

Standing Firm in Unstable Times

Selected Scriptures

GTY78

2001

Hello, John MacArthur here, Grace To You Bible teacher and I'm welcoming you to a special session of some profound and eternal issues that I know are of great importance and urgency to you and you'll find that out as we go. In fact, this is a little interview we're calling, "Standing Firm in Unstable Times." And I do believe that it's going to be a help to you personally and it's also going to equip you to help others during the days and weeks to come.

No matter where you were or what you happened to be doing on September 11, 2001, there's no question that things haven't been the same since. The terrorists attacks brought sudden, sweeping changes to our nation, in fact to our entire world and in some ways to all of our lives. They have hit close to home on deeply personal levels...our families, our businesses, our churches, our communities, really nothing has been untouched. And wherever you go there's sort of a new model of "business as usual," a new model for day-to-day life and it's been forged in the fiery cataclysm, really, of multiple suicide attacks in our own homeland. In the work place, I guess, glib memos we could call them and pretentious jargon ring hallow today. Corporate decisions are being sifted through the reality of homeland terrorism in a struggling economy. And at home families, I guess, for the first time ever in some cases are discussing the "what if" scenarios that come with rising unemployment and even a war threatening our own shores. No question things are very different.

But what is most interesting, and actually most important in all of this is to take a look at the spiritual issues that have erupted into public life and discourse. It seems people everywhere are doing what just a day before this event was politically incorrect and that's talking about God and faith and the future and life and death. Here is a recent Fox news article that says, "To an extent unheard of in recent years, God is suddenly a very public figure in America. 'God Bless America' signs are nearly ubiquitous and lawmakers are urging Americans to pray. Some students are even doing so openly in classes. Many schools have had clergy-led assemblies and some communities have voted to post the Ten Commandments in the courthouses."

Well that's interesting, isn't it? The difficult question, of course, is do most people even know this God they're reaching out to in this time of need? And is He listening? Are there any absolute authoritative answers to the serious looming spiritual questions being raised as this worldwide crisis trickles down to an intimate individual's spiritual issue between the creature and the Creator? How can people deal personally once and for all with the problems at the level of their own souls?

It's those kind of questions that I have in mind as we bring this special Grace To You interview with you. We're calling it, again, Standing Firm in Unstable Times and in the interview I'm going to try to expand on some of the questions that I'm hearing most often these days, questions about evil and

God's power or lack of power to stop it, questions about truth and questions about the Bible's claim to being the only source of truth and the only way of eternal salvation is found therein. Also going to address bluntly some of the serious theological errors that sadly are getting a lot of air time and I'm hoping that will help you stand firm for God's truth. And finally, I know many are struggling with how to deal with fear, anxiety and uncertainty not only for themselves but even thinking about children, and grandchildren and how to help other people who are fighting the same battle. So we're going to talk about that as well. And I'm hoping that when we put it all together we will help you to stand firm in your inner man, as Scripture says, during these difficult days.

Now in order to help me a little bit on this, I've asked my dear friend and executive director of Grace To You, Phil Johnson, to join me in the studio. Phil is also one of the elders and pastors at our church, Grace Community Church. Phil is the one who does the editorial work on my major books that I write. We have been close friends and shared many ministries together through the years and he's a great resource to me, knows more about what I've taught than I can remember, I think. And in his own right is an outstanding student of Scripture and theology. So I'm going to have him sort of form the questions, questions I know that have risen in his mind but a lot of questions, too, that have risen in the public discourse as well as questions that have flooded our ministry from many of our listeners who have been writing to us. So, Phil, thank you for joining me for this very special interview and for helping to minister to our listening family.

PHIL: Thank you, John. You've consented to answer some questions for us. Shortly after the terrorists incident, I think it was a week or so, you were asked to be on the weekend edition of the Larry King's television broadcast to discuss the question...where was God? I saw that program live and I'm sure many of our listeners did and on behalf of a number of people who e-mailed me and spoke to me immediately after that broadcast, I want to say...Thank you, John, for the clear stand you took for Christ and for the way you made the truth of the gospel clear. You don't see that very often on Larry King.

JOHN: Well, it was a pleasure, believe me. It was a great opportunity and, you know, when you get an opportunity like that to give the simple straight-forward gospel to the wide world, it's just a great privilege.

PHIL: Well, on that program Larry King raised a number of questions that I thought were really quite good. But because of his format you really only had time for short soundbyte(?) answers. I don't think you had more than 90 seconds for any one answer.

JOHN: I don't have many 90-second sermons, do I, Phil?

PHIL: No, I don't think I've ever seen you answer a question in 90 seconds before. And he's cut to a commercial and I kept thinking...Let him talk, let him say something. And, in fact, he had at least five other guests in the studio that night, most of them had contradictory opinions...opinions that certainly disagreed with yours. There was a rabbi, there was a muslim leader, a theologian. There was also a New Age religious guru and one other evangelical author, and then you. I think you...again, you might have had just a few seconds for each reply before he'd cut away for a commercial or ask a new question from another guest, so we set up this format to avoid that. So we have no commercial breaks, no other guests besides you. And I want to pose some of those same questions Larry King asked you and give you an opportunity to answer in more depth. So let's just go to it.

