

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

Bible Questions and Answers, Part 42

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 70-14

Well, tonight we're going to be having a little time in questions and answers. Not what we had planned really, planned to carry on in the book of Revelation but when we did this a couple of weeks ago, there was such a huge number of people with questions, we felt we needed to satisfy, at least in part, what was on your heart. And we had such a wonderful time in question and answer, the last Sunday of December, that I'm very anxious to see the Lord bless even tonight as we share what might be on our hearts.

There are three microphones and there should be one of our pastors by each of them. Guys, where are you? There we go. Stan and Lance and I think Dick Mayhue, all right. And they're just there to kind of help you get in line and maybe crystallize your question in some way. So if the line is like...well you do what you wish, if you want to stand in line a long time, that's your privilege, I guess. But we're just going to ask you to mention the question as clearly and directly as you can. And then I'll do the best I can out of the Word of God to answer it for you. And we'll try to stop in about 45 minutes, at 7:30 so we don't keep you too late. I know these kinds of things can go on and on and on, we'd rather not have that happen.

All right, who will be first? Anybody ready? Dick, are you ready over there? Good.

????? I'm ready. John, I have two or three questions about having...it doesn't...I'm just concerned, it doesn't matter what the answer is really...(Laughter)

JOHN: I think I can handle this question. Okay.

????? Paul says it's better to depart and be with Christ. And Jesus told the thief on the cross, "Today you will be with Me in paradise," now one question...I'll ask two or three questions and then you can comment on them. When we leave...you can wait till I ask all three questions and then answer...when we depart from this earth, I know we're not given a new body right away, but are we in heaven? Then when we get to heaven, there are those that are in heaven, do they know what's taking place here on earth? Now if the answer is no...

JOHN: What?

????? In Revelation 6 it says, "And when He broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who have been slain because of the Word of God and because of the testimony which they

had maintained. And they cried with a loud voice, How long, O Lord, holy and true, will Thou refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"

JOHN: Okay.

????? If they're not...well just, if you can just...

JOHN: I got you. First of all, the first question that you asked is when we depart do we go immediately to heaven. And I think the answer Scripture gives is yes. I think it's clear from perhaps three passages. One of them would be Philippians chapter 1 where he says in verse 23, "I am had pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ." That statement "to depart and be with Christ" leaves no room for anything in the middle...to depart (snap) to be with Christ. And we know where Christ is, He's at the right hand of the throne of God on High, right? We see Him in the vision of Revelation 4 and Revelation 5 and where is He? He's the Lamb in the midst of the throne and John says that throne was in heaven because he was caught up to heaven to see it. So to depart and be with Christ is clearly the promise that is given to the believer who dies.

Second Corinthians chapter 5 also says, and I think this is equally strong, verse 6 of chapter 5, 2 Corinthians, "While we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord for we walk by faith not by sight," verse 8, "we are of good courage and I say...prefer, rather, to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord," 2 Corinthians 5:8, to be absent from the body, to be at home with the Lord, to depart is to be with Christ.

And I think one other Scripture perhaps that we could add to that would be the text of Hebrews 12:23 where you have the general assembly and the church of the firstborn who are in heaven, Hebrews 12:23.

Second question that you asked, do they know what's going on on earth? And the answer to that question is they...they know what went on, there's no reason to assume that all of a sudden they have had a blanked-out memory of the past, I think it's a selective memory because if they could remember evil they could...if they had the capacity to remember and cogitate with evil they could put themselves in a position where sin could influence them. So I think what they can do at that point in time is to remember what occurred on earth, but they remember it with a pure mind so that it never degenerates into an evil thought. And what you have then in Revelation 6 are not people in heaven who are watching what's going on in the world, there's no reason to assume that they do that. In fact, all that we know about heaven is that we will contemplate the Lord and we will contemplate His throne and we'll contemplate His glory and we will be face to face and we will know as we are known and the Lamb is all the glory of that place and so forth and so on. So I don't believe that there's anything going on on earth that can in any way distract them from the preoccupation that they have with the living Christ. So that what you have in Revelation 6 are people who are focused on Christ,

who are enamored with the glory of Christ, who are so overwhelmed with who He is that they are pleading with Him to exercise the authority to bring the world in to harmony with His glory. So I think the vision that elicits the prayer is not the vision of the problems in the world, or even necessarily the memory, specifically of their suffering, as much as it is the preoccupation with the right that Christ has to be all in all and to be fully exalted. Okay?

????? Okay, thank you.

