismal testimonies at Grace, people will often say, "I asked Jesus into my heart when I was twelve years old but lived a profligate life for fifteen years and now I'm coming back." And when I hear that, I often think, I think this person may not even realize it but it seems pretty clear to me that he wasn't saved when he asked Jesus into his heart as a twelve year old.

JOHN: Yeah, it's back to that whole thing. You know, "Many will say to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and I'll say to them, 'Depart from Me, I never knew you.'" And the test becomes not what you say but what you do. Right?

PHIL: Yeah.

JOHN: So I would just say to someone, you know, you don't need to get back to the Lord, you need to come to the Lord. You've experienced what an artificial conversion is, now you need a real one. And that's a matter of repentance. You need to ask the Spirit of God, ask God graciously to convict you of your sin, to convince you of the truth of the gospel and you need to cry out for forgiveness and

mercy and salvation.

PHIL: That pretty much goes for anyone who considers himself a carnal Christian, who thinks he's saved but lives a horrible life.

JOHN: Yeah, remember the ole deal, "I want to rededicate my life."

PHIL: Yeah.

JOHN: I want to rededicate my life." Well that is not a biblical concept. I don't even know where that came from. But stop thinking about sort of re-upping, you know, and start thinking about conversion. That's what I've been saying since...

PHIL: That first sermon...

JOHN: That first sermon. There's a real salvation and a false salvation. And there's a lot more folks caught up in a false salvation than have come to a real one. And that's what needs to happen. Get the book, The Gospel According to Jesus and read it.

PHIL: Yeah, Amen. John, here's a question we get all the time. People want to know what writer or books have had the most impact on your life?

JOHN: Oh, that's a hard question and I'm asked that question all the time. You know, when I really began to sort out my bibliography and read the things I needed to read, meaningful things, I was a seminary student, early on there was...it was Benjamin Warfield, Inspiration and Authority of Scripture, and particularly his book on the Charismatic Movement, really helpful on the work of the Holy Spirit. It was Stephen Charnock's book on The Existence and Attributes of God that had a profound effect on me. It was Thomas Watson, the Puritan's Body of Divinity and his exceptional book on the Beatitudes, I read the whole book one night flying from Lima, Peru to back to the states.

There were other books that had an impact on me. There was a little book that John. W. R. Stott wrote on Portraits of a Preacher that was a word study on several different aspects of ministry. There was a book by Alexander Rattray Haye which was a kind of brethren book on the biblical order for church, kind of a biblical ecclesiology and for the first time in my life, that book exposed me to thinking biblically about a church and its structure rather than thinking historically. There have been books that had immense impact on me in a more modern writer, David Martyn Lloyd-Jones on The Sermon on the Mount, profound effect. Ian Murray's two volume biography of Martyn Lloyd-Jones only enhanced and enriched that.

There was a book I read while I was in seminary called The Greatness of the Kingdom written by Alva McClain(?) that really helped me get the big picture. There was a three book set by Walt Kaiser toward Old Testament theology, toward Old Testament ethics. And the third one was toward Old Testament interpretation or hermeneutics, really, really, helpful books. There's been a lot of books.

PHIL: Yeah I've noticed...I've kind of watched your reading habits over the past twenty years or so and you mentioned the two-volume set on Martyn Lloyd-Jones by Ian Murray. It seems to me of all the contemporary current authors, Ian Murray, you can gravitate to everything he writes. There was *Evangelicalism Divided*, Jonathan Edwards biography, then the follow up volume on Lloyd-Jones.

JOHN: Yeah, I even enjoyed Ian Murray on Wesley and others, along with Wesley's movement. Yeah, I just read Murray's new book on Lloyd-Jones which picks up a lot of the pieces that he didn't include in the two volumes and when I'm reading Murray, I really understand him, he's a pastor, he's a theologian. So he makes for a great biographer as well. But particularly when he writes on Lloyd-Jones, I feel like somebody's in my head because I think the way Lloyd-Jones thought. I react the way he reacts. I think our personalities must have been somewhat the same, at least in some ways. I didn't agree with him in that one glaring area of the ministry of the Holy Spirit that he seemed to be struggling with, but yeah, I love Lloyd-Jones and certainly Murray has opened Lloyd-Jones up to me as well as reading his own, you know, the stuff that he himself wrote.

PHIL: All right, now let me turn to the question that we probably get asked more than any other single question...

JOHN: By the way, Phil, before you leave that question, I have to say this. I have not read anything through all the years of my ministry more than I've read Bible commentaries. And I don't often say that. Every single week of my life I'm preaching on two passages of Scripture, one on the Sunday morning and one on the Sunday night and I read for each of the passages I'm preaching on at least 15 to 20 commentaries.

PHIL: Wow. Yeah, I've seen you do that. And you're not a fan of modern technology. You don't use a computer. You need a lot of desk space when you study, don't you?

JOHN: Uh-huh, yeah, cause I have books all over everywhere. I've got a system pretty much where I can work through my pile. But the reason I read all the commentaries is I want to be exhaustive. I don't want to leave any stone unturned and I want the cross references that somebody might have tucked in there or an illustration that somebody might have or an insight into a passage, or a connection to some other passage, or some other theological idea. And I may read those commentaries and only draw five or ten thoughts out of them.