JOHN: Okay.

PHIL: Larry King's first question and the title of that broadcast was, "Where was God?" He posed that question to a well-known rabbi this way. These were his words, he said, "If God is omnipotent He could have prevented this, could He not?" And the rabbi, you may remember, answered, "No." He said, "Even God couldn't have prevented this." And I'm wondering what your thoughts on that are, John.

JOHN: Well, I have to tell you, Phil, it was very frustrating because I had all kinds of thoughts and ways that I wanted to answer that. I never got the opportunity to give a complete answer, so I just try to proclaim the truth. But in answer to the question...where was God?...I immediately went to Isaiah in my mind. I mean, I'm so biblically arranged mentally that that's where I went and I went right to the fifth chapter of Isaiah and there I was in the fifth chapter of Isaiah and Isaiah receives this revelation from God that pronounces a series of curses on Israel, on Judah actually, and Jerusalem. And the prophet receives these messages that God has found Israel to be a fruitless vine that in all His provisions and all His goodness and grace and mercy to them and blessing should have produced good grapes, but instead there aren't any grapes there are just sour berries which is symbolic of the fact that they're in idolatry and iniquity and sin. And God says, "I'm going to come down and I'm going to whip up My vineyard, Israel, I'm going to take away its protection, I'm going to trample it down and I'm not going to rain on it." And this is a huge curse pronounced by God on Israel. And then that sequence of woes that follows the opening verses delineates the sins...sins of materialism, sins of drunkenness, sins of corrupt leadership, sins of perverted morality. And He goes down...Woe, woe, woe through all of these things. And then He pronounces at the end of the chapter this horrifying prophecy that the enemies of Israel are going to come, you know, in massive force and just wipe them out, just total destruction.

And it's a frightening passage. I mean, it would be worse than knowing your twin towers are going to be attacked by some Arab terrorists. I mean, it was total wiping out of Jerusalem and the whole of the southern kingdom. And Isaiah immediately is seen going to the temple. And he goes to the temple and he wants to check in with God because he wants to find out where is God...where is God? This just can't be. This is the covenant people. This is God's own chosen people. This is the seed of Abraham, you know. And he goes to the temple and I think the most startling thing occurs in the opening of the chapter, he says this, "In the year that King Uzziah died," and that was the final straw because Uzziah reigned 52 years and Uzziah was the...Uzziah was the symbol of God's blessing, the symbol of God's protection and he died and God killed him, remember. He stepped over the line from the kingly role to the priestly role and God struck him dead...and that was the final blow. And in the year King Uzziah died, when all trauma from God was falling on Israel, he said, "I saw the Lord and He was high and lifted up." And it's just shocking. He wasn't in the rubble, as the L.A. Times guys said, He was right on the same throne He had been on all the time. He hadn't abdicated. He hadn't lost His sovereign purpose. He hadn't diminished in His glory. High and lifted up and His train fills the temple...and Holy, Holy, Holy. And you see God in all His full sovereign majestic glory and everything that is happening is happening in the framework of His perfect purpose. And His purpose happened to be for judgment on Judah.

And I will say this. I don't know what the purpose of God was quote, "for America," but I do know what the purpose of God is when something like that happens. It is for judgment on some because they perish and God has every right to bring that judgment on the ungodly who have rejected Him. It

is for those who believe the blessing of all blessings, the Christians who died in those events, and there were some that we know of because they were interviewed on that flight that went down in Pennsylvania. For them it was an entrance into glory. God was in control of all of that. God is in control of judgment and God is in control of blessing for His people and that fits within the righteous pattern of God as He expresses His purpose and His will.

Amos the prophet said something very, very interesting. He said, "Is there a calamity in the city that I have not done?" It's God. It isn't that God is in the evil of the terrorists but it is within the framework of God's purpose of judgment that that came to pass.

PHIL: And, in fact, if I understand you correctly, you're saying that God's judgment can also be His blessing, that people who die in a disaster like this, some of them are righteous, some of them are evil...

JOHN: Yes.

PHIL: We can't tell from looking externally whether in any given instance this is an act of judgment or an act of blessing. It could be either one.

JOHN: Yes, and that's why I've said God's providence does not discriminate. Providence doesn't discriminate, a flood doesn't discriminate, a plane crash doesn't discriminate, a war doesn't discriminate, a sinking ship, like the Titanic, doesn't discriminate, train wreck doesn't discriminate. You remember the famous sermon by Spurgeon which he was trying to explain to his people that the plane...that the train wreck occurred and there were mangled cars, mangled people and it over simplifies to say, "This is God's judgment on the worse people." They're not the worse people, death is reality. And God's people die and Satan's people die, but that's all within God's purpose and plan that He allows those things. He gives evil...even Satan is His servant...He gives evil its space within His confinements.

PHIL: And then uses it for His glory.

JOHN: Yeah, because as I said to our people, I said..."What happened in that tower was severe, obviously it was the ultimate severity for the ungodly but the ungodly perish all the time, they perish all the time. But it was there a severe mercy. I mean, look at the results of it. Everybody talking about God. People going back to churches. People, you know, it's not a good day to be a comedian. Frivolity and the trivial and the shallow and the cheap and the tawdry has lost its place in the public discourse.

