

**Q & A**  
**Selected**  
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Tonight, is an opportunity for us to do something we do a couple times a year. I think it was last March was the last time I did it. And that is just to open up the mics for questions that you might have. Now, here's how it works. Basically, you can get up and stand at the mic as soon as you want to, starting now, in fact. Don't be bashful about it. If you have questions. If you don't ask questions, I can talk for a long time. But I don't want to do that. I really want to answer your questions. And there is no question too simple, and there's no question, well there are questions that are too hard. But I'll tell you if it's too hard, all right, but I would love for you to have whatever is on your mind and heart answered. It will vary, I'm sure, from theological questions to maybe contemporary Christian events to Scriptural issues.

But whatever it is, feel free to get up and, you don't have to ... I know Texans are real polite, and there's this tendency, I learned this when I came to Texas. I was standing in the grocery store line, and I saw this guy standing like fifteen feet back, and so I just thought he was just waiting for something else, and I just got in line, and then I realized he was actually waiting in line. But he was allowing fifteen feet between him and the person in front of him. So, there's this tendency to be a little overly polite. You don't have to that, it's okay to stand at the mic and wait for your question and your time to come. Okay, let's begin. You have to first tell us who you are and then your question, okay.

[Rich] Okay, my name is Rich Dewey, and this is an issue that I have struggled with personally, and I think I kind have a leaning in the right direction, but what I've struggled with is finding good scriptures that really illuminate it. So let me read this to you. Recently a new ecumenical statement was issued termed the Manhattan Declaration in which evangelicals, Catholics and Eastern Orthodox people joined together to affirm certain social principles. At least one evangelical leader has refused to sign it, so as to avoid authenticating as believers those who clearly espouse a false gospel. So, my question is, what are the relevant biblical principles or passages that instruct us regarding cooperation with others to pursue social and spiritual agendas?

[Tom] It's a great question. I don't know if you are familiar with it or not, but this is a question that is coming up a lot. If you read, out on the internet, there are blogs and other things. In fact, I got a call about that this afternoon. The Manhattan Declaration is essentially a group of people who have professed Christ from various backgrounds, from Evangelical Protestantism, to Eastern Orthodoxy, to Roman Catholicism who have banded together to take a unified front on various political issues. From the gay marriage issue, to I think abortion may be included. I don't remember all the issues that are addressed, but there are various issues. There are a series of cultural issues and frankly sin issues that are addressed.

Now, you have to start, Rich, I think, and I know you are here, but you have to start by saying, it's not that we don't affirm those things they're affirming. For example, we all would agree that to take the life of an unborn child is the moral equivalent, it is murder, and it certainly can't be categorized as anything less than that. So, we would absolutely agree with them on that. The same thing, with the fact that marriage was intended, Jesus Himself said in Matthew 19 that marriage was intended to be between a man and a woman, one man, one woman for life. And so, we affirm those realities. So, it's not that we don't affirm those things, we do, and it can be tempting when everyone's saying, well if you agree with this, why can't you sign to say well why don't you embrace that? Why don't you agree? And there are Evangelical leaders whom we respect who have signed that, and you'll find their names attached to it. There are others we respect who have refused to do so such as Rich mentioned for the reasons I would agree.

You know, I think the scripture is filled with specific illustrations why that is inappropriate. I would even go back, and I will get more specific, but I would even go back to the Old Testament. I think when you have Israel, the nation Israel, Judah or the north, either the southern or the northern kingdom, When you have them making alliances in order to promote the good and health of God's people, okay, there's nothing wrong with the desire of the kings of Israel to protect and to promote the security of God's people, but to accomplish that, you remember, they went and made alliances with the various nations around them.

And what does God say about that? God chastises His people through the prophets. And He says, you know, I'm going to use those people. Well, they are going to turn on you, and they're going to attack you. All you need, God says, is Me. And for you to go make those alliances, to go to Egypt for their horses, you know, that's kind of a common theme you read about in the Old

Testament. When you go to Egypt, or you go somewhere else for their military might to support you, you are essentially saying, I am not enough, God says. And God is more than capable of taking care of Himself. Okay, He doesn't need our help, nor does He need the help of pagans to promote the people of God.

So, I would even go back and say, you can find that theme woven throughout the Old Testament. But I think you get much more specific when you come to the New Testament. And let me take you to a text, there is so many, but let me take you to one that for me is the apex of the argument. Turn to Galatians 1. If you read that document, the Manhattan Declaration, you will find that there is language throughout it, now remember, these are Evangelical Protestants. These are people that we would absolutely agree with, and in at least one case a man who has spoken in this pulpit, and whose ministry we would still support and embrace. You have Eastern Orthodox priests, basically the offshoot of the Roman Catholic Church, and then you have Roman Catholicism itself represented. You have all of that represented in this sort of Ecumenical gathering to support and advance these social and cultural issues.

In the document then, this sort of vast assortment of people from various backgrounds use language like this. They say, as Christians we, or as those who are brothers in Christ, we and so forth. They use that sort of inclusive language that essentially implies that everybody signing that document is, in fact, a genuine follower of Jesus Christ. Now, there's a problem because what we believe about the doctrine of salvation; what we believe the Bible teaches about how a man is made just before God; what Roman Catholicism believes about how a man is made right before God; and what Eastern Orthodoxy believes as far as how a man is made right before God, they're all different. They can't all be right.

