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

Questions & Answers with John MacArthur
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
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2012 Shepherds' Conference (Session 05)

My fellow elder and pastor and dear friend, Phil Johnson, he's going to come at this time and we're going to have a little bit of a discussion. Phil is the director of Grace To You ministries, among the many things he does, occupies the pulpit with great blessing and power as he opens the Word of God here to us as well as many other places gives him opportunity to proclaim the truth. We have worked together on many books through the years and we interact all the time on issues and theology and ministry. The Lord gives many gifts to his people and to me He has given many more gifts than I deserve. The richest of those gifts that have been given to me are people…people who are precious to me in my life for personal reasons and ministry reasons. And Phil is one of the most precious of those gifts for both those reasons. It's always a delight to have a conversation with Phil in any condition even if there are three thousand people listening. So, Phil, come and we'll get started.

(Applause)

PHIL: Thank you, John, you're very kind. You made that crack earlier. Hang on…I'm on. Can you get me? Should I keep talking? What?

JOHN: You can just…

PHIL: Let me use this hand mike.

JOHN: Okay.

PHIL: I hate when things like that happen. (Laughter)

JOHN: Is this divine, do you think? (More laughter) What do you want him to do, guys, come on.

PHIL: Yeah.

JOHN: There are only about 480-deals on there so they're down…(Laughter)

PHIL: Clayton was actually scheduled to do a solo, you want to do that? Are we on? Hey…okay.

JOHN: Which one is it?

PHIL: The thing is, I don't know which…I don't know which mike it is.

JOHN: There it is.

PHIL: Okay. That's never happened before.

JOHN: It looks good on your ear, even if it doesn't do anything.

PHIL: I stuck it through the piercing in the ear there. Thank you, John. You made that crack earlier about job security, I should mention that actually this week is my anniversary of employment here. The first day on the job for me was the first day of the Shepherds Conference that year, it was 29 years ago. And so I have set aside my concerns about job security for the moment.

JOHN: Twenty-nine years, really?

PHIL: Twenty-nine years.

JOHN: Will you sign on the dotted line for another 29?

PHIL: I'll stick around for at least one more year. I've got to make it 30.

JOHN: No, we're going to keep you for good, you're a keeper,

PHIL: Now you've been here 43 years which means I've been here exactly two thirds of your ministry. And listened probably to ever message you've ever given because I listen to all those messages you did on tape before I came.

JOHN: Before you got here.

PHIL: I just have to say, it's an amazing output and so much fresh material, not a lot of recycled outlines and things. How do you do that week after week, two sermons a day, I'm sure, you know, it has to become times when it feels like a drudgery to you. What do you do when you feel that way?

JOHN: Well first, I don't have a choice because everything I've ever said has been recorded and so I have to keep coming up with new things. But it's never been a drudgery to me. It's a discipline. There are times when I would like to do something else. It's a kind of blessed bondage with a ball and chain. Any of us who do this. I always think back to this English order who said, "The most paralyzing thought he ever had was that he would have to speak twice to the same audience." Well we speak

twice to the same audience every week for our lives as long as we're in an environment. And to try to be fresh and interesting is a great challenge. But for me, the Word of God is alive and powerful. And if I stepped outside the Bible, I would be terrified. I would be absolutely terrified. So I completely rest in the living Word of God doing its mighty powerful work, even if it comes out of the same voice.

I actually try to minimize myself, if I can. That's why you will never see big screens in here, because people need to hear the Word of God, they don't need to see my nose hairs. They don't need to become overly familiar with every nuance of my face and my expressions, it's not about me. And, you know, when you're such a dominating presence, and such a continual presence in a congregation, you need to disappear. You know, you need to be out of the picture and that's one of the reasons, that's the dominating reason why we've never even considered putting anybody's face on a big screen. I don't need to be twenty-feet high. The Word needs to be taught. And so, I have such confidence that this is all about the truth of Scripture, that what drives me is that confidence in being able to come back and back and back and back for 43 years.

But the other aspect of it is that personally…personally, the Word of God to me now in my life is more interesting and more exciting and more energizing and I find a greater passion than I ever have. I haven't…that has not diminished one bit. And I believe with all my heart that if I had packed up everything say five years ago and gone to repeat this somewhere else, I wouldn't have that same passion because the passion comes out of the discovery, it comes out of the freshness of it. Preaching is…preaching is something I have to do. Study is something I love to do. And I'm not a scholar, you know that. I'm not a scholastic, I'm not an egghead. But I just love discovering the Word of God, it's living truth coming out.

PHIL: Yeah, it seems like this shift to the Old Testament has just infused you with new energy. That scares me because I can't keep up with you.

JOHN: Well look, it has…you know, I should be dead because I did what I thought I was supposed to do. I did the New Testament and that's it. So, you know, I'm now ready to be offered. The time of my departure is at hand. But here I am. So I'm saying to myself, "I can't…I can't come every Monday and say, 'I've got to come up with something for Sunday. You know, I've done the big deal, now I'm just going to find something to preach.'" I have to have a big picture, I have to have a big passion, I have to have a big task with lots of parts. And so last summer when I finished the New Testament, I went away for a few months. I just started absorbing everything about the Old Testament, I got energized and, you know, I'm ready to go for as long as the Lord lets me. And you're right, you're absolutely right, I am excited about the bigness of this opportunity and this privilege that I have and energizes me for the component parts of it.