JOHN: You're welcome. I think you understand what I'm saying, I don't think people are in heaven looking down on earth. I don't think Hebrews 13...Hebrews 12, I mean, has any reference to that when it says we're compassed about by so great a cloud of witnesses, you know that passage, and you probably have heard sermons where you've got all the saints in heaven and they're in a big arena and you're down there running and they're watching you, and I don't think that's what that means at all. I think what you have there is a great cloud of witnesses. Witnesses to what? Not witnesses of you but witnesses to the validity of a life of faith as described in chapter 11. They are living in eternity as witnesses to the validity and the benefit of a life of faith. It isn't that they're sitting in an arena watching us do what we do, the glory of Christ would make us very disinteresting to them. And I think the only reason that they even pray about what's going on on earth is that Jesus Christ might have the fullness of glory and worship and majesty that He is due. And how long is He going to tolerate anything less when He's as glorious as He is? Okay?

Lance?

????? Good evening, John. I have three questions, I've really got more...okay?

JOHN: Yeah, well we don't want to...

????? Okay, I'm going to cut them, sir.

JOHN: Okay.

????? I'm going to ask you a question...where did we get our marriage vows from? I mean, you know, the saying of the marriage vows when people get married? Where did this come from?

JOHN: You mean the ones that Grace Church uses?

????? No, what the ministers use, you know, for better and for worse...sickness and health.

JOHN: That's a sort of a traditional thing. I think you can trace most of that back to the English church for the most part. When I started in ministry, the basic format that I used came out of the Scottish Presbyterian Book of Marriage, just a very dignified expression. But I think that the root of all of those

vows, however you articulate them, whatever may be the traditional or national source of those, the root of those marriage vows is tied to what Scripture affirms to be necessary to make that relationship what God wants it to be. In other words, they all relate to the leaving aspect of marriage, or the cleaving aspect of marriage, or they relate to the mutual respect of marriage. They relate to the protectorship and savior role that the husband plays as according to Ephesians 5. They relate to the nourishing and cherishing, they relate to the submission that the wife is to bring. They relate to the permanence of marriage, the fact that God has designed one man, one woman to cleave together for life. So all of those components no matter how they're framed up or verbalized in a given ceremony I think are reflective of what the Bible has to say about what marriage is.

Now if you go back in to pagan history you'll find all kinds of different things that don't necessarily relate to Christianity but within any Christian service there would be some connection with a biblical view of marriage.

????? Okay, I've got another question. We hear in our church, and I hear it from you, where we tie Christianity as a religion. And as far as I'm concerned Christianity was...is...was created by Christ where religion is created by Satan. And I hear ministers tie them both together and we get the idea that Christianity is a religion where Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth and the life." And I look at Christianity as a way of life not a religion.

JOHN: Yeah, some people have said Christianity is not a religion it's a relationship. But in a technical sense, in just a dictionary sense, Christianity can be classified as a religion, that is to say it is a system of beliefs in the supernatural. Obviously we think it's the only right one. And that sets it apart. But it isn't necessarily wrong to call Christianity a religion if you look at the dictionary and you see that a religion defines some concept of God and system of beliefs that goes along with that concept.

But I understand what you're saying. If you just throw Christianity in the big pile of religions, some people might see that it's basically just one of many options. The best way to comprehend that distinction would be this...there are only two religions in the world...just two. There aren't five, there aren't 50, there aren't 500, there aren't 5,000 even though there are 330 million gods in Hindu, in the Hindu system. There are only two religions. There is on the one hand the religion of human achievement and on the other hand the religion of divine accomplishment.

The religion of human achievement says that man somehow earns favor with God, whatever God he believes in, or whatever gods he believes in. Christianity says man cannot earn any favor with God, the only way he can come into the knowledge of God is through what God has done. The religion of human achievement says that your relationship to God depends to one degree or another on what you do. The religion of divine accomplishment says that your relationship to God depends solely and only on what He has done for you. And so what you have then is Christianity as divine accomplishment and every other religious system in the world fits in to that other category, the

religions of human achievement.

It is important that we make a distinction between Christianity and the rest of world religions but I don't think that simply saying Christianity is not a religion makes that distinction very clear. From a dictionary's standpoint we would be a religion. But from the standpoint of all other religions by which people judge and ascertain religions, we wouldn't be, we would be a relationship with the living God through Jesus Christ. So if you're going to make a distinction make a distinction in the fact that all religious systems in the world have people achieving salvation by something they do or contribute except Christianity which says you can contribute nothing, you are hopelessly sinful, you cannot save yourself, you must throw yourself on the mercy of God and receive the gift that God provided for you in Jesus Christ.

