

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

Theology and Ministry: An Interview with John MacArthur

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: GTY133

PHIL JOHNSON: John, this is a great privilege for me. When I was in my twenties, before you even had a radio ministry, I used to listen to your tapes. I subscribed to every tape that came from Grace Community Church. I used to think, "What would it be like to spend an hour with John MacArthur and just ask him questions. And the Lord has, over the years, done exceedingly, abundantly, beyond what I ever dreamed and I've had many opportunities to question you and I never run out of questions.

JOHN MACARTHUR: No.

PHIL: But...no, I know it. But it's a privilege to do this and sort of share it with people of Grace Church.

JOHN: Yeah, I just need to add something. The first time I met you...

PHIL: Right.

JOHN: You invited me over for dinner at your house in Chicago because you were editing a book, it happened to be the book on worship...I think.

PHIL: That's right.

JOHN: And you were working for Moody Press and you gave me accommodations in the Ramada Inn next door in the dead of winter and the place had no heat. So I pulled the carpet off the floor and put it on top of the bed to stay warm all night. Do you remember that?

PHIL: I do...

JOHN: So I've never let you make reservations for me...(laughter).

PHIL: Yeah, I think the only other time I helped make reservations for you was when you got stranded in...

JOHN: India...

PHIL: Seventeenth century house in India.

JOHN: Yes it was and I got ill. But I have forgiven you, Phil. (Laughter)

PHIL: Well you still answer my questions and...

JOHN: I do.

PHIL: And that's the great thing. And tonight I have some questions but I want to preface this first question because it has to do with what you plan to preach when you finish Mark. I want to preface it with a couple of things because I don't think everybody at Grace Church really grasps what an achievement it is for you to have preached verse by verse through the entire New Testament over 42 years time. As far as I know, that's an achievement unparalleled by any expositor in the twentieth century. Nobody's ever done that. And we're grateful that you've stuck with it...(Applause)

JOHN: Thank you, thank you.

PHIL: And I actually remember actually the very first time I met you was at a meeting at Moody Press to discuss the commentary series. They were planning this massive project, one of the biggest projects Moody had ever undertaken to do a series of New Testament commentaries by John MacArthur and Jerry Jenkins had asked me to be involved. And when he was describing it to me, he said, kind of breathlessly, "We think it's going to take as long as ten years." That was thirty years ago.

JOHN: Yeah.

PHIL: So, I think you shifted in to a more deliberate gear once you started the commentaries, right?

JOHN: It had a very direct effect on how I expounded the text because I knew that I couldn't prepare to preach and write commentaries at a different pace. I knew that if I was going to do the commentaries, they had to come from the preaching and so they dictated the depth and breadth..

PHIL: Right.

JOHN: ...Of the content of the sermons so that I could produce in the pulpit the material that eventually would show up in the commentaries. And that's what has strung it out over thirty. And I think when it's finished, probably another five years maybe to finish, there will then be thirty-two volumes or thirty-three volumes in thirty-five years, so it

PHIL: But, you will finish the preaching...if you've followed the outline you've laid out, you will finish preaching through Mark which is the last book for you to finish, you're in the last few chapters, you will finish...your plan is to finish on the last Sunday of July this year.

JOHN: Maybe even sooner than that.

PHIL: Really?

JOHN: Yeah, it could be...

PHIL: I'll be surprised. (Laughter)

JOHN: Maybe sooner, might be surprised as well, but you're right, that some time in the summer, that is the plan.

In a sense, it's a little bit hard for me because it wasn't that long ago that I was preaching through the last part of Luke. And while when I started Mark I was a long way from the beginning of Luke, because I took ten years to get to the end, here we are getting to the end in two years which only puts it two years pass the end of Luke. So trying to look at these familiar texts that we looked at in Luke in a fresh way, even the preaching this morning, to try to bring new insights into those things...so that's the challenge as I look ahead, to go back over material that's somewhat recently familiar. But, you know, the Word never loses its freshness to me.

PHIL: Right.

JOHN: So I'm actually looking forward to going back over some of these things and discovering the things that perhaps we left out last time.

PHIL: Now the reason I know a lot of people at Grace just don't grasp what an accomplishment that is, is the question I most commonly hear is, "What do you think John will do next? Do you think he'll ever preach through the Old Testament?" And I figure...if it took you 40 years to get through the New Testament....

JOHN: Sure.....Right.

PHIL: I don't think you're going to make it in...

JOHN: No. I'm not even going to try to preach through Psalms. I don't have a hundred and...

PHIL: Do you have a plan?

JOHN: Do I have a plan? My plan is to seek the Lord about that. At this point, I really don't. And the plan is in the summer when I finish Mark, to that, as you said, that's been my life goal. I think people probably don't think about it the way I think about it. When I first came to Grace Community Church in

1969, February 9th, I had in my mind the idea, "Wouldn't it be incredibly blessed for me to be able to go through the whole New Testament."

I'm not so much driven by the preaching of it as the knowing it. Preaching in a sense is what I have to do, studying the scriptures is what I get to do. I never study the Bible to make a sermon, I only study it to understand the text. And the exhilaration of my life is the text itself. I love it. You know, every time we have a conversation, we have a conversation about the Word of God and what the Word of God teaches and this is my life.

