

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

A First Response to the September 11 Terrorist Attacks

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: GTY77

Hello, this is John MacArthur, Grace To You Bible teacher. As you have already guessed, we have decided to preempt our regularly scheduled program to bring you a special edition of Grace To You, one that we're devoting to a discussion of yesterday's events. And, frankly, it's a program we're praying will be an encouragement and some comfort, as well as instruction to you and a special encouragement to any members of our listening family who have been directly or indirectly affected by the disasters.

Now we've all seen the graphic news footage of the areas of these horrible disasters on the east coast and it's really still hard to grasp exactly what has happened. I'm sure the details will be coming in for many weeks, and even many months, as the story grows and becomes more dramatic and more complex with each passing moment. So what do we have to add to the flood of information you've already received? Well I hope, as always, we can...we can something that will give you God's perspective, the biblical perspective, the Christian world view on things like this.

So let me encourage you to take the next twenty minutes or so and focus your attention on some very specific biblical truths that I think will help hold you up during the days to come, give you some guidance and provide some help for your family through this very, very difficult event. Hopefully you can capitalize on the obvious opportunities to represent Christ during these dark and spiritual-needy days when that has been made so very clear.

Well, I asked our executive director, Phil Johnson, if he would jump into the studio with me. We're making this broadcast on Tuesday, just after this series of disasters has taken place. Phil is a fellow preacher, preaches often at Grace Church, fellow elder at Grace Church as well as executive director of Grace To You and more than that, a very dear treasured friend and personal confidante and adviser. So I just asked him if he would come in the studio and kind of pose the questions. He's got the ability to analyze what's going on and kind of frame up the questions. I'm just going to ask him to sort of put himself in the position of a listener...What would be on your hearts out there?...and hopefully he'll ask those kinds of questions and it will give me the opportunity to respond.

So, Phil, thanks for being with me and for helping us kind of represent our listening family and see if we can't give them some help today.

PHIL: Thank you, John. I'm filled with questions. I woke up this morning and turned on the television and was confronted with this thing, not realizing what was going on I saw those buildings burning and immediately grasped some sense of the magnitude of this disaster, and my mind was just saying, "No, no." And then I came to grips with the shock of it. And you mentioned emotions that we all feel, let's talk about those emotions, if we can.

In many cases the emotion we feel is a raw, just intense anger. Is there a place for anger among Christians?

JOHN: Yeah, I think...I think you'd have to say God in creating man in His own image gave him the capacity to be angry. The Bible says God is angry with the wicked every day. We know that God is a God of anger. We see the wrath of God poured out throughout redemptive history. We are told in Romans chapter 1 that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness. We see Jesus make a whip and cleanse the temple. We see Jesus presented to us in John 5 as the one to whom God Himself will pass all judgment and in the end Jesus Himself will be the executioner of the wicked.

But all of that frames up a kind of anger that is, I guess, what we could call "holy anger," or "righteous indignation," as it's been called. I think...I think we have to be angry at what sin has done to this world. I think we have a right to be angry at the wretchedness of sinful people. I think we have to be angry when...when life is taken because murder...that's murder...all of these are acts of mass murder, we certainly have a right to be angry with a mass murderer. We have every right to be angry with a man who shoots up and kills his family, as we've seen in the last few days out here on the west coast, a couple of places, one in our own area. We have every right to be angry with a man who walks laden down with bombs into a pizza parlor in Jerusalem and blows up 21 people. And it isn't that our anger is reserved just for the man himself, although it is certainly right to have a righteous anger against one who violates the command of God not to kill, one who is so wicked and so wretched as to take life. It's a bigger anger than that. It's anger with the whole of the unrighteous reality that exists in our fallen world.