PHIL: I put the word out that I was doing this Q&A and invited people to submit questions. And our friend Steve Creloff(???) wanted me to ask you…

JOHN: Oh.

PHIL: What's a typical day like for you? And I thought when I saw that question, do you ever have a typical day?

JOHN: Well there's a—there's a relentless variety to my days because there's so many organizations and so many people I work with and, you know, the church, and Grace To You, and the college and seminary and whatever other things I'm doing. But I guess it's better to say I have a typical week because the days may vary. But the one compelling reality in every week of my life is that Sunday is coming and I have to preach a sermon on Sunday morning and another one on Sunday night, and it has to be something I've never preached before. And that means that there are at least two full days, at this point of my life, at least two full days and very often spilling over to three, when I have to do nothing but focus on the preparation for the preaching of the Word of God on the weekend.

So, it…and I typically will start that at the beginning of the week. For years and years I sort of breathed on Mondays, you know. Monday can be a joyful day or it can be a somewhat disappointing day depending on how you feel you did on Sunday. There are some Mondays when I just feel kind of a sinking feeling inside that there was so much more than I did. It could have been done better. I couldn't have emphasized something else. I just feel like I failed. I don't have the luxury to live with that very long. There are other Mondays when I'm thankful, I'm just thankful that I escaped with something that I could live with and sleep on.

But by the time I get to Monday night, I'm starting to think already about what is coming the next week. And I get on it as fast as I can on Tuesday to start to capture that next passage. I know where I'm going, but I need to capture that passage and begin to think about interpreting it which is what my big effort is to work with the text so that I know that I've got that thing prepared early. There aren't any Friday sermons, there aren't any Saturday specials. I don't leave it till then because I don't ever want to make up my mind about the meaning of a passage in a short amount of time. I want to be able to come to the right meaning and sometimes I can't do that in a hurry.

PHIL: Yeah, and it's… I know from personal experience, it's hard to get in touch with you on those days when you're studying. We try to leave you alone, but…

JOHN: Well now we've kind of tried to say, "Okay, Monday and Tuesday, I'm nothing," because what happens is people look, people in these organizations look at, "Let me see John's calendar. Oh, there's a spot, there's a spot and they just stuff things in." So I said, "Wait, hold it, stop, you know, I have to…" If people don't understand that, you come and you hear somebody speak and that's the typical tip of the iceberg. I mean, what's underneath that and behind that is…

PHIL: It's intriguing and somewhat comforting for me to hear you, of all preachers, say that you have those Mondays when you just feel disappointed that, you know, you didn't do as well as you wished you could. You really feel like that?

JOHN: Oh absolutely.

PHIL: I've never come away from a Grace Church sermon where you were preaching thinking you just feel that way.

JOHN: You know, I actually sort of…(laughter).

PHIL: But, you know, Lloyd-Jones said something similar that…he said one time, I think, that his whole life he only felt like maybe two or three times he had ever really preached.

JOHN: Yeah, but he was looking for some Holy Ghost buzz. (Laughter)

PHIL: Yeah.

JOHN: And I'm not talking about that. I mean, he said that the only two times did he know the anointing? Well, I don't know what he ate that day, but (Laughter) I don't think…I just think he was looking for something that he didn't need to look for. You know, he couldn't…he didn't disconnect from the old Welsh revival thing and he kept expecting something that he never could find. And he died without ever realizing it. So I think that's not it. It's more like…

PHIL: Like you've prepared more than you can possibly deliver. That's part of it.

JOHN: No. It's getting it right and saying it in a compelling and powerful and accurate way. And sometimes you just kind of fumble it, you know. I always used to say when I played football, I could sleep like a baby the night before a game and never sleep the night after cause I replayed everything. What if I had zigged there and zagged there? You know, I will analyze that to the point where it bothers me. And depending on how much failure I felt was exhibited on a given Sunday, it can go on for a long time.

PHIL: Wow!

JOHN: Sometimes I call Grace To You, not often, but once in a while ask them to kind of pull a section out, you know that.

PHIL: Yeah, yeah, I've gotten calls like that from you, but not very often. You know, you don't sort of project the sort of personality that would be that introspective. It's interesting to hear you…you

actually critique your own sermons.

JOHN: Well, there are some things I don't really care about, but preaching the Word of God accurately, that doesn't belong in the category of things I don't care about. I mean, I have to give an account for every single passage. You don't want to do this unless you are serious about what you're handling.

PHIL: Yeah. Talk a bit about the process of your preparation. One of the things I vividly remember from that first year when I came here, and I think it was that week during Shepherds Conference, and I came into your office, in those days you did all your study here at the church, and I walked in and you were in the midst of studying for a sermon and it absolutely amazed me the scene that unfolded before me. You had two large surfaces of desks filled with books that were open on these little book stands and you were going from book to book writing stuff down, is that still…talk about the process.

JOHN: Pretty much.

PHIL: You also do kind of two drafts. While you're studying you take notes, and then when you prepare your sermon, you transfer those notes to…talk about that.