So what I wanted to do, in all honesty, and the Lord answered that prayer, was to go into a church and stay there the rest of my life because I knew if I was moving around, I couldn't possibly get through the whole New Testament. I didn't think I could get through the whole New Testament any way, honestly, but that was going to be an objective. But I knew the only way it would ever happen would be if I could stay in one place, because if I went somewhere else, there would be too much temptation to use what I preached before again because it's easier to do that.

PHIL: Right.

JOHN: So if you're going to do this, as relentlessly as it demands you do it, and then produce commentaries, you have to be in the same place where everybody's heard everything you've already preached, taped everything you've already preached so you have to keep moving. So the Lord put me in one church and just left me there and I know there were times through the years when probably for the sake of the people I should have left but didn't. I tell pastors some times that I'm living on the backside of when you should have left, and this is the best of all worlds, to survive the crises and have all your enemies die off and still be around. So, you know, it's a surprise to me, as much as to anybody that this has actually happened to go through the whole New Testament and then to have the commentaries come alongside.

PHIL: At what point in those 40 years did the idea that, "Well I'm just going to keep preaching through the New Testament," finally become, "You know what, I am going to complete this New Testament. If the Lord gives me time here, I'll make it all the way through?"

JOHN: You know, I'm not a real long-range planner like that. I don't think a lot about that. I don't think I really seriously began to think about the end of all of this until I was toward the end of Luke. And, you know, you never know. I had a few years ago a blood clot situation, I could have gone to heaven pretty easily. I never know what the Lord has for me, but I just kind of now, for the first time in my life, think I might live till July. Because...come on, Lord, this far...and the I'd have to leave the rest to you...which would be great. Like William Hendrickson, remember William Hendrickson? He wrote all those commentaries and then he died and passed the baton to a friend?

PHIL: I'm going to add that to my prayer list...Do not let that happen.

Now I have several questions...

JOHN: Now just humor me for a few more months, folks. That will be good.

PHIL: I have several questions prepared and some of them are doctrinal, some of them have to do with philosophy of ministry, church policy, and such. I'm going to give them to you in no particular order and just see where this goes. And I've taken down questions I hear a lot that I know people are asking, because I think people want to hear this. And so let me start with a really tough one, about the Charismatic Movement. You wrote 20 years ago, *Charismatic Chaos* which was a revision of your earlier book, *The Charismatics*, both of those books were really hard hitting. And *Charismatic Chaos* in particular, took on the third way, at the time there was a huge thrust with John Wimber and the Signs and Wonders Movement, to sort of move more into the main stream of evangelicalism. And I think to some degree you have to say they were definitely successful in doing that.

People ask me all the time, has your stance on the Charismatic issue softened?

JOHN: No. And I'll just give you a little bit of history on that. I'll make a general statement and then I'll back up. The Charismatic Movement is largely the reason the church is in the mess that it's in today. In virtually every area where church life is unbiblical, you can attribute it to the Charismatic Movement, in virtually every area....bad theology, superficial worship, ego, prosperity gospel, personality elevation, all of that comes out of the Charismatic Movement.

Now I knew at the beginning that this was a disastrous embracing by the evangelical church and it happened, by the way, in Van Nuys, California.

PHIL: Right.

JOHN: It happened at an Episcopalian church in Van Nuys, California, pastor by the name of Dennis Bennett, who got the baptism of the Holy Spirit and it...that leaped out of the contained Pentecostal tradition. The Pentecostal Church with its claim of miracles and healing and signs and wonders was contained, it never spread to the mainline church, it was always seen as aberrant, its theology aberrant. But when an Episcopalian got the experience, it jumped out of its containment, and then it started being...the phenomena started being embraced by Baptists and dead church Methodists and Presbyterians and Roman Catholics and it invaded the church.

And then what happened was, it demanded to have acceptance...it demanded to have acceptance. It demanded to be embraced. It demanded to be included. And you had very strong leaders coming out and demanding that the Evangelical Church embrace them. And I knew at the time the deadly

character of this because once you give a place to bad theology, then theology is no longer an issue. Once you corrupt worship, then worship is going to fall to the lowest tolerable level and on and on it went. So I wrote the book, *The Charismatics*, and Zondervan published that. That was back in the seventies, the late seventies. And, you know, the Evangelical Church pretty much rose up and said, "Yeah, that's....we see that." And Moody Monthly, remember Moody Monthly Magazine picked up the book and syndicated it in a series of monthly issues of Moody Monthly, they syndicated every chapter in the book and they had the Charismatic cover on the cover of Moody Magazine and they were saying, "Yeah, we're there, this is where we belong."

It wasn't too many years after that, the climate dramatically changed and Charismatic Movement has gained the ascendancy and become the public face of Christianity. It's the face of TV Christianity. It's primarily the face of radio Christianity. In the Christian bookstore it is largely the prevailing view is some form of Charismatic mysticism, or whatever. So it has done a takeover and it has redefined Christianity in people's minds and it's an aberrant form of Christianity. Of course, so my view has not changed, its theology is bad, it is unbiblical, it is aberrant, it is destructive to people because it promises them what it can't deliver. And then God gets blamed when it doesn't come. It is a very destructive movement, and has always been.