Galatians 1, I think, makes this point very clearly. Paul is dealing here with the Judaizers. Now, you have to understand a little background about the Judaizers. The Judaizers were Jewish people who had embraced Christ at some level. They had committed themselves to Christ in the sense that they believed in the Messiah. They believed they were saved by grace. They believed they were saved by faith. All of those things they would have affirmed.

But they would never say by grace alone, by faith alone because the Judaizers believed that you needed to add to those things an obedience to the law of Moses. That if you were going to be received by Christ, not only did you come in faith because of the sacrifice of Christ, but you

needed to add to that circumcision and some of the ceremonial laws and other aspects of the Old Testament economy. And that was necessary for salvation.

So, in many ways, understand this, the Judaizers were a whole lot like the first century Christians, except, and it is the except that is huge. And so, Paul addresses that, and listen to what he says in Galatians 1:[6-9].

I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel— which is *really* not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. [verse 8] But even if we or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! [is what the *New American Standard* says, damned is the idea, let him be anathema, let him immediately go straight into eternal hell.] As we have said before [verse 9] so I say again [In other words he is reiterating what he has said both when he was with them and now in his letter as he has said before] so I say again now, if any man is preaching a gospel contrary to what you received, [the received gospel, he is to be anathema], he is to be accursed! [he is to be damned.]

Now, notice what Paul says here. He says, listen, if we, that is, if tonight, the apostle Paul would have walked in that back door, and he would have come up here to this stage, and verifiably we could prove that it was, in fact, the resurrection of and in person, the apostle Paul, or he says, an angel from heaven. If an angel came and appeared in this room tonight, and it was Gabriel or Michael or one of the other angels, and it was verifiable that it was, in fact, a true real angel from heaven, Paul says, if it's me, or if it's an angel from heaven, and they preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, the received gospel, the one you have already received, the one that we have received here in the pages of God's Word, let him be damned.

Now, folks, you know, I know the new math is interesting, but if there are two conflicting ideas, they can't both be right. You cannot have it both ways. The laws of logic don't permit it. If one person believes A, and another person believes not A, they cannot both be right in the same time, in the same relationship. That's the basic law of noncontradiction. It just can't be true. And so, if we believe the gospel is this, and Roman Catholicism believes the gospel is not that, which is, in

fact, what they do affirm, then somebody's wrong. And one of us is preaching the true gospel, and the other is preaching what, a false gospel, another gospel.

And how are we to respond to someone, a person? Notice Paul's responding to the person here. How are we to respond to the person who embraces that false gospel? Let them be damned. Now, he's not talking here about individuals who have embraced a system. They've been brought up in a system. They're victims of the system. They have been abused by the system as many, for example, in the Roman Catholic Church.

I just, as you know, was over in Italy, and it was such a horrible thing to see there the church of St. John Lateran, as I think I mentioned to you several weeks ago, where Martin Luther climbed up on his knees, and half-way up realized the full import of the just shall live by faith, and he stood up on his feet and walked down.

You can still go to those steps today, and you can watch a steady stream of people, where there is no room on the steps at all, climb those marble steps on their knees in an effort to obtain absolution, forgiveness of sins. That's an enslaving system. We're not talking about those people who are enslaved in it.

We're talking about those who enslave them. Those who teach this damning doctrine, who lead them and do so with, in many cases, greed, and hypocrisy in fact in all cases, greed and hypocrisy and other sins. What did Jesus have to say about the Pharisees who led that enslaving first century Judaistic system? Read John McArthur's new book, *The Jesus You Can't Ignore*. And you'll get a pretty good feel for how Jesus confronted the Pharisees in the first century. And so, I would say, coming all the way back to it Rich, I would say, there are a lot of places you can go where it deals with, where the apostle is dealing with those whose doctrine is aberrant.

Never, ever, will you find a New Testament example where he marries up with someone who embraces that aberrant gospel to accomplish some social good. And in fact, to me this text in many ways is the strongest. And if we kept reading it, and I won't take the time to take you all the way through it so we can get to some other questions. But if you keep going, obviously he gets to the interaction between him and Peter over in chapter 2. And he talks about even an apostle, he confronted him publicly to his face when he in any way compromised the gospel. And so, to marry up with those who are antithetical to the gospel is nothing the Scriptures embrace, in fact, it's exactly the opposite.

And I would say this. Understand, that a person who has come to another gospel, and certainly with Roman Catholicism that would be true, that person is not, cannot be a follower of Jesus Christ until they recant and turn from that false theology that they have embraced, and embrace the gospel by faith alone, by grace alone, in Christ alone. And so, it doesn't matter how spiritual they look, it doesn't matter, you know, how much time they spend praying, all of those things.

