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The GraceLife Pulpit

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It's our privilege and pleasure, it's always great for us when we get these opportunities to have Phil and Mike just answer our questions. I know it's a special treat. People have been asking for a while when we were going to do it again and so we're going to try to do it, I think, a couple of times a year is what we have been planning on so we look forward to these times and give you an opportunity to ask things that are on your heart and maybe you're questioning or wondering about from the teachings that Mike and Phil or even just other things as well too.

So we have Ron and who do we have? Kevin out there with microphones this morning. Sue, you have our first question of the day.

Question: I've just been very curious about the replacement theology mentality and evangelical mindset. I know that it's part of the battle of God and Satan but how important is that situation for us and how that impacts us and I don't hear much talk of it here but I know that "Israel My Glory" magazine is very informative about a lot of it but I was just curious how it affects us here?

Mike Riccardi: Replacement theology which Sue mentioned for those who may not be familiar is the teaching that God had his people, Israel in the Old Testament, and that now in the New Testament he has his people, the church, and what they would say is that really the church is an organic outgrowth from the people of God, Israel, the remnant of Israel and so in a sense, the church has replaced Israel in God's program as God's special people, as the ones who are going to inherit the blessings and promises of the covenants. The reason that people think that is because there is a lot of language in the New Testament that is used originally of Israel that gets applied to the church like 1 Peter 2:9 as a text we've mentioned a couple of times, "You are a chosen race and royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession." So those are terms used of Israel and here is Peter applying them to the church and so people take that and they sort of say, "Oh well, you know, that's evidence that the church is the new Israel," and it's in such a way that the promises originally made to Israel for a land, for a nation of their own with peace on every side, for the fulfillment of the Abrahamic, Davidic king to rule on the throne of Israel, that's all happening now spiritually in the church. Jesus is reigning on the throne of David, so to speak. That's been transferred into heaven and in a spiritual sense he is reigning in the hearts of his people. The land promise is expanded to include the

whole earth and that will be eventually fulfilled in the new earth and it will be, you know, they'll go to texts like Ephesians 2 that talk about the unity between Jew and Gentile, that the dividing wall has been broken down and there is no longer Jew or Greek. The problem with that is that though the application of Israel terminology happens to the church, that does not argue decisively for a replacement or, well, that language can't also again one day apply to Israel itself. Yes, we enjoy spiritual benefits. We are the spiritual seed of Abraham but the particular aspect of the Abrahamic covenant that the church enjoys, Paul says in Galatians 3, is the universal blessing to the nations. That's who we are. We're the nations who were justified by faith and that was one aspect of the multifaceted promise to Abraham: land, seed, nation and a universal blessing. Well, the universal blessing has come about in the church but that's no reason to say that the land, seed and nation aspects won't also come about, especially when you have texts like Romans 11 that promise all Israel will be saved and texts like Zechariah 12 and 14 and 8 and Malachi that predict a future return. Micah 5. Isaiah 2. That predict a future return of Israel to their land, enjoying a place of prominence and leadership among the nations.

Those prophecies haven't been fulfilled yet and so that's sort of the issue and Sue is asking is it a prominent thing or what role should it play? Well, it shouldn't play any role in the sense, you know, of our church. We don't hold to replacement theology. We believe that Israel is Israel and the church is the church and so we would say that the promises that were given to Israel are meant to be fulfilled in that nation which will one day be regathered and restored at the end of time and that's when the millennial kingdom will happen and that's that.

Phil Johnson: Yeah, and if I understand your question, Sue, it's how dangerous is this? In the scope of various errors, how much of a concern is this? And the answer is: it depends. There are people who hold to replacement theology who generally are sound on everything that's important: the Gospel and all of that. It causes them to go off kilter in their eschatology and I wouldn't worry too much unless you see manifestations of other problems. For example, once you say these Old Testament promises about the land and the promises that were made to Israel, once you say that those are spiritual, they are being fulfilled spiritually, you open the door to all sorts of spiritualizing every text in Scripture. So it kind of undermines the hermeneutic principle that gives us the Gospel and if it makes your hermeneutic go askew, to that degree, it's dangerous.

There also are a couple of small cults in the US at the moment that hold to a kind of radical replacement theology where they are just overtly antisemitic and they use that replacement theology principle in order to justify their antisemitism. Of course, that's obviously dangerous but I think the dangerous aspect of it is the antisemitism and I would see replacement theology as just one of those hermeneutical errors that we need to work with people who are caught up in that and try to help them see a better hermeneutic.

Mike: But there are brothers in the vast overwhelming majority of cases, some of our great spiritual heroes subscribed to that and so we have our position and we differ with them but we certainly have fellowship.

Phil: We don't regard it as heresy.

Mike: Right. Next question?

