

Sunday Morning Q&A with Mike Riccardi and  
Phil Johnson

*Bible Q&A*

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Moderator: We started this two Friday nights ago, going through questions and I think we got through about 10-11, I think last time.

Mike: I was guessing 12.

Moderator: We had 12, was it?

Mike: My estimation.

Moderator: And we had about 48 that were submitted so we'll probably get through about that many again this morning and then after that we'll see how we're going to handle the rest of the questions but, again, Phil and Mike have said nothing is off limits. We wanted to make sure we got these so we had really a lot of good ones and I'll try again today to separate them out. If you weren't there on Friday night, some of the theology ones, you know, my eyes started to glaze over when Mike got into it a little too much.

Mike: I have that effect on people.

Moderator: So I'll try to call time out at times or something and get us all back on track again. But really a good mix of theology, Christian living, things like that and personal things.

Just to start off today, I'll kind of give one to Phil and then one to Mike and then some of them will be kind of a combination but to get us started, Phil, I thought one of them was interesting because I think we think a lot of times, you know, you guys as pastors, you've got this all figured out and everything and we sometimes struggle and wonder, "Should I really be doubting some things?" Or have difficulty, maybe is a better way to put it? Somebody had said, Phil, "What's the most difficult biblical truth for you to believe or what biblical truth do you personally have trouble, you know, not maybe accepting but just getting your mind around or is everything perfectly clear?"

Phil: Well, no, not everything is perfectly clear. I try to preach on issues that I am certain about. People always says, "Well, you're so dogmatic." Yeah, because I preach on stuff

my convictions are settled. You know, if there's something that I'm not really sure on, I kind of try to tiptoe around it in my preaching. There aren't many things like that. I mean, I've been a Christian now for probably 45 years, since 1971, close to 45 years and at times I still feel like a new Christian, you know, because I am still learning and I can only answer that question in retrospect, looking back.

The truth that I now hold to that was the most difficult for me to really sort of wrap my arms around was the sovereignty of God. I mention that all the time in my sermons because it's such an important truth and yet I understand how difficult it is for the average person who is just, you know, thinking with common sense and a fairly simple view of Scripture to put together all the questions and all the doctrines that have to do with the fact that God is sovereign, that everything that happens happens according to the plan and the decree of God. He is in control. Nothing is spun out of his control. That's all good news when you come to grips with it but until you really sort of see the big picture and look at it biblically instead of trying to filter it through your common sense, that is a hard truth to come to grips with and I understand that because it took me from the time I was saved until I really finally laid down my objections and said, "Okay, it's pretty clear to me this is what Scripture teaches and I need to embrace this doctrine."

It took about 15 years so I haven't always been a Calvinist and I use that term, by the way, I'm not really a Calvinist because there is a lot of stuff Calvin taught that I don't agree with, you know, infant baptism, his view of the sacraments. I just wouldn't...I'm a Baptist, at least theologically. It's funny, I've never belonged to an actual Baptist church but I'm not Calvinistic in the sense that I think Calvin had some kind of authority but I think on the doctrines that are most connected with his name, the truth of divine sovereignty and election and, you know, the doctrines of grace, I think Calvin was right because he drew those truths so clearly from Scripture and it was Scripture that convinced me that God is sovereign and I'm not and it was a long journey to get to the point where with a settled heart I believed that.

Mike: Yeah, I think Whitfield said, "I'm a Calvinist not because Calvin taught me these doctrines but because I learned of them of Jesus Christ."

Moderator: Mike, is there anything you want to add to that? I mean, anything that you've maybe struggled with or had a hard time and come to...

Mike: Well, I mean, there are difficult doctrines certainly and I'm not sure if it's the kind of thing where the question is asking, you know, "Is there something that is difficult for you to understand?" There are a lot of things that are difficult for me to understand but it sounded like the question was phrased more like, you know, "Is there something that you see in Scripture that you know is true but maybe you have a hard time embracing? Liking?"

When we were talking about this just kind of discussing the questions, you know, Phil mentioned the doctrine of hell. That shouldn't be something that we, you know, are giddy about. It should be something that, you know, everything as we think about it for any

length of time, everything in our spirit should recoil from that. That's the nature of hell and absence from God and punishment that's eternal, that's conscious, that's torment. I mean, that kind of thing, it's the kind of thing where you go, you know, I do believe it is sin to not like doctrines in the Scripture that we know are true. I think that it's sinful to have a backwardness of spirit that would seem to, you know, disagree in any sort of way with God because, you know, if he has revealed truth in his word and it's true, you know that's the way that he has done it. So I actually do think that it's sinful for us to say, "Well, I don't like that," but I understand that sentiment, you know, that's where I think being submissive comes in, recognizing that my mind needs to be submitted to the Lordship of Christ. My affections do the way that I react to certain things, need to be submitted to him and if he says, you know, x, y and z, that's where my faith has to take over and say, "I know this God. I know that he is sovereign. I know that he is all powerful. I know that he is perfect in wisdom and I know that he is entirely good and benevolent and righteous and I'm not those things so who in the world would I be to sit in judgment on those?" So at that point I would try to submit my affections, "Lord, this is what you are showing me in your word. This is what other faithful believers are agreeing with this understanding and are teaching me this and yet, Lord, there's a backwardness in my spirit to it. I'm a wrong man. I'm a sinful man so please, if this is what you're teaching, grant me the grace to submit my mind to your word and not to my own thinking."