I had the opportunity many years ago to travel to Calcutta, India. and I met Mother Teresa while she was still living. And, you know, so many people treat her as this wonderful saint. And certainly, at a human level, she did many wonderful things in terms of caring for people who are needy. I visited her home for the dying destitute, but Mother Teresa did not embrace the true saving gospel of the New Testament. It's clear from her writings. And so, therefore, no matter how loving and gracious on a human level a person she may have been, she did not know Jesus Christ, and unless at some point in the end of her life, and we're unaware of it, and she came to embrace the gospel of grace alone, by faith alone, then she is not in God's presence, she's in the presence of those who have embraced false gospels with her.

Okay, you know, I can't be more clear than that, in terms of, you have to understand the reality. Don't trust the façade, don't buy into the façade of spirituality. Read 2 Peter, read Jude. Read those passages that describe false teachers, and that's the reality of them no matter how much they may say they embrace these cultural causes.

That's a long answer to a short question, but is that, I would use Galatians 1 very straightforwardly because that is the issue, the gospel is the issue. They want to make it not the issue. But it is the issue. It always is the issue. It was the issue for Paul.

[Kirk] My name is Kurk Chalgren. And I've got a question from Proverbs, more of a broad question. When you're reading Proverbs, there's a lot of principles in there. Some of them, I'll give you an example here, would it be dishonoring God if you don't pick the wise route? Like, for instance here, we're reading from Proverbs 27:10, [Tom, what verse was that] 27:10. "Do not forsake your own friend or your father's friend, And do not go to your brother's house in the day of your calamity; Better is a neighbor who is near than a brother far away." So, the principle there is: don't forsake your friends close by and always just go to your family, seemingly. Would it be something that you could rebuke and exhort someone if they were always doing that?

[Tom] I think you have to look at the nature of proverbs, that is of a proverb. First of all, understand, it is not a completely unalterable promise that will always be true. So, the proverbs, by definition, are proverbial, they are generally true. So, it's not that you would go to a proverb, unfortunately there are parents who go to passages like, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it." And they cling to that as their hope that that child will someday come back to faith in Christ. Well, there are two problems with that. One is, it is a proverb, it is not an ironclad guarantee. It is a truism. It is generally true, and this is true in life. Many of the proverbs take that approach.

Okay, but in addition, there is another problem with that specific one. I cited that example. That is not what that proverb says. One of my very first projects in Hebrew class. I still remember it because it sort of shattered my understanding of the verse as I got into it. But basically, that verse is simply saying this, if you will train up a child according to his own way, that is according to his own strengths and abilities and skills, then you will have prepared him for life, and when he is old, he will not depart from it. It will be something that stays with him. That skill, if you have trained him according to his own natural propensity, and bent and skill, then that will stick with him throughout his life. It's not an ironclad promise. I wish it were. I wish there was an ironclad promise I could take, or you could take, that is something where the text says, if you do the right thing, your child will turn out right. But there is no such promise.

Basically, we are to be faithful. And we will stand before God as parents and give an account for our own responsibility to carry out that faithful, day in and day out, Deuteronomy 6, line upon line, while you sit down, while you rise up, etc., teaching them the Scriptures; being faithful to live before them. That's what we will be evaluated on, not the outcome, not the product because I can't control that child's heart. Now, I got a long way from your question. Let me come back to it. Basically, then, understand this: that the proverbs are truisms.

There are proverbs that are stated in other places in Scripture that are absolutely defined. You know, verse 7 we looked at this morning of Proverbs 1. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom." I mean that's always true, and every time, there is no exception to that. But there are other proverbs, because they are a collection of wise sayings that are generally true. I would tell you this. The proverbs are, I'm not going to discourage you from reading through the Proverbs a chapter at a time. I know there are some of you that do that. You take, you know there are 31

chapters, and you take a chapter of Proverbs for each day. There is nothing wrong with that. But I would encourage you to do something in addition to that.

The Proverbs are like condensed wisdom, okay. They don't yield themselves to quick and speedy thought. Remember, this is the wisdom of the sages of Israel. This is the wisdom of the wisest human being, apart from our LORD, who ever lived. He pulled these together, wrote many of them and pulled others together. And others were pulled together after his lifetime, the time of Hezekiah. But basically, then, these are incredibly wealthy sayings, rich sayings to be mined. So, don't imagine that we in our own little puny brains can read a proverb, and with basically, with no thought come to the full understanding to all its depth, to all its riches, and move on. That would be like doing the same thing with the New Testament. As you can see, there's a whole lot more as we go through our study than meets the eye at our first glance. The same thing is absolutely true with Proverbs.

So, get you a good little commentary, a study Bible and in addition to reading through a section, take a proverb, and spend a day or two meditating on, thinking about that proverb, each word, its application to life. Why did he say that, why did he use that word? And go through that. A good proverb commentary, proverbs commentary, I would recommend is a little short one, but is very helpful is Derek Kidner's commentary in the Tyndale series on Proverbs. It doesn't comment on every verse, but he'll give you a really great grasp of what's going on in the Proverbs. He begins with some subject studies like the fool in Proverbs, and on wisdom, and what is wisdom, and those kinds of things. So, if you are interested in Proverbs, that's a great place to start.

But there's nothing wrong with looking at the wisdom of a Proverb and admonishing or encouraging someone based on that. Just understand that those Proverbs are truisms, and they are not universally true, and they're not circumstance or universal promises. In the case where promises are made, unless they are reiterated in other places, or it's clearly something God is doing, then of course, God is faithful and will always do that. Okay?

