

The Old Schoolhouse Interview on Home-school

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Paul Suarez: I am excited to bring you John MacArthur, the pastor of Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, California, and Christian radio host of Grace to You. This interview is near and dear to my own heart because of the respect I have for this pastor. Welcome, John MacArthur!

Dr. MacArthur, could you briefly share with our readers how you came to know Christ? What was the turning point in your life that led you to Him?

John MacArthur: I was raised in a family where Christ was exalted. My mom was a sweet, devout Christian, my dad was a faithful lover of Jesus Christ and a preacher of the gospel, my grandfather was a preacher, and I was surrounded by the people who served the Lord and the ministry of the church.

I grew up being raised in the church, a pastor's kid, an evangelist's son, and my parents shared the gospel with me. I think I came to a real awakening to the reality of the gospel at the age of 9 or 10. Although it was after a severe automobile accident at the age of 18, where I was thrown out of a car going 70 miles an hour, slid down a highway, and ended up for three months in bed trying to recover from friction burns and injuries—that was really the turning point in my life. I think that is where I went from being a Christian to saying, "Okay, Lord, I'll do anything you want me to do." That was really the point at which I abandoned my own will and said if my life is so fragile, if it indeed is a vapor that vanishes away, and it could disappear as fast as that one accident, then I know it is in Your hands, and I want to give my life to You. That's when I really turned over my life to the Lord for ministry. Three months lying in bed thinking about what truly mattered. That set me on the course to serve Him. I've never really been deterred from that since that time.

I look back to the time of my salvation, sitting on my church steps talking to my dad, who was telling me what I needed to do to receive Christ, and then back to that accident at the age of 18 as the point in my life when I was sort of sealed in the commitment of my heart to respond to the Lord and to go into ministry and teach and preach His word. Those are the two main turning points in my life.

Since then, there are other things that happen in your life that keep you moving, but those are the greatest redirecting experiences that God brought into my life. The incident at the age of 9 or 10 was following something I did that was very wrong, very bad. I was guilty in my heart before God as a result of that, and I think that is what drove me to the place where I wanted my dad to tell me what I needed to do to be saved. I had vandalized a certain place, got caught up with some bad kids, and

that kind of pushed me over the line and made me recognize my true sinfulness, and I needed forgiveness, and I needed a savior. Both of these events had a profound impact on me.

Prior to the car accident, I was going in the direction of my own; you know, maybe I wanted to be a professional athlete or whatever, and I was greatly redirected at that point. I am thankful to the Lord for His grace to me since those times to faithfully allow me to fulfill more than I could ever imagine. I have lived out the Ephesians 3:20 promise, "Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us."

Paul: What a testimony! Thanks, John for sharing it. Tell us about The Master's College. How was this school born? What is its overall purpose, and do you see more and more home-school kids applying?

John: As far as the Master's college is concerned, it was actually founded in 1927 by a group of Baptists, and I didn't come along until 1985, a long time after the school was founded.

It started out as a Los Angeles Baptist seminary... Later on they added a college to it. It relocated out to the area now called Santa Clarita before I was ever involved. The school was well along; it was already accredited as a liberal arts college. By the time I came, the seminary had disappeared; it was no longer there, so it was just a four-year Christian liberal arts college. As any liberal arts college, it had a multi-faceted program. It had the opportunity to do some training in Bible, of course, a strong Bible major, music major, there was a business major, there was a major in English, and there was a wonderful elementary and secondary education program. It was just a fragile foundation—it was sort of eking out its existence, and it had not had enough money to survive. They were several million in debt, there was a half million dollars in unpaid bills, there was ten years of deferred maintenance, and it had been at least five years since faculty members had received an increase in pay. It was very fragile, and yet it had a beautiful campus, it had tremendous potential, and the Lord just kind of prompted my heart when I was asked if I would take it over and be the president. I said, no, I already have a job. I didn't know if I could do two, but the Lord kept the pressure on from these people, and finally I could see the hand of God in it because I had such a passion to see young people trained. In 1985 I said yes, and I thought, well, I'll give five years to this and we will try to see if God will put it on its feet. Here I am 18 years later, and I can't let go because it is so fulfilling.

The first thing that happened was some people came along and all of a sudden from out of nowhere, we had three and a half million dollars given to us, and that saved the school at the outset. Over the next ten years, a businessman that I met caught the vision for the college and invested 26 million dollars, essentially, in the campus of that college and turned it into a first-rate institution. During that time, we began to develop strength in our programs, increasing their quality everywhere we could until ... we were ranked by U.S. News and World Report, with no consideration for the Christian side, the fifth leading baccalaureate college west of the Mississippi. They see the quality of the education

that is there. You add the spiritual component, and it is a remarkable place. It has grown to an enrollment of, I suppose now, totaling 1,400, not including the seminary, which has 350 men training for ministry.