Question: My name is Jemma and my question is, I hear it all the time that Muslims come to the Lord by having dreams that Jesus visited them and shared the Gospel. I was born in an Islamic country and I never thought that any Muslim would come to Christ so I don't know how to respond to it. How do you see it because the dreams, how do you respond when somebody asks you?

Phil: I think most of those stories are mythology. You hear these accounts always second and third hand about vast numbers of people in Islamic nations who are coming to Christ because they had a dream. 1. If they come to Christ, the Lord may providentially use some dream or something to get them to pursue Christ but if they have truly come to Christ, it had to be through the Gospel. The Scripture is very clear about this that the Gospel is the instrument God uses to bring people to salvation and how can they hear without a preacher Paul says in Romans 10. If the answer was as simple as, "Well, maybe they'll have a dream," Paul would have said that in the context of Romans 10 but he's making a very specific point there that we need to go with the Gospel because people won't come to salvation otherwise and I think all these stories about Islamic people coming to Christ, I've never met a person who actually claims, "Yes, I never heard the Gospel but it was revealed to me in a dream." I don't think people like that really exist and I think those stories circulate because somehow it salves the consciences of Christians in the West who think, "We don't need to send missionaries to the Arabic world because God is saving those people through their dreams." I think that's a dangerous delusion. Until there is some documentable proof that this has really happened, it's folly to give any kind of credence to the stories and, you know, I don't consider, in this case, the fact that a story was published in "Christianity Today," that, to me, is not convincing proof that it actually happened.

Mike: John MacArthur did an interview with Tim Challies. I was trying to find it on my phone as Phil was talking there. After "Strange Fire" and he answered that particular question Jemma, so if you were...he was asked, "Given that you say that prophecy doesn't happen, right, that God doesn't reveal himself through dreams and visions, what do you do with these Muslim converts?" He had a really helpful answer on challies.com but if you just Google "John MacArthur Strange Fire Challies Interview" or something like that, you would find that post. There might be two posts and it's asked in one of those.

But one of the points that I think is really helpful that he made there was to say that if that argument is made in order to support ongoing continuing revelation today, particularly you would give that for support for the gift of prophecy continuing, you have to realize that that's a significant departure from what the gift of prophecy would be in the New Testament. These are, as yet, unbelievers and unbelievers are not given spiritual gifts, you know, and so certainly whatever that is, whatever it is, it's not the gift of prophecy, we can be sure about that. But then when you ask, "What is it?" I think that Phil is right on that in a lot of cases it is fabricated. I think the charismatic movement is a very

powerful, suggestive force. I think a lot of people have been pressured into having to do things because they think this is what true spirituality and true Christianity is and so I ought to expect this kind of a thing and I had this dream and I give this sort of interpretation to it.

So yeah, what's verifiable, what do we base our lives on as Christians? I think that's really what the issue goes back to. As Christians, how do we know what we know? What is our authority? It is always Scripture. The Christians epistemology, the theory of knowledge, how do we know what we know is always God's revelation and his revelation is in this book.

Phil: Also, it seems to me that there are waves of tales like that that come, you know, every decade or so. When I was a new believer back in the 1970s, I remember there were all sorts of tales coming out of Indonesia about a revival there that was attended with supposedly people being raised from the dead and all sorts of spectacular miracles and these stories are being reported in places like "Christianity Today" and lots of Christians gave credence to it. In retrospect, I think most of those tales have been decisively debunked and whatever happened in Indonesia had no lasting effect and, in fact, just in the past decade or so, Islamic terrorists have slaughtered the few Christians that remained in Indonesia and it's a spiritual wasteland right now. There are some devoted believers there and precious believers who are living in the midst of awful persecution but the stories that were being told in the 70s would have led us in the West to believe that mass conversions were taking place in Indonesia and this whole nation was about to become, you know, the most evangelized country in the world and that didn't happen.

Mike: Yeah. I'm just reading John's answer now. It is on that thing. He makes another good point that: listen, the way that we know how the Gospel advances, we know how people get saved and it's by the preaching of the Gospel, Romans 10, "How will they believe if they don't hear? And how will they hear if no one preaches? And how will they preach if they're not sent?" So yeah, that's what we should be basing our lives on.

Speaker: Good. Let's go on this side.

Question: I had a question. I'm kind of at a standstill as far as reaching out to someone who hasn't necessarily read the Bible, hasn't been to church but has their own ideas about God maybe from the media, maybe from their parents. I don't really know exactly but this person is convinced they know God but they don't know the real God, the God of the Bible. My question is: how would you maybe approach someone to, you know, maybe get them to look at the word or to say, "Okay, you've been told this but this is wrong." And they are convinced that they, you know, as far, that's all they know. "Well, I understand God to be this way." How would I approach someone with that roadblock?