Moderator: That's good. Thank you. Mike, somebody asks that since your arrival in Grace Life, we have heard much from you in your preaching and delighting in, treasuring, prizing Christ and it says, "It sounds like this is another dimension of how we're to relate to Christ as treasure." He goes on and says, "It is enough to receive Christ as Savior and Lord but not treasure him? Will true conversion inevitably result in this or is this something that happens after conversion?" Even at the end it says, "If I don't sense this in me at all, should I be alarmed? How do I cultivate a deeper valuing of Christ in this area?"

Mike: Yeah, that is a great question and I'm really, really glad that it was asked. You know, I'm glad also that somebody kind of discerned that theme in my preaching because I believe it's a biblical theme, the idea that we are to treasure Christ, that he is to be the object of our delight. That gets to the heart of worship and, you know, it's a good question. We don't separate Savior and Lord, right? We don't say that we can receive Christ as Savior from sin and not as Lord over my life. What about this idea of treasuring? That seems to be new but I would just say that's part, receiving Christ as treasure is part of what it means to receive him as Lord because, I mean, I think hopefully the place where the people sort of heard that theme clearly in preaching is in Philippians 3. Paul is giving his own testimony of how he was a Pharisee. He was a Jew born of Jews, "A Hebrew of Hebrews," all those, you know, "as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor; as to the righteousness which was in the Law, blameless. But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count presently all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord."

So as a basic tenet of Paul's conversion is to survey all of the righteousness that one might put one's hope in for salvation and to survey all of the sin and all of the things in the world that he might have counted as gains, that he might have pursued as having surpassing value and then looks at them and sees them as nothing more than rubbish, nothing more than refuse, things which are fit only to be thrown to the dogs and that's measured against the surpassing value of knowing Christ. Now, if Christ is not surpassing valuable to you, then we've got a problem. Then that aspect of conversion that Paul seems to have so central in his conversion story there isn't there.

And I'm also thinking of Matthew 13, the parable of the pearl of great price and of the treasure hidden in a field. This, again, this is a parable of what Jesus is saying conversion is so he says, ""The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field." So this is a picture of the sinner happening upon a treasure and then doing everything that he can possibly do, demonstrably showing the value of that treasure in his mind by selling everything that he has. Now, to me, that's conversion, it's finding a treasure. And what does that conversion do to you? I've got to sell everything in order to get this. That is Lordship. I've got to surrender everything that I have to follow after this Lord whom I find to be a treasure and it's not a drudgery, right? Like sell everything that I have because I want to go to heaven and if I don't do this I'm going to get punished but I sell everything that I have and follow this Lord who is delightfully compelling.

Why would I hang onto anything else if I can have him? The thing is, if you don't have that attitude in your life, the questioner is asking, you know, "Is it something that I sort of grow into?" I mean, the reality is that kind of truth that I have to receive Christ as treasure scares a lot of us because a lot of us aren't overwhelmed with the delightfulness of Christ all the time and I'm not saying that we're saved by a perfect delighting in Christ or a perfect love for Christ or a perfect estimation of his value. It's not perfection as Pastor John always says, it's direction. So Paul would say he didn't already obtain all this or become perfect, that he presses on so if you're not loving Christ perfectly, can you be saved? Yes, I mean that's all of us. We're loving Christ imperfectly but if there's some sort of settled disposition in your heart where you're just sitting there saying, "I don't delight in him. I don't find him as a treasure. I don't find him compelling. You know, I'm here because I don't want to go to hell," then you do have some thinking to do and you do have some heart searching to do because, you know, again, I see this going to the very heart of what the Bible says conversion is.

Moderator: Phil, do you have anything you want to....

Phil: Yeah, just want to stress what we're talking about is not how you feel at any given moment as much as what you believe because and how you regard Christ when you contemplate him. If you think that some great feeling of intense love for Christ is going to just naturally well up inside you even when you're not availing yourself of the means of sanctification, it doesn't happen that way. You know, the world dangles some bauble in front of us and we get distracted and it is possible for a time to leave your first love. Lots of the Christians in those churches that Jesus wrote to in Revelation were in exactly that

position, you know, they had let other things sort of crowd out their love for Christ and we have to be careful not to do that. But when we talk about valuing Christ as a treasure, we're talking, first of all, about what you believe and then the more you avail yourself of the means of sanctification, the more that becomes the feeling that dominates your worldview and perspective and everything else.

Moderator: Good. Thank you. Maybe even around that, I mean, even as you were saying that thoughts come in my mind then, kind of what you were talking about a few weeks ago, radical. I mean, I think people have taken that to the point now to say, "Well, then that means I should sell everything. I'm only going to treasure Christ and I'm going to go the other way and I'm going to sell everything, I'm going to move to Thailand. I'm going to do all of that because I treasure Christ far above anything else." How would you guys respond to that?