There are people like people like C.J. and other people like that who have shed that theology and simply hold on to what is called a non-cessationist view, that is the view that may be the miracles and the signs and the tongues still exist. They haven't ceased. That's what's called a non-cessationist. We would be cessationists, if we would say we can show biblically how that's all ceased. So what's left to them is they've embraced good theology and I think they're moving in the right direction. But many of them, you know, people like John Piper and Wayne Grudem who are, generally speaking, theologically sound will hold on to that non-cessationist's view and say, "Well, God could do that and there could be miracles and there could be tongues." And that's sort of the last vestiges of the Movement. But the Movement, in itself, with all of its components is a disaster to the reputation of Christianity and a severe corruption of biblical teaching, biblical.....

PHIL: Yeah, in fact I think it was just a year ago or so you wrote a series of articles that were published on the Grace To You Blog about some of the things you see on Christian television.

JOHN: Right.

PHIL: The more extreme and far out manifestations of the Charismatic Movement.

JOHN: It all seems pretty far out to me.

PHIL: Yeah, do you think it's getting bigger and more influential?

JOHN: Well, you've got to top yourself and now it's a Ponzi scheme. Now the whole idea is to get money out of people. You know, it's that corrupt. Yeah, the series of articles was really an attack in Trinity Network and called it "The Unholy Trinity."

PHIL: Right.

JOHN: And, you know, the whole idea...that started out, as you remember, as letters that I sent to Paul Crouch.

PHIL: Right

JOHN: And started this feedback. And, of course, the condemnation coming back to me is that I don't have love and that, you know...of course, they've always said I'm void to the Holy Spirit. You know, I've heard them say, "You know, John MacArthur's a good Bible teacher, think of what he'd be if he had the Holy Spirit." And I've been accused of blaspheming the Holy Spirit and this barrage of letters coming back from then. And then we wrote back...if you haven't looked at that, you could still probably pull it up on the Grace To You website. If anybody wondered where I was on that issue, that's as definitive as any statement made recently.

PHIL: Yeah.

JOHN: And look, I don't have an axe to grind with people that are caught up in this. I want to help them out of this. This is what I was talking about this morning, this is corrupt worship. This is something that needs to be cleaned up and cleaned out. I offered, you'll remember, in that correspondence, we did, to have them come up and we would be glad to sit down with them with an open Bible and help clean house and show them how horrendous and wrong this is.

PHIL: Yeah, you mentioned Cessationism and that's, I think, the key issue here. Cessationism being the view that the Apostolic gifts and the Apostolic office ceased, that they're no longer in operation. That has kind of fallen out of favor. It seems to me 30 years ago you were either a Charismatic or a Cessationist. Now, as you point out, there are a lot of non-Charismatics who are also non-cessationists. I think maybe it was Martyn Lloyd-Jones that started that trend, who said, "I don't see any exegetical reason, or any...there's no passage of Scripture that says the Apostolic gifts have ceased." So the argument goes if you can't prove Cessationism exegetically, then it's not a valid doctrine because we want our doctrine to be biblical. How do you respond to that?

JOHN: Well, I think 1 Corinthians 13 is where you prove that, "Where there be tongues, they shall cease." And I think you can...we just did that, going through 1 Corinthians 13, you can talk about the linguistics of that. I have a whole explanation of that in the commentary in 1 Corinthians 13, following

1 Corinthians 14, the whole series that we went through that. I think there's plenty of exegetical evidence to indicate that. Those are Apostolic signs of an Apostle, they're called in 2 Corinthians 12:12. The Apostles have ceased. They are the foundation, Ephesians 2:20, the church is built on the Apostles and the prophets. You don't put the Apostles and Prophets on the second floor, the third floor, they're the foundation of the church. Apostolic gifts ceased. You can go to the end of the book of Acts, you see healings disappear completely. People get sick and there's nobody around them to make them well. All of those things were signs to draw attention to the true Apostles preaching the true gospel before there was written text of Scripture inspired by the Holy Spirit. Now you don't need miracles to verify a Prophet, you only need to compare him with the Scripture. And I've often said, "If these signs and wonders did still exist, do you think they would be given to people with bad theology?" To me, do you think God would give Benny Hinn the power to do miracles to authenticate really bad theology? I mean, on your Blog, it would be, "How many bads are there?"

PHIL: Really, really bad.

JOHN: Really, really bad theology. I mean, that is ludicrous.

Well if those gifts existed, they would belong to the purest, most faithful sound teachers of the Word of God to authenticate their teaching, not to harebrained people who are just spinning out whatever comes to their head and are prompted by Satan, not the Holy Spirit.

PHIL: Now on your exegetical proofs, take for example 1 Corinthians 13, the first one you went through, the typical non-cessationist would say, "Yeah that may say tongues will cease, it doesn't say when and, in fact, the context indicates it's the consummation of all things, etc., etc. So the argument goes, if you don't have a solid proof text, you can't prove this to me."