JOHN: Yeah. Okay, let me just say all this is driven by a high degree of desperation. (Laughter) All these people show up…like you don't think there's a certain desperation in my mind when I arrive here on Wednesday and have to talk to you guys twice with the level of expectation you have? I mean, I basically live at a high level of desperation about my preaching. And that desperation shows up in this fashion. And what Phil's talking about is, I will read on any given passage anywhere from 15 to 20 commentaries. I don't need 15 to 20 commentaries to get the sense of the text. I can go into the original, which I do, and study that and come to conclusions and get a few commentary insights. But I realize that somewhere in one of those 20 commentaries, there might be some truth that is so fresh and so compelling and so heart-capturing and so rich and so helpful that I might miss it if I didn't read them all. That's the level of desperation I'm talking about.

I could take one commentary and my Bible and come up with whatever, an interpretation of it, and kind of wing it. But I'm looking for those things that are hidden in places…and commentaries are places where good stuff gets hidden in, you know, dense paragraphs and things. But I've always exercised myself to read that. So I string them out around me and when I hit a verse, I just go through all those verses and I might write down one thought…or one thought, or it chases me to a Scripture verse that elucidates that or it gives me historical point of contact. It's that I don't want anything to escape my view, so what I say when I write a commentary is that what you're going to find in my commentary is what I have deemed to be the very best stuff that I found in every single commentary I've ever read, distilled, poured through my own heart and put on that paper.

PHIL: And you write those notes on yellow legal paper.

JOHN: Yeah, eight and a half…

PHIL: With a fountain pen…

JOHN: Yeah.

PHIL: Are those in random order?

JOHN: I write with a fountain pen, yeah…

PHIL: In random order?

JOHN: What do you mean random order?

PHIL: Well as you're reading through, do you…it seems to me you just take down thoughts and then later you come back and….

JOHN: No, I take a sheet, an eight and a half by fourteen sheet and this is like verse 6, and then another sheet is verse 7.

PHIL: But later you come back then and organize those in a different order in your sermon notes.

JOHN: Yeah. This is just note taking and I just take…first I take notes from…you know, I look at the Greek text and make sure I'm dealing with the right stuff and then I just start writing this stuff…

PHIL: I have a large collection of these notes, by the way. Years ago I asked John to save that yellow…he was throwing that stuff away.

JOHN: I know…I know it's your retirement program, isn't it? (Laughter)

PHIL: Well actually it's more of a plan for my great grandchildren. I figure they'll be able to sell them on E-Bay.

JOHN: Well yeah. Look, they're still selling Spurgeon's written notes.

PHIL: Yeah, I know. That's exactly what I'm thinking. (Laughter) But anyways, I didn't mean to interrupt, go ahead.

JOHN: No…where was I before we got into your future economic…?

PHIL: You're reading these commentaries and chasing the best thoughts…

JOHN: Right, and my thoughts are mixed and one thing stimulates another thought and I'm all the time I'm also looking for cross-referencing because the *analog Scriptura* is a big issue to me that the Bible's consistent with itself and what it teaches in one place is going to be supported somewhere else. And once you've seen the truth here, when you expand it then people not only get the individual look at it, they get the big picture look at it. So the best tool to explain the Bible is the Bible itself and it enriches its own truths. So I'm working to cross references written down, I write a lot of those down.

PHIL: That, by the way, I think is one of the most powerful things about your sermons, the way you use Scripture to illustrate Scripture. You don't sit around and think about how can I illustrate this point from some cute story or clever joke? You typically illustrate Scripture with…

JOHN: If there is ever any kind of analogy in a sermon that I give, it is purely spontaneous. If there's any kind of illustration, it's almost always spontaneous.

PHIL: I've noticed that because I look at your notes and the anecdotes and personal stories and anything like that, if it slips into your sermon, it's not in your notes, it just comes out when you're preaching.

JOHN: Yeah, and I've got to watch that because it's easy to talk about yourself because you're so familiar with yourself. But I choose not to do that. And I don't talk about my kids, and my wife, and my own experience. And I don't repeat conversations that I had 14 years ago because I can't repeat them accurately and I don't want to make them up as I go. So I just think you illustrate the Bible from the Bible and it's got living illustrations that also have authority as well as interest.

Now there's nothing wrong with using "Where's Waldo," that was a spontaneous thing.

PHIL: That was good, by the way, I thought it was a great illustration.

JOHN: Thank you. Well your grandkids, you know, you've got some, they make contribution to your ministry in strange ways. Yeah.

PHIL: Well now, in fact, yesterday…

JOHN: So did I answer the question that you asked?

PHIL: You're half way there but let me just follow it up and I'll get you going. Yesterday you made some remarks that amused me, sort of disparaging homiletics, and you said, "You rarely spend five minutes making an outline."

JOHN: Yeah.

PHIL: And can I just say, sometimes it shows. (Laughter)

JOHN: You can say that. You can say that.