PHIL: That's right.

JOHN: And is that good?

PHIL: Yes.

JOHN: Well you know evangelists can create that, you can't hype that up. It takes something like this which I call a severe mercy. It may be wrath on the ungodly who die, at the same time blessing on

the godly who die, but for the rest who live it is a severe mercy because it is a wake-up call. And that...you know, we all know this, that God would have every right to take our lives immediately to all of us, I mean, the whole world of sinners, but we live and we enjoy what theologians have called common grace and the sun shines and the rain falls on the just and the unjust and we enjoy life when we have no right to life. And then when somebody dies, we say...what's wrong...what's wrong? Nothing's wrong, that's what we all deserve, but we're all living on borrowed time. We're all living under grace really and when these kinds of events happen, I think they shake people to the core. I mean, look we live in California, Phil, and you know this as well as I do...every time we have a big earthquake here, we get the same response. The next Sunday the church is jammed with people who wouldn't think of coming to church until the ground underneath them starts shaking and bursting open, their houses collapse around them and gas starts flying out of everywhere and some of the doomsday prophets rise out of the woodwork and start saying, "California is going to fall into the Pacific Ocean."

PHIL: In fact, I remember in the last earthquake the news media sent reporters to interview you about it and the question they wanted to know was...Did you think this was an act of divine judgment? And I remember your answer, do you?

JOHN: Well, I think what I said was that this was not an evil thing, this was a good thing, this was a beneficial thing, this was another one of those severe mercies. In reality, the earthquake killed very few people. In fact, the earthquake allowed the people to live who should die because the wages of sin is death and yet while it only took a few lives, it awakened thousands of people to the reality that they have no control over their own death. And I see that as greatly beneficial.

I mean, Phil, just think about it. One day before September 11, on September 10, God's name wasn't in the public discourse. I mean, you didn't speak about God unless you were sworn in somewhere in a courtroom or unless you were overstepping your bounds. Now everyone is reaching out for the sky hook and as I said in the introduction, we can all assume that they don't know the God they're crying out to and they may not be crying out on His terms but on their own terms, but that ought to be evidence enough that this is a severe mercy.

PHIL: And it's a reminder that God usually is merciful to us.

JOHN: As I said to Larry King, you know, I said...Let's say six or seven thousand people died, which I think is probably going to be what the number is going to be, that's how many die every day in America. I think I said that on the air, that that would just make a 366-day year in terms of the number of deaths. So we just don't like it when they die suddenly and in big groups like that. That really wakens us up and that's plenty of reason for God to allow that to happen.

PHIL: Larry King also asked you if the events of September 11 caused you to question your faith? He seemed to be asking that of each of these guys. Talk about that a little bit.

JOHN: You know, I liked him, I liked Larry King. I like people that are straightforward, and he is. I like people that are honest. And I think one of the reasons why he's so interesting as an interviewer is because he's so interested in the issues. He said to me, he said, "Are you afraid to die?" This was off the air.

And I said, "No, I'm not afraid to die."

He said, "Really, you have no fear of death?"

I said, "No, I don't really have any fear of death." I said, "Because that's all a settled issue, I know exactly where I'm going to go when I die and I'm going to go to the place the Lord has prepared for me and that's a settled issue with me and I have no concerns about that."

And he said, "I wish I had that faith."

Now that's really honest. I mean, I have great respect for that. And I think if you watch him at all in his discussions with people in religion, and occasionally with people who profess Christianity, he's not put off by it. He's not offended by it. He has pretty wide tolerance which indicates an interest, an honest and maybe even you could say a certain openness. So it was interesting because when he began to ask me questions, I guess like I always do, I answer exactly what I believe the Bible teaches...just matter of fact. And...because that was my goal. I...the only thing I could prepare to do, cause I didn't know, it's like sitting in a room with balls flying off the wall, you don't know where they're coming from because you don't know what he's going to ask you, or who's going to do what or where the thing's going to go...and so there's no way to prepare to say anything specifically in response to anything cause you don't know what you're going to get. But I did determine in my mind that I was going to look for an opening to present the gospel. I wanted to say a couple of things...one, I wanted to say the Bible is the authority and nobody else is...and I think I got that in. I also wanted to give the gospel clearly and I think in order to do that I had to say...Well, I want...I don't want to answer that question, I want to go back to something that was said earlier...and I just sort of cleared the air and said this is what I want to talk about...and I did. And I think the fact that I was firm about that convinced him in just that little bit of time that I had a strong faith.

PHIL: Yes.

JOHN: Because he said to the muslim sitting next to me, he said, "Don't think you're going to change his faith." And he pointed to me.

Well, how do you convey that, you know, in that environment?

PHIL: I'd say he got the message, he definitely got the message.

JOHN: I think he had respect for that kind of conviction. It's not that I was trying to earn his respect, it's that that's exactly what I believe and if you ask me what I believe I'm going to tell you that whatever the venue is.