We believe, and let me just kind of shift into a broader subject, we believe theology must be biblical or it's not valid. Does that mean there has to be a proof-text for every doctrine?

JOHN: No, look, you can make a case for the verb *pauro* in 1 Corinthians 13 and for it ceasing. You can make a case for that, I think, in that text. You can make a case in general for the temporary gifts that were part of the apostolic deposit. You can make a case for that exegetically. But even without a proof text, the fact of the matter is they ceased and you have this historical argument which is a very, very weighty historical argument.

PHIL: The cessation of the canon itself, right? There's no proof text on that.

JOHN: There's no proof text on the cessation of the canon, but the universal consciousness of the church was that it had ceased and it was the once for all delivered to the saints faith. And you have the same argument historically with regard...Cleon Rogers some years ago did this sort of seminal

work on tracking the fact that tongues were gone...they were gone. They belonged in history to groups like the people that worshiped Cybele, you know, the Cybelene priestess cult and in bizarre tribal groups there were ecstatic speech. But there was never in the church ecstatic speech until the Azusa street meeting in Los Angeles which gave birth to the Pentecostal Movement. It came absolutely out of nowhere when it hadn't been a part of Christian history. You don't read, for example, if you read...you could read the Anabaptists read the Reformers, read the Puritans, they're not debating tongues. They didn't exist.

PHIL: Right.

Well this question about proof-texting theology I think is an important one. It has to do with what makes theology biblical. Just to give you an example, people knew I was going to be asking you questions today and several people on Twitter sent me questions to ask you. And one smart-aleck said, "Ask him this, is there a verse that explicitly commands believers baptism only?" And then he says, "Yes or no answer."

Well what he's basically asking for is a proof text and the suggestion is, that doctrine you teach isn't biblical unless you can supply an easy proof-text that proves it. That's not what we mean by biblical theology, is it?

JOHN: No, and that might be a problem for the Trinity, too.

PHIL: Yeah, and some other big doctrines.

JOHN: Yeah, the Trinity is a pretty big one. Yeah, there's no one single proof text for the Trinity, but it's apparent and obvious to anybody who studies the Scripture. You know, biblical theology is the truth revealed in Scripture. It's not proof-texting and sometimes it's the composite of all that the Scripture says that leads to the correct understanding.

PHIL: Yeah, I think in the Westminster Confession in early...one of the earliest paragraphs in there says, "The whole council of God is either expressly set forth or may be deduced by good and necessary consequence from Scripture." Would that be the view that you hold?

JOHN: Absolutely.

PHIL: What makes it biblical is either that it's explicitly stated or that it's the necessary logical deduction from what Scripture does say.

JOHN: That's exactly right. You can't improve on that. See, Phil, this is why, just as a footnote to that, this is why doing what I do is so important because every doctrine gets tested by every passage. You know, I can get up in a pulpit and you trust me and I could say whatever I wanted to say and a lot of

people would believe me. People must believe what people say, they pack out stadiums here to hear people lie all the time. I mean, look at them. These churches of these people are full and packed to the gills and they're not telling the truth. So I know you can get people to listen to you and believe you if you manipulate them. But the true test of any understanding of Scripture, the true test of doctrine is to drag that doctrine through every single passage. That is what we do here. The test is given again and again and again and again, week after week, month after month, year after year as we go into every text of Scripture and ask the question...what does this text teach and how is it consistent with everything else the Bible teaches? And at the end of a day, here we are 42 years later and we haven't had to jettison our theology in the process because it has stood the test of careful exposition of every single passage. That's the value of that. That's what the Bereans were after when it says they studied the scriptures to see if these things were so. They weren't looking for a proof text. They were looking for the collective revelation that comes through the Scripture.

PHIL: And we compare Scripture with Scripture.

JOHN: In fact, that's the best way to interpret Scripture is with the Scripture.

PHIL: You taught me that. That's what I think is one of the most valuable lessons I learned from you, how to compare Scripture with Scripture, how to trace the cross references and, you know, put the threads of meaning in Scripture together so that they make a coherent doctrine.

JOHN: You may be my best student.

PHIL: I know that's not true. But I do catch your typos every now and then.

JOHN: I know you do. But...you've got to know this...Phil edits my books and he does mess with my typos but he puts things in the book that they're so outrageous that he wants me to say them instead of him saying them. So he puts them in my book and I'm reading and I say, "Wait a minute, I didn't say that."

"Yeah, but it needs to be said."

Sure and I'm going to get all the heat for saying that. Is this true?

PHIL: Yes it is true, but it's...(Laughter) I do that just because I draw great comfort from the knowledge that you review what I've done and make sure it's....

JOHN: Yeah, you get great comfort from your anonymity here. (Laughter)

PHIL: That too. But, let me ask you this. Have you ever...have you ever preached something say in the book of Acts and then when you get to Philippians five years later you...it causes you to

reexamine the interpretation you put on that when you were in Acts? Do you ever have to go back and...?