[Daryl] Yes, sir. My name is Daryl Shelton, and I stand here with much humility. First off, I'd like to say I'm very nervous, so I'd like to read what I prepared, or I'd really mess this up. Also, with Proverbs. I have always believed that whosoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved regardless how bad our past sins have been. I believe that word. And knowing that only Scripture can validate Scripture, I seek to understand and reconcile what we read this morning in

Proverbs 1:28 where these sinners are calling on God, but He will not answer, and they seek Him diligently, but they will not find Him. God seems to be rejecting them because of their disobedience and prior rejection of Him. Basically, how do I reconcile Proverbs 1:28 with biblical evangelism to the lost, and for myself even, 1 John 1:9. And if a Christian falls for a season to sin and rebellion, and like the prodigal son, returns to God, how does Proverbs 1:28 fit with that?

[Tom] That's a great question. And I think you do have to bring the texts together to understand them. If you look at Proverbs 1 again, and you will see that what's going on here is: wisdom has been offered; it has been rejected, and not only rejected, but it has even been scoffed at. It's been mocked. And because of that, there comes a time when wisdom will not receive those who come. I think a good way to sort of give an analogy would be if you were to retrace back to the days of Noah and the building of the ark. You know, for 120 years the gospel was proclaimed through the mouth of Noah. He proclaimed repentance. God's going to judge you for your sin. But God has provided a way of escape if you will turn from your sins, you know, there is rescue for you. So, he proclaimed the gospel day in and day out, day in and day out during those 120 years. All of them had the gospel freely extended to them.

But there came a time when God, as He says, "My Spirit will not always strive with man" when God shuts the door. You can bet, that when the rains became, when the rains came, when the grounds split open and the waters from underneath the earth began to flood the earth, and the rain's coming down, and the water's rising and that ark begins to tilt on its foundation moorings, and you can absolutely guarantee there were people outside pounding to get in. But the day of grace had passed, the day of open invitation had gone.

The point is God does extend, and He is gracious and patient beyond patient, but there comes an end when God says, okay enough, and the day is passed. And that's what's going on in Proverbs 1 is: they have spurned, and they have spurned, and they have spurned, and then when calamity comes, they come running to God. It may very well be, it probably is not even sincere because Psalm 107 talks about the fools in their rebellious way spurn the will of God, and they find themselves in difficulty, and they cry out to God, and God hears them. And so, it's very likely there's not even a genuine repentance here. That's the point, is yes: they want to be rescued, they want to be out of their calamity, but they still aren't willing to leave their sin.

I would say, turn over to Isaiah 55, because I think Isaiah, the prophet, describes the heart of God beautifully in Isaiah 55. It's an open invitation to anyone who will come. Look at verse 6.

Seek the LORD while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near. [There seems to be an implication in that, that the day will come when He won't be. But call upon Him, seek Him. Whoever will,] Verse 7, Let the wicked forsake his way, [his predictable patterns of behavior, in other words he's talking about repentance now. He's willing to turn from those patterns of behavior that he knows are contrary to the will and purpose of God.] And the unrighteous man his thoughts; [that is his unrighteous thoughts, his sinful thoughts] And let him return to the LORD, And He will have compassion on him, And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon. [That's the heart and promise of God.]

If anyone will genuinely turn from sin and come to God, then God will receive them. There is never any indication in all of the Bible where God didn't receive someone like that. And even those who drew near to death. In fact, turn to Psalm 107 because I love this description. In Psalm 107:17,

Fools, because of their rebellious way, And because of their iniquities, were afflicted. Their soul abhorred all kinds of food, ... they drew near to the gates of death. [So, whatever is going on here brings them to the point of death itself. And from that, and they're suffering this because of their own foolish rebellion against God. Their twistedness, that word iniquity, their moral twistedness, because of all that, they were afflicted, but] Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble; [and] He saved them out of their distresses, He sent His word, and He healed them, ... [He] delivered *them* from their destructions. Let them give thanks to the LORD for His ... unfailing love, and for His wonders to the sons of men!

So, I think wherever there is genuine repentance and a willingness to turn from sin to God, there is never any indication that God is not willing to receive the repentant sinner. I think the issue is, you often find people, I think, like the fools there in Proverbs 1 who find themselves in trouble, and don't like the trouble, and they want out of the trouble. They want out of the difficulty, but they are not willing to turn from what they know is sin, as He says here, back in Isaiah 55 rather,

they're not willing to turn from their wicked way and the unrighteous man from his unrighteous thoughts. They still want that and rescue.

But wherever there's that openness and willingness to turn, God is amazingly patient. I mean, you see that in, I love the Old Testament because it pictures that so beautifully in so many ways, perhaps none more profoundly as what God did with Nineveh. I mean you had the people of Assyria, who were a brutal, brutal people known for butchering people, hanging the heads on the wall, flaying the skin off their victims, and putting their bodies decorating the gates of their city. I mean they were brutal vicious people.