But I think at the same time, we don't necessarily want to be filled with personal vengeance, you know, because the Bible says, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay." The suicide bomber has received his just reward already. We believe the Bible is very clear that those who are without Christ are plunged into an eternity of torment. No one needs to be concerned about that retribution, that's a sealed matter. There's no...there's no need for us to wreak havoc even as a nature in the world as an act of vengeance. But while I'm not the kind of a person who thinks we ought to retaliate and go somewhere and massacre a bunch of people to offset this, I do think we need to put into force as a nation whatever it takes to protect innocent people anywhere and everywhere from evil aggressors. And if there are people behind this, they need to pay in the way the Bible has prescribed that pay. But I think there is a place for righteous indignation. At the same time, we are righteous as God is

righteous against sin and we allow the vengeance to belong to Christ.

PHIL: Let's talk about another emotion, a common one, fear. There are probably people listening to us right now who are trying to go about their normal routine and maybe finding themselves in the grip of fear, fear for their lives, fear for their safety, fear for their families, their loved ones. What can people do with the fear?

JOHN: You know, I don't think there's probably anybody working in a high-rise building in a major city right now, and that's all fear. I mean, I think the people just flooded out of those kinds of places that are just...you know, that's the bull's eye. I mean, if you're like we are, we're in a two-story building on the fringe of Los Angeles and nobody is going to fly a plane into this thing. But I think people in urban areas, people in big cities, people working in government buildings, people in military places like that, they're going to feel that personal fear. There's...there's that sort of immediate terror that somebody is going to fly into my building, and I think that gets mitigated as things kind of calm down and people flow out. They may not be real eager to go back again.

But I think there's a larger fear than that. There's a deep-seeded fear and I heard it out of the mouth of a lady when I was walking by your office in the hall. She was being interviewed on the radio and she said, "I'm holding my baby and I'm wondering whether there's a future for my child." Now this is that enormous sweeping fear that takes this one incident and somehow the incident transcends itself and creates an aura of terror that exists just as a general reality.

You know, if you don't know the Lord, if you do not have the hope of eternal life, if you don't believe in a sovereign God who controls everything, if you don't believe your life, its beginning and end is in His care, if you don't believe that, you should fear because there are no guarantees. I can't say to people, "Don't worry, it's not going to happen again." Frankly, this was so successful, there's every human reason to believe they're going to do it again. There's never in the history of humanity been this kind of consequence to any single military action with the exception of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. But this is a huge thing and given the fact that today we aren't dealing with nations anymore, we're dealing with individuals now, we're dealing with fanatical individual people who can literally commandeer an airplane and massacre huge amounts of people, you can't even focus your fears anymore.

You know, we're all just sort of recovering from the cold war, the end of the cold war ?????? Russia falls apart, eastern Europe falls apart, no longer a threat. And we're all just getting a deep breath. And at the same time, the Islamic world is...is marching to a huge force and we already know that many of the bombers who have been imploding themselves in suicide bombs have been these radical Moslems who are doing this because they think it's going to catapult them right into heaven. And, of course, Moslem theology teaches that you can't know whether you're going to heaven. When you get to the end of your life and you die, you come before God and He decides purely on His own deterministic basis which is somehow swayed to some degree but not finally by whether you've done

good works, you get into heaven or you don't, but you can never know. Unless you're a martyr, then you can go right to paradise.

Now we've already seen that, and we don't know whether it was radical Moslems that did this, that information hasn't been given to us, but our national security people tell us that it looks like that kind of thing. Now we realize these people could be anywhere and everywhere in the world so there's this pervasive fear, germ warfare, chemical warfare, all these kinds of things. It's not really...it's not really a very good time, in fact it's the worst time in the history of the world to not know what your future is.

PHIL: So one of the questions I was going to ask you is what could twist a mind so much to cause someone to commit an act like this, knowing it's going to cost him his own life?

JOHN: Well, the kamikaze bombers in World War II did the same thing in Japan. What...what gets to these suicide bombers, and we don't know this in the case of the planes, we do know this in the case of the...well, there's been a hundred bombings in Israel, many of them have been suicide bombers and there have been bombings across America, there have been some suicide bombers as we know...some of these suicide bombers are begun in this process when they're five-years-old. Some are taken at the age of twelve and they're programmed through this.