The overall purpose, of course, is to train Christian people for Kingdom ministry in every walk of life. We are not just career oriented, we are mission oriented. Whatever career you go in is simply a means to the overall mission of the gospel in the world, but we want to have the best prepared students, whether they are in the legal profession, whether they are in the medical profession, whether they are in the teaching profession, wherever they are in business, or the arts, or whether they are pastors, or missionaries, or biblical counselors, whatever field they go into, or whether they are scientists. We want them to be trained at the very highest level, and that is why we have drawn the faculty that we have. It is a remarkable story of what has happened at this school, and it's now reached, I guess, what we can call cruising altitude, and we are seeing the hand of God really blessing an answer to many years of prayer as we were taking off from the runway.

The purpose, as I said, is to train a generation of Christian leaders who can affect the world through a myriad of career opportunities.

Regarding home-school kids, we have a lot of home-schooled young people applying, and I will tell you this: across the board, they generally perform as our best students. We recognize the value of home-schooling done well. I mean, basically they come in ahead of everybody else. They definitely come in ahead of the public school kids, and they come in even ahead of the Christian school students, in general. There may be some exceptions here and there. We are anxious, we are excited, and we are enthusiastic about receiving home-school young people. I will tell you there is another reason, too, because we believe that we provide an environment at the college that embraces all of the values, all of the things that home-schooling families treasure. We understand that; I understand that. There are many in our church, of course, who home-school, many families that are friends of ours that are involved in that. I know what their values are, I know what the things are that concern them, and they are the same things that concern our college.

We take a student who comes to our college as a spiritual trust, with a responsibility to guard that student and to protect that student, and to continue to make sure that student holds dear all that their parents invested in them. We are not trying to test what they parents invested, we are trying to protect and preserve what those parents invested. It is a wonderful relationship that we enjoy with the families of those young people that have come to the college from a home-schooling background.

Paul: Regarding learning in the home (what to study): How important is doctrine? Hermeneutics? How heavy should the emphasis on apologetics be? Is it essential?

John: Doctrine is critical. Let me put it to you very simply; you live your theology. You absolutely live your theology. Let me say it another way: life imitates doctrine. You are going to live what you believe, and the sounder, clearer, stronger, and more defensible your doctrine is, the more it is going to affect how you live.

Hermeneutics is the science of interpreting the Bible that yields the accurate doctrine. I think it is foundational that if you are going to teach doctrine, you have to teach hermeneutics, because your doctrine is the product of a properly interpreted Scripture. You cannot rightly divide the Word of Truth; you can't cut it straight unless you understand what the rules of interpretation are. Once you have cut it straight, you can assemble the doctrine.

It is really a picture of Paul, who made tents, and he made tents typically out of woven goat hair, so you had a piece of fabric. Any of you who do any sewing know that if you are going to make a dress or a shirt or something out of fabric, you have to cut the pieces right, and then you assemble the pieces, and then you get the final product. Until you cut the individual pieces of the Scripture right, you can't assemble them and get the right theology. So interpreting passages of Scripture by the means of a proper hermeneutic will yield not only an understanding of the passage, but the sewing together of the various passages that constitutes an understanding of doctrine.

I do think there is a place for apologetics in home-schooling. I think it is good. I don't think it is as critical as doctrine and hermeneutics, but I think apologetics kind of rides on that. Let me tell you how I think apologetics works. Once you have taught a student hermeneutics, that is, how to interpret, and it has yielded doctrine, then I believe Bible doctrine becomes the most powerful hermeneutic; it becomes the most powerful apologetic. At the Master's College, we take what is called a presuppositional approach to apologetics, not a non-presuppositional approach. The presuppositional approach to apologetics means that we presuppose that the Bible is true, so that our apologetics, or our defense of God and

His Word, comes from His Word. Apologetics, then, is most ably handled by the person who is most skilled in doctrine. The person who is best in doctrine is the person who has made best application of hermeneutics. It all fits together.

Paul: Division in the home-schooling community. We've seen it go from all angles. People dividing over gray areas, like one educational method versus another. Moms being turned away from Christian support groups because they don't school a certain way. Churches splitting hairs—sometimes resulting in "mini-exoduses"—over what's "acceptable" in terms of "methodology." Any words of encouragement regarding the big picture?

John: I'd like to give you some encouragement over the big picture, but evangelical Christianity today is so hopelessly fragmented that you see in the home-school community a sort of microcosm of the

macrocosm of evangelicalism.

I mean, I have lived long enough to remember a time when evangelical pastors could all get together and we were pretty much all on the same page. Now the divisions are just endless, and I guess the amazing part about it is, they are not particularly divisions over doctrine. They tend to be divisions over methodology. The camaraderie, I guess what you could call the evangelical pastoral camaraderie, has been devastated. It has just been wrecked by the pragmatists. There has been some theological assault on it, like the charismatic movement and the new sort of seeker friendly theology that produces a minimalist gospel.

More than that, I guess more widely spread, there are so many different styles and methodologies that people literally today would die on the hill for a method before they would die on the hill for doctrine. They might agree doctrinally, but because they can't agree methodologically, the camaraderie is shattered.

We are [putting] too much emphasis on methodology. Methodology will always be divisive because methodology is not inspired in the Bible. If we would all get back to the Word of God and the sound doctrine of the Bible, we are going to find the common ground. We are never going to find common ground fussing about methods—and methods, I might quickly add, are a poor substitute for the real deal.