Mike: Are you thinking specifically people who would say they believe in Jesus or just God generically?

Question: I would say Christian. I would say Jesus, too. Not just God like some...they're talking about the God of the Bible, they just don't understand it correctly.

Phil: I think what you're describing there is if you took all the members of all the evangelical churches in America, the majority of people are like that. They think they love Christ but what they love is a figment of their own imagination. They've made up a replacement for the Christ of the Bible and so while they use all the terminology and speak about Christ, when it comes right down to what Christ taught and what the Bible says, they have very little loyalty to it and I was like that before I was a believer. I mean, I grew up in a church where, I've described it before, it was basically liberal theologically and yet I thought of myself as a Christian. I believed that I loved Christ but the Christ I had in mind was not the Christ of Scripture. I had a friend who was a believer who just constantly challenged my views of Scripture and my understanding of who Christ is and he just constantly did this over a five year period.

I would say, you have to be patient with people like that. It's not always easy to upset someone's notion. If he's made a god out of the figment of his imagination, for him to dethrone that god and replace it with the God of Scripture, it really will take an act of the Holy Spirit to convict him and God uses us as instruments to be a testimony to people like that. To challenge them to think and read the Scriptures and, you know, not believe these erroneous ideas. So I would say, just be persistent and be honest. Don't shy away from challenging, you know, a wrong notion when someone tells you, "Well, this is what I think Christ is like." That's an open door for witness and most people who have their own concept of God aren't going to easily overthrow it so don't expect that the first time you challenge someone he's going to be converted. Don't give up easily. Just be persistent.

Mike: Yeah, I mean, again, it goes back to how do we know what we know? How do we know that Jesus is what you think he is or versus what I think he is? If all we have to go upon is, you know, my opinion or what makes me feel nice so I believe it. It's entirely irrelevant. I don't care what your opinion is, you know, and you don't want to base your eternity on the fact that you have a certain inclination or feeling about how Jesus might be. What we have to do is we have to constantly be driven back to the only infallible authoritative source of revelation about who Jesus is and God has given that to us in the Scriptures and so as you're working through them and Phil was saying this, I'm trying to bold it, underline it here, is when your friend says something that's particularly untrue about Christ, you say, "Well, you said this. Now, the Bible says this. How do you reconcile these two? That doesn't seem to be what God says about himself, what Christ says about himself." I would just continue to drive that back to Scripture.

Question: My name is Smiley Alexander. I'm struggling with a little thing that I have and at the senior citizen club that we go to, they play pinochle and I love to play pinochle. As a matter of fact, I was in a pinochle club some years back. They collect a dollar just to be a part of it so I guess they could run it but they give the winner of the pinochle tournament all the dollars and so I kind of shied away from it. I said, "Don't you guys play for free at any time?" So they said, "No, that's the rules and that's it." So I talked to

my wife about it and she said, "Give them the dollar back if you win. Give them the dollar back." Then I thought maybe if I made an announcement before I started playing that I don't want the dollar, I just want to play. I'll put my dollar in but if I win I don't want the money. You can do whatever you want to with it. Give it to some charity or whatever. I shouldn't do that either because I know who they'd give it to.

Phil: Do they collect the dollar every hand or is it just once? Just once at the beginning and then...

Question: Yeah, just once. You give the dollar before and they put your name on the list and they tell you what table to sit at and then you start playing.

Phil: Yeah, okay, so this is a kind of complex answer that requires...actually, I did a series a few years ago on gambling. Look for it online. I don't think it's back there in the cds they regularly bring but if you look online, I did a long message on gambling that I think will answer part of your question. There is a difference in tournament style poker or pinochle or whatever and actually gambling on ever hand. If they were gambling on every hand I would say, "Yeah, that's gambling and no matter how much it is, I think that's hard to justify it from a biblical point of view." If it's just a dollar to enter the tournament and the winner gets the prize at the end, that's a bit different in my mind and I explain why in that long message. But then on top of that I would say, "If your conscience troubles you, don't do it because whatever is not of faith is sin."

Speaker: Anything from your pinochle background?

Phil: My family used to play pinochle on family vacations but we always did it for free.

Question: Hi, my name is Becky. Yesterday I listened to a sermon from a pastor, I think he's in Nashville, and their church is, they call themselves inclusive to the LGBT community so there are a lot of questions that came up after listening to that but one of the things he talked about was how sexual immorality is ambiguous and not super clear in Scripture and he went back to some Old Testament passages. It was really confusing so I'm particularly confused by the treatment of women in the law and some of the passages that talk about like when Israel conquered a nation, if they found a woman that they thought was beautiful, they could make her their wives where if a woman is raped by a man, then the man can pay the dad to take that woman as his wife. That all seems immoral so I'm just curious and there are other passages too, I'm sure that you are familiar with.