Mike: Yeah, I don't think that the point of the parable is to say, you know, we're to sell all our possessions and be monks. I think that the, you know, the point of the parable is what has any sort of totalizing claim on your life? What hooks are there in your heart to the things of this world versus is your heart entirely sold out to Christ? If it was that I was called upon to sell everything, if there was anything in my life not about selling or owning possessions but sin in my life. If there was something that I loved doing that I wouldn't give up. If I'm dealing with issues of drugs or issues of some sort of sexual immorality that I'm continuing in and I'm refusing to repent of and submit and give over. The point of Christ as treasure is just to say in that process what you're doing when you're refusing to let go of those things is you're worshiping those things and what we're asking you to do, what Christ is asking you to do is to worship him by finding your satisfaction not in the sin but in him, in obedience to him and in knowing him and growing more in relationship with him.

So it's not about, "I've got to sell my possessions," because part of what it means to enjoy Christ and delight in Christ is learning to enjoy and delight in him in all the good gifts that he gives. It's that fine line between thankful joy and idolatry in anything that God gives us. You know, it is a fine line but we want to walk it. I mean, "God is the Gospel," by John Piper talks about this a whole lot and I think he does just a great job where he talks about there, you know, the idea of seamless joy in God and his gifts. It's not that we have to, you know, live in a cloister to, you know, have, kind of get joy in God as some sort of contemplative, meditative state, you know, where I have nothing and I just sort of, you know, my burlap sack over my back and that's it. But it's, you know, enjoying the gifts that God gives us in a way that doesn't seek to...doesn't have that joy terminate on those gifts but traces the joy as a sunbeam from the sun, you know, back to the giver of those gifts. So, I don't know if that helps.

Moderator: Alright, let's go, Phil, you had mentioned as you often do, you know, Calvinism, doctrines of grace, we had an interesting question that said, this was coming from parents. It said, "If there are two believers and they were specifically talking about their daughter and a young man that she was now dating, courting, whatever," and they said, "If one embraces these truths, reformed theology, doctrines of grace, Calvinism, and

the other does not, would this be considered as a form of unequally yoked and would it be biblically valid to advise against marriage?"

Phil: Well, it's not what Scripture means when it talks about unequally yoked. To be unequally yoked is for a believer to be married to an unbeliever.

Moderator: And that's different than a Calvinist and a non-Calvinist.

Phil: Usually. Some of the non-Calvinists are...

Moderator: I just wanted to get it out there.

Phil: I know some non-Calvinists who are pretty shady in their...so thoroughly shady in their doctrine....

Mike: All nonbelievers are non-Calvinists.

Phil: Yeah.

Mike: It just doesn't work the other way.

Phil: That's right.

Mike: Not all non-Calvinists are unbelievers.

Phil: Seriously, I think there can be and you'd have to know more about, you know, where the person who is fighting against Calvinism, what is his theological stand? If it's evangelical Arminianism, I'd be less concerned than if it's, you know, pure out-and-out Pelagianism which may mean he's not a believer. Pelagianism meaning he holds a view that he doesn't believe in original sin. He doesn't believe in the primacy of divine grace. He thinks that conversion is simply a matter of, you know, self reformation, that you have it within yourself and the power of your own will to will yourself to be sanctified and that's what conversion amounts to, you know. That's not a Christian perspective and if that's the perspective the person holds, yeah, I'd definitely say that is an unequal yoke.

In any case, if it was one of my kids thinking of marrying someone who held firmly to a position and let's get it out of the realm of Calvinism and Arminianism, what if one is a charismatic and the other is not? What if one is, you know, believes in infant baptism and the other doesn't? Any kind of fundamental disagreement like that, if it's strongly and firmly and dogmatically held by both sides, it's a recipe for conflict in the marriage. I don't know why you would do that. I mean, I love Darlene and I loved her the first time I laid my eyes on her but if she had been a, you know, an ardent charismatic and unwilling to even review, you know, that perspective, I would have not considered, you know, as much as it would have pained me, I would have said, "I don't think we can live harmoniously together with such a deep conflict and what is really a fundamental level." If your marriage is going to be a spiritual union of two people who worship Christ

together and share essentially the same worldview and convictions but to go into that with a disagreement on a basic spiritual truth is begging for trouble. I mean, you're in for a lifetime of conflict. Why would you want that? It's not the same as an unequal yoke but it's a problem in the same direction where you've got two who can't walk together because they're not agreed.

Moderator: I think you made an interesting point when we had talked a little bit about this one time too about even the man should be the one that needs to lead in this and especially if this was the case, I think....

Phil: Yeah, if it's the guy who has the sub-biblical theology, then it's an even bigger problem because he's supposed to be the spiritual leader and she's supposed to submit to him and, you know, that's a real problem. You know, I married Darlene in 1978 which was an election year, right? And she voted for, this was before I got her straightened out, she voted for Jimmy Carter.

Moderator: What?

Phil: But he was so nice. Yeah, well, you know, Carter said he was a Christian and everything.

Moderator: Yeah, that's right. That had an effect in our family too, I'll tell you. Yeah.

Phil: Yeah, yeah, you know, that....

Moderator: I mean, like peanuts and things too so, I mean, that was good.

Phil: When she told me she had voted for Carter, I said, "You know, we need to talk about this." So we talked that out a little bit before we got engaged, wasn't it? So.

Mike: One of the best things that Jan and I ever decided to do was before we were engaged, while we were dating, we found a bunch of questions and I know this is really a privilege for those of us who live in, I guess, the internet age, but we found a series of 50 questions to ask before you get engaged online from a ministry that we trusted in. We went through...in all things, about kids, about worship, about theology, and just sat down over a number of weeks, actually, and just talked through all 50 of those and really got ourselves on the same spiritual wavelength, even on, you know, home life, family life wavelength.