JOHN: To a small degree that is true. You know, it's not that you were outright wrong, it was maybe you made an exclusive statement that turns out not to be exclusive or you made a definitive statement that may be isn't quite that definitive. You drew a principle out of there that needed to be modified a little bit. It isn't that you taught a doctrine in the book of Acts that gets completely overturned in Philippians.

PHIL: Right.

JOHN: This is why seminary is so important and I'm so grateful for the seminary I went to when I went to it, because in a three-year period in seminary, they gave me a well thought out historic theological system of systematic theology. It was the product of understanding the Bible, but it was tried and tested. That's what seminary does for you, so that you start out with this cohesive, tested, historic.... I was reading...in seminary I was reading the Puritans, I was reading some of the Reformers, I was reading people like the Westminster Divine as they're called, I was reading Machen and Warfield and hearing lectures. I heard a week's lectures from Cornelius Van Till(?) and so my theology was framed up as not my own. You know, there's a new book on church planting written by a guy named Darren Patrick and says, "If you want to be an effective church planter, develop your own theology." You know, when I read that, I just almost fell off the chair...what? I mean, can you think of anything worse than to have some guy develop his own theology? This is ultimate nitch-marketing, you know, develop your own style, your own wardrobe and then your own theology.

So seminary really helped me to get a theology that I could put to the test and through the years I will say that theology has been changed and refined and enriched but not severely altered because it embraced all the things that have been passed down through the great theological struggles and through the writings and councils and the creeds through history.

So when I teach the Word of God, I'm anchored by that. So while I might get something wrong here or something wrong there, or need to kind of fix that, or correct that, or clarify that, it never overturns everything.

PHIL: Right.

PHIL: Yeah, I occasionally hear people say, "John shifted dramatically with regard to...say the sovereignty of God. You've become more of a Calvinist..."

JOHN: No....No...No....

PHIL: And I know that's not the case because I've listened to those early tapes. But I think as you preach, you do become sometimes more definitive, more firm, you see the importance of a doctrine that you maybe barely touched on years ago. And so it becomes stronger and clearer and more, and more powerful.

JOHN: You know this because you've gone the same journey I have. When you first understand a doctrine, it has a certain weight. But as you go year after year after year and you just keep piling on to that doctrine, passage after passage after passage, the weight of that doctrine seriously increases. So the doctrine of divine sovereignty goes from being a new insight to all of a sudden being this overwhelmingly weighty truth that just lands on you with such force that you see it everywhere and the richness of it. The same would be true of justification. You and I were going through trying to understand the doctrine of imputation and I had said something...I think it was in a Romans commentary...that showed a sort of sophomoric understanding of that doctrine. You remember that. I didn't really say it the way it should have been said. I didn't have error in mind, but I didn't give...I didn't make a distinction that needed to be made between imparted righteousness and imputed righteousness. And so, I was taken to the woodshed by Michael Horton, you remember, and it was justified at the time and I had to go back and rethink that.

Well as time has gone on, and I read every week of my life, I read and I don't know how many dozens and dozens, if not hundreds of pages every week of my life because I can't get it out if I don't take it in. And through these years of preparation, study in passage after passage in expanding my understanding, that doctrine is clearer than its ever been, it is weightier than its ever been. So I think it's the combination of clarification and weightiness that is the product of the years. The doctrines haven't changed, but they're clearer now and they carry so much more weight. And the thing that rides along with that, and you know this as well, is the sanctifying process which then elevates your affection for that truth.

PHIL: Yeah, right.

JOHN: So that you not only feel the weight of it and see the clarity of it, but you have this love for it, this affection for it.

PHIL: Right.

JOHN: And that shows up in the preaching, all those show up in the preaching of it.

PHIL: And, just as you minister in the church, you see these trends come along like young guys devising their own theology, and you realize these doctrines that I've always preached need more emphasis because this is the answer to the problem in the evangelical world and it keeps bringing

you back to the gospel.

JOHN: I can't keep up with it, Phil. You know this. I mean, we get together all the time and we say, "Okay, I need to write this, I need to put this on a Blog, I need to write this guy a letter. We need to do this book. We need to do this thing." Because we're always trying to correct all this stuff. And I know I'm like a dinosaur in the new environment, the new environment of entrepreneurial Christianity, what I call....well what we started calling historical isolationism where you think it's a virtue to isolate yourself as the church that's happening now. And you pointed that out in...was that in the original book or did you add that? The church of what's happening now?

PHIL: Yeah, that was in an article that you had published after the original *Ashamed of God*.

JOHN: That was Flip Wilson. Flip Wilson who was the black comedian who was the head of the church of What's Happening Now, and that was like 30 years ago and it was a joke. And now, every new church is called the Church of What's Happening Now. It's all Flip Wilson reincarnated.

PHIL: Yeah, Reverend Leroy was the character.

JOHN: Reverend Leroy...Reverend Leroy...yeah. I mean, who wants to be a part of the Church of What's Happening Now? I want to be a part of the church of Jesus Christ that's been happening ever since it started. I don't want a new thing.

PHIL: And people often point this out but I think it's worth underscoring. All of your key books, all of your most important books are in one way or another a defense of the gospel. So all this keeps bringing you back to that point.