????? Before I ask the last question, the professor at Biola University when I was attending gave it a perfect example of basically religion versus Christianity and he used the example of a servant versus a wife. A servant does things because she gets paid for it, a wife does things for her husband because she loves her husband.

JOHN: Right, and that's the distinction between...between the achievement aspect and the relationship. Right.

????? Okay, the last question, the professor of Christian education department at Biola University made this statement, "If the church was doing its job we wouldn't be here," referring to attending Biola University, and that statement really struck home to me. Because I was raised in the Assembly of God Church and their big thing is speaking in tongues. And like you mentioned this morning, John, my mom asked me, "What did you talk about this morning?" I said, "About your attitude, about your behavior, about your capacity of speech and about really the Assemblies of God church." Because she sits down and listens to that one particular channel and she loves to listen to that Gene Scott and etc., etc. And...

JOHN: Okay, get to your question...you want me to respond to what that Christian education guy said. I know what you're asking. What you're saying is if we didn't have schools that corrected people and taught the Word of God...

????? No, no, no, no, I'm saying if the church was doing its job I wouldn't have to be going to Biola University.

JOHN: Yeah, okay, I understand what the guy is saying. On the...what he is saying is if the church was providing the full range of education you wouldn't need that. I don't agree with that. And I'll tell you why I don't agree with that. A college education is not something that a church can provide. I mean we're not here to teach you the wide range of academic subjects. But I think a Christian college

is a tremendous thing because what happens in a Christian college is you learn that wide range of academic subjects that prepare you for a career in life, but you learn it in the context of a biblical perspective, which I think is really true education...that's true education. So I think when a college...Christian colleges come alongside the church and they say...Look, we want to teach mathematics and science and history and English and business and whatever else with a biblical perspective...that that is a tremendous assistance in the life of the church as young people are preparing for all kinds of things in the world. I think there's a sense in which the church needs to be doing a better job in theological training but I don't think the church can become a college or a university and cover the wide range of things that are there. Okay?

????? Thank you.

????? This is just theological, I don't know how much practical application it has to it, but I think I have a few. I have to hurry, I'm told. Between Ephesians 2:8 and 9 and between those verses and 10 something happens after salvation and it's denoted by the word "created," God creates us unto good works. And in Ephesians 4:24 where it's told to put on the new man, created in holiness and righteousness...and...so God creates righteousness in man as...so couldn't we say that at times when we're walking in the Spirit and not fulfilling the lusts of the flesh, the Christian becomes innately righteous and not just imputed righteousness?

JOHN: Yes...yes. That's a very important question. What he's asking is at the time of conversion is there only a forensic righteousness, or an imputed righteousness or a declared righteousness?...which is, by the way, what justified means. To justified means to be declared righteous. That is to say God looks at me and says...the fact, the reality is you're not righteous, but I input to you the righteousness of Christ and therefore clothing you, as it were, as Isaiah puts it, in the robe of righteousness, I now see you as righteous because your unrighteousness is covered by Christ.

That's a declaration. That's what justification means. But justification cannot be separated from sanctification. You are declared righteous in justification, and then the process of making you righteous begins to function. You have put on Christ and yet you must put on Christ. We used to say it's becoming what you are, you are righteous in Christ, now act like it. And I think that's what sanctification is, I think that that process begins at salvation. You're created unto good works. There is a life principle in you that produces those good works. And you have the ability in your fallen nature to resist that effort on God's part and that's why there are commands in the New Testament for you to line up with the power of the Spirit and let Him work that through you. But I am convinced clearly in Scripture that there is not just a declared righteousness, not just a forensic righteousness, but a real righteousness that is wrought in the heart of a believer. There are a number of reasons for that. Textually you can see frequently that salvation is even referred to by the word sanctified, that means to be set apart from sin. You're not only declared righteous, you are set apart from sin. So both those

realities go together.

I just finished writing a new book called Faith Works, it is the sequel to The Gospel According to Jesus called Faith Works, faith a noun, works a verb, faith is a working faith, that's Ephesians 2:8, 9 and 10. It will be out the middle of February and it takes this whole issue of justification and sanctification and deals with it through all of the epistles of the New Testament. Good question.

????? Hi, Dr. MacArthur.

JOHN: Hi.

????? My question comes from John 3 and particularly verse 5 where Jesus says, "Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God."

JOHN: Right.

????? And my question is, what did he refer to when He said one has to be born of the water, cause I know it doesn't mean we have to be baptized to be saved?