There are good things. I think there's a little booklet called "50 Crucial Questions to Ask Before You Get Engaged," or something like that the Council of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood put out so that's Piper and Grudem. Then there's a little booklet called "Pre-Engagement" that's part of some sort of little booklet series that you can see in the bookstore. They've all got the same sort of design. I don't remember the name of the series. But, you know, those kinds of things, whoever asked that question, you know, would be good to have this young couple go through.

I do think that's a great point. I mean, if you're going to compromise on that issue, if you're going to say, "Well, listen, we're both Christians and, you know, we love each other and we want to get married," I mean, you're basically rendering that theological issue difference, whatever it is, you're just saying it's just not as important enough to us. And I think on the idea of the sovereignty of God and salvation and in all things and just your view of God, I think that it's worth having a big disagreement about and then talking through it and coming to a resolution.

Phil: Yeah, your position on that affects so much that you believe. I mean, just to shift the example a little bit: suppose you've got a couple and one of them says, "My idea, the sort of perfect pastor, the best teacher, the guy I want to follow is John MacArthur," and the other one says, "Yeah, but I'm a disciple of Benny Hinn. But we're both Christians, you know. But we're going to get married, you know." What they're actually saying is their spiritual convictions aren't important enough to them to need to agree on, you know, so that's not going to be the center of their marriage. If couldn't be the center of their marriage because then their marriage would just be one long conflict. So, yeah, that would trouble me if one of my kids wanted to marry somebody with a totally divergent theological view of any kind. I'd try to dissuade them.

Moderator: Well, somewhat along that same theme but not, I'll throw this one to you, Phil. Somebody asked this question and it says, "What does Scripture say about a man's responsibility and particularly an older man's responsibility to seek a godly woman as a companion, helper, wife? What does Scripture say about the appropriateness of a man's choice to remain single, in other words, when is it okay or rather when it is not sinful to choose to remain single given that God has said it is not good for man to be alone?" There's one for ya.

Phil: Yeah, you know, when the Lord says it's not good for a man to be alone, he was talking about humanity there as a race. He was dealing with Adam, you know, who was the only human and it wasn't good for him to be alone because how would the race procreate, you know? But Scripture is pretty clear that there are some people who are called and gifted to be eunuchs, to be single, to be devoted so totally to the Lord. The Apostle Paul was one and he never suggested ever that he felt any obligation. In fact, he says in 1 Corinthians 7, he deals with that at length but he saw his singleness as an advantage in his ministry. It wasn't a sinful thing at all. It's not a question of sin or not. What would be a sin would be...he says, for example, it's better to marry than burn and he's talking about burning with lust there. It would be a sin to live with a passionate desire to be married and try to pretend that, "No, I really have the gift of singleness or I need to stay single." Paul says we're not to forbid to marry for that very reason. There's nothing extra holy about being single or remaining single. Celibacy isn't some kind of higher level of spirituality and Scripture is pretty clear on that but the opposite is true as well. There is no absolute necessity for people to get married. If you can remain single, do it.

Moderator: Mike, anything?

Mike: Well, just the one thing that I'm thinking about, you know, as Paul says, you know, I want you to be free from concern. One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord. The one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife and his interests are divided. It says the same thing about a woman. And it seems pretty clear that certainly in Paul's case that his singleness, you know, was an asset to his ministry. To have a wife in the situation that Paul was in, you know, to be a frontier missionary getting beaten and stoned all over the place, it would've been, you know, a serious hindrance to his ministry.

So I think that what the questioner is maybe trying to get at is, you know, I don't think you can say it's sinful to do this and it is sinful to do that but it is sinful to say, "I'm just going to remain single because it's easier because I just want to be, you know, it's hard work, relationships. I kind of like being a bachelor. I kind of like, you know, just being untethered, doing my own thing, being my own boss." I think that that's not a good reason. I mean, that's not what Paul was thinking. He wasn't thinking, "You know, I just don't want to put the effort into a marriage." He's thinking, you know, "I'm going to be undivided here. My ministry is such that I need to have my mind and my heart entirely undivided."

So, you know, I agree with what Phil has said and the emphasis with which he said it. I would just add if you're a single guy or a single lady but, I guess, the emphasis landing on the man because, you know, you think he's the leader, he's the one to pursue, if it's just, "I just kind of like how it's going and I don't really feel like I'd like a change." I mean, you want to think through that. You'd want to think through your own heart there and ask if your motivations are pure or if they are motivated by selfishness a little bit.

Moderator: Here's one I thought I want to hear the answer for and maybe others that are around. Somebody asked, "Solomon was granted wisdom by God yet his life choices many times lacked wisdom. Why is this?" I think there's a lot, maybe not a lot but quite a few in the Old Testament that you would think, you know, I just talked to somebody the other day again and they said, "What about Solomon and all his concubines and wives? And what about all these Old Testament...?" And so a lot of times, it's like, "What was going on there in the Old Testament and why if he had been granted wisdom by God did he make so many poor choices and things?"