JOHN: Well you have to get it right, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, which really...all these folks wouldn't understand was an attack on an institution in America that was viewed as above the possibility of attack for their bad theology. And that started this whole thing. It unmasked the no lordship issue and changed the history of that institution...hopefully for some maybe for good, hopefully. And then *The Gospel According to Jesus*, and then *Ashamed of the Gospel* which has come out again in the new edition because the Crossway publishers wanted to bring it out again.

PHIL: Right. *The Gospel According to the Apostles*...

JOHN: *The Gospel According to the Apostles*, *Ashamed of the Gospel*, *Hard To Believe*, and now *Slave* is basically...one of the reviews, there were like 60 reviews on Amazon. And one of the reviews was, "This book is a huge disappointment, it's just MacArthur again on the Lordship issue."

PHIL: That is no disappointment to me.

JOHN: You got it. Yeah. Hope you didn't have to waste your money to buy the book to find that out, but that's...it is MacArthur on the lordship issued.

PHIL: You know, that brings me, one of the questions I was going to save to the end if we had time, but I'll bring it up...Is there, as you survey the books you've done, is there a personal favorite of yours?

JOHN: *Slave.*

PHIL: Really. It's always the latest one.

JOHN: Yeah....

PHIL: Yeah. Every time I ask him that question, it's whatever book just came out.

JOHN: You know, that's like asking me which of my grandchildren is my favorite, you know? I can't...I'm engaged with that....

PHIL: Basically your books are always getting better.

JOHN: Pardon?

PHIL: Your books are always getting better.

JOHN: Well, you're very kind. Look, you have job security, Phil. Just keep it real. You know, I have to tell you this. I have to tell you this because I went to a conference two years ago and I had this *Slave* thing on my mind and...yeah, no book has moved me in the last ten years like this one has...no theme has moved me. I went to this conference and there was this great big smiling African-American gentleman sitting on the first row with his wife. And I decided to preach on *Slave*. And when I introduced that at this conference, this high-level kind of intimate conference at the Billy Graham Cove, he looked like somebody had shot him because he was from Charleston, South Carolina, and, you know, came out of all that slave, tragic slave life and his background. So he was stunned that I would talk about this concept of *Slave*.

As the days went on, he began to be drawn into it. His name is Dallas Wilson and he is an Episcopalian rector at St. John's Church in Charleston, South Carolina. If you look at the back of the book, you'll see his endorsement on the book.

When I finished at the end of these few days, he came up to me and put his arms around me and he said "That's the most important message I've ever heard in my life." He said, "You know, we're all worried about past slavery." He said, "We've got to get over it, we're all slaves and we're all slaves to Jesus." And he said, "You've got to give that message. You've got to give that message, that's the message African-American pastors need to hear."

So, two weeks from now, three weeks from now, I'm going to go to South Carolina and to Charleston and we're having a conference and he's promoted it all across Charleston there are big signs that say "Slave" and we're going to have a conference there and we're going to talk about...I have three sermon titles...the first one is "The Son Who Became a Slave," Christ. And the second title is, "The Slaves Who Became Sons," the believers. And then we're going to talk thirdly about the paradoxes about being a slave of Christ.

He's rolled out the carpet...it's unbelievable thing to watch this happen. I got a letter from the mayor of the city, they're inviting me...giving me the key to the city, taking me a tour of the city of Charleston, South Carolina, and it's all over this Slave thing. It's like, what is happening here? Because that which was unacceptable to them, is now being embraced in a new way. I understand the power of this concept in that community to help those people.

PHIL: I want those tapes because we'll want to air them on Grace To You. That's going to be a great conference.

JOHN: I'm really looking forward to it and they are throwing out...they've even...they've even told me where they're taking me to eat and the special delicacies they're going to be feeding me. I mean, they have laid this thing out. It's really a...it's one of the most precious things that I've ever had in my life and the way they're treating me, it's just like...I am amazed at the whole thing. And to be able to help them be freed up from a painful stigma by understanding there is a kind of slavery that is the most elevated thing that could ever happen...slaves who become friends, who become sons, who become joint heirs, who become citizens of heaven who sit on the throne with Christ. And that is...the unfolding of all of that for them. So you can see the joy that's in my heart to be able to do that.

PHIL: Yeah...yeah.

JOHN: (Applause) So that is a book....

PHIL: Now before we get away from your books, I need to ask, what are the next few books you intend to write?

JOHN: Oh, well we're going to...I mentioned this morning, we're going to reissue the worship book and that is going to be an important thing. And I mentioned this morning, I may do a Sunday night

series on worship and it will be a blessing to all of you to really think that through but it will be something that we can use on the radio when that book comes out, and then it will be available for others who need to hear about worship. You know, I'm still trying to soak in that the Lord let me do this book on Slave. There are publishers asking me to do things in the future. I just finished Luke, volume 2, and I don't know why they make them so short. This is only 6 through 10. This thing is going to be five volumes on Luke. I wish it was only three...

PHIL: They're thick volumes cause you took a long time to get...

JOHN: People are going to say, "Can't the guy make his point? Come on, five volumes."