JOHN: It's a good question. Through the years there have been a number of different suggestions. In America just before a woman has a baby there's an expression that we use, we say a woman's water breaks. And I when I was very young used to hear people preach and say that what it means is you have to be born twice, you have to be born of water, that is that you're, you know, you're in that sack of fluid in your mother's womb and so you have...and that water breaks which means you have to be physically born. So that Jesus was saying to Nicodemus, you have to be physically born first, and then spiritually born. The problem with that interpretation is two fold. One, why would He tell a grown man he needed to be physically born, it was obvious he had already passed that test. Secondly,...secondly, the Jews didn't call that water, they didn't have that colloquial expression for that fluid we have, calling it water, so you can't read some kind of Americanism back into that.

Others have said it does refer to being baptized but you have to remember that Christian baptism isn't even instituted until Acts chapter 2. What does it mean? Very simply, it is a reference to the prophet Ezekiel and if you remember Jesus is talking to Nicodemus, Nicodemus is a teacher, he is a teacher of the Jews. In fact in verse 1 it says he's a ruler of the Jews. That would put him in a very preeminent place. In fact, I believe the definite article is there...THE ruler of the Jews and those who ruled over the Jews were in religious authority, not political or military authority.

And so how would Nicodemus have understood it? Would he have understood it as Christian baptism? No. Would he have understood it as the physical birth and the water breaking? No. How would he have understood it? Well the answer goes back to Ezekiel and there was a very famous

passage in Ezekiel that every teacher in Israel knew because it was the promise of the new covenant. And in Ezekiel 36 verse 25, God made this promise to Israel about a new covenant. He said, "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you and you will be clean. I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols, moreover I will give you a new heart and put a new Spirit within you. I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh, I'll put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes. You will be careful to observe My ordinances, or My commandments."

Now what Ezekiel is writing there is that the day is going to come when the Lord will wash your heart, He'll wash your life, He'll wash your inner man, He'll put a new heart in you and He'll put His Spirit in you. So when Jesus talks to Nicodemus and says, "You must be born of the water and the Spirit," Nicodemus knows immediately that He is saying, "I am come to bring the fulfillment of the promised new covenant promised to and through Ezekiel." Okay? See, his is a Jewish Old Testament context. And so it would be...actually what the Apostle Paul calls...the washing of regeneration...the washing, the internal washing of regeneration and the renewing that comes by the Holy Spirit, that's Titus 3:5, where you have both the water and the Spirit. Okay?

????? Thanks.

JOHN: Good question.

????? Are there degrees of sin as far as...I'm thinking of lusting in your heart versus adultery?

JOHN: Well I think we would have to say that there are degrees of sin, yes, just from the practical standpoint. I may entertain a thought of sin briefly, I may entertain that thought at length, I may allow that thought to become a deed, I may allow that deed to become a habit. So there certainly would be degrees of sin. And the Lord would say the first time you have the thought, deal with it then. And if you continue to have it, deal with it. And if you start to do the act, deal with it. And if it's become a habit, deal with it. I mean, at any point in the process the Lord would want us to halt it and not carry it to the next degree...to the next expression. So yes, I believe there are degrees of sin. I believe sins of thought are an abomination to God because any iniquity no matter how small abominates God.

But from the standpoint of practicality, God will bless you if you cease from your sinning. God, I'm sure, would be grateful if the thought of sin never became the act of sin, if it was dealt with at the point of the thought. Do you understand what I'm saying? So from God's standpoint, it isn't...you can't just say, "Well I thought the thought, I might as well do the deed." "I did the deed, I might as well make it a habit." I don't think so. I don't think so. So God would be satisfied if you just stopped over here and not convince yourself that because you've thought the thought you're as good as having done the deed and you might as well let it run its course. No.

There's another...there's another component to that and I think it perhaps is worth mentioning. And that is in Hebrews 10 and here is a specific sin that certainly brings about a severer degree of punishment. Hebrews chapter 10 verse 29, "How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified and has insulted the Spirit of grace."

What's he saying? Well all...all those who aren't saved go to hell. All those who do not come to God through Jesus Christ will go to hell. But the hottest hell and the severest punishment is reserved for those who knew the most fully the gospel and trampled on it. If a person rejects God, never hears the gospel, doesn't live up to the light they have is indicted on the basis of Romans chapter 1, they will suffer punishment. But it won't be like the punishment of one who has come to understand the gospel, come to understand what Christ did, who He was, fully understand that and trample it under his feet. That person will suffer the greater punishment. So I think there are degrees of sin from the practical standpoint and there are definitely degrees of punishment which would reflect back on the level of one's sin. So I think the answer to the question is yes. And I think what God would want you to do in your life is to cease at whatever degree you have reached and not let it go any more beyond that. And the wonderful truth is...as Carrie was singing a little bit earlier...that God forgives that sin and as the guys were singing, God wipes out and blots away the past and remembers it no more. So the sooner you cease, the sooner it's forgotten. Okay?