Now we do know that the radical Islamic fundamentalists are training pilots as well. It would take a pilot to crash a plane like that. So this is a jihad for them, if indeed, and we don't know for sure yet who the ones are who did the damage today, but if it is that, it's a religious way to catapult yourself into heaven.

Apart from that, however, you know there's nothing man won't do. Romans 3 says, "His feet are swift to shed blood." The first crime in the Bible, Cain kills Abel. I mean, ask yourself, "How can Hitler do what he did? How could Stalin massacre fifty million people?" Fifty million people, that's way beyond what this thing is. Hitler, genocide of the Jewish people was his goal, six million Jews. How could he do that? But then how can a mother drown five of her kids? You're talking about the wretchedness of the human heart. It isn't postpartum anything. It isn't Attention Deficit Syndrome that causes a mass murderer. It isn't...it's the wickedness of the human heart. I mean, the heart of a man is desperate. God had to create government and He had to create the fear of death to keep man from killing each other. So I think this is man at his worse and then when you get him under satanic influence where he thinks it isn't an evil act at all, it's a way to get to heaven, you really...you really heighten the motivation.

PHIL: So this is proof of the depravity of man.

JOHN: Proof of the depravity of man and proof of the wretchedness of satanically inspired religion.

PHIL: Let me ask you a hard question, then. We're actually preempting our broadcast on election and you have always taught that God is sovereign over everything that happens, how could such a horrific thing happen if God is in control?

JOHN: It happens because everybody dies. Nothing happened to those people, Phil, that wasn't going to happen to, right? Nothing happened to those people that wasn't going to happen to them. Nothing happened to those people that isn't going to happen to you or me. It might be a car accident, I might get hit by a truck, I might die in a plane crash, you know, going somewhere to preach. My boat might sink when I'm fishing. I might get cancer. I might have a heart attack. Look, wasn't Sunday we had an earthquake here, a 4.2 earthquake? People die in those. I visited...you were there with me...we went to Pompeii, Mount Vesuvius buries the whole city of Pompeii. It happens. Everybody dies. "It's appointed unto man once to die."

I think the big lesson here is not some big prophetic thing. It's not...I don't even think this is apocalyptic. I don't think, I don't think this is...Oh, this is the end of the earth. I'm sure the people who have, you know, 20 thousand people died in an earthquake in Mexico City, we read about tens of thousands people dying in floods in Bangladesh in India and places like that. I mean, this is life, this is everybody is going there. The question is, we don't know when we're going to die. There are people in that building who already had cancer and the clock was ticking. There are people who had they lived would have died in other ways. I mean, the big question is not am I going to die? That is already answered. That isn't a hard question because sin produces death.

So in answer to your question, why, you know, how can God allow this? "The wages of sin is death," so death exists. And God says, "Look, you don't have to die and go to hell. Here's the gospel. Here's the salvation that I offer you in Jesus Christ." And so, you know, Jesus says, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, tell them there is a heaven and that they are sinners, but there is forgiveness and there is hope."

So I think the only thing that can take out the fear is personal faith in Jesus Christ. That is the only thing that can take out the fear. If you have hope only in this world, Paul said, you're of all men most...what?...miserable. I mean, what are you going to look to? Whether you're living in the shadow of a volcano, whether...and this is in ancient times, I mean, people were dying under all kinds of natural disasters throughout all of human history. Look at the Flood, the whole world died. But everybody is going there. Nothing happened that wasn't going to happen.

PHIL: All right, you're speaking though from the perspective of those who died, what about their loved ones who are struggling with the grief and intense pain of this? This is other worldly pain for them.

JOHN: And I would say for those without Christ equally, there's no comfort because the parting is permanent. There's no comfort. Comfort is only in our hope in Christ.

You know, if, for example, you lost...let's say you lost a non-Christian friend, a non-Christian family member, let's say the Christian lady in New York and her husband died in the building, how do I comfort her? Her husband is in eternal punishment, how do I comfort her?

There's only one way to comfort her and that's to tell her that God has promised to her eternal life in Christ in His presence in heaven where there's no more sorrow, no more tears, no more crying, no more death. And the former things are forgotten. There is a heaven for her and forever she will never remember the pain of this life. That's the only comfort I have for her.