PHIL:Well, job security. Yeah. In fact, my favorite, you did a sermon once from Matthew 27 on the miracles that occurred during the crucifixion. And you had…you had doubly illiterated every point. There were like six or seven points, I forget how many miracles there were, but I do remember your outline because it had to do with the tearing of the curtain in the tabernacle and you called that "sanctuary desecration," and then there was the supernatural darkness and when you got to the earthquake you called it "soil disturbance." (Laughter)

JOHN: Well yeah, that's the best I could with an S D for an earthquake. But…

PHIL: I know, but you could have said….

JOHN: You know, I have to say the Lord has forgiven me for that.

PHIL: No…no He hasn't because (Laughter) whoever edited that part of your commentary left it in there. If you look at the Matthew commentary on that passage, it's right there, "soil disturbance."

JOHN: I'm the only one who edits the commentaries.

PHIL: Okay.

JOHN: But, you know, that's a very…you could only think of that one illustration because that's a very…

PHIL: You know I used to try.

JOHN: I know what you're going to say. But I used to do that but it only takes me like…they just come quick, quick, quick. And eventually, I thought, you know, I don't want people getting caught up in it. It helps in a commentary because you're breaking sections out.

PHIL: Right. If you guys use that, make it "seismic disturbance," or something.

JOHN: Yeah, well why didn't I think of that? That's why you edit my books.

PHIL: That's why you need an editor. That's right.

JOHN: Yeah, but you know what he does a lot of times, he'll say something so inflammatory after he's edited something and I'll come back to him and say, "Phil, did I say this?" And he'll say, "No, no, I added that." I said, "Phil, you can't do that to me, you can do that in your own book." So that's why he called his website Pyromaniac.

PHIL: Okay, anyway. (Laughter). At what point in the process because you do outlines and seriously, most…

JOHN: No, there's a logical flow of thought, I just don't spend a lot of time dreaming and scheming those up. They fall naturally into clarity.

PHIL: In this preparation process, where you do you start thinking about the outline? Do you do that…I mean, I do that at the beginning. I read the passage and think through the passage and thing what is this saying and how can I outline it. But you don't do that. You…you actually do the outline somewhere later in the process.

JOHN: Yeah, I think there's a logical flow of thought that you pick up on pretty quickly and I'll mark that along the way like here's a point, here's a sub-point, here's a point, here's a sub-point, here's… And somewhere in the process it starts to congeal and you pick up a point and another point, and another point. But really, the clarification of that outline usually happens toward the end.

PHIL: So, as you're working through it, you study the passage, you take all these notes on the yellow notepaper, do you put it aside then for some time, maybe go play a round of golf before you come back and actually start to write your…

JOHN: Don't I wish. No. When I get…there's…that's not the time to step away because that's the time when your mind is at the fullest point and if its…and it's cryptic, those notes are cryptic and if you walk away from that, you'll never be able to recover what you had at that moment. So that's the most intense drill-down time for me when I write the first draft.

PHIL: It's amazing to me, frankly, that you can do that because…

JOHN: And I write it out, the whole thing.

PHIL: Yeah, I know, and I see you doing that for two days with no interruption, no recreation. You've said many times that the secret to your preparation is that you learn to keep your seat in the chair.

And that's not easy. That's not easy for most of us.

JOHN: You know, I'm sort of living in Proverbs 2. You know, I want that wisdom. And I go for it with everything I've got. And I love the hunt. I love that. It gets more exhilarating as I go. The hardest thing is sort of the beginning point, it's getting off the launch pad, you know, it's getting it going. Once I get that thing going, momentum starts to build and the closer I get to the finished product, the more I'm energized and the more excited I get in my own heart. And then I really can't stop. It's like I'm going downhill. I would find it very difficult, any kind of interruption is distressing because…that's why I have my office at home, but any kind of interruption, even well-intentioned and sometimes necessary ones stop a very intense focus time of thinking.

Look, I'm confident most people don't need to do this the way I do, I have to work with what I've got and I can get really focused. I don't consider myself a scholar or an intellectual, but I can get very focused on what I'm doing and I don't necessarily hold on to everything going on in my mind at a given moment, but when I've got it, it's got to get on to that page because if it doesn't get on that page, it may never come again.

PHIL: Right. And it doesn't get any easier as time goes by.

JOHN: No, you must experience that. When you're putting something together, you've got this captured and if you don't get it down, it will go away and you can't recover it.

PHIL: Darlene would tell you that I…I absolutely tune her out when I'm deep in the thought like that. She might come along and start to talk to me and I'll carry on a conversation with her in the back of my head, I'm answering her questions, but I'm not thinking about what she's saying and not remembering it. And she'll say later, "Well we had a conversation about that." I don't remember that.

JOHN: She doesn't say, "You don't pay any attention to me?" That too.

PHIL: Well, she said that…

JOHN: When I first moved my office home, it was in a couple of weeks, Patricia came to me and she said, "You know, I think you ought to take your office back to the church." (Laughter) I said, "Why?" She had never received rejection at the level that she had received it in the weeks that I came home because…

PHIL: I feel your pain. I know it.

JOHN: Yeah, because it's hard, you know. She was so excited when I came home, she was going to give me lunch, and pretty soon she was trying to find the flattest pizza in the place so she could slide it under the door. She was mortally afraid, you know.

PHIL: Yeah, and grandchildren don't make that any easier, do they?