?????(youngster) Yeah, I just wanted to ask what your view was on double predestination and why?

JOHN: My view on double predestination and why?

Pastor: He's entering seminary next week.

JOHN: Yeah, I understand. (Laughter) That's good. Well double predestination is the viewpoint that God in eternity past just basically laid out for all intents and purposes all of humanity that would ever be born and just said...Okay, you go to hell, you go to hell, you go to heaven, you go to hell, you go to heaven, you go to hell...and just went down the line. That's what is called double predestination. He predetermined some to salvation and He predetermined and selected some to damnation. That is not taught in the Bible and that's why I don't believe it.

What is taught in the Bible is that we are chosen for salvation. A good passage...nowhere in the Scripture does it say that God chooses people to be damned, no place, does not say that. In fact, the Old Testament says that God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, none. Jesus said you will not come to Me that you might have life. Jesus sat and wept over the city of Jerusalem and said, "How oft would I have gathered you as a hen gathereth her brood, but you would not come." And He wept. Isaiah said, "Oh everyone that thirsts come," Isaiah 55. Jesus said in John 6, "Him that comes unto Me I will in no wise cast out, or turn away." The end of the book of Revelation says, "Whosoever

will, let him come." Jesus said to the Jews, "If you will not...if you will not believe on Me, where I go you can never come," but He always ties damnation to unbelief, never to predestination...never to predestination, always to unbelief.

A good illustration of that is a little bit technical but I think you'll understand it. It's in Romans 9 and Romans 9 is a very important passage because here the Lord is talking about this very issue. Verse 23 it says, verse 23 talks about vessels of mercy, I won't go into the whole text, but it talks about vessels of mercy which He prepared before hand to glory. Now vessels of mercy would be Christians, believers. God prepared them before time for glory. He chose them for glory.

We go back to verse 22, God is active then in the preparation of those for glory. Back to verse 22, what if God although willing to demonstrate His wrath and make His power known endured, not prepared, but endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? Now the difference is this, this is where it gets a little technical. The verb in verse 23 is active. An active verb, if you remember your English class, is when the speaker does the action...the subject does the action. A passive verb is when the action is done to the subject, right? I hit the ball...is very different than...I was hit by the ball. In an active verb the subject does the action, in the passive verb the subject receives the action. Here you have an active verb in verse 23, God actively preparing vessels of mercy for glory, you have a passive verb in verse 22, you have certain vessels of wrath that were prepared for destruction, God is not the actor, He receives the action. So God never takes the responsibility for damnation, except for the fact that He will be the judge and the executor, but He is not responsible for the unbelief. So you don't have double predestination.

People go to heaven because they believe and were chosen before the foundation of the world. People go to hell because they do not believe. And that's as far as the Scripture goes. And I know that's hard to understand, very hard. And there's really no way around it. People say, "Well I feel a lot comfortable...more comfortable if God doesn't choose anybody and everybody does what they want." If everybody did what they wanted nobody would be saved. But even if everybody did what they want and some people chose not to be saved, you'd have to ask the question...if God knew...God knows everything and He knew that when He created them they wouldn't choose Him, why did He go ahead and create them? You've got the same problem. If you're trying to get God off the hook, you do have a problem. You can't get Him off the hook. And it's just...it's just an impossible thing to harmonize in your mind, impossible to harmonize in my mind. I can't...I can't understand how people go to hell and they're fully responsible for rejecting Christ and they go to hell because they failed to believe. And on the other hand, they go to heaven because they believe because they were chosen and God is all responsible for that. How does that harmonize? I don't know, but it isn't important that it harmonize in my mind. If I fully understand that I'd have the mind of God. That's, by the way, one of the great proofs the Bible was written by God because it doesn't resolve those apparent paradoxes.