PHIL: Nobody says that about you.

JOHN: I don't know.

PHIL: We know you can get your point....

JOHN: Anyway, so I have to do that. There are some things in the back of my mind that I haven't really admitted to.

PHIL: Also the collection of your prayers which I don't know if everybody here knows about that, but over the years the one request that I've heard more from people than any other is, "Can we compile some of John's pulpit prayers, the pastoral prayers into book form to be used as a devotional?" And we're actually doing that.

JOHN: Yeah, my kids had that project in mind.

PHIL: Yeah that was Matt's...sort of personal....

JOHN: Yeah, Matt, my son, got the rest of the kids and they got together and their personal gift to you as a church is to pull together I don't know how many of those prayers...are there 50?

PHIL: Fifty-two, one per week.

JOHN: One per week and so...and then there will be Scripture reading and then the prayer follows.

PHIL: All right, I mentioned that you did a series of articles on the Blog about TBN and Trinity. You did another series of articles. People should read the Grace To You Blog and also the church blog cause it's interesting stuff. But recently you took on this organization called Bio Logos which is a well-funded sort of fellowship of scientists and sort of marginal evangelicals who want to sell to the evangelical community the idea that doctrines of evolution are true and reconcilable with the book of

Genesis. How important is that issue? Would you consider someone who embraces the Bio Logos view of Scripture, the doctrine of evolution, the idea that Genesis is a myth, would you consider someone like that an authentic Christian? Would you automatically write them off? Would you say, "Well I have grave doubts but could go either way?" What's your view on that?

JOHN: I think it is most likely that they're not Christians. Well just a little background on that. Bio Logos is this group of scientists who are captured by the need to sustain relationships in the scientific community. Their view is that if we as Christians espouse creation, we're going to be judged as fools because the evidence is going to roll in for evolution.

The guy that gave them traction was Bruce Waltke. Now that name may not mean anything to you, but it means a lot to people who have been around a while in the world of theology, evangelical theology. Bruce Waltke, in my early years, I did a Bible conference with Bruce Waltke and Chuck Swindoll at Grace Seminary, that's where I met Dick Mayhue and Dick Mayhue ran that conference and he ran it so well that I said to Chuck Swindoll by the time the week was over, "I'm going to hire that guy if I can." And Swindoll says, "No, you've got to wait for me, I get a first crack at him." So Swindoll tried to hire him and he refused. And then I went and hired him.

So, Dick came to be with us. But Bruce Waltke was the third speaker and he's a...he was at Dallas Seminary Faculty member, he was clearly an inerrantist in Scripture. He could sign the doctrinal statement which was a firm statement at Dallas Seminary and his series, by the way, that week was The Use of the Ugaritic in the book of Job...which was like really boring.

PHIL: Wow! (Laughter)

JOHN: The use of the Ugaritic in the book of Job...

PHIL: What's the Ugaritic?

JOHN: The Ugaritic is a foreign language and there's a couple of places in the book of Job where some Ugaritic words appear but you don't need to know that for your spiritual development.

PHIL: Thank you. (Laughter)

JOHN: But anyway, so

PHIL: So it's a biblical language I haven't studied yet that I need to...bone up on?

JOHN: No....don't stress over that. Anyway, so Bruce Walke is, you know, he's banging the drum for the text of Scripture and he was...he was right on target and he was a very skilled scholar and he was a very capable communicator. And he was really kind of a flagship guy for Dallas Seminary. And then

he started to move...move theologically, and then he ended up with Regent College with people like Jim Packer and others, and it was...he was starting to equivocate on things that he had never equivocated on. And the latest equivocation was when he actually made a video for Bio Logos which they put on their website in which he said that "We have to reject creationism or we're going to be embarrassed." We're going to be embarrassed. And it was Bruce Waltke's clout that gave larger traction to that movement. And so now you've got well-known evangelical quote/unquote scholar saying, "You know, we're going to get ourselves embarrassed if we don't bail out of this creationism stuff and get with what's coming down the scientific pike.

But as I've always said, this is God's Word. You can believe it or not believe it but you can't change it. And there is nothing in Genesis 1 or 2 that gives the least notion of evolution. It is an evasion in Scripture, it is a pollution of the purity of Scripture. And it is utterly unnecessary because the weight of all evidence is not on the side of evolution. It is clearly on the side of recent creationism. So it's just a tragic thing to see this happen.

So, we felt that we needed to engage them on the Blog and, you know, went after them and, you know, you want to be gracious and irenic and it's not something...you're not picking on people. I never really attacked a person, but these issues are really important because if you can undermine people's confidence, then the rest of their confidence in Scripture is shaken. Cause if this isn't true, what else isn't true?

PHIL: Right.

JOHN: And there's no need for that. It is a...it is a serious attack, I think, on the authority of Scripture which ultimately is an attack on everything in the Bible.

PHIL: Yeah, now so...and my original question...how important is that? I'm really asking, I suppose, is this a fundamental issue or not? If it comes down to the authority of Scripture, then it is fundamental.