Phil: Yeah, that's a great question. I've pondered that frequently too because Scripture commends him because he could have asked anything he wanted and he didn't ask for material riches and all that, he asked for wisdom and the Lord commends him for that. But then he goes and makes such a wreck of his life and position and it's really one of the tragic stories in the Old Testament and I think what it demonstrates is that wisdom alone isn't enough. It wasn't that he made bad choices because he didn't know the right thing or he was confused or any of that. Here was a man with all the wisdom he needed. He knew the right things. He even wrote, you know, the Proverbs which talk all about the right things to do and yet he made wrong choices which suggests to me that he made a lot of those wrong choices deliberately and what it proves is that, you know, wisdom alone

doesn't overcome our sin nature. Our struggle with sin cannot be solved by extra wisdom. What we need is the grace of God and he's a living picture of what happens to someone who tries to live his life in his own energy or his own wisdom. I think his wisdom may have been part of his downfall because he was feeling, I mean, he was the wisest man and Scripture says this. This is God's evaluation of him. He was the wisest man on the face of the earth and I think he probably got to a point where he felt like, "That's sufficient. I'm a smart guy," and he became very self-sufficient. He didn't sense that dependence on divine grace that is absolutely necessary for sanctification.

That's a common problem with people who are wise. I mean, you just think back over the 20<sup>th</sup> century, some of the...I could name and I won't, but I could name a list of at least five or six of the brightest theologians who wrote some of the best books in my library who utterly made shipwreck of their personal lives and that seems to be an all too common pattern. You know, it's a constant reminder to me, I'd rather have grace than wisdom, frankly. I mean, I want both but wisdom alone...

Moderator: It's good for us that aren't as smart, too.

Phil: Yeah, yeah. Wisdom alone is not going to cause you to be holy.

Mike: I think just sort of in the redemptive plan of God too, I think it's to demonstrate the need for a greater ruler, a greater King, that if, you know, again, Solomon starts the cycle of the kings where, you know, "So-and-so did evil in the sight of the Lord and walked in the ways of his father and.... Do right in the sight of the Lord," and that kind of thing and it's just this recurring cycle of, you know, "We had expectations for this king and disappointment. We thought David was going to be this righteous ruler but he's a man of bloodshed and he's going to die and Solomon is going to build the house. Our hope is in Solomon, the man of peace," and he's got 700 wives, 300 concubines, you know, a heart chased away after foreign gods. Then we think it's going to be Rehoboam but now the monarchy is split and who is going to heal this rift. I think ultimately just as it points to our need for grace that wisdom can't overcome our depravity so does it point to the need for a perfectly righteous, perfectly wise king over Israel who we have in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Phil: By the way, there's an interesting parallel, I think, in Samson who was the strongest man who ever lived, you know? So physical strength and, you know, superior intelligence, neither of those things really answers the need that we have because we are fallen sinners. Jesus said the greatest man in the Old Testament era was John the Baptist who, you know, what he was known for was his singular devotion to the Lord. It wasn't wisdom or strength. He didn't do any miracles, you know, he lacks all of the stuff that we normally associate with these superheroes, you know. It's like Samson and Solomon are almost comic book heroes, you know? And here's John the Baptist who is a regular guy, I mean, he's like a reincarnation of Elijah who the biblical description of Elijah is just leather and hair and John the Baptist is like that and he eats bugs. He's just a regular guy but Jesus said he was the greatest and I think it's because you look at his life, you look at his ministry and he pursued sanctification rather than strength or smartness.

Moderator: Well, I need to ask you these because I think I got four or five questions along this line so I'll throw this out there and I'll hit about five in a row here. So listen to them all and then you can kind of respond but the first one says, "What exactly happens to believers after they die? What takes place from the moment of death until they receive glorified bodies? What about unbelievers? Where are they until the judgment?" Kind of along that same line, "Is it possible that after we die but before the rapture saints in heaven might have some kind of intermediate physical body?" Then sort of along the same line, "Do all infants, children before the age of consent, go to heaven when they die or just the elect?" Then, "What do you think happens to children at the rapture? Do they stay children? Do believing women who are pregnant at that time arrive in heaven still pregnant?" So I'm going to lump those all together and pick and choose as you would. I think there were several.

Phil: It's actually a good collection. I'm glad you lumped them all together because they're all asking for information that Scripture doesn't give and so I can't give you a dogmatic answer. I mean, the question about intermediate bodies is an interesting one. I remember spending three days on that in theology class when I was in Bible college. There are, you know, theologians who have written, you know, long treatises on speculation whether are we disembodied spirits? Because Christ is sitting at the right hand of God the Father Almighty in a human body, his glorified human body so if we're going to be with Christ, are we there disembodied or in bodies and, you know, Elijah and Moses come back on the transfiguration and they had physical bodies, at least in appearance. So what will we be like? Bottom line after reading a lot of treatises on this, my conclusion is: Scripture doesn't say. I don't know. I just don't know and I'm as eager as anybody to find out but Scripture doesn't answer those questions for us.

So there you go. The only one in there that I would say, I would be inclined to give a pretty firm answer on is the question about infants who die. I did preach a whole kind of long sermon on that a few years ago here in Grace Life so there's probably a full message on it. But yeah, I believe all infants who die, you know, before they reach an age where their rebellion against God is so deliberate that they are accountable to him for that, I think God is gracious to them. Scripture, again, doesn't give us an explicit statement on that and I said in that message I think there's a good reason for that because if the Bible simply told us, "Look, anybody who dies, you know, before reaching a level of adulthood where they are, you know, their sin is deliberate or whatever," somebody somewhere would get the idea that we should, you know, as a sacrament, kill children before they reach that age just to guarantee that they'll go to heaven.