PHIL: In fact, one of the callers asked a provocative question. Somebody phoned in to ask whether the hi-jackers were in heaven or hell. And I thought when I was watching, well here it comes. You never see a discussion of hell on television and here was this panel of different religious opinions, most of whom I knew up front would not even believe in such a thing as hell. And in fact, I was intrigued by the rabbi's opinion. He said he had problems with hell, remember. He said he just couldn't even believe in a God who would send people to hell. What's your response to that?

JOHN: Well, you know, he...the rabbi and I say honestly, God have mercy on his soul...the rabbi has no authority but himself. I mean, at least he could say, "I'm a Jewish rabbi and the Old Testament says..." But he doesn't believe the Old Testament so what is he? He's a self-styled religious philosopher who's only holding on to Judaism in some...in some traditional or genetic fashion. But as far as being a representative of Judaism, he isn't even a representative of Judaism, he's a representative of himself. He is no different than Depok Chopra(??), a self-styled religious philosopher who invents his own views. Well what kind of authority is that?

PHIL: He's made up his own God, hasn't he?

JOHN: He is his own God. He even says that.

PHIL: He begins to define God as everything. And I thought Larry King had a good comeback, he said, "If God is everything then God is nothing."

JOHN: But the rabbi is no different. The rabbi is no different than any kind of philosopher because he has no authority. And when he said, "Well, I think...." he's gone, as far as I'm concerned. If a moslem guy says, "I stand by the Koran..." I have more respect for that because he's saying there's an authority outside of me and I bow to that authority. I have more respect for that than a guy who thinks that he is God, that he literally can define deity and reality out of his own intuition. To me that is egotism gone bizerk. I mean, you don't even have an authority outside yourself. And so...and that's why I said with all due respect, Depok is not the authority and neither is the rabbi. And Larry picked up on that and he said, "And you're not either." And I said, "Absolutely not, the Word of God is." And it's so important to understand that if you're truly a representative of God, you didn't invent Him in your own mind and you have to come with an authoritative divine Word.

You know, I've...well these are the things I would have said if I had time.

PHIL: I wish you had had the time. One other question came up that I found myself wishing you had time to respond to more. Larry King was curious about whether we should forgive the terrorists. And, in fact, he went around and asked...he made it a point to ask each panelist this question. That's really a hard question to answer in a soundbyte(?) and I'm eager to hear a more in depth reply from you.

JOHN: As far as is humanly possible, yes I would forgive them.

PHIL: Whether they asked for it or not?

JOHN: Yeah, whatever that would mean in a sense that I would not be bound in my own heart by some unrelenting bitterness toward them. I don't mean that there can be any kind of reconciliation. In the first place, there's no relationship to start with. But I don't believe vengeance is mine, I think it's God's. Even if I had lost a son or a brother or a spouse or a friend in the disasters, I don't think I would have had a heart of bitterness or vengeance or hostility toward those people, I...it would be in me to forgive them and the way I would manifest that forgiveness is not by anything on their behalf, I mean, they're dead, but it would simply be manifest in grief over the terrible disaster of their eternal soul. Nobody talks about that. It's terrible that people died in that destruction. It's more terrible that

some people went to hell and those men who committed those horrible acts went there, too. That is a great grief. The deception of Islam is a great grief and there are more coming after them who are going to be literally cast into eternal judgment under the illusion that they're serving Allah, God. So I would have nothing but compassion toward that.

I think an illustration of that that may help is one of my nephews, just a really outstanding young man, he was about 21, 22, his name was Tim, my wife's sister's son, a fine young man, loved the Lord. He was in his college days, he was a volleyball player at Cal State University, just a great, great kid. Was working in a market and a guy came in to hold the market up and killed him. I think he was like 21 or 22, shot him dead. And, you know, the guy was on drugs and Tim tried to intervene when this guy was getting money from a cashier, he tried to protect this lady and he was killed. And his dad, my brother-in-law, Duane, I watched his response to somebody who had just murdered his son at the prime of, you know, his young years. And Duane went to the prison with one purpose, he said, "I'm going to see that man." And he went there with the purpose of sharing the gospel with him and telling him that he forgave him for what he did to his son and that more important than the death of his son was this guy's death because his son was with Christ. Now that's what I'm talking about when I talk about forgiveness. I mean, there's no way to restore a relationship unless somebody comes and asks for forgiveness but I'm not going to be bound by bitterness and vengeance. I even look at the war that way, I don't see the war as some kind of retaliatory vengeance. I think a just war begins when the peace is interrupted and it ends when the peace is restored. And I think a just war is a war that takes away the terrible, terrible interruption into the peace of this nation. In other words, it's a war of protection and justice. But I don't think we need to get caught up in personal vengeance, but on the other hand, as well, only God...only God can forgive sinners and the sad reality is, those men will never be forgiven because they died without ever believing the gospel of Jesus Christ.

PHIL: So just to be absolutely clear, when you speak of forgiveness, the forgiveness you grant, you're talking about letting go of any bitterness, or hostility, or anything towards them. But not absolution for their sin.

JOHN: I couldn't do that anyway. I mean, I can't give that to anybody. So any time I talk about forgiveness, I'm just talking about the fact that I'm not holding a bitterness, I'm not holding a grudge. I can't absolve anybody's iniquities anyway, that's for God to do. And He's not going to do that for a person who doesn't come to Him through Christ.