Mike: That's a good question. I'll let you answer that. No, I do want to preface it by saying let's just take a step back and analyze the form of that argument. The form of that argument is: there are things in Scripture that I find to be morally repugnant, therefore, they must not be valid and since there are those that we can agree on are morally repugnant, there is another command somewhere else like, you know, do not commit sexual immorality, the homosexuals will not inherit the kingdom of God and so on, that I find repugnant as well. Since we don't obey the command to take, you know, pillaged

wives as our own and since we don't obey the commands to not mix fabrics or the commands to not eat shellfish, well, then we shouldn't have a problem disobeying other commands too. That's simply not the way that a Christian reasons. A Christian does not say, "Well, we disobey this part of Scripture so why not this part of Scripture?" So right off the bat, that's a very unbiblical, un-Christian way of reasoning. Do you want to jump in on the actual.....?

Phil: Sure, I would say if there is anything that is not ambiguous in Scripture, it's the condemnations against sexual sin, fornication. Fornication is a word Scripture uses that covers a broad array of sexual immorality. There is a sense in which homosexuality is singled out in Scripture as the sign of divine judgment when a society goes to the point where they are affirming and even applauding homosexual behavior. Romans 1 says that's the proof that God has given them over to their lusts but the problem started long before our culture began to discuss whether homosexuality is acceptable or not with a widespread acceptance of all kinds of other forms of fornication. Scripture is not the least bit ambiguous about this.

Now, the question about Old Testament rules regarding the treatment of women in conquered nations and all that is a complex one. It's often exaggerated and caricatured by people who want to do what this guy was doing and that is throw a cloud of ambiguity over the clear commandments of Scripture. Without getting into all the details of a tribal culture where there were wars and just the worst kinds of idolatry where people were, you know, throwing their kids in the fire and all of that, the Lord did judge those nations harshly in ways that we read today and it makes us gasp and think, "Wow. I mean if God is a God of compassion, why would he judge the Canaanites so harshly?" and yet when you realize what Canaanite culture was like, you understand that the harshness here still falls short of what those sins deserve.

The rules about what happens in a culture when it's been decimated and what you've got left are women who have no source of income, no way to live, you have to understand it in that light. What Scripture is...it's not authorizing rape. In fact, the texts that people often point to and say, "Well, if you raped a woman, you could just pay her father a fine," that was about premarital sex basically. That was about a boy who seduced a young girl before she was married and all that. We have the same problem in our culture and that wasn't about violent rape. The Old Testament treatment of women is not at all what gay activists today are caricaturizing it as.

Without actually going to those specific texts, it's hard to answer those questions definitively but one of these days we'll do that because that really is a good question and that sort of anti-biblical propaganda is becoming more and more common today and you do need to know how to answer it.

Mike: Yeah, and it's just, again, biblically it's just a farce. That argument is just a farce. There are distinctions. Israel was a civil society. It was a nation with civil boundaries and civil laws that, you know, constructed the nation. The church is not a civil institution. The church is a spiritual institution. There are no borders. There are no boundaries. There is

no civil law. There is a moral law. There is a law that governs our hearts and so to take what are instructions to a nation in that period and say, "Well, since those instructions somehow don't apply today, we can pick whatever we want in the Bible and say that it doesn't apply today because culture has changed," ignores the whole flow of redemptive history. This is not a cultural matter, it's a covenantal matter. The law, the covenant law for Israel that was given to Moses is what it was and now we are under the new covenant and so we have a new covenant law and the things, the civil aspects of that old covenant law are not carried forward because we're not a civil nation.

So to say that, well, because this civil nation could do these terrible things, I find this other stuff in the New Testament terrible, you don't have an option. The New Testament is very clear. Even if you wanted to do the radical thing and just say, "Alright, let's just ignore the Old Testament for a second," which I'm not advising you do, but let's just say that for the sake of argument. You have clear as day prescriptions against homosexuality and porneia, the word for sexual immorality, is not at all as ambiguous as this guy would make, understand. You know how unambiguous it is, you go off to somebody and you talk about sexual immorality, people know what you're talking about. They get it and so that's that.

The other thing is, going back to okay, now the question, really the question is, you know, how is it that we provide a defense for what seemed to be unconscionable things in the Old Testament? Like Phil was saying, you need to have...let's look at it case-by-case. Let's respond to the issues as they come. But I think an overarching governing principle that we all need to operate from is that, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly? And let God be found true and every man found a liar." Whatever it is, mankind cannot exalt itself and its reasoning to stand in judgment of the morality of the God of the universe. It simply can't happen. Once you have set yourself in that position of judge, you have already decided the case. You have put God on trial and now you're lord and he is your subject. You will grant him the gift of your faith and your trust and your dependence and adoration if he meets a standard that you have set in your mind. That is, again, it's an unbiblical starting place. That's not how Christians reason. We are slaves of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are the creature, God is the Creator and so we can trust that whatever it is that God has decreed happen comes from the God who is perfectly holy, just, compassionate and merciful and so what he does, he does rightly.