Mike: People have defended abortion that way.

Phil: Yeah. Yeah. And so, you know, Scripture deliberately, I think, leaves the question more or less unanswered but as you read through Scripture and know what the character of God is like, every time the subject is even hinted at, it gives us every reason to be confident that God is especially merciful towards young children.

Mike: And I think they asked about, you know, "How does this work with God's election?" And I think that it's important to say that children don't become elect by virtue of their untimely death, that God who decrees all things, who is sovereign over all things, sovereignly has decreed their early death and therefore, you know, probably not therefore but, you know, elected whomever he will, you know, to save, Ephesians 1:4, before the foundation of the world and among that number were all those infant children who were to die before or, you know, young children who were to die before a condition. I call it a condition of accountability, not an age because I think that condition is met differently in children of different ages with different capacities.

So I think it's important for us to understand that one does not become elect by virtue of their early death. That's what the people who say, "Well, go ahead and just kill them," mean because, "Well, maybe if they grow to adulthood, they have a chance then of dying and going to hell and that's so much worse than dying early." No, you know, God's decree is what it is. One does not become elect in time on the basis of any sort of condition. Election is unconditional and before the foundation of the world.

So if you're interested more in that, I wrote a blog post called "Election by Murder?" with a question mark, responding to somebody who was making the argument that we should abort babies because all children go to heaven. So if you're interested in that and then Jesse Johnson on the "The Cripplegate" also wrote a three part series on what happens to infants who die. I think it is named that, "What Happens to Infants Who Die?" He gives kind of an introduction of the subject, the Old Testament answers and the New Testament answers and he just kind of compiles a list of almost 30 verses where he's saying, "Is there any explicit comment? No, but the cumulative case is pretty strong."

About the other questions, you know, we can't be dogmatic about what Scripture doesn't reveal plainly. If you said, "Mike, come on, I want to just know what you're thinking." I think that when a believer dies or an unbeliever dies our soul is separated from our body. Paul talks about not wanting to be unclothed but wanting to be clothed with his tent from eternal in the heavens. That our soul is separated from our body. Our body goes into the ground, whatever it is, decomposes. We go to an intermediate state. What we think of as heaven or the Bible calls Hades or Sheol, an intermediate....I think that it's a spiritual place. How you get around Christ having a glorified body in that spiritual place, that's a good question. I don't know so that would be a potential argument that way. In that we're kept in that intermediate state, whether in heaven or in hell, in blessedness with Christ or under punishment in the mediatorial hell, until the time of, you know, Christ coming where the dead in Christ rise first, the Old Testament saints are resurrected, reunited with their bodies and yet in that intermediate state before, you know, they come down to heaven. So it does get confusing at how you have physical bodies in a spiritual place but that at the time of the kingdom, the kingdom is on earth and then after those thousand years we live in heaven forever with our glorified bodies. Resurrected...the unbelieving, you know, are actually reunited with their bodies. Their bodies are resurrected so that they can be fit for the eternal lake of fire where they will be tortured day and night forever and ever, Revelation 20. So there is a resurrection unto judgment and there's a resurrection unto life and those who are in part of the resurrection unto life will live on

the earth, on a renewed physical creation in physical bodies united soul and spirit. That I can be dogmatic about, that heaven as we think of it in eternity will be a physical life on a physical earth.

Phil: We talked about this at the last leadership meeting. Just beforehand, Mike and I were discussing this and he had some good arguments but I've always leaned the other direction. I mean, my perspective has always been that there is some kind of intermediate body or some sort of physical state that I would say is comparable to what you see in the Old Testament when you have a theophany or the appearances of Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration, where they were there; they were tangible; they were in bodies that appeared real; recognizable so they had bodies that looked just their earthly bodies and so on. I mean, my assumption is that whatever the existence is after we die, it's in a place where Christ exists physically and we will be with him. My expectation is we'll have some kind of intermediate body. It's not the glorified resurrection body because we don't get that until the end but, again, it's speculation either way. I don't know. I might be wrong. He has some very good arguments and so do I so one of us is going to be surprised.

Mike: Happily surprised.

Phil: Yeah, but I won't be disappointed either way. I'll just be glad finally to know the answer to that and dozens of other questions like it that Scripture doesn't directly address. By the way, I should say, because there is a collection of a lot of questions like that and a lot of times you go to a Q & A, you listen to the questions people get up and ask John in the church and it surprises me sometimes that people, even people who have been Christians for a long time, their minds tend to gravitate towards questions like that, that Scripture doesn't answer. John always jokes about the guy who asks him, you know, "You know the name that no man knows? What is that name?"

Mike: Written on Christ, yeah.

Phil: So I think one of the aspects of maturity and spiritual maturity is you get to the point where you don't let yourself be troubled by those questions that aren't answered because the things that are revealed are for us, the things God hasn't revealed belong to him. We're not supposed to spend our time meditating on things that we know don't have answers, speculating about things that Scripture doesn't address. We're supposed to focus on the things Scripture does say. I think it was Mark Twain who said, "Look, I'm not troubled by the stuff I don't understand in Scripture, what troubles me is the stuff I do understand." I know what he meant and that's what we ought to focus on, what's clear and what Scripture instructs us. Once we have mastered all of that, then we can worry about the speculative stuff.