PHIL: You mentioned the war. Let me follow up on that. Just to put that together with what you're saying about forgiveness, I notice a lot of Christians are confused about this and they're asking questions like...can we as Christians support our government's retaliation against terrorism? And occasionally you hear a Christian cite Matthew 5 verses 38 and 39 where Jesus said, "You've heard that it was said, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, but I tell you not to resist an evil person but whoever slaps you on the right cheek, turn the other to him also." Now what did Jesus mean and does that have any application in a situation like this?

JOHN: Well, first of all, it has no application in a situation like war which is not a personal offense, which is a national issue dealing with an entity that's been ordained by God for the punishment of evildoers. I'm not an entity ordained by God for the punishment of evildoers, right? That's not my personal issue.

PHIL: Right, and Jesus here is talking about personal issues.

JOHN: Yeah, and I think to understand what that text actually means, if anyone slaps you, turn the other cheek...you have to understand a little bit of background, it's pretty fascinating. We'll take a minute and explain it to you.

I've been reading on that very issue this week and I came across some fascinating information about the fact that when Christians in the New Testament era who were Jews, obviously, because Jesus was preaching and they were following Him and believing in Him and identifying as followers of Christ and all of this, when they were in their synagogues you remember Jesus said to them at the upper room discourse, He said, "The day's going to come when they're going to throw you out of the synagogue and they're going to whip you," and all of this. Some historians indicate that there was interestingly enough when a person was excommunicated a symbolic slap across the face by the ruler of the synagogue...whack...before the synagogue and that this symbolized that rejection. A slap across the face was viewed as a very shameful thing, a very demeaning and humbling thing to be smacked across the face.

There's still that even in our culture. Right? I mean, it's one thing to knock a guy's lights out, that's one kind of demonstration of how you feel about somebody. But just a smack across the face is a "how dare you," it's a demeaning kind of thing. And that's the way it was. And so there's some historians who say they literally would smack somebody across the face who was excommunicated.

PHIL: Gives new meaning to the right hand of fellowship.

JOHN: That was the right hand of disfellowship. But...so what Jesus is saying is this...Look, if you have so identified with Me, if you have by that identification created such an offense that they have literally slapped you across the face, continue in the same path so that you are continually vulnerable to the same thing over again. And He had an illustration of the fact that it's not literal in the case of Jesus when He was slapped, you remember, they slapped Him across the face and He didn't say, "Here, hit the other cheek." He said essentially, "Why are you doing that?" And He called them to account.

I think what that's talking about is if they hit you once, get ready, they'll probably hit you again. And you have to maintain a certain vulnerability. And He's talking there about a Christian living in a persecuting environment. If you get slapped in the face, don't compromise, don't lose your courage, don't go underground, don't deny the Lord, don't retaliate, don't get full of vengeance, don't become bitter, just live that same godly quiet life with all of its vulnerability cause you may get hit again. That's a whole different issue than God giving the right to a national government, which is exactly what Romans 13 says, the powers that be are ordained of God and they bear the sword and they don't bear it for nothing, they bear it to use against the evildoer for the protection of the one who does good. And that's a just war.

And you know...what America is doing now is as close to following that model as possible. On the one hand we're dropping bombs, on the other hand we're dropping aid. I mean, who does that? Who...who does that? What...what nations in wars in history have done that? That's the kind of war that's fought by men who understand the role of government. I'm not saying they're necessarily Christians but they have a biblical understanding of the role of government which encompasses the punishment of evildoers as well as the protection of those that are good, whether they're here or

there. And so I have every...every confidence at this point that our nation is doing everything it can to walk that line in a responsible way. And I'll tell you something, and I say this with all candor, we can be thankful to the Lord that George Bush is our President and that this didn't happen frankly during the Bill Clinton era, because I think what we have is a coalition of men in the Cabinet who have some character.

PHIL: Would you say then that Romans 13 puts a responsibility on our government to retaliate?

JOHN: Well I definitely do.

PHIL: It would be wrong for them not to retaliate?

JOHN: Absolutely. Well, I mean, it's...it's pretty obvious, if we don't do anything, what's going to happen? They're going to keep it up, and keep it up. And where does it end? I mean, all you have to do is be successful at what you do once and if you gain the desired effect, America goes into a shell, doesn't do anything, doesn't go back to try to root out this evil and to deal with it and to bring it just punishment, now you've just energized them. Now they're going to be flooded with other people who want to go and accomplish these great purposes and these great ends because there's no consequence. It's just like, you know in simple level, it's like asking whether you should punish a child when he does something that's wrong, is that the compassionate thing to do? Yeah, it is in the end unless you want to turn your child into a criminal. I mean, if you don't punish this kind of thing, what's going to happen now and what's already happening, and I'm not here to answer questions about politics in the military, what's going to happen now as the world retaliates against this is the forces, the Taliban, and whoever they are, are going to disintegrate under the fear and the pressure of this tremendous act of justice that's coming against them. And that's the desired effect you want, you want to disintegrate the entire base of power and that brings about a protection of people.