PHIL: Do you have one commentator that's a favorite?

JOHN: Well, I think over the big, big sweep of things, you know, there aren't a lot of guys that wrote on all the New Testament, for example, but probably as consistently good as anybody would be William Hendrickson. And then there are other series that have different authors for different volumes. Hendrickson is good. But I think each book, you know, you get the best available commentaries on the given book you're working on.

PHIL: Do you have a guideline, a favorite resource that tells you what are the best commentaries?



JOHN: Well I've been doing it long enough to know now who the writers are that I want to read, but through the years Dr. Jim Rosscup one of our faculty members at the Master's Seminary has developed a book which is a book that gives you annotated bibliography of all the best commentaries there are. That book is available through the Master's Seminary. So anybody who wanted to get that can reach them.

PHIL: All right. Now let me turn to what is probably THE most commonly asked question we get. I think somebody either phones us or writes us on a daily basis to ask this question, and it's this: What do you do when there are no good churches around?

JOHN: You go to the best one. You just can't not go. You need to be the blessing. You need to be the difference. You need to be there. You...you know, I always answer that question by saying, look at the churches of Revelation. You've got seven churches, two were good, right? Just two, Smyrna and Philadelphia were two good churches. The other five churches were flawed profoundly flawed, left their first love, compromised with the world, tolerant of sin, dead, you know the Lord vomit the other one out of His mouth. These are serious, serious assaults on those churches by the Lord of the church. In fact, He tells them, "I'm going to remove the lampstand and I'm going to judge you."

Now if you were living in Ephesus or if you were living in Pergamos or Thyatira or you're living in Sardis or you're living in Laodicea, you didn't have a choice. And so in those letters the Lord says, "I know there are some of you who haven't soiled your garments, you know, you've been faithful and I commend you." And He tells them, "I'll give you a new name and I'll give you this and I'll give you that." I think the model there is...look, they only had one church per town. And you were there because you're a part of the church of Jesus Christ and there's no such thing as a floating Christian. You belong to an assembly of believers under the leadership of the people that are there. You identify openly and publicly there. You baptize, with the Spirit spiritually into the body of Christ, you're baptized with water visibly physically into the fellowship of the church. I think you pick the best church, you go, you go prayerfully, you go not looking for what you can get out of it. That's not worship. You go, bringing to God the best that you can bring from your own prepared heart. Tap resources like Grace to You and other places. Read good books, listen to good material, listen to Christian radio. Get what you need to grow in grace and be a part of the best option.

PHIL: One last question comes to us from a listener Dorian. And he asks, "How do I engage in a respectful way, how do I engage in the truth war?" I think what Dorian is getting at is there's an all-out assault from right within the church to discredit the authority and the clarity of objective biblical truth. How does a person listening right now, maybe a lay Christian expose that trend for what it is and fight that fight?

JOHN: Well, I think you use every means possible. And I tell people when you're in a church, go to the pastor one on one, don't start a rumor mill, don't start a...you know, some kind of a destructive mutiny underneath him, I think you go to the pastor. You go to the elders, the leaders of your church and say, "Here are my concerns." I would write it out in a letter, spell it out, give a biblical presentation of the issue. I would write it in an irenic peace-seeking way and then I would say, "I want to come and meet with you and share my heart." And then I would go. I would take somebody

with me and I would just lay it out with leadership. I think that's the right thing to do.

The Bible knows only one way to confront a problem – face to face. There are no other ways. If somebody's overtaken in a fault, you go to him. That's what you do. And certainly error is a fault. If a person is heretical, you go to him and you go back, right?, and you admonish him and you admonish him. And if he still doesn't respond, you know, you follow up by putting him out of the church. So there's only one way to approach any of these issues and that is you confront biblically. That's the only way. But I think you're much better off if you go to the leadership, if you write a letter that lays out your concerns, it may be that having done that you're going to go, you're going to be rebuffed, you're going to be considered some kind of a threat and you may end up in another church. But I think you have the obligation to defend the truth, to uphold the truth. And I'm not talking about nit-picking about I don't like that kind of music, or I don't like that... That may be true, you may hate all of that but you've got to pick your battle and it needs to be a truth battle. And when you're dealing with sound doctrine and truth, you've got the Bible on your side. If you're dealing with style of music, you're not going to find a lot of verses that are going to tell you what style to have in music. So you've got to make sure you're dealing with issues of doctrine and biblical interpretation and a true and direct representation of Christ and His church. But I think you go to leadership. They are the ones who are accountable and should be held responsible.

PHIL: Thanks, John, that's all we have time for today. But to our listeners, I want to say thank you for listening in with us. We're going to be giving you more opportunities to ask more questions down the road and we're going to air those questions on Grace to You radio, maybe post them on our web site, that's GTY.org...GTY.org. On behalf of John MacArthur and the staff here, thanks for listening and thanks for supporting the verse-by-verse teaching of God's Word through Grace to You.

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