JOHN: Then they bring the grandkids over, then what are you going to do? No, when we had kids, I couldn't have my office at home. Then the kids were gone and now the grandkids come and it's…they don't knock…grandkids don't knock. They just come flying in.

PHIL: Yeah, my granddaughter will sneak up behind me and grab the office chair and turn it around and make me look at her.

JOHN: And, you know, you love every minute. You realize this is damaging to the Kingdom, but oh it's so wonderful.

PHIL: Exactly.

JOHN: I mean, we've got to have some of that, right? I mean…

PHIL: People often ask this and I'm going to ask it, I know you don't like to talk about negative things or whatever. What have been the most difficult trials in your ministry? You look back over 44 years, if you had to name the two or three greatest trials, what would they be? Because a lot of us watch your ministry and think, "Everything you've ever touched is successful and easy," and it's not like that at all, is it?

JOHN: I think when my second son, Mark, had a brain tumor, I was…it was an overwhelming reality, I fasted and prayed for I think it was nine days and the Lord was gracious in his case and the next event was Patricia having a car accident and breaking her neck, shattering C2 and C3 and they said she should have been a quadriplegic and there's just overwhelming dread that sets in. Those kind of intimate things in our lives, those were very, very deep points in time and you didn't know the outcome of those things. And God was very kind and gracious to me in regard to that.

The personal, you know, illnesses and blood clots and stuff like that, those didn't seem to affect me anywhere near the way it did when it was somebody I loved. I didn't have any fear if I were to go to heaven. But the loss of those people was dramatic.

I would say the second category of potential loss was just overwhelmingly dramatic. The second thing is the disappointment in people that you love and work very close with. Being blind sighted by people that you thought you had a good relationship with who at some point in time turn on you. That's very hard to deal with. To be betrayed by your own familiar friend who lifted up his heel against you, you know.

PHIL: That seems to happen at every ministry, too, isn't it? That's a common experience of pastors.

JOHN: It is but, you know, it's still a surprising thing because when you put people in positions of responsibility in a ministry, it's because you trust them. And it's because you believe in them and you believe they believe in you, and when betrayal comes and, you know, you start to uncover that kind of stuff, it's very, very hard to deal with. And you can't get jaded. You know, you can't get to the point where you insulate yourself from anybody because you're afraid somebody is going to bring you down. I don't care about that part of it. It's just kind of heartbreaking. It's just a disappointing thing because in any kind of ministry in anybody's life, you know, the closer people are to you, the more potential they have to hurt you. And I'm a very trusting person. You know, I can say that and people wouldn't know it's true or not. But I'm a very trusting person. If you have a responsibility of ministry, I'm going to trust you and I'm going to be your defender. And I'm the last person that anybody in this church would ever come to complain about anybody because I don't receive that. I want to be supportive and loyal to the people I serve.

So when things happen, and I'm not saying I'm free from culpability and the reason some things, some relationships don't stay the way they should, but I think that is the most difficult thing to deal with. I think that's what was cutting the heart out of the Apostle Paul was the way he was being treated, for example, by the Corinthians and you never see him more heart-sick than he is in 2 Corinthians. And it has to do more with how the church is treating him than how the non-believing world is treating him. He's just in agony over that. And he even…he even prays three times to have this thorn in his flesh, this messenger from Satan, I think it was a demon-led conspiracy of false teachers just blasting away at his Corinthian congregation and turning them against him and it was almost so overwhelming he couldn't get past it. He even talks about being depressed earlier until Titus came and gave him the news. So I think the deepest pain in ministry, it's not about economic things, it's not about buildings, it's not about, you know, programs, it's people.

And then I think the third category is the people in whom you pour your ministry who seem to walk away as if they never heard anything. That's hard.

PHIL: That's a common problem, too, isn't it?

JOHN: I guess, I mean we preach the Word of God, people are here, they're here Sunday after Sunday, they serve and all of a sudden they just walk away, leave the church, maybe leave the Lord, leave their wives, run off with somebody. And, you know, people have made maximum impact in their life personally as well as, you know, in terms of teaching. But it all really comes down to those kind of relationships.

PHIL: If you could go back to the very beginning of your ministry, is there any key thing you would do differently?

JOHN: I'd preach better and maybe be a little more patient. I think, you know, I was so anxious to try everything and do everything that, you know, we made a lot of stupid moves. But I don't know that I could say I would do it differently because I think God had a purpose in all of it. And His strength was perfected in my weakness. If I hadn't failed on a number of fronts, I think I would have believed myself to be invincible and I needed to believe that I wasn't. I needed to be wrong.

PHIL: Anything…anything that you felt like in retrospect, your seminary education didn't actually prepare you for?

JOHN: Yeah, oh yeah, a lot of things. I think my seminary education didn't prepare me for the rigors and the responsibilities of leadership. It was all about the Bible and that was necessary. It was all about the languages and history and theology. But it wasn't about leadership. Whatever I got in pastoral ministry was virtually useless to me. And given the world we live in today that nobody told me about how to read a balance sheet and all of a sudden I wake up one day and I've got a multi-million dollar complex on my hands and, I mean, just some basic knowledge of those kinds of things would have been helpful. You know, in college I studied Greek and I studied history and I didn't study anything else, you know. I didn't study anything about economics or business, but the Lord has always surrounded me with people. But having said that, I will say this, Phil. The most important thing is to learn to handle the Word of God carefully and get a grip on your own life, right? Isn't that what Paul says? You know, that your life as an example and how you handle the Word and then surround yourself with people who can take care of the stuff you don't know how to do well. But I do think I would love to see a much more intentional direction in seminaries on leadership. There are a lot of good material out there and there's a lot of bad material out there, biblical leadership.