I think we're not only doing what's right in the protection of our own nation, but we're doing what's right in the corollary protection of Israel, not because Israel is by any means a righteous people, but because I do think that Israel is a nation that understands right and wrong on a human level and understands justice on a human level and doesn't do to its neighbors what its neighbors continue to do to it.

PHIL: One other interesting thing about the Larry King interview is that he asked you...what did you think would happen...he said...to a two-year-old baby at the bottom of the World Trade Center? I happened to know that you were planning to preach on the question of what happens to infants who die, so you've been studying that issue anyway. Take a little time and give us an answer about what happens to infants who die.

JOHN: That was one of those things that came out of nowhere. I mean, I don't...that's obviously a question on people's minds and it was on his mind. I didn't know it was coming, he just looked at me and said, "What about a two-year-old baby that's at the bottom of the Trade towers?" I said, "Instant heaven." That's what I said, I said it twice because then he responded by saying, "Didn't sin?" And I said, "Instant heaven, I didn't necessarily agree they didn't sin but I said instant heaven." Cause that was the right answer.

But I remember being on a panel with four pastors and the question was asked from the audience in

a big conference, what about babies that die? And three of them didn't know. And I thought...Well how can that be? How can you not know? I mean, this is a massive issue here. I mean, it is conceivable that more, more little ones have died than have reached adulthood in the history of the world.

PHIL: Wow.

JOHN: I mean, that's conceivable, isn't it? I mean, mortality rates in the past...I mean, you think about...look back in the Puritans and the Reformers and how many kids that had to die...and go back a few centuries before that and people were having babies die all over the place.

PHIL: And even now in some parts of the world.

JOHN: In some parts of the world, it's possible that half the babies conceived die even in Third World areas today. So you're talking about millions and billions of souls that are souls. Psalm 139, God wove me in my mother's womb, and knew me before I ever said a word...and these are real souls. We need to have an answer to that. And I believe the right way to understand that is that God in grace gathers them into His eternal glory. He saves them.

And there are a number of reasons why I believe that. I believe that because Jesus said, "Permit the little children to come unto Me and forbid them not for such is the Kingdom of heaven," Mark 10. I believe it because of a wonderful verse in Matthew 18:14 where Jesus said, "The Father would never let one of His little ones perish." I believe it because of David's confidence in the death of his baby son when he said in 2 Samuel, "He cannot come to me but I shall go to him." Oh there are a number of other passages. I believe in the Scripture, Job said when he was really in despair, he was really at the end of his rope, I mean, he had lost everything and he said, "It would have been better for me if I had been stillborn, because then I wouldn't have this misery, I would be at rest." And here was the confidence of Job that the little one who is stillborn escapes pain and suffering and goes into rest. There are a lot of Scriptures like that.

And I also believe that the sovereign salvation of infants is the most magnificent analogy as to how God saves adults because in saving an infant it's all of grace because an infant can't believe, they can't do anything. God saves them purely by His grace and we know that He by nature is a Savior. He saves them by grace. That's a perfect analogy of how He saves us. Even as adults we can't do anything to contribute to our salvation either and purely out of His sovereign grace He saves us. So I believe that...there are a lot of other reasons, but I believe that when I said "instant heaven" to Larry King, I had a lot behind what I said.

Another interesting thought about that, you'd read in the Bible that heaven is a place where there will be people from every tongue and tribe and people and nation. If you think about it, not every tongue and tribe and people and nation have necessarily heard the gospel, but if the Lord is rescuing the little ones from all those places, then they'll be representatives of every tongue and tribe and people and nation.

PHIL: Huh...thank you. So, John, have you gotten some good responses to your appearance on Larry King? What's the most interesting response you've got?

JOHN: Well...you know what the universal response is? Ninety-nine point nine percent of the response is, "Thank you for giving the true gospel." It's almost like people had hoped somebody would just give the straightforward gospel and hold the line. And that's what people keep saying. You know, we watched and we hoped that you would give the gospel and that you wouldn't compromise the gospel. And they were just very encouraged. I think it strengthened Christians to be...maybe to be bold. And, of course, I'm not thinking I need to, you know, suck it up and say the truth here no matter what, I just said it because that's what I believe the truth is. But I think it was encouraging and, you know, most all of the mail is basically saying we need to stand up for the gospel in a day when so many people compromise and water it down and want to make it blend in with everything else and not offend anybody. And I think that's what struck me is how, you know, because we hear so much about "let's open up everything, let's embrace everybody and let's accept this...whoever, Catholics and let's be open to other religions and let's," and you think this is a big widespread movement. And then what happens is, I get on there and I'm really firm about the singularity and exclusiveness of the gospel and there's this flood of affirmation and you begin to realize there are people out there who aren't buying into this.

PHIL: Thank you for doing that, John.

JOHN: Well, I don't understand why it's a difficult thing to do. You just say what's true and as I...you know me well enough to know I'm not concerned about where it gets me. You know, I'm not concerned about what I might achieve on a worldly level, I'm just concerned about the truth and so there's the truth and what happens happens. And so I don't know what will happen. My initial reaction was I'll probably get one shot at this deal, and they'll never have me back again. But we got a different response from the people at the program so that's good. They said that they are looking forward to having me back again, so we'll see if that happens.