The real thing is sound doctrine. There may be lots of ways to teach it, but I find that when people will live and die for methods, it is probably true that they have abandoned the sound doctrine. There is only one way to convey sound doctrine, and that is to teach it. The best way to teach it is from one person to another person. There isn't a system, there isn't a computer program, and there is not even a book that is as effective as one-on-one teaching of the truth. I think that is critical.

One of the problems is that people, home-school people as well, are sitting in churches where there aren't powerful, clear, definitive sermons, sound in doctrine, explaining the Word of God. Bible teaching and doctrine is being depreciated, and whenever it is depreciated, the methodologists rise to the surface. They just rise. They just sort of float to the top in the vacuum, and they take over, and then you get the chaos you talked about.

Paul: You have authored well over 70 books, your most recent a project in which you served as general editor: THINK BIBLICALLY: Recovering a Christian Worldview. What has happened to the church, in your estimation, regarding "worldview," and how can parents of home-schooling children "turn the tide," so to speak? What is a good starting point?

John: You know what, let me give you a simple answer. Take Think Biblically and make it a part of the curriculum in your home-schooling. There isn't a clear Christian worldview. In fact, we looked for

one, and we couldn't find one, so we wrote the book. You turn the tide by education from the Word of God. All Think Biblically is, all the Christian worldview is, is simply defining certain key themes that everybody is aware of: origins, morality, the role of women, the role of men, the arts, science, those kinds of things. Everybody is aware of those things. And giving God's Word on those is really just another way to frame a theology. Think Biblically is a kind of book on theology. The Christian worldview book is a theology book. All it is, is God on this topic or that topic or the other topic. If you teach your students the Bible, you are giving them a biblical worldview. Nobody ever taught me "biblical worldview, Christian worldview." I never had that growing up. My parents just taught me the Bible, and I saw the world through the Bible.

When I got to college, I continued taking Greek and Hebrew and things like that. I got to seminary and I took all the stuff there, and I just continued to view the world through the Bible. I have never had a course on Christian worldview. I've read a few books through the years, but by then, I already saw the world the way God sees the world through the Bible. You are going to encounter the trends, you are going to buck the tide, and you are going to protect your children by simply teaching them the Word of God. They will see from the Word of God the world the way the world really is to be viewed.

Paul: Has the Lord brought certain individuals across your path who have blessed you with teaching and friendship? Iron sharpens iron; who does John MacArthur listen to?

John: As far as who John MacArthur listens to, anybody that is good. I read anybody that the material is good. I listen to the people who preach in my own church on my staff, the people that I work with, the professors of the seminary and college, and the people that I preach with at conferences, and the folks that come to preach in our conferences. I read every day of my life books written by those I believe have insight into the Word of God, anybody and everybody that I can get my hands on. I am sort of a pack frat; wherever it comes from, I am going to try to take what is good.

Paul: What is next in the works?

John: What is next in the works: I just keep writing. I'm trying to finish the whole New Testament commentary series. I am preaching through Luke and 1 John. When I finish preaching through Luke in a few years, I will preach through Mark, and I will have preached through the whole of the New Testament.

Books are on the horizon, not only the commentaries, a new MacArthur Bible Handbook, which is a great tool. Every home-school family should have them; church libraries should have a Bible handbook. This is the latest and the most comprehensive one done...

We are going to launch into a Bible memory program on CD and CD-ROM, 52 verses for the year, and I give a five-minute explanation of the meaning of each verse, a verse for each week to be

learned. We are starting up with 52 verses selected from various themes in Scripture, and what is going to come after that, I think, 52 on God, 52 on Christ, 52 on salvation, and on and on and on. We are trying to get people to get back to memorizing the Word of God. If you are looking for a Bible memory plan, this new one is up-to-date and it is computer friendly, and you can even throw it in your CD player and listen to me explain the verses. It comes with little plastic cards and the whole bit. We are just trying to do everything we can to put the Word of God in the hearts of people.

A wonderful new book, by the way, that families would want to know about, called **Safe in the Arms of God**, is a book I wrote that explains what happens to children that die, what happens to babies that die, what happens to stillborns, what happens to miscarried babies, aborted babies. The Bible does tell us what happens. People just haven't known it was there. This book unfolds what Scripture says about that. It also explains some wonderful testimonies by people who have lost their children. It is a heart-warming, compassionate book, as well as one that opens up the Word of God. There are lots of things like that on the horizon, and we are glad to see that coming up. Thank you very much for this opportunity.

Paul: Thank you, John, for being here with us. We hope it blesses our readers as much as it did us. May the Lord bless your ministry.

John MacArthur is the pastor-teacher of Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, California, as well as a conference speaker and featured teacher with the Grace to You radio ministry.

John has written more than six dozen books and is president of The Master's College, a regionally accredited, four-year, liberal arts Christian college in Santa Clarita, California, and The Master's Seminary graduate school. John and his wife, Patricia, live in Southern California and have four grown children and twelve grandchildren.

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