Moderator: That's good. And right after you say, "Well, this isn't something that Scripture doesn't say," but I think this is a very practical one that somebody asked, "Why does the Bible not speak directly about abuses?" and they specifically said, you know, spousal abuse, child abuse, things like that. Or, "How is this topic addressed biblically?"

Phil: Slave abuse. Those sorts of things which did exist in abundance in the first century in the time of Christ and all of that. My answer would be: Scripture does address it. It doesn't address it as a discreet issue like our culture does today, you know, like spousal abuse is a huge problem. Well, how can you say Scripture doesn't address that? It's very clear in Scripture that, you know, we're to do unto others as we would have done to ourselves. That's a sin and there's no ambiguity about that in Scripture. It is a sin for a husband to abuse his wife. It is a sin for a wife to abuse her husband.

The problem you have today is people who magnify that issue because they see it as an issue that somehow ought to overturn the biblical order in marriage, you know, because there are, let's be honest, frankly, husbands and too many, far too many husbands who use the notion that, "Well, I'm supposed to be the head of my household." They use that in an abusive way rather than dealing with that principle the way Scripture does which says, "Husbands, love your wives the way Christ loved the church and sacrificed himself for her." The idea of headship in Scripture is all about responsibility and self-sacrifice and service, it's not about perks and privileges and all that. If you're the head of your house, what you ought to be concerned with is the weight of responsibility that falls on you and not the idea that everybody in your household ought to be serving you. If you're doing that, you're sinning and sinning in an egregious way and you will be accountable to God for that and all of that is very clear in Scripture. I think the only reason it tends to be murky in the minds of some Christians today is because the secular world has sort of picked up on that issue to try to argue for the reordering of gender roles and sexuality and things like that and that's just one of the big arguments that humanists throw in for an unbiblical worldview. But it's just wrong to think that Scripture is silent on that issue.

Mike: I think that might come from a spirit to say, "Well, why isn't abuse part of the exception clause for divorce?" I mean, I don't know but it sounds to me like that would be lurking somewhere behind the intent of that question and I could be wrong about that but, you know, "Why doesn't Scripture say abuse is grounds for divorce?" It's such a difficult question. I probably shouldn't have even brought that up at this stage.

Moderator: But you did, so now you have to answer it.

Mike: Yeah, you know, I mean, the short answer without the nuance that it deserves is that that situation makes me think of the Gospel: marriage is the parable of covenant keeping grace between Christ and his church. I don't know about you but Christ endures an enormous amount of abuse for me: my taking advantage of his grace; not submitting to him in the way that he deserves. And I think that the reason that we are so committed to honoring the covenant of marriage is because we're committed to the Gospel. We're committed to telling the truth about the relationship that Christ has with his church, that the husband does not forsake his cheating wife. I mean, Gomer and Hosea, for crying out loud, there's the picture. But the sinner against God comes and pays the ultimate price for his unfaithful bride whom he knows will continue to be unfaithful and yet he is longsuffering and his covenant keeping grace is steadfast and enduring. And when we bear up under unjust suffering whether from authorities in the political realm, 1 Peter 2,

or in a relationship that is designed to glorify God, when we bear up under that for the sake of it says conscience toward God, we tell a marvelous truth about the unbending iron grip of God's grace to us.

I don't mean by saying that to say, you know, "Ladies, if you're in an abusive situation, just sit there, take it and count that as your cross to bear." No, you know, talk to somebody. Get help, you know, it doesn't mean that you can't separate for a while to make sure that all parties are safe. But, you know, why aren't there any number of things in the Scriptures that are added to that exception clause? Because God desires to put on display in the world both in the church and in the world, the absolute, unshakable commitment that he has to doing his bride well, doing his bride good, and I think that's something to love and cherish.

Moderator: Well now, Mike, I'm going to ask you this and I'm going to give you a time limit so...

Mike: Yeah, what time is it?

Moderator: Ah, I have about eight minutes till so we're getting there but I know you wanted to respond to this question and I know I haven't given you a whole lot of time now but it says, "How would you respond to someone who says we are not under the new covenant yet, that the new covenant does not come until the millennial kingdom and that says Jeremiah 31:31-37 backs up his argument?"

Mike: Right.

Moderator: And you might want to give just a little bit of context for that.

Mike: Sure, so that question comes because part of the new covenant promise does not just include spiritual salvation, though it does that. You know, what are the promises and the provisions of the new covenant? The provision of an indwelling Spirit. Putting the law on the heart of the believer. Everybody in the covenant community will know God. You won't teach each man his neighbor saying, "Know the Lord," they'll all know me from least to the greatest of them. The forgiveness of sins, "I'll remember their iniquity no more." Rejection, "I'll take out their heart of stone and put in a heart of flesh." So there are all these provisions in the new covenant but right alongside those in Jeremiah 31 is, you know, again, "I'll forgive their iniquity and their sin I'll remember no more." That we experience today. "Thus says Yahweh, Who gives the sun for light by day And the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, Who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar; Yahweh of hosts is His name: 'If this fixed order departs From before Me,' declares Yahweh, 'Then the offspring of Israel also will cease From being a nation before Me forever.' Thus says Yahweh, 'If the heavens above can be measured And the foundations of the earth searched out below, Then I will also cast off all the offspring of Israel For all that they have done,' declares Yahweh. 'Behold, days are coming, when the city will be rebuilt for Yahweh from the Tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate. The measuring line will go out farther straight ahead to the hill Gareb; then it will turn to Goah. And the

whole valley of the dead bodies and of the ashes, and all the fields as far as the brook Kidron, to the corner of the Horse Gate toward the east, shall be holy to Yahweh; it will not be plucked up or overthrown anymore forever."