And Jonah wanted them dead. He wanted God to judge them. But God sends Jonah to preach, and He forgives when they turn at the preaching of Jonah. Of course, Jonah resents it in chapter 4, but the whole point of Jonah, the message of Jonah is that God will show mercy even on repentant Gentiles. That was the message in the Old Testament to His people. Where Gentiles turn, God will be merciful because He is compassionate. In fact, read Jonah 4. Early in the first part of Jonah 4 he describes God's character. Now, he's upset about it because God forgave the people he didn't want to forgive. But He says, I knew this was You. You are compassionate and gracious. You are slow to anger, you are abundant in unfailing love, and I knew You would forgive these people. That's how God is.

I was talking with somebody else today. You know, we talk about God and His character. I love the word grace. You know, that's what our conference coming up in February is going to be about, sola gratia. I love that word, but I think so often we sell it short. We don't define it the way the Bible really defines it. Can I ask you to do something? If you use the expression unmerited favor, fill that out a little bit because I think we get so used to saying that, that it loses its punch. What is grace? You remember when we studied it together now a couple years ago on Sunday night. We worked our way through, and of course, in Ephesians 2 we studied it in various places.

Grace means that there is an aspect of the character of God; there is something about God's character that permeates His being that means He finds His greatest joy and delight in doing good to those who deserve His punishment. Now, think about that for a moment. God knows you and I deserve His punishment and His wrath, but there is something about the character of God,

and it's described as grace, that causes Him to find joy and delight in doing good to us. So, that's the character of God, and I think, you know that's reiterated over and over again.

And of course, there's no more powerful expression of that than in the person of Christ Whom God sends to provide for sin. But, and He extends over and over again that invitation doesn't He. And the Scriptures end with that invitation. You know, you go to Revelation 22, and you have that invitation repeated. "Whoever thirsts, let him come, drink of the water of life freely." And so, wherever there is a truly repentant heart, God receives, but that's where it starts.

You have to be like the beatitudes. You know, it starts, the beatitudes begin, the first way into the kingdom Jesus says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." Blessed are the beggars in spirit. You come to God with nothing. And you come casting yourself like a beggar on Him. And to that kind of cry, and that kind of heart, He responds. And of course, the next beatitude is mourning, mourning over sin. So, where there are those kinds of expressions, God always receives. That's His character. Does that answer your question?

So, in terms of evangelism, we can share the gospel freely. Now, I think we also warn people if they're postponing the decision. I don't know if you have run into people, I've run into people who like the idea of escaping hell and of belonging to God, but they've got some things they want to do first, you know, that want to kind of postpone that into future. I think it's appropriate to warn them that they may very well come to a point when their heart is hard to the things of God, and they cannot, they will not respond to the truth. Now, they can cross a line I think when they have no interest, and God lets them alone.

Now, we can get into how that all meshes with election, but that's a different question for a different time. But hopefully that helps.

[CJ] Hello, I'm CJ Blankinship, and mine's from Ecclesiastes 7:15 and 16. Alright, it says, "I have seen everything during my lifetime of futility; there is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his wickedness. Do not be excessively righteous and do not be overly wise. Why should you ruin yourself?" I guess its, I don't know, it just seems like funny wording.

"Sure." [Tom.]

[CJ] Is he talking about being legalistic, or is there something else?

[Tom] Sure, that's a great question CJ. I think there are 2 possibilities, but let me back up before I get to your specific question, and I'll remind everyone about the book of Ecclesiastes. I love this book because it is, I think, often maligned and misused. I personally believe that this book describes living life in a fallen world; how we should live life in a world that is filled with vanity that doesn't really satisfy. If you look at the book, basically there're these two parallel themes that weave their way through the book of Ecclesiastes. On one level there's the theme, Life is a good gift from God and is meant to be enjoyed. Over and over again you see that recurring theme; life is a gift, enjoy it. Enjoy life with the woman you love, the wife of your youth, all the days of your life and so forth. You see those expressions, "It's good for a man to enjoy the fruit of his labor." So, you see this thread weaving its way through the book, that life is a gift and is meant to be enjoyed.

And then there's another thread that weaves its way through, another track, if you will, that goes through the book of Ecclesiastes, and that is that we live in a fallen world, and because the world is fallen, that good gift cannot fully satisfy, and the way the wise man puts it, the sage, Qoheleth, the sage of Israel puts it is, "Life is vanity." That is, it's breath; it's intangible; it can't satisfy; it can't fulfill; you can't get your arms around it. It's like chasing after wind because we live in a fallen world. And so, you see these two tracks.

And Solomon will come back to those two tracks as he weaves his way through the book. You'll see life is a gift, enjoy it. And then you'll see, life is vanity; life is like breath, it's like wind, it's here and gone. You can't get your hands around it because we live in a fallen world. And then he comes to the conclusion, "Therefore, fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man." Basically, enjoy life, enjoy the gift, but don't expect the gift to satisfy; only the giver can. So, keep your focus on the giver. Okay, fear God and keep His commandments.

So, that's an overview of the book of Ecclesiastes. I believe it was written near the end of Solomon's life, probably about 935. He finished his life in 931 BC; probably written right at the end of his life. I think it's an expression of his repentance. I think Solomon came to a place where he repented of his sin, the sin he committed in marrying the foreign wives and building temples for them and all of those things that are recorded in Kings, but you know, regardless, that's the message of the book.