Phil: Let me recommend a resource to you as well. James White has a ton of material online, Alpha & Omega Ministries. Do a Google search for Alpha & Omega Ministries, James White. He's a debater. He does public debates. He has debated several people who've made these sorts of arguments against biblical morality and you'll find those debates are very helpful. Also, his podcasts, his daily podcasts. He has critiqued some of the books that have come out recently making these arguments, you know, against biblical morality.

Question: My name is Phyllis McFadden and I would like to know more about is there a difference between reformation and Calvinism?

Mike: You mean like reformed theology?

Speaker: Let her ask the question.

Question: Reformation and Calvinism and then you have neo-Calvinism and it's all kind of confusing. One day I was at a conference and John MacArthur would say, "I'm a Calvinist," and this lady said, "Oh, come on, John. Get off of that stuff." And I'm thinking, "Why is she here?"

Mike: Amen.

Speaker: We've never heard Phil say, "I'm a Calvinist," have we?

Question: I'm a Christian. I'm a Christian but....

Speaker: So I think reformed theology is that what you're thinking? Like what's the difference between reformed theology, Calvinism.

Phil: Yeah, it's true, there are different varieties of people who call themselves Calvinists. You mentioned neo-Calvinism. That was, I hope, a short-lived fad that was more or less commandeered by Mark Driscoll and people like him who thought they could declare themselves Calvinists and make it cool by being as outrageous as possible. That has nothing to do with historic Calvinism. Historic Calvinism is simply an affirmation of the sovereignty of God and there are even among historic Calvinists different flavors. There is high Calvinism, low Calvinism. You don't need to worry about sorting out all those distinctions. I think if you just make your aim to stay close to Scripture and affirm what Scripture teaches. Stay away from hyper-Calvinism which is a view that says because God is sovereign, there is no such thing as human responsibility, you know.

Mike: We don't need to evangelize.

Phil: Yeah, you don't need to evangelize. You're not really responsible for your sins because, after all, God is sovereign and if he wanted to stop you from sinning, he could. That sort of rationalistic approach to the sovereignty of God is very dangerous. So there are flavors of Calvinism that are dangerous and when someone says he's a Calvinist, you do need to listen very carefully to find out what he means by that and the best barometer is how biblical is he. How much does he come to his conclusions by sheer rationalistic processes or how much does he actually go to Scripture and affirm what he's teaching. If he goes to Scripture, then you can have a higher level of confidence. That's what Scripture encourages us to do like the Bereans. Go to the Scriptures and see whether these things are true.

Mike: And, you know, Calvinism for some people can be a stumblingblock. The word itself can be a stumblingblock because they have ideas of what it is and what it means and therefore when you say you're a Calvinist, they think you mean something else by that and then it trips over them or they trip over it. But it can also be a very helpful label

if you understand it rightly. You know, all labels have their shortcomings but when it stands for something that people know about, when it communicates a truth that has content, it can be an easy way to just sort of identify where you are theologically. If you believe that man is entirely depraved apart from God, that he can do nothing at all to commend himself to God, every part of him is affected by the fall, his mind, everything, that he has nothing redeemable in himself and on his own would only ever perish, that's total depravity. If you believe that God chose before the foundation of the world those whom he would save as it says in Ephesians 1:4, that's unconditional election. Irrespective of anything that we've done in ourselves, God chose ahead of time, that's unconditional election. If you believe that Christ has paid for the sins of those for whom God has chosen, that he has particularly laid down his life for a particular people and accomplished redemption at the cross and not just a potential, not just an offer but an actual redemption that he has secured infallibly, you believe in what's called particular redemption or limited atonement. If you believe that God's grace is not just a general enabling grace that brings man to a savable position but rather a grace that effectually draws one out of death into life, you believe in irresistible grace. Then if you believe that those who are in Christ can never be lost because of the strength of the Father and the Son, "No one can snatch them out of my hand," then you believe in the perseverance of the saints. So that's what I would say I am when I say I'm a Calvinist.

Phil: Yeah, I would also point out that all of those truths were known and affirmed long before Calvin. It's a shame we nickname those views Calvinism because it leaves the impression, I think, that we follow a man and I have Calvinist friends who will tell you, "I'm no Calvinist at all because I'm a Baptist."

Mike: Right.

Phil: So, you know, I would defer to that. I don't agree with Calvin on everything and wouldn't follow a man but I think on the question of God's role versus the sinner's role in salvation and I've said this before, everybody who believes the Gospel is a Calvinist. You have to be because otherwise you'd be taking credit for your own salvation.