You know, all you have to do is just think for a minute. If this Bible was edited by any committee, they would have taken all that out. I work with editors all the time. They take everything out that doesn't square. But if...I'd like to just point out the fact, if you have trouble with that, you also have to realize you have trouble with a lot of things. And I can just illustrate it by asking you a few simple questions. Who wrote Romans? Paul. How many of you think Paul wrote Romans? Any other answers? Holy Spirit. How many of you think the Holy Spirit wrote it? This is a basic question, folks, we've been here a long time. Who wrote Romans? You say, "Well Paul wrote a verse, the Holy Spirit wrote a verse, Paul wrote a verse, the Holy Spirit wrote a verse, alternating. You say, "Every word was out of the mind of Paul...every word was out of the vocabulary of Paul...every word was out of the experience of Paul, the heart of Paul." That's right. "And every single solitary word came from the mind of the Holy Spirit." Right. How can that be? I don't know. I don't know.

What about the doctrine of security? You say we're secure. We're kept. We're kept by His power forever. Once we're saved we're kept forever. But the Bible also warns us...don't fall in to unbelief because you must persevere. There's a persevering side, that's our part, there's a keeping side, that's His part. If He's keeping us, why do we have to worry about persevering? But that's the way the Scripture outlines it.

I'll ask you another question. Since you're doing so well on these. (Laughter) Is Jesus Christ God or man? Yes...good. That's very good. Yes. How can He be fully God and fully man? It's incomprehensible.

Let me ask you another question. Who lives your Christian life? Who lives it? You ought to know this because, you know, this is you, folks. Who lives your Christian life? If it's both of you, the Lord is doing a much better job for His part, right? In fact, anything good happens in my life He did it, anything bad, I did it. It's impossible. You say, "It's me...it is me, I beat my body to bring it into subjection, it's me." Then you have some people that come along and say, "Let go and let God." (Laughter) So you have these two...and there's a kernel of truth in that. Paul had it...Paul had it, you know how he said it? He understood it fully, this is what he said, Galatians 2:20, "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet (laughter) not I," see he didn't know either. (Laughter) It's the same kind of tension. John Murray the great theologian says, "In every major doctrine in Scripture you have apparent paradoxes." You want to talk about the trinity? There's another one.

So don't get...that's a long answer, but it's an important category of questions. Don't get caught up in trying to harmonize everything in the mind of God. You can't. You have to take it by faith. Leave those doctrines where they are. Leave them at the poles they're at. If you harmonize them in the middle you destroy both of them. And God will resolve it sometime in the future when we know as we are known. Good. Good question.

Over here, are we? Yes, hon.

LITTLE GIRL: Pastor John, I have a question. The trinity, how could there be three in one? (Laughter & clapping)

????? By the way, this is Stephen Kelly's daughter.

JOHN: I know who that is...I know who that is. Honey, I haven't got the faintest idea. (Laughter) But there are three in one. And it's not something that I can understand in my puny mind, but God is one in essence and yet manifests Himself at all times in three different persons. I've heard all kinds of kind of silly little descriptions of it, like somebody said it's like H₂O. H₂O can either be steam, water or ice. That doesn't do it for me. But you understand what they're trying to say. The problem with that argument is it can't be steam, water and ice all at the same time. That's the nature of God. And God is...one of the things you want to learn about God is God is beyond comprehension. You know, there are some things you just don't understand. You just can't understand them. And no matter how hard you try you can't understand them. And if you work at it harder and harder, you still won't understand them. And if you keep doing that you'll find yourself under the bed saying the Greek alphabet because you're trying to unscrew the unscrutable. It's just impossible to understand. But God is three in one. And He's so far beyond us that we can't fully comprehend what that means. I know this, God is one...that's clear. The Lord our God is one, Deuteronomy 6:4, and at the same time within the oneness of God the Father loves the Son and the Son loves the Father and the Spirit loves the Father and the Son and the Father and the Son love the Spirit and they work together in perfect harmony. And they're not just blended together because they talk to each other. How that can be explained humanly, I don't know. That's one of those things you just believe. Okay? All right.

????? Hi, John. I just had a question, I was reading in Genesis and I'm coming across where it's kind of confusing to me, that I was wondering why different people had more than one wife. Is it because they were in the Old Testament and they weren't in the New yet? Or did God allow it? Was it sin?

JOHN: It's always sin. The...you go back to Genesis and God designed one man, one woman, leaving, cleaving for life. That's always...

????? That's what I thought.

JOHN: That's always God's standard. In the Old Testament period, people who violated that suffered. Read the rest of the story. I mean, look at the life of David. Look at the life of Solomon. Look at other people who had more than one wife...bigamists, or polygamists...and you will always see trouble, distress, difficulty. But at the same time there's a certain sense in which God was patient...to put it in maybe terms you can understand, the Scripture is very clear about marriage, but God was very patient in the early years.