Now, let's come back to what he's saying here. There are two possibilities specific to the passage you read, and I'm looking at Ecclesiastes 7:15 and 16. One possibility is that he is describing, don't be overly pharisaical, don't be, don't live, you'll be self-righteous and pharisaical in how you live your life. That is one possibility, and that may be what he is intending to say. In other words, you know, don't fall off on either extreme. He's not saying don't be deeply spiritual and love God. He's saying don't fall off the extremes of the ends of the spectrum. On one end would be licentiousness living however you want, doing whatever you want, and on the other end would be super pharisaical self-righteousness. That may be what he is saying.

The other option, understand that these words "righteous" and "wicked" are often used in non-theological settings, particularly in the book of Ecclesiastes. So, for example, the word "righteous". The word righteous basically means to conform to a standard. For example, if you go out to your, you go get gas in your car this evening on the way home. You put gas in your car. If that gas pump gives you the amount of gas it says it's giving you, by the biblical use of this word, that's a righteous gas pump. Okay, it has given you what it promised to deliver you. It has fulfilled its obligation to you. It's measured up to the standard of a gallon of gas for whatever the going price is.

Alright, so this word is used that way even in the Bible. If you go back to Deuteronomy, we have there described for us a righteous scale. He says use righteous scales. What does that mean? Well, you know, you had scales. You went to the market, and you didn't have everything prepackaged, so you had these scales. On one side of the scale, they put the grain or whatever you were buying, and on the other side of the scale they put rocks or whatever were the standard measurement. And if you were an unscrupulous person, if you were an evil person, you could play fast and loose. You know, you could shave some off the rocks you used to sell, and you could add a little bit to the rocks used, or vice versa, to buy so that you could gain money, on the financial advantage in that process. But if your scales were conforming to the standard, they were righteous.

It may be here that he's using these words not as theological words, but more like that. He's saying, and some commentators would say this, and I actually studied this when I taught through Ecclesiastes. Some would say that you shouldn't be overly regimented in your life: you shouldn't live too much by a standard. You know, the people who live by their calendars, they're driven by

the, you know, the next item and the next item, and everything is about that. On the other hand, you shouldn't be too lax in how you live your life; too unregimented in how you live your life. So, those are two possibilities.

I probably lean toward the second, that he's really using these words not as theological words, but he's using them out of everyday life. He's saying don't be overly regimented; don't be too unregimented. You need a life that has structure and order, but realize then he goes on to say, understand that regardless, you are going to find yourself, the wise or the foolish, the righteous or the wicked are going to find themselves perishing, so he comes back to that theme of life and vanity that passes. It may be either of those, and I don't know that we can be absolutely certain. There is a lot of argument about that. Does that help at all?

[CJ] Yea, that helps a lot.

[Tom] But what he's not saying, and we know this from other texts CJ, is he is not saying that, oh well, yeah, don't worry too much about it; you can be a little wicked; you can be, don't worry about being too spiritual. We know that's not what he's saying because the rest of the Scripture screams out against that interpretation. So, whatever it's saying, it has to be reconciled with the rest of what the Scriptures teach. And that's true, by the way, of any text. That's a good standard of interpretation. That's a good question.

Yes sir.

[Randy] My name is Randy Rose. And I'll go ahead and admit, I think I'm looking for some assurance and maybe just more of your commentary. It has to do with parenting. It has to do with raising children. I admit I get a little confused when I think of the passage in Titus, the elders, you don't have to turn to it, I'll just read it to you, "If a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children, not accused of dissipation or insubordination. The question I have there is having faithful children as if the elder has control. And I also in some other I guess some online; I think you referenced a gentleman earlier that's spoken in our pulpit. I'll frequent that website where he will talk in Deuteronomy 6, the shemah, having a multigenerational view. And in that context, I certainly understand Deuteronomy 6. And my question is, my job as a parent, I think is to train my kids. God will perform the act of salvation. I just wanted to see if you had any comments in terms of the, it looks to be that the parent or the elder has control over that

household. And I don't know if that's household in terms of where the child lives, or if it's inferring that the child is saved.

[Tom] Well, those are great questions. There are really two questions there, Randy. Let me address. One of them is about the interpretation of Titus 1 and the qualification for an elder. The other question is what is our responsibility when it comes to the salvation of our children? And they relate, and I understand how they relate at this passage. But let me take them as two separate questions.

First question, in terms of Titus 1. If you look at the passage, it basically says if a man has faithful children, or as it's translated here in our translation, verse 6, "... if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion." There has much ink been spilled on the interpretation of that expression "children who believe". What it really says is "faithful children". It uses the word for faith or believe "pistos," and it uses an expression that could mean one of two things. And frankly, I'll just be honest with you, there are times when good men just disagree. And this one is one of those where there is kind of a split. I'll be honest with you.

On one side there are those who think that means exactly how the *New American Standard* has translated it here. The elder's children have to believe. Now, there are those who would say that means that any man who wants to be an elder has to have children, has to have children old enough to believe, and they have to believe for him to be an elder. Most would say that all this is to say those who would take this view, if there are children who are old enough to believe.