Speaker: Phil maybe, I mean, when people buck that, what typically is it that they don't like about Calvinism? Is there something? It's like there's always one or two things that they really have a problem with.

Phil: Yeah, it could be a couple of factors. You know, with hardened unbelievers, they don't like to give up the pretense of their autonomy. "I don't want to admit that God is sovereign over me. It's my decision and my will and my choice." That desire to take credit is actually the very antithesis of faith so that's a dangerous idea. There are also people, I think, who don't fully understand the doctrine who think that somehow it makes God responsible for sin.

Mike: Or it's unfair.

Phil: Or that it's not fair. We in American think everybody deserves equal treatment for everything, you know, and that isn't how the economy of God works. He is merciful on whom he chooses to have mercy and he doesn't owe anyone mercy. So if he's not merciful to Pharaoh, he's not to be blamed for that. Pharaoh gets what he deserves. Those of us who find mercy in the eyes of the Lord should just be grateful that he is gracious to us and recognize that we didn't do anything better than Pharaoh to deserve that mercy. It's merely the grace of God that redeemed us.

Mike: And if you would call God to account for that, I think we're back to that same issue before that you are now exalting yourself to a place to judge God and you're just not in that position. Paul says that very thing in Romans 9 where the objector says, "You will say to me then, how can he still find fault for who resists his will? How can God hold accountable those who are unable to meet the demands that he is placing on them?" And the answer is, "Who are you, O man, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to the thing that formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" Romans 9:19-20.

Question: Hi, so there is a woman who came up and spoke about Muslims having a dream before they started studying the Gospel or not, I was a Muslim and I had one of those dreams and ever since I had that dream, I haven't been able to put the Bible down and, you know, the rest of my family kind of just scoffs at my studying of the Bible or what not, my Christian beliefs. But I just wanted to know what you thought about that? I know I can't verify it for everyone else but it's like kind of the anchor that, you know, reinforces my faith in Jesus Christ as God.

Phil: I'm glad you asked that because I was going to say this before but then I didn't want to get too off track for the other question but, yeah, I have met people who've said, "God arrested my attention and my life by this dream I had that either scared me or woke me up from my spiritual lethargy or whatever." I do believe that happens and God uses that. What you have to resist is the notion that that was some kind of prophetic dream. What that is is divine providence. God providentially used your dream to spark in you an interest in Scripture. You said since you had the dream, you just couldn't put the Bible down, that's the providence of God, the gracious providence of God. Did God do that? Yeah. Was it a prophetic dream? No, because if it's prophetic, it would contain an infallible message and all that. All it did was move you to look into the truth and the truth comes from Scripture, not your dream.

I've been corresponding over the last year with a woman who keeps emailing me because she wants to convince me that she had this prophetic dream that she actually saw Jesus in her dream and I've tried to tell her the same thing, that the dangerous aspect of that is if you regard your dream as prophetic, the dream is going to take on more significance in your mind than the Scriptures. Just be thankful that God providentially used that dream to drive you to the word where you do find infallible, inerrant truth. Not in your dream but in the word of God.

The Lord uses all kinds of things like that. In my case, the thing that drove me to the Scriptures where I discovered Christ was a conversation, an argument I'd had earlier in

the day with a guy who I was driving home from school with. There was nothing prophetic about that argument. It's just that the Lord used that to motivate me to open the Scriptures and it was in the Scriptures where I met Christ.

Mike: That's so huge. I would just echo everything and underscore everything. Get the tape and listen to that three times. That is exactly right. The foundation of your faith can't be the dream or the conversation with the friend or for me in my case, you know, an apprehension of the beauty of creation, you know, which is what sort of led me to realize that I wasn't living in a way that I should be and I had been given all these good gifts. These are things that bring us to the foundation which is Christ, which is the Scriptures, because if you, I mean, the place where this can go really bad is that if you surrender epistemological foundation or I should just say, "How do I know what I know?" my knowledge, my faith, is based on this foundation, if you surrender that to anything but the Scripture and Christ himself as revealed in Scripture, then you leave open the possibility that you'll have another dream later on that will tell you that you should do this or that, that Christ isn't that way.

Phil: It's a huge problem today with people putting far too much credence in their dreams and in the charismatic movement, it's just become an epidemic issue because with Wayne Grudem's view on prophecy, he says prophecy is anything God brings to mind or something God brings to mind. That means pretty much anything that occurs in your head and if your dreams are like mine, they're usually irrational, but they seem to make sense at the time, don't they? You know, when you're dreaming it makes perfect sense. When you wake up and think about it, you go, "What was that?" And if you think, "Well, that was God putting a thought in my mind," then you're going to fall into trouble.