PHIL: In fact, I have some questions on leadership that maybe we'll come back to. So hang on to that thought. What time do we have to be finished, Jonathan? Like a quarter till…? Okay.

Yeah, talk briefly about your philosophy on travel and conference speaking. I often have people ask me how can I get John MacArthur to come speak at my church and my standard answer is, "You can't because you just don't go…I mean, on a Sunday when you have the option to be here at Grace Church or a guest speaker in someone else's church, you're going to be here at Grace.

JOHN: I would rather be in my own house, I would rather be in my own bed. I would rather be with my own family. I would rather be with you. I'd rather be with my own church with own flock that God has given than any people on the planet. This is my home, this is my place, this is what I love, this is the flock God's given me. I love being here. I love working with the men that surround me in all of these ministries. It's my joy. So this is where I want to be. So I don't have any urge, I don't have any itch. I'm not trying to…I'm not trying to stifle some compelling need. I never have really felt that way. I am willing to serve in other places. Look, now I'm downloadable, so I don't need to go anywhere really.

But I do want to be available to serve the people that the Lord has brought into my life to serve, my own congregation, missionaries. I just came back from a three…three-week-plus tour of mission fields all across Europe. Why did I do that? Because these are the people that are in my flock, these are the people God has given us at Grace Church. I wanted to go to be an encouragement to them, to help them, to assist them, to serve them, to be able to better tell their story, to be an encouragement to them. I don't feel like I need to do that for other organizations and other meetings. And I get it, I mean, in a sense I do, I know that I get invited places because it contributes to the success of an event. That's…that's okay but that's not compelling to me.

There are some very strategic things that I would go to because there's a certain sense in which I feel urgency about speaking in that situation where I might be the only voice. Recently I went to Charleston, South Carolina, to do a conference for Dallas Wilson who is an African/American Episcopalian rector. I don't do a lot of stuff for the Episcopalian church, as you would know. This was under the authority of the South Carolina diocese of the Episcopal church, in St. John's Episcopal Church in the east side, the ghetto, an African/American Ghetto of Charleston and some people said, "Why would you link up with the Episcopalian Church?" And my answer was I'm not linking with the Episcopalian Church, hopefully some Episcopalians will come and hear the truth. So don't judge me by where I am, judge me by what I say when I get there. That's the issue. (small applause) I don't want to spend my whole life just talking to the people who already believe what I believe, I'd like to think the Lord can get me out of that box. There are unregenerate people in the world that I could speak to but there are unregenerate people in the church that I need to speak to as well. And that's a form of evangelism and I want to be a help.

Well, the fallout of that is they said, "Would you come back cause we have all these guys, these pastors who want to be able to preach the Word like you do," so we sent four of our guys, I think four of our African/American guys who graduated from seminary back there to hold a conference for the guys in that area and follow up on that. Well, that's a…and there were only like 300 people there. That doesn't matter to me, it was just that that's…and by the way, they wanted me to do the whole conference built around the theme of Slave.

Well, if you know anything about Charleston, Charleston is like slave central in American history and the news people called up and said, "Are you out of your mind? You're going into Charleston? You're going to do a conference on Slave?" But it was a really remarkable opportunity.

So there might be some things like that, that I feel compelled to do. But the basic rule is I don't want to really go anywhere, I love being here. My productivity for the years that God gives me is tied to my preaching in this pulpit. Otherwise I become an echo, right? It's here where I prepare new things. It's here where I'm fresh. It's here where I advance the breadth of ministry. Somewhere else I just repeat and tweak. So…I don't know if that answers…

PHIL: That's good…no, that's good and it prompts another question in a similar vein but totally different topic. Zondervan just recently announced that they are beginning work on the MacArthur Study Bible New International Version. Talk about the thought process that you went through in deciding whether to authorize such a project, or what is your thinking in doing that?

JOHN: Well, I was approached and asked if I would be willing to do an addition to the MacArthur Study Bible in the NIV. That was a lot to think about. The first thing to know is that over 40 percent of the English Bibles in the world are NIV. That's nine percent ESV and two percent NAS and New King James is in there. So by far the majority Bible in the English speaking world is the NIV.

PHIL: It's not your favorite translation.

JOHN: It is not my favorite translation. That was the first question. The second question was does anybody who reads the NIV care what it means? (Laughter) Obviously you get the question. You know what I'm saying, it's sort of like a pew Bible. But I realized that if you get out of the United States and you get into Australia, and you get into the UK and you get into New Zealand and other English speaking part of the world, it's all NIV. It's everywhere.

And so, it took a year to decide and here were the criteria for it. "Can we in the notes say exactly what we have said in every edition as to the interpretation of every passage and where the text needs to be corrected, can we be free to correct it." And they came back and said, "Absolutely."