They would look at 1 Timothy 3 and say there it's dealing with younger children. The qualifications in 1 Timothy 3 don't mention this same qualification. They simply said the man has to manage his own household well, and he has to have his children under subjection. They would say those are younger children. You have young children in the home? They have to be under control. They have to be managed well and supervised, and they have to be respectful and those things. When you have older children, this view would say Titus 1 is saying they must be those who have come to genuine faith in Christ.

I personally, do not believe that's what this text teaches for the very reason you mentioned. I think that there are clear indications that God holds the individual child responsible for those choices and not the parent. And I'll show you that in just a moment. What I believe personally,

and I'm sure there might be even disagreement on the elder board about this because this is one of those very disputed texts. But that this is children who are faithful, that is who are faithful to what their parents have taught them. And I think the next phrase explains what he means; not accused of dissipation or rebellion. They are faithful, not in the sense that they necessarily are even in Christ, but they are not completely repudiating the entire teaching of their parents. They are not living in dissipation and rebellion in a way that would bring reproach on the gospel and on the ministry of the man.

And so, if you want to read a little more about how the elders of our church have sort of worked our way through this, there is a document I can make available to you if you are interested. Just give us a call this week, we'll get it to you as we sort of walk through this. But it's a complicated issue. But I think you wouldn't use necessarily this text, Randy, to make the determination of what our responsibility is for the salvation of our kids because it is such a hotly disputed text. And there are good people through the history of the church on both sides of what this means. Some saying the children have to be true believers, and others saying they have to be merely faithful to their parents. That is: they can't be living a life of dissipation and rebellion that brings a reproach on their parents, reproach on the gospel, etc. Okay?

Let's go to the second question. I think Ezekiel 18 is one of the most powerful passages that deal with the parental, where the parental responsibility stops. You know, in Ezekiel God is dealing with the people of Israel who have gone into exile, and Ezekiel 18:1,

Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "What do you mean by using this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, 'The fathers eat the sour grapes, But the children's teeth are set on edge'?" [In other words, they were using this proverb to basically say, look, others sinned, and now I am getting punished for it. And God says, [verse 3] As I live," declares the Lord GOD, "you are surely not going to use this proverb in Israel anymore. [Because] ... all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine. The soul who sins will die.

The point God makes over and over and over again as you work your way through this passage is that there can be any number of combinations. [Verse 5] "But if a man is righteous and practices justice and righteousness, etc." verse 9 "if he walks in in My statutes ... he will ... live." In other

words, I'm going to deal with him based on his own choices. On the other hand, if there are some who chose the opposite, I'm going to deal with them based on their choices as well. I'm going to deal with the wicked man based on his own response. The point of chapter 18 is this: God deals with each soul individually based on their response to Him and to His truth. If you read your way through this chapter, you'll see that. I once looked at this.

If you look at the kings of Judah, the southern kingdom, there's like, I want to say there's a six-generation period in the period of the kings of Judah when you have every conceivable combination. You have a righteous father with a righteous son; you have a wicked father with a wicked son; you have a righteous father with a wicked son; and you have a wicked father with a righteous son. You have all of those conceivable combinations, and God deals with each of them based on their response to Him. And I think that's the clear indication of how He deals with us and with our children.

My responsibility, as a parent, is to be faithful to what I am obligated by the Scripture to do. I am not responsible for what my child chooses when they are old enough to make those choices outside of my home. As an elder I am responsible for how they live while they are in my home. Are they under subjection? And if they leave my home, if they are accused of dissipation and rebellion, then I have to step out of the ministry. But I don't think I'm responsible to ensure that my children believe.

Now, it is my hope and prayer earnestly and my effort to ensure that they come to genuine faith in Christ. But I can't ensure that, I am not the God Who elects. I am not the God who redeems. I am not the God who regenerates. So, I have no control over that. I can be faithful to share the gospel. I can be faithful to be an influence in that person's life.

But let me tell you why I think, even on a biblical level it's clear that God is responsible, if I can put it that way. Think about this. In Genesis, Adam and Eve are the only two people on the face of the earth. They are in a perfect environment. They're walking with the second person of the trinity in the garden in the cool of the day, and what do they do? They choose to sin. Is God responsible? He was in a sense their parent. He was the one dealing with them. He was the only influence in their lives until Satan came and tempted them.

That about Judas? Judas was under the ministry of Christ, not for the entire three-and-a-half-year period, although he knew from His baptism on that was a requirement to be a disciple. But for at

least a year and a half to two years he was intensively under the teaching of Jesus Christ for twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. And yet, what happened? He chooses his own way. Is Jesus responsible for the fact that Judas didn't come to genuine faith? I don't think any of us would say that.

And I think the same is true obviously with children. We are responsible to be faithful. And God will evaluate our faithfulness as parents in their lives. But I don't have a control over what goes on in their heart. And so, all I can do is leave that with the Lord, be faithful, pray, share the gospel; do everything I can on a human level to influence their souls toward God. But in the end, I can't control that. Does that help?

[Rick] Rick Roybal, I just have a quick question that's been pondering in my mind for awhile. It basically has to do with if Jesus is fully man and is fully God, and we read scriptures like, and Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and in stature with God and man. Was Jesus born with a blank slate or was there some knowledge that was retained from eternity past that came down, because definitely you can imply from early passages in Luke that His mom probably said, guess what, you are Jesus.