Somebody was asking me before class about Sarah Young and this book "Jesus Calling." This falls into this same category. Here's a woman who has made her own imagination the voice of Christ, not just for her but she found a publisher willing to put it in a book and millions of women are reading. Not just women, people are reading this stuff and thinking this is actually Jesus talking when it's really nothing more than the diseased thinking of this woman's demented brain who thinks Christ is in her head somehow. It's dangerous.

Mike: Yeah. Yeah. So again, I think you need to hear that nobody can get inside your head and heart and say you had this experience or you didn't but what that experience was comes under the sovereign providence of God just like my experience and Phil's experience and everybody else's conversion experience that the key point is: what is the basis for our salvation? It's Scripture and Scripture alone. If it's anything else, that is distinctively un-Christian.

Question: Yesterday I was having a conversation with some people about the movie "God's Not Dead," and I first wanted to ask you if you had seen the movie.

Mike: Nope.

Question: Okay, well, in the movie the Christian student tries to explain the reason behind human suffering, in other words, the reason why there was a holocaust and genocide and the reason why atheists will look at that and say there ultimately must not be a God. The Christian student in the film says the reason why this happens is because of human free will. I'm sure the directors and everyone who wrote this script said that this must be a satisfactory answer to all the skeptics who say there is no God in the face of this kind of human suffering, free will. I wanted to ask you how would you answer?

Phil: Yeah, I think that's a bad defense of, I mean, that's a very common, you know, what we call theodicy. Theodicy is a fancy term for an attempt to explain all the suffering in the world in a way that lets God off the hook and Scripture doesn't do that. Scripture doesn't try to let God off the hook. Scripture simply says, "Look, these are the fruits of sin." It's not about human free will, it's about sin and its consequences.

Mike: A will enslaved to sin. Go ahead, I'm sorry.

Phil: No, you're right. You're right.

Mike: I didn't mean to cut you off. I just wanted to...

Phil: You didn't. I was just going to say...I mean, that truth is made clear all the way back in Genesis 3 when God pronounces a curse because Adam sinned. If you think about the nature of Adam's sin, it seems like a small matter and what Scripture is trying to say is no sin is a small matter. Not because the act itself doesn't seem trivial but because it's a sin against God. It's like if you insult me or threaten me, shame on you. But if you insult or threaten the President of the United States, the Secret Service is going to come down pretty hard on you. Not because you committed a different or worse kind of act but because of the dignity of the office that you committed that sin against and when you see that on the scale of God who is eternal and the Creator of all things, sin is no trivial matter and the consequences of sin teach us that. That's what suffering is about.

Mike: I would say that the problem of evil is so much more of a problem for the atheist than the Christian. You can't even understand what evil is. You can't make sense of the concept of evil. If God does not exist, if there is not an absolute personal law-giver upon which the law is based, then absolute law, moral law, then you do not have any concept for evil other than, "These are the things that I just think are bad. I just don't like these things. These are unpleasant. I just sort of disagree that these are good for humanity." And all you've got is your opinion if you don't have an absolute standard of morality and you don't have an absolute moral standard without an absolute moral law-giver. You can't even say that what Hitler did was evil, you can just say that it was really a shame that all those people died. But you can't consistently account for why such a thing was evil. Of course, I agree that it was evil but I have a way to account for that. God is not a murderer. God is a life-giver. Taking a life of someone who is created in his image is wrong. But as an atheist, how do you account for that? "Well, it harms people." Why is harming people bad? Why? You can't give me...bad...you don't have a vocabulary word for bad or good

because you don't have a vocabulary concept understanding of what is absolutely good and absolutely evil.

And the problem of evil in a real sense, that's for the atheist. For the Christian, the problem of evil is the problem of sin. It's not free will like, "Oh well, God decided he wanted to make humanity free and because they are free, they went ahead and did whatever they wanted and so they screwed it up." Well, what kind of God would that be that he can't overrule human freedom? "I guess my hands are tied. They did what they did and whoops, you know, six million Jews, goodbye." I understand that argument but that's not going to stand up under scrutiny. God, again, he does what he does. He has created the world. He has ordained all things that come to pass and human beings do sin. He has revealed his will and we've rejected it and so we should expect that in a world that is dominated by the brokenness of sin, there should be brokenness and problems but God has solved that problem in the cross, in the person of Christ, because he took the evil, the sins of those who would repent and believe and exercised the punishment of that sin in his innocent, righteous Son so that now we can be freed from the evil which enslaves our hearts and breaks the world and look forward to a day when Christ will come back and put it all to rights on this earth and then evil will be solved in its consummation. What explanation have you ever heard like that from an atheist about how to solve evil? Nothing.

Phil: That was a great answer.