So you can curse the darkness, in a sense, and say, "Oh it's terrible, they've got an NIV," or you can turn on the light inside the NIV. If I wanted to do anything to help people to understand the Bible who use an NIV, the best thing I could possibly do was get inside their NIV and explain it. Right? (Applause) I was thrilled that they…I was thrilled that they said we want to do this. I said, "You understand this?" This is…you know, Charles Ryrie did it and there's an NIV Ryrie Study Bible, Moody produced it. Well…now you say, "Well, they've got a new NIV." I understand that and there's an eleventh…they dumped the TNIV which was horrific, gender stuff. There's only an eleven percent change from the older one to the 2011 NIV, from what I understand, eleven percent change. You, I said, "Phil, find controversial passages," right?

PHIL: Yeah, actually we picked, because one of the issues is it seems like Zondervan is driven by this egalitarian agenda to the point where they change genders on pronouns and things like that. And so, I deliberately picked the passages that would be most provocative, you know.

JOHN: Where my note would most out of touch with their text.

PHIL: Cause I was kind of trying to show them, you know, here's what this is going to mean…

JOHN: Here's what you're getting into.

PHIL: Yeah.

JOHN: So what happened?

PHIL: Well, we edited the notes so that they fit the text, you know, and corrected the problems and submitted them and they read it and said, "This is fine."

JOHN: So, when they came back and said this is fine, if this is what you want to say, one of those texts was in 1 Timothy 2 where the NAS says, "I permit not a woman to…"

PHIL: I think it says, I can't remember how they worded it, but the idea is they took out…

JOHN: Take authority…it doesn't say take authority, there's another word there.

PHIL: They tried to take out the idea of usurping authority.

JOHN: Yeah, permit not a woman to exercise authority…in the new one, and this is how subtle the change is, it says, "I permit not a woman to assume authority." Well one could read that and not see a difference. That's pretty nuance between assuming authority and exercising authority. Their intention may be egalitarian, in other words, she can't assume on her own, but she could take authority if a man gave her that right. But that's so…so nuance. But the note says, "This text makes clear that women are not to take positions of leadership in the church." The nuance just disappeared.

You know, I get it because we had people call Grace To You and say, "You know, I've been a Grace partner and we won't give you any more support in the future because John sold out to the NIV." You know, we'll have to see but there are millions of people in the body of Christ in the Kingdom who have that Bible and read that Bible and we think the higher ground is to give them a tool that can help them understand what they've got in their hands in the Word of God.

And just another footnote to that. I have no idea what the Arabic translation of the Bible says, okay? I know it's the Vandyke…it's the Vandyke text and the Vandyke text of the Arabic Bible is basically a *textus receptus,* it's a text, it's the later manuscripts that, you know, the King James is from. Would everything in the Arabic Bible be exactly the way I would like to see it in the Scripture? That's not even the question. The question is should we explain the Bible that they have to them…that's the question. And it would be true. I know what's in the Russian Bible, the Italian Bible, Spanish Bible, French Bible, Portuguese Bible, now we're doing the Chinese Bible. I don't have any idea what's in that either. I don't even know what the text says but I'm willing to say here's what it means. So…does

that make sense? Okay.

PHIL: We're running out of time very quickly and I haven't even asked you one tenth of the questions I had brought. So let me do what Todd Freiel(??) did with you once…word association. I'll just throw some words at you and you give me your quick response. And…and mainly…mainly these are going to be issues people wanted me to ask you about because there have been recent controversial issues that you really haven't said anything publicly about people want your opinion on and so on. So we'll do word association.

Elephant Room

JOHN: That is the word self-destruction. It was its own destruction.

PHIL: Robert Schuller

JOHN: Spiritual tragedy

PHIL: You saw the news on that yesterday.

JOHN: Yeah, he's suing the Crystal Cathedral.

PHIL: Stephen Ferdick(??)

JOHN: Unqualified.

PHIL: Church planting.

JOHN: I'm for it. (Applause) What else would we plant?

PHIL: Yeah, that's right. That's good.

Multi-sight.

JOHN: Wrong. I've got to explain that.

PHIL: Yeah, go ahead.

JOHN: Hebrews 13:17, "Follow the faith of those who are over you in the Lord, those who care for your souls because they have to give an account." You tell me how a flat-screen pastor lives an example to back up his message and how he cares for the souls that are sitting out there staring at the screen? That is a million miles from a model of a pastor.

PHIL: All right. I don't like the one-word answers because it really doesn't give us enough. So let me ask you another…another sort of recent controversial issue that you didn't say anything specifically about but relates to…

JOHN: You're not looking for information on this, you already know the answers. You just want to…

PHIL: But people want to hear what you say.

JOHN: I know. You're just putting me on the spot. Okay.

PHIL: Sometimes I'll…I'll…this is why I put the, you know, pyromaniac stuff in your books, people want to know what you think. And I'll say something and they go. "Whoa, does John MacArthur agree with that?" I wouldn't put it on line if I didn't think you pretty much agreed, but…(Laughter) and if I'm not sure…

JOHN: That's pretty safe since I don't have a computer.

PHIL: That's right. And if I'm not sure I'll slip it one of your books and see what you do in the editorial process. So…

JOHN: I've noticed.