You know, the Apostle Paul talks about it in the book of Acts. He says there was a time that God overlooked to some degree these things, the times that God winked at that, just kind of looked away. There needed to be the progress of revelation, the full bloom of spiritual truth. And in the process of that unfolding, God was very patient and God was very gracious.

And I'll tell you, just in case you think that's odd for God, take a look at your own life. You're not dead and neither am I and it...maybe our thing isn't polygamy but there's a lot of other stuff for which we had every reason to be killed by God, right?

????? Amen...yeah.

JOHN: If the wages of sin is death. So the fact that in those early years when the world was filled with bigamy and polygamy and it starts right off in the book of Genesis, you see it right after God lays down His law and then the Fall and then the mess. And what do you have? You have prostitution, incest, homosexuality, polygamy, all right in Genesis. And God is simply expressing what happens in the Fall. He never advocated it. There were times when He restrained His judgment.

????? Oh, I see.

JOHN: That's all.

????? Thank you very much.

JOHN: In His mercy. Okay.

????? Okay, thank you. God bless you.

????? I understand all the Old Testament feasts have had a New Testament fulfillment except for the Feast of Trumpets. Aside from the caution against date setting, could that be the Rapture?

JOHN: Ahh, you know, I'm not really very good on all of that approach. Could the Feast of Trumpets be a parallel to the Rapture? Possibly, I don't want to be dogmatic about that. Could it be a parallel to the return of Christ to set up His Kingdom. That could be part of the image in that. Certainly those feasts intention...the intention of those feasts is to look back but we can also assume there could be a forward look as well. I mean, some people would say...Obviously the feast...the great feast of Pentecost which is the gathering in, and there you have the church being gathered in and the harvest and all of that...and then the Feast of Trumpets being the culmination and the celebration of glory. I can see that. There's some...there are some Bible teachers that I've read in years past who equated that with the Rapture and others who equated it with the Second Coming of Christ as certainly the

ultimate fulfillment of the trumpets and the glory of Christ and all of that. But I'm not...I'm not much...I'm not much of a symbolic guy, you know, so I haven't spent a lot of time on that. But whether or not that is the intention of God with the imagery of the Feast of Trumpets, it's going to happen, whatever you call it.

And, of course, I think in the Old Testament there's no separating the Rapture from the return. So I hesitate to think the Feast of Trumpets would be associated only with the Rapture...rather with the whole perhaps of the coming of Christ. Okay?

Who is next?

????? Yes. I have a verse that you can interpret. For John chapter 20 verse 23, "If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them. If you retain the sins of any, you have been retained...they have been retained."

JOHN: Right. This is a verse that Catholic priests use to claim the right to forgive sin. Jesus said this, by the way, on other occasions. And what He means by this, you can go back to Matthew 16 and we dealt with it in great detail, in fact there's a whole tape on that very thing. But what He is saying to His disciples is this. If you say to a person your sins are forgiven, they're forgiven. If you say to a person your sins are retained, they're retained. On what basis? On what basis can I say that? I have said that. I have said to people...Your sins are not forgiven, they're retained. I have said to other people...Your sins are forgiven. On what basis can I say that? On the basis of what they do with whom? With Jesus Christ. You see, once I give them the gospel, and then see their response, I have on the basis of their response the authority of the Scripture to say your sins are forgiven or your sins are retained, right? That's what He's saying.

When the Apostles were given what Matthew...what the gospel of Matthew calls the keys to the Kingdom to open and close the door and let people in and out, that was essentially the gospel, the saving gospel. And so I can say to a person...your sins are forgiven, or your sins are retained...not ipso facto on my authority, but based upon how they respond to Jesus Christ. And Jesus is saying to them, when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you become My witnesses and He breathed on them really as a symbol of the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts chapter 2, He was anticipating that great event and He was saying to them...Of course, when the Spirit comes and the death and resurrection has taken place and you are empowered with the gospel on the basis of how they respond to that gospel, you can affirm their sins either to be forgiven or retained. Okay? Good question.

????? What are the symptoms of being chastened by the Lord and how can you tell it's from Him?