JOHN: It is fundamental because it is the authority of Scripture. I say this sometimes when I'm talking to places about the Master's College. There are 104 Christian colleges in the Christian college...which used to be known as The Christian College Coalition and now has another name. A hundred and four Christian colleges, as far as we know, five of them believe the Genesis account. So if you want to know the impact that this kind of thinking has had on Christian education, that's the impact.

PHIL: It's one of several things where you see evangelical conviction drifting because of secular opinion. I think of other issues like homosexuality which surprisingly just in the past six months or so you've had some key evangelicals seem to waffle on what the evangelical response to the homosexual issue is, you know, the question of whether we should ordain women or not. There's been a major drift on that, that's been over the past 15 years or so. These issues that we wouldn't say

necessarily that they are fundamental, but they are supremely important in the sense that once you begin to drift on these issues, you're...

JOHN: Look, you just get two things right. The Bible is the Word of God. And it is to be interpreted correctly.

PHIL: Right.

JOHN: Then everything comes from that. If you say homosexuality is not a sin, then you've denied a true interpretation of Scripture. In fact, you don't even need to interpret it, you can just read it.

PHIL: So here's my question....

JOHN: If you say women should preach, you have denied what the Scripture says.

PHIL: Right.

JOHN: So it's not that difficult. It's what the Bible says rightly interpreted.

PHIL: So here's my question. This may be the hardest one I have for you all night. With these issues that aren't really necessarily fundamental gospel issues, but they're supremely important, with so much drift on issues like that, do you think that Together For the Gospel formula is sufficient, the idea that we can unite and fellowship with anyone who simply affirms the gospel? What if they affirm the gospel but they deny Genesis, they deny that homosexuality is a sin and they deny that, you know, they suggest that it's okay to have women preachers? What do you do with someone like that?

JOHN: It's not enough just to be together for the gospel.

I just think a biblical issue is enough. Sure, I'm not going to restrict fellowship with people who take a different view of eschatology, different view of baptism, mode, maybe a different view of Old Testament covenants. But when people begin to violate Scripture, I'm not talking about different views of Scripture or different interpretations of Scripture...some of them very historic. But when they begin to set the Scripture aside, that's scary. And you've got these young guys who even call themselves evangelicals who are caught up in this self-exaltation movement of promoting themselves and they're the big guru of their movement, developing their own style and their own theology...that is really scary.

PHIL: Yeah, rock-star pastors...

JOHN: Rock-star pastors...yeah...yeah. I don't want to be...I don't want to cut myself off from them...I love these guys and they minister to me and they encourage me and I try to encourage them. But I

have a stewardship of young lives.

I'll give you an illustration of this. I as an elder of a church have to give an account to God, Hebrews 13, for this flock, to make sure that I don't send them mixed signals about what is okay and what isn't okay." And so sometimes it's a fine line. You want to be broad and loving and gracious where you can be with people who differ. But someone who tampers with what is clear in Scripture, that's a whole different story. And I just think there are things coming down that now literally are stylistic ways to overturn basics in Scripture.

PHIL: Right.

JOHN: So that's what kind of controls me at some point because I don't want to send mixed signals. I want them to live lives of strong conviction and I have to set a pattern for that.

PHIL: One more question. Because there's a danger on the other side of that as well...what you're saying is, well the gospel defines what's most important, and therefore all the fundamentals are somehow related to the gospel...there are other very important issues worth fighting for that are maybe not directly related to the gospel but still worth defending. And you don't want to give up the fight on those things and say, "The only thing that's really important is the gospel."

JOHN: No.

PHIL: And yet, on the other side of that if you look at the history of the fundamentalist movement, the twentieth century, what they did was begin to fight mainly about secondary issues. How do you avoid that pit fall?

JOHN: Yeah, we used to say about the fundamentals, it was no fun, too much damn and not enough mental. They basically made...they died on the peripheral hills. You know, you just can't do that. So I go back to what I said before, the issue for me is what does the Bible say and what is the clear interpretation of what it says. For all of those truths, I have to be ready to take my stand...for all of those truths, not some of them, all of them.

And I think that's why things drift the way they drift, because the people who have the ear of these young guys are too restrictive in what it is that they will fight for. Paul gave the whole counsel of God. I think...look, if you don't know what your view is on something, then get back in the book until you do know what it teaches because you're responsible for all of it. And I wish...well, I wish more people would take the Genesis to Revelation responsibility and stand for all that is revealed in Scripture.

Obviously there are things we can't be dogmatic about, but we're not talking about those. We're talking about the things that Scripture clearly teaches.

PHIL: Well thank you for being clear and dogmatic on those things.

JOHN: Well I want to be clear and I want to be dogmatic when I have a right to be dogmatic. And I don't ever want to give my opinion, I try never to give my opinion...One of the lines that Ian Murray put in his book, "MacArthur rarely refers to himself," and then he says, "as no preacher ever should." I love that line. I mean, that is pure English, isn't it? As no preacher ever should.

You know, my Dad used to warn me when I was a kid, he said, "Beware of men who are heroes of all their own stories." You know, you just open the book and teach the book but all of the book and truthfully and you take a stand on all its truths. So....thank you, Phil.

PHIL: Thank you. (Applause)

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