Speaker: And I did see the movie and they didn't quite answer it as well as that. Not even close. Hey, I know we have one more question and we just have a couple of minutes but I feel like I did get a couple of things emailed to me. I just wanted to ask you one of them, otherwise I feel like we asked you to email questions and I didn't even take them. So let me just quickly give you this question. This person that emailed me said, "We've been studying how Paul related to troubled Corinthian believers. I find myself feeling renewed concern for my brother. I believe he's saved. He attends church each week and reads his Bible regularly but he has no involvement in any ministry, no fellowship with other believers. He is detached and generally uninvolved in the life of our family and provides no spiritual leadership in his home for my sister-in-law and nephews. He doesn't talk about spiritual things. His prayers are repetitive, mindless, mechanical. He seems remote from God, church and family. He has been lovingly encouraged and confronted on these issues over the years by myself and others in the family. He has certainly heard it in sermons over and over." She goes on a little bit and finally says, "Our relationship is a little strained because I find it hard to respect him as a man. How should I relate to him in a way that is faithful to Christ and honors the Gospel? Can believers go on sinning like this for years and not change? I'm confused or am I guilty of unforgiveness?" I think just practically, I mean, I even know from some counseling things, husbands who claim to be believers don't really lead. The wife is frustrated. What do I do? How would you guys answer that?

Mike: I mean, it would seem to be, you know, it's a case-by-case thing. I really would want to....

Phil: You have to know more details. I would say just from that explanation, her concerns are justified. I think she needs to be careful not to deal with it in a way that would shun him or be less than loving towards him. There are, you know, between, among Christians, there are, you know, different levels of faithfulness, maturity, commitment and all of that and you've got even in Scripture everything from Lot to Daniel and not everybody is a Daniel and yet those who live like Lot need to be consistently and persistently challenged on their, you know, lack of zeal and commitment. There is a good reason. I mean, you look at Lot, for example, and think if the New Testament didn't say he was a righteous man, I would conclude he's not a believer. The same thing here. I think she's right to be concerned about the state of his soul but, you know, that's as far as she can go. She can't, you know, there is no grounds here to excommunicate the guy or declare him an unbeliever at the moment.

Mike: And in terms of orientation of how I would interact, I think this is actually really an important and helpful little interpersonal thing. You know, you can almost detect a little bit of frustration in that and, you know, it's understandable because you see the standard set in Scripture and you say, "I don't want my Lord's name to be defamed by someone who is taking his name to himself and yet not walking in a manner that is worthy of that." So I understand there's a little bit of a righteous anger that comes up but, listen, both Jesus and the Pharisees corrected people for their shortcomings. They both rebuked people. The Pharisees did it because the standard wasn't being met. These were the Chasidim. These were the people for whom, you know, "We have to keep the law. This is the standard that God has given us and, you know, listen, don't be healing people on the Sabbath. That's the Sabbath. You don't do any work," and that sort of kind of messed with their circuits a little bit. For them, a standard had to be kept and therefore they were harsh and impenetrable and cold in the way that they gave correction.

But Christ corrected people as well and for him, he always seemed to do it with an eye of compassion that said, "Disobedience for this person robs them of blessing, robs them of knowing me, robs them of what they were created to do and disobedience only plunges them into further sorrow." I think that if we can correct people from a disposition of, "I really desire your benefit. I really desire God's best for your life and you're living in a way that is not going to bring that to you and I would really hate to see you waste more time not having the fullness of God's blessing." I think you communicate in a way that is so much more winsome and overtly attractive to the person you're trying to win when it's, "I really care for you and so therefore I have this correction," versus, "You're not meeting a standard that I think needs to be met."

Speaker: So often it's our standard that kind of ticks us off that's not being met instead of...yeah, that's very good.

Phil: Remember what Jesus said about getting the log out of your own eye. None of us, none of us are living such perfect lives that some of those same criticisms couldn't be made of us.

Speaker: Thank you, guys. I know we're out of time, in fact, a couple of minutes over but let me pray for us and then we'll be dismissed.

Gracious heavenly Father, we thank you so much again for this day. Lord, thank you for your word. Thank you that it gives us instruction. Thank you that it gives us everything we need for life and godliness. And thank you for Phil and Mike and their many years of study and dedication to your word and even the wisdom that comes out in these Q&A's. Lord, help it to be even a motivation for us to dive more into the word that we wouldn't just rely on Mike and Phil but, Lord, that we would desire to be curious and to know the answers ourselves. Help us to be like the Bereans and even take these things and find them out for ourselves. But Lord, thank you so much for providing us with the guidance that we are given through your word. Lord, we just ask that you would bless the rest of our day, even as we go now to another service. Help us not just to be looking to gain head knowledge but, Lord, to really listen today intently to your word and to be ready to obey. God, we just ask you and thank you for all these things. In your precious name. Amen.

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