JOHN: Sometimes it's hard. Job experienced that. Job had a bunch of friends that nobody would want. You know, Job...do you know that Job's friends came and didn't say anything for a long time,

they just sat. They thought he needed sympathy. I mean, everybody in his family was dead except his wife and she was saying curse God and die...as if cursing God would make them go away and as if dying would get you out of His power. And..so his friends just came and they were sensitive and they just sat for a long time. And finally one of them spoke, the oldest one, you thought he would be the wisest and what he said was..."Your problems are related to sin." He was wrong. He couldn't tell. And you know something? Job couldn't tell too well either for a while until he really examined his heart. So I think...I don't think I can help you with that unless I know flatly about your sin. I think you're the only one before God who can discern that. And what is chastening? It might be physical illness, it might be a loss of joy. We read Psalm 51 this morning, didn't we, and David says, "Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation." Make these bones which literally ache be healthy again. He was feeling physical pain. In Psalm 32 he says my life juices are dried up. His blood flow was probably restricted. His saliva problematic. The fluid that conducts the impulses on his nervous system effected as physiologically we know that trauma can do. It may be physical, it could show itself in that traumatic way.

It may be the tremendous oppressive burden of guilt. We know that David felt that as he cried out, Against Thee only have I sinned and done this evil in Thy sight. So if God is chastening you, my personal conviction is if God is chastening you He wants you to know it. And so if you seek to know why these things are happening in your life, I think you'll know. But you're really the only one who can know unless I know you're living in sin and I can say to you there's every reason to assume this is chastening, look at your life. If I can't see that, then only before the Lord God can know.

And I know what happens in my life if things are difficult and there are trials in my life, the first thing I do is do a spiritual inventory. And go through my life as carefully as I can to see if there's anything in my life that isn't right.

I remember telling you some couple of years ago when my son Mark had the brain tumor and they told us that he might die. The first thing I did wasn't pray for Mark, the first thing I did was a spiritual inventory in my own life because I didn't want to be the cause of any...anything in his life that was sort of a spill over from my unfaithfulness. I examined my own life, first of all, to see if something is wrong there. And if there's something not going well in my own life, I want to examine my own heart.

If I get through that inventory and I can't...and I'm not holding on to a sin, you know, I may find some things but I confess and let go of them, and I'm not holding on to them, then I can assume that maybe this isn't a chastening, maybe this is a strengthening. Second Corinthians 12:7 to 10, Paul prayed three times for something to be removed. I'm sure he did a spiritual inventory when he had the thorn in the flesh and he's probably saying...Lord, why? Why? What did I do? What did I do? When he went through the spiritual inventory he just basically said...Well, I've prayed, I've pleaded, I've asked, You've said no, I'm going to leave the thorn in the flesh there. And the Lord said...Here's why, My grace is sufficient for you and My power is perfected in your weakness.

Sometimes it's chastening and sometimes it's a humbling process to make you more powerful. The only way ultimately to know that unless your sin is widely known or obvious is to do an inventory before the Lord. Okay? Good question.

I think we have time for maybe one more question and then we'll have to stop. Thank you all for waiting. Is there somebody who is desperately needs to ask a question, your life will not go on? If there is, Lance, hold them there. Okay.

????? Okay, in Colossians 1:24 it says, "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake and in my flesh I do share on behalf of His body which is the church in filling up that which is lacking in Christ's affliction." And seeing the last part it says, "And filling up that which is lacking in Christ's affliction," and all that He went through on this earth, what was lacking in His afflictions?

JOHN: Nothing from His perspective. But a lot from the perspective of people who rejected Him. What Paul is saying is a wonderful thing. He's saying I rejoice in my sufferings. You know, Paul suffered, right? Stoned, shipwrecked, beaten...he suffered. And he suffered for the church's sake. What does that mean? Well because he was trying to reach them with the gospel, he was trying to build them up, he was trying to bring them to faith and maturity. So I rejoice in my sufferings. Why? The sufferings I share on behalf of His body which is the church. Why? Because I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions. It doesn't mean I'm adding to some insufficiency in His atonement, what it means is this...the world still hates Christ. The world still persecutes Christ. They can't get Him because He's there, so they're getting me in His place. That's what he meant. He says the same thing at the end of Galatians, "I bear in my body the marks of Jesus Christ." Christ isn't here for them to whip so they whip me. That's what he means.

What a privilege, he's saying, to be able to suffer for the sake of the church and the growth of the body knowing that my suffering is taking the blows meant for Christ who on the cross took the blows meant for me. Okay?

????? Thanks.

JOHN: All right. Thank you very much. Boy, good questions, right? It's a great place to finish, isn't it? We should be willing...and we're going to have to do this again I think because you have all these good questions.

Father, we thank You tonight for this wonderful time in Your Word, a time really orchestrated by Your Spirit, to lead us to discuss the things that we trust You wanted discussed. And we just pray that You'll make us ever thankful for Christ who did take the blows meant for us, and though we cannot fathom all these things, this we can fathom, Jesus came into the world to save sinners like us and we

thank You for our salvation, in His dear name we pray. Amen.

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