If on the other hand her husband who died is a Christian, then she's comforted in a reunion. If neither of them are Christians, there's no comfort.

PHIL: So one of the great lessons in all this about the nature of life and humanity would be what James said in James 4, right?

JOHN: Yeah, your life is a vapor, it appears for a little time and it vanishes away. Don't say tomorrow we're going to do this, and tomorrow we're going to do that, you don't know because you don't know what tomorrow brings.

The lesson, the one great lesson is everybody is going to die and some people are going to know they're going to die and they're going to be able to plan for it and go through a process of illness or whatever or aging, but there's also the very real possibility that you're going to die when you least expect that, but die you will. It's appointed unto men once to die, Hebrews 9:27, after this the judgment.

I mean, look, God has sent a huge wake-up call to the world about the sudden reality of death on a large scale. You know, this is somewhat like previews of coming attractions because there is going to be massive judgment and death during the great time of the Tribulation yet to come. This is a foretaste of what horrors the world is going to experience.

But, you know, if you read Revelation when the Tribulation comes and, first of all, a fourth of the world dies, in that brief period of time, at the same time there will be an unprecedented preaching of the gospel. A hundred and forty-four thousand from all twelve tribes of Israel preaching the gospel, two witnesses with miraculous powers preaching the gospel, obviously over media, an angel flying through heaven preaching the gospel...I really think that it is always in the great times of judgment that God cranks up the preaching of the gospel.

And I will say this to all those unfaithful pastors and all of those unfaithful churches and all of those people fooling around out there with this shallow, trivial services on Sunday and try to entertain people, if you've been doing that, you need to repent and get serious about preaching a serious message in a serious day. If anybody thinks seriously, they're going to run from places like that and they're going to find places where God is speaking out of His Word the truth about life and death and time and eternity. This should be serious enough to shut down the trivia going on in the name of Christianity.

PHIL: So, John, your remarks remind me of an incident in the New Testament when a tower fell and killed some people and people came and asked Jesus...what happened here? Were these people worse sinners than the rest of the people? Your answer is very much like His.

JOHN: Yeah, Luke 13.

PHIL: Right.

JOHN: Yeah, a tower fell and the people said, "You know, were they worse than everybody else? Why did the tower fall on them?" His answer was, "You better be careful, you might die too, it could happen to you."

The point is no, they're not any worse than you, it just happened as a warning to you. It happened and it could happen to you, nobody is exempt. It could happen to me, I'm prepared. A tower could fall on me, I'm prepared. It could fall on you, you're prepared. And most of the people probably listening to this program today, you Grace To You people, you're ready, the tower falls on you, you just go right into the presence of the Lord. "Far better to depart and be with Christ." But there's no guarantee. Those people that die under a natural disaster, or a construction disaster or something like that, they're not any worse than anybody else. Nothing happened to them that isn't going to happen to everybody.

PHIL: So what would your appeal be to those who are without Christ who might be listening to us?

JOHN: All I can say to you dear, dear friend is if you want to eliminate fear, then you have to know your future is secure. You have to know that you have an invisible means of support. You have to know that God is carrying for you and that you're not going to die until it's His time. And when you do, you're going immediately into His eternal presence where there is blessing forever more. You have to prefer heaven over hell. And what ever sacrifice you think you have to make...Well, I can't, you know, commit adultery, I can't be a homosexual, and I can't lie and cheat and steal, I'll have to give up all the fun things of life, I'm not willing to do that.

Well, that's like the fool, you know, who gains the world and loses his eternal soul. All I can say is you better run to Christ who will forgive your sin and who will embrace you if you will embrace Him by faith as Lord and Savior and He will grant to you eternal life. And then death for you is not an ending, it's a beginning. It's not...it's not a disaster, it's the greatest benediction that life can offer because it takes you into the glories of eternal life.

PHIL: John, without a doubt there were people directly impacted by this that are members of the Grace To You family, people listening to us today, would you have any special words of counsel or comfort for them?