So people read that and they say, "Well, okay, that means the new covenant hasn't taken place yet because we don't see Israel in their land reconstituted as a nation with rest from its enemies such that it doesn't get plucked up forever. We don't see that yet. Part of what the new covenant blessing is is not only this spiritual salvation but there are material blessings for the covenant nation so we're not there yet." The problem with that is that Jesus, I mean, in Luke 22:20 in the Upper Room, he takes the bread and the cup and he eats the Passover meal and he says, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood." And that imagery means to evoke imagery from Exodus 24 and Moses on Sinai where Moses is taking the blood of the bulls and the animals that have put into the basin and he sprinkles it on the people and says, "This is the blood of the covenant," and they say, "All the Lord has spoken we will do." So the establishment of the old covenant by blood, there are certain overtones of that in, "This is the new covenant. This cup is the new covenant and is in my blood," and Hebrews talks about Christ's blood being the blood of the covenant. Hebrews 8, you know, talking about quoting that passage in Jeremiah 31 and speaking of it as if it is inaugurated now saying that, you know, the first covenant is obsolete on the basis of this bringing in of a new one, Hebrew 8:13.

So, you know, I would say to that person: you've got overwhelming statements, you know, explicitly overwhelming statements from Jesus and from the writer of Hebrews and Paul in 2 Corinthians 3, that we are ministers of a new covenant and that all of these, I mean, John 3, Jesus talking to Nicodemus talking about being born of water and the Spirit, that's a reference to Ezekiel 36 about the sprinkling with clean water and putting in a new heart. There are so many parallels to, you know, yes, this is what the new covenant is that was promised to Israel that I just think it's insurmountable.

So how do I get around the fact that we don't see Israel in their land? There is a construct that theologians talk about called initial partial fulfillment that the covenant promises, all of them, were multifaceted, that there were spiritual aspects there and material aspects. The Abrahamic covenant, right? Land, seed, blessing. We see the seed of Abraham in Christ coming and the seed of Abraham being all those who are in Christ, Galatians 3:29. We see the universal blessing in Galatians 3, right? "In you all the families of the earth will be blessed," well, we see that because Abraham is the father of faith, brings the blessing to all those throughout the nations who are justified by faith but we don't see that promise of land. The same thing with the Davidic covenant. We have the Davidic king anointed. Jesus has come. He is the one who has been anointed as the Davidic king but he's not yet reigning on the throne of David from Jerusalem.

So there is this initial partial aspect of fulfillment throughout all these covenants because why do we have that construct? Because the Old Testament did not foresee the coming of Christ across two comings. They call it the mystery that was revealed in past ages. It was not made known but is now revealed to the holy apostles and prophets, Ephesians 3:5. So when the Old Testament prophets prophesied of these endtimes, they saw it as if there

were two mountains. You know, from looking at a distance, you have the two mountains like this and they look like they're one mountain but there could be miles separating the mountains in between, it just depends on their vantage point and from the New Testament we learn that those mountains were indeed far apart so we should expect that some of those promises would be in the close mountain in the first coming and some of them would wait until the second coming.

Phil: Let me summarize that real quickly.

Mike: Yeah, please do.

Phil: If you look in a concordance for the expression "new covenant" it only appears one time in the Old Testament and that's in Jeremiah 31. It appears multiple times in the book of Hebrews and when Jesus inaugurates the new covenant and says, "This is my blood of the new covenant," in Luke 22, is it?

Mike: 22:20.

Phil: You see, he has the exact text.

Mike: I've had this discussion, you can tell.

Phil: Yeah. So it's clear that Jesus has inaugurated the new covenant. Paul says in 2 Corinthians that we are ministers of a new covenant. Hebrews treats the new covenant as if this is the one that's in operation right now. When you look back then at that one verse in the Old Testament that mentions the new covenant, you have to realize what that is describing is the consummation of the new covenant, the fulfillment of all of it, what Jesus declared was the inauguration of it. It's utter folly and makes mincemeat of Scripture to say, "We're not in the new covenant yet." That's pretty much what the Judaizers were teaching.

Moderator: Great. Thank you, guys. Let me just pray for us and then we'll dismiss.

*Gracious heavenly Father, we thank you again for this morning. Thank you for being able to come together on the Lord's day to worship you, to sing praises to your name. And, Lord, thank you so much for Phil and for Mike for giving them to us as our shepherds, as our teachers, Lord, and just the great job that they do. Thank you for the wisdom that you've bestowed upon them and their diligence to look into your word to find answers to all of life's problems. God, I pray that your hand of blessing would just continue to be upon them. Lord, just keep them far from sin and temptation. Lord, we see so many that have fallen and, God, we would just ask that you would just help them to continue to be pure and to strive after knowing you more and more and that we would reap the benefits of that. God, we thank you for all of these things and ask that you just bless the rest of our day. In your name we ask it. Amen.*

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