PHIL: Let's move on. I want to ask you a few questions just in closing that I wish Larry King had brought up. I know in the midst of all this uncertainty and with all of the threat of war, U.S. tax...U.S. attacks retaliation are now underway and there's almost a guarantee the news media are telling us that there will be further retaliation from the terrorists...in the midst of all of this, fear isn't very far away even from Christians. It's hard to avoid anxiety. Let me ask you, first of all, is fear always a sin?

JOHN: Oh I wouldn't want to say that. I think when fear spills over in distrusting God, you know when it becomes a settled fear that goes against the grain of divine revelation about God's promises to care for His own, then it's a sin. But there is such a thing as a responsible fear that makes me watchful, careful, protective of myself, my family, people around me. I think there's a wholesome sense of self-protection, a reasonable fear that keeps me from putting myself in dangerous places, in dangerous positions. You could almost say that fearlessness could be a sin because fearlessness could step over a line into presumption. You know, the old story of...do I trust God so much for my life that I'm going to lie down on the freeway...that's presumption. That's overstepping the bounds of trust and you've now entered in to presumption. On the other side, you can overstep a reasonable sense of fear, a reasonable common sense approach to life that takes care about where you go and what you do and how you protect yourself and those around you, you can step over that line into a settled distrust in the divine purpose and the divine care of God which is pledged and promised to a believer.

PHIL: Now I know you've written a whole book on this subject, Anxiety Attacked...

JOHN: Yeah.

PHIL: But let me at least ask you to give us a brief summary of the advice you would give to someone who is struggling with anxiety.

JOHN: Well, you know what I do in that book is in the back there's a whole bunch of Psalms and what I've told people through the years is just start reading the Psalms because so many of the Psalms were written in a time of either the psalmist's distress or Israel's distress and they start out with a dilemma and they end up in confidence. They're just great confidence builders because they affirm who God is and they affirm what God has done. And again, I believe that fear is connected to two things...it is connected, first of all, to a lack of information and secondly, to a lack of trust. What I mean by that is it's generally fear of the unknown that panics people. If you can see it coming, if it's there, if you can analyze it, you can deal with it. It's the blind-side thing. And I think from the standpoint of a Christian, we can eliminate the lack of knowledge side of it by understanding Scripture, all that the Scripture says about life, all that it says about God's control over the circumstances of our life, all that it says about rejoicing and trials, all that it says about casting all our care on Him for He cares for us, all that it says about He never slumbers or sleeps, He's always the watchful Shepherd over His flock. Learning everything you can from the Word of God so that your knowledge of God is accurate and when you know God who is the God revealed in Scripture then I think you have the foundation on which to trust.

Why do I trust God? Oh it's not because I've cranked up my emotions. It's not because I've...I've gritted my teeth and said I'm going to hang in there and tough this out. The reason I trust God is because I know who He is and what He's promised because I have the information revealed to me in Scripture. And I think...and this is something very sad, there are so many people in the Christian church who have such a shallow understanding of the Bible, they have such a limited understanding of God...many of them have been in these experiential kind of Christian churches or these seeker-friendly churches where they are literally injected with a placebo where they're swallowing Sunday placebos instead of any nourishing vitamin, anything that's going to make a difference in their life that when it comes to the crisis they have absolutely no...no foundation of the true knowledge of God on which to stand.

When Larry King said to me, "You don't have any fear of death," I said no. That's not because I'm better than anybody else, not because I have more resolution than anybody else or because I'm a tougher guy or because I am more self-disciplined, it is connected completely to my understanding of who God is and what God has promised. So the direction you have to go in relieving anxiety is to know your God. It's that old thing that J.B. Phillips said long, long ago..."Your God is too small." And if your God is too small, you've got problems because when you hit the crisis He's not big enough to carry you through it and we need to know our God is not small, we need to know our God and that's why I said preaching through the years that the goal of all preaching should be the revelation of God. Above all things His greatness is glory, His promises so that our faith rests truly on the one who is God. And then we can face anything, including death unwaveringly.

PHIL: It brings us right back to where we started when you used that illustration about Isaiah who in the midst of all his tragedy that was falling on the nation, he saw God high and lifted up.

JOHN: That's exactly what he needed to see. He needed to see God is on the throne, God is sovereign, God is holy and this is happening within the framework of His sovereignty, this is

happening within the framework of His holiness. He hasn't lost His control of anything. He is holy. And if you just think about that, God is not in the rubble, God is not up there wringing His hands. God is on the throne and the angels are saying, "Holy, Holy, Holy," and Holy, Holy, Holy means that whatever happened was consistent with God's holiness. And I'll tell you what is consistent with God's holiness...sinners die, they die in a building, they die on a deathbed, they die in a hospital, they die in a car wreck, they die here, they die there. But that's consistent with God's holiness. So why would we question...where is God?...then than at the death of anybody else any other time in the world. And I think I read one time where 78 or 80 people die every second...and I think it may be more than that now. Where is God? I mean, death...I'll tell you where God is, God has every right to take the life of an individual who is a sinner because the wages of sin is death. The only question, and this is what I kept going back to, the only question is...are you ready for your death that you have no control over?