[Tom] Well, I think, Rick, that's a great question, but I think it's a very complicated question, because now we're talking about a mystery that we can never fully plumb. We're talking about one united unified person with two distinct natures. You know, as the creed defines it, God of very God and man of very man. He is both at the same time. So, while those natures cannot be separated or divided practically, He is forever the God man. I love that, you know I prayed that in my prayer tonight because I'm just struck with that. You know, Jesus didn't come for 33 years to the earth and sweat out those 33 years looking forward to the day when He could stop being one of us and go back to heaven. Yes, He went back to heaven, but He went back to heaven as one of us. He is now and will forever be fully human. Everything I am, He is except for sin. And so, that's the mystery of the incarnation.

I think what you have to understand is this. While they can't be separated, those natures in Christ, logically, to help us sort through and understand them we have to separate them. Okay, understand they can't be. That's clear, but to just discuss it logically, let's separate them for a moment. Christ's divine nature was unchanged. He was in eternity past fully God. He was the second person of the trinity in a relationship of submission to the first person of the trinity. He

was eternally the Son of God. Okay, there is a relationship within the Godhead that can best be illustrated or defined or described as that of a human father and a human son as well, of course, the Spirit, but right now we are just dwelling with Christ. That didn't change.

When Jesus was that baby lying in a manger, He was still fully God of fully God. He was fully divine. He filled the universe. He was all powerful. He was all knowing. He was all of those things. Now, remember, in the incarnation, He gives up what theologians call the independent exercise of those attributes, of some of those attributes. Okay, He doesn't cheat, He doesn't use them. You know, you have a lot of the apocryphal stories of Jesus, you know, using His powers to sort of make childhood a little easier. Some kid on the block who is a bully, you know, He calls down fire and brimstone on the kid or something. You know, Jesus didn't cheat. He didn't use those powers, those powers of deity to get along better in life. He surrendered the use of those attributes, and He lived like one of us, and He only used them when directed by the Spirit to do so. But He was God. He had that power. He was filling the universe as far as God, His divine nature, as He lay in human form in that manger.

So, could God, can God learn anything? No, God knows everything. He knows it immediately. I wish I had recall like that. This would have been a lot easier tonight. But He knows it immediately, He didn't have to think about it. He didn't have to conjure it up. He knows everything that has happened, that is happening, that will happen. And He even knows the potential for what could happen, all the potentialities. It's incredible, and Jesus Christ was like that. And yet, He was also, now let's go back to the other side of His nature. He was fully human. He was everything we are. He grew and developed just like you and I grow and develop. That's why those verses are in Luke 2. It's to let us know that it wasn't like He came into the world, and He was, you know, some prodigy, some child star. you know, at two-years-old, He's quoting the Old Testament. No, He had to learn and develop just like you and I do. He had to pour Himself into His studies. He had to develop socially. He had to develop physically. All of the struggles of humanity, apart from sin, He encountered. And so, absolutely, He grew and developed and learned.

Okay, so. I tell you there is a good series, well, I shouldn't say it's a good series, that's probably for you to judge. I should, there is an appropriate series if you want to learn a little more about this. Back a year or so ago, I did a series on a survey of the New Testament in six messages. I did

a survey, if some of you who are newer, you might enjoy catching up with that in, I know you find it hard to believe, I could do that in six messages. But six messages on the Old Testament, one message on the intertestamental period or the one hundred silent years, and six messages on the New Testament. And part of the early part of that, I went through the life of Christ, and in the early part of that I dealt with the childhood of Christ, how He developed, what He would have gone through, studies and so forth. You might find that interesting.

But He developed and grew just as you and I have. You have to think as far as Him human nature, Jesus was just like you. He went through what you went through except for sin. That's why you always hear me say it like that because it's so important that we understand that. He is, was and is fully human, and He didn't cheat when He was here. He went through life as you and I have to go through life. And He only used His divine attributes under the direction of the Spirit for His ministry. It's really an amazing thing isn't it. That God would condescend to become a creature.

I think that's an appropriate place to end because there's no better way to anticipate this Christmas season than remembering that's the reality we celebrate, is that the second person of the trinity, eternally God became fully man, as well. There is no struggle you face, no developmental issue you've encountered as you've grown into maturity that Jesus didn't encounter, but He did it perfectly. He lived the life you and I should have lived so that, that life could be credited to us. That's the beauty of the gospel. Our sins, He gets the credit for and is treated on the cross as if He lived our lives, and we get the credit for that 33-years of perfect humanity. That's good news, isn't it.

Well, thank you for your questions tonight. I hope some of them have been helpful. And I hope some of my answers have been helpful, too.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank you so much for your goodness and grace to us. Thank you for all that You've done in Christ. And Lord, I pray that You would give us a renewed perspective on what our Lord did when He became one of us and continues to be one of us.

Lord, we thank you that we have an advocate with You, Jesus Christ the righteous, Who is the satisfaction for our sins. We give You thanks and praise. Send us out from this day with full hearts, eager for a week before us to live in a way that honors the One Who gave Himself for us.

In whose name we pray, Amen.