JOHN: What we need to do is come together in prayer. If you're able, let me ask you to set aside what you're doing for a moment, and join me as we bring these many needs before the throne of God. Let's pray.

Father, as we watch what has been going on, as we contemplate these horrible events, the death of perhaps thousands and thousands of people, we're all experiencing all kinds of emotions, anger and fear and anxiety and shock and disbelief and pain. There are many who are afraid they're losing the future and is this some kind of portend of a horrible world to come? Father, we pray that we might know the comfort with which only You can comfort our hearts, the comfort that comes from the affirmation that You are our great God, You are our sovereign God and You're still sitting on the throne, You're still ruling and Your purpose is yet being fulfilled.

We also need to pray for people who have been affected by this, those who have been killed, certainly have loved ones, family, friends that are going to be devastated by the loss of life, some of those people, no doubt, who have died were listeners of this radio program, some of them have entered into Your presence, some have gone out of Your presence forever, we pray for the families of those people. We pray, too, for those who were injured, some perhaps still languishing somewhere in the dark recesses of the rubble of these places, not even yet found. We pray for those who are in that condition that they might have the time and the opportunity to draw to mind the gospel and to embrace Christ.

We pray for those who risk their lives to help, those rescue workers, authorities, police, military, fire people, all of those who work at medical services who are so engaged now in caring for people, finding them and rescuing them and trying to meet their devastating physical needs. And particularly, Lord, we come back to those who have lost their friends and their family members and their co-workers and their lives have been shattered by this, we pray a special, special benediction of grace upon them.

We pray for our listeners in the WMCA New York City area, our listeners in the WAVA Washington D.C. area who will particularly be affected. And because we know that several of the flights that were really where the suicide bombers took the planes into the buildings were coming to Los Angeles, we know that there are people in our own city, probably people in our own church who are affected by these deaths.

And then, Lord, we want to pray for our leaders. We pray especially for our President. We know his efforts have been directed at the typical political banter that goes on between the Republicans and the Democrats and all of a sudden that seems so unimportant and the bar has been raised so high, we pray that You'll give him and those around him the strength and the wisdom and the insight and the fortitude to take the leadership and do what needs to be done for the security of our nation and the well-being of people around the world.

We pray also that the church will mobilize as a body of believers and engage itself in prayer and any other way that can help meet needs. And may the church do what it really does best, to love people and to show them Jesus Christ in practical ways as well as bringing the perspective of God's Word to bear on what ultimately is a spiritual crisis.

Father, we thank You that You are the God of this world and You are in control of everything. Nothing happens outside Your purpose, everything is within the framework of Your plan. And we pray, Lord, that You will grant us the wisdom to see all of that as it unfolds before us and may we be used in ways that can bring You glory even in this terrible crisis. May somehow it turn the hearts of the people of this country to eternity and in taking a look at eternity may they be drawn to You and to Christ, the One who has conquered death for us through His own resurrection. We pray in His name. Amen.

Phil, I want to thank you. We could go on and on but I think we're out of time today. Let me just say some things in conclusion. If you've been directly affected by yesterday's events, would you do something for me? Write to me today, regular mail, e-mail, let me know specifically how we can pray for you in your situation. We really want to come alongside, we've got a whole building full of volunteers here who will embrace your prayers as well. Let me give an address for you who may be new to our family. Grace To You, Box 4000, Panorama City, California, 91412...Grace To You, Box 4000, Panorama City, California, 91412. If you have pen and paper, you can jot down our e-mail address, letters@gty.org...letters@gty.org. And we have set up a special phone line just for urgent phone requests. If you have any prayer requests, please call (661) 295 6288...661) 295 6288.

This final important note. I'll be addressing these circumstances to my congregation this coming Lord's day. We're recording the entire message I'll be giving and air it on Grace To You next week. In the meantime, we'll be back with our study of divine election tomorrow, I think this study will have renewed impact on your life as you see God's sovereignty spelled out in all its glory. So join us here on Grace To You each day this week. And on behalf of all of us who bring you Grace To you, know

we love you and you're in our prayers in the days and weeks to come.

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