PHIL: That's how I figure stuff out. You didn't make any public comment about Mark Driscolls recent book, Real Marriage. Do you want to? You want to…

JOHN: Commercialism, there are such a beautiful dignity to the way the Scripture speaks of marriage and such a precious veiled way in which even the intimacies of marriage are presented in Scripture that maintains its intimacy and its personal nature and its beauty without painting it in what are commonly deemed pornographic language. I just think these are things that don't need to be said, shouldn't be said and pander a prurient interest in the part of people. And the last thing you ever would want for the people who gather before you to hear the Word of God was to have their minds filled with your sort of uncouth, unclean speech and the images that go with it. (Applause).

PHIL: Last question. This has to do with the messages you're doing on the Holy Spirit. Are you planning to do a new book on the Charismatic Movement? Again, I know the answer to this, I just want you to say it out loud.

JOHN: Yeah…yeah, I want to…because if somebody would do it, maybe I wouldn't have to do it, but it needs to do several things. One, it needs to follow what we said a little bit last night, and we'll say tomorrow night about restoring the rightful place of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church. It needs to

deal with aberrations. We did a long series on the unholy Trinity…Trinity Network, it incorporates some of that. And we need to go back to the history of this Movement and we've got great material on the history of the Movement because sweet water doesn't come out of a bitter fountain and good fruit doesn't come on a bad tree. So, yeah, with all that pulled together, not a rewrite of Charismatic Chaos but a whole new treatment of this and, of course, what we didn't talk about last night, cause it's not directly connected to the Holy Spirit, just the abomination of the prosperity message, which is now starting to seep over the edges into more mainline evangelicalism because people are thinking they can't capture those audiences if they don't give them that shtick.

PHIL: Right. In fact, it's interesting you say you wish somebody else would do this, it's true. I think you kind of referred to this last night that cessationism has pretty much lapsed into silence. There haven't been any…

JOHN: Right, and that's the other part of the book. It needs to deal with the Reformed Non-cessationism, that allows for these people to think that if the scholars aren't on our back we might be okay.

PHIL: Now…now, see I'm a cessationists so I know that the reason cessationists have lapsed into silence is not because they've run out of arguments or conceded the argument. Do you think…do you think there's a sort of downside to our stress on gospel unity, together for the gospel, the gospel coalition, groups like this…

JOHN: Yeah, in this sense, Phil. You can't, you could never overemphasis the gospel enough but in this emphasis on the gospel, there has been indifference toward a lot of other things that are of essential importance and are…it would have to be embraced within the big picture of the gospel. For example. Do you have a full understanding of the gospel if you have no ecclesiology? No…no. It's as if you affirm substitutionary atonement or imputation, then you can have no ecclesiology. I mean, you can get your ecclesiology from the local singles bar. I mean, you can repeat the singles bar experience and call it church.

PHIL: Which is what people literally do.

JOHN: Yeah. I'm just saying, you don't get a pass on the rest. And Tom said that yesterday in his message. You don't get a pass on everything else just because you check off the box on imputation and say you're a believer in the sovereignty of God and Calvinism, that is no excuse for you to fail to declare the whole counsel of God. And these guys that think they…and they have no interest in ecclesiology, a biblical ecclesiology, they have no interest in soul care of the flock and all of that. They also, I think, they get a pass on the doctrines of the Holy Spirit and the doctrine of sanctification which is woefully missing as they try to make the church as much like the world as they can rather than separating it. They get a pass on eschatology, you know, if you even have an eschatology that's

cohesive and biblical and clear and you have some strong conviction about it, you're seen as some kind of a fanatic. I don't understand how people can think that God muffed the ending of this whole deal. So, I don't think…I think you say you have an accurate soteriology is then to put yourself on notice that you're required to have everything else accurate as well. You don't get a pass on the rest.

PHIL: Don't say too much more because my seminary, this afternoon, is on that very subject. And I stole all my material from you, so you're going to…

JOHN: Oh…no you did not…you did not. Phil's going to tell you why you shouldn't get a pass on everything else just because you affirm the gospel. That's a narrow view of the gospel.

PHIL: All right, we're out of time. I have to make one announcement then I'm going to ask you to close in prayer and pray for our lunch.

JOHN: No, I'm going to ask you, you close in prayer.

PHIL: Okay, will do. One announcement….

JOHN: Because you have the most to pray about. (Laughter)

PHIL: Suddenly I'm worried about job security. They gave me this announcement, I hope I get it right. Tomorrow at noon, March 9, 12 P.M., there will be a luncheon for those who are interested in the D-Men Program(???) at the Master's Seminary. And the location is in the Student Lounge in the Master's Seminary building just over this way and lunch will be provided there for you.

JOHN: D-Men in expository preaching. Okay.

PHIL: All right, let's pray.

Lord, thank You for this time we've had together, these subjects are weighing on all of our minds and we pray, Lord, that You would give us wisdom, give us biblical understanding, give us power as we preach. We pray, Lord, for the mess that church is in and so many venues today that we would be instruments in Your hand to help correct things and set right what needs to be set right. We pray, Lord, also for the lunch that's coming, bless the food, bless our fellowship together, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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