In the little break I said to Larry, I tried to say, I said, I forget exactly whether it was or off, I said, "There's a terrible evil in the world, Larry, and it's getting everybody." And he sat back in his chair and he said, "You're right, there's a terrible evil loose in the world." And I said yeah, and it gets us all in its death and the only question is...what are you doing to do when it happens? That's the compelling question. And he understood that that's the question. So I think the way you resolve that question is to know the God who is the source of eternal life.

PHIL: Lots of people are asking similar questions today and I think a lot of our listeners probably are finding they have greater opportunities than ever to share the gospel with their friends, their neighbors and so on. But what advice would you give them as looking for ways to share their faith?

JOHN: Well...yeah, don't shuffle your feet and beat around the bush would be the first thing. I mean, if the door was ever opened, it's open now. And I think that, you know, I would say to them what I said in the tape I did on terrorism, take them to Luke 13 where Jesus did and ask this question...what would have happened to you if you would have been in the building? What would have happened to you if you would have been on the flight? Where would you be now, today? Isn't that the question? Would you be in heaven?

And if they say, "Well, I hope so."

Well, on the basis of what? On the basis of why would you be in heaven?

"Well, I'm a pretty good person."

Boy, there's the door right there. Salvation is not by works. So I think the question is just capture the moment. I mean, the moment is vivid. All you have to do is say to somebody, "Well, if you were on the 105th floor or the 95th floor when the plane hit, where would you be? Or if you were in the plane where would you be?"

PHIL: And I bet there's not a person in America who hasn't asked himself that question. Where would I be?

JOHN: Yeah. And then you go from there, I mean, if you're looking for an opening, an entree, a starting point for evangelism, here's a universal one.

PHIL: Well thank you, John.

JOHN: Well thank you, Phil. It's been a delight to talk about these things and I hope it's helpful to people. It is strange for a preacher to be thrown into a short answer soundbyte environment because I'm used to explaining things. But, you know, preachers are also proclaimers, we're not just explainers and there's something wonderfully powerful about just the proclamation because the power is in the truth. You never know what the Lord is going to do in planting the seed, as the Apostle Paul said, some plant and some water, God gives the increase. So you just say what's true and then you leave it to the Lord, whatever that environment allows you to say, that's what you say. But I'm very thankful to the Lord for the opening that was there to proclaim the gospel and grateful that I had enough time to at least articulate the truth and to try to get across that Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation. And I know the message got through and I'll close by saying this, I know the message got through because I did get three letters that were furious with me, just furious. And it was really good feedback because they said, "How dare you say Jesus is the only way." So I know that message got through not only to Christians, you know, sometimes you think...well, the Christians got it, you know, cause it's inside talk, it's Christian jargon and lingo. These are three non-Christians.

In fact, one guy wrote me a letter, he was so mad at me, he was so...the letter is filled with invectives, filled with four-letter words, filled with filth and blasphemous language toward God and in the letter he actually says, "I know why Mohammed Atta, you know, led those planes into the building," he said, "and when I get to hell I'm going to ask him and I know he's going to tell me because he thought you were in the building." And then he said, "How dare you think that your Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation." This guy was just furious.

And, you know, in a sense that was really important feedback because if it's clear enough for somebody to get that mad who is outside the gospel, then it was clear enough for the people that the Lord may be drawing to Himself and so, you know, even that feedback was important. Another lady wrote and said that I was interrupting the peace of the world by making Jesus the only way of salvation. Well I was glad she got it. She didn't like it but she got it. And I remember Jesus, you know, when He preached the gospel in His synagogue in Nazareth, they tried to throw Him off the cliff and kill Him. They got it, they got the message, they didn't like it but they got it. And you're going to run into that. I mean, there are going to be people who resent that truth but that doesn't make it the less true. And I think that's why I wonder why anybody who represents Christ equivocates on that. What do you gain? You certainly don't gain anything with the sinner. If you don't tell the sinner the truth, he can't get saved. You certainly don't gain anything with the saints because if you don't tell the truth, the saints don't have any respect for you. And you certainly don't gain anything with the Lord because if you're ashamed of the gospel, you're in some serious trouble there. So...I mean, what's the upside of not just saying the truth?

PHIL: There is none. That's what I think.

JOHN: One thing I need to say sort of in wrapping all this up. This is a time for great compassion. While it is a great opportunity, we don't want to go roaring in there with guns blazing. This is an important time for sensitivity and compassion. People have been seriously tenderized. This kind of fear is not superficial, it is deep and profound. And there's an important necessity to come with the meekness and gentleness of Christ to demonstrate the kind of weeping compassion that Jesus did, a tenderness. We come tender-hearted, we come kindly, we come compassionately realizing that there's a lot of real fear and real anxiety and real suffering in people's hearts and particular to those

people in New York who lost people and others around the country who lost people. This is a very, very tender time and I think we want to be truthful, we want to speak the gospel but we want to make sure we stay compassionate and tender-hearted and loving and gracious in the presentation of the gospel. So I would just encourage you to take every opportunity you have to demonstrate the truth and to do it in love.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2017 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).