

Heaven, Hell, and the Resurrection

(Greg Boyd and Paul Eddy)

QUESTION AND ANSWER:

Shawna: OK, this is a question from Josh from Vancouver, and he says:

On what Biblical basis do folks like C.S. Lewis in "The Great Divorce" develop the idea that those in hell might still be given the opportunity to choose heaven? Does that make him a Universalist?

Greg: Ah...hmm. Hello, Josh from Vancouver. Well you know, there actually has been throughout most of church history, the dominant view has been, God's not done with people at death. Now, they made a distinction between "hell" and "purgatory" and I don't want to get into the whole purgatory thing, but that wasn't just a groundless belief that the Catholics just kind of came up with. They had some scripture that they interpreted to support that: the idea that God continues to work with people. And so you find some of Jesus' teachings, for example, there's kind of a punishment involved, but it comes to a definite end. For example, He says that the servant who knows to do good but doesn't do it will be beaten with many stripes but one who didn't know will be beaten with fewer stripes. He says make peace with your brother while you're on the way lest he takes something against you and brings you to the judge and throws you into jail and you don't get out until you've paid the very last penny. But you do get out! And so, there's a number of teachings that have been used to kind of support that.

There's also a few that are really interesting. Like, [to Paul] is it I Peter or II Peter where Jesus descends into the...he uses the word for hell there, "Tartarus" I think it is.

Paul: Ah, I Peter 3.

Greg: And Peter says to the spirits that are in prison... and so there's been some...Or Paul says in Ephesians 4 that Jesus went to the lower regions of the earth and led captivity captive. And there's a number of ways of interpreting those, but those are the kinds of verses that are used to support the idea that God isn't necessarily done with everybody at the moment of death. Ok, there's something more to work with, in some cases at least.

Paul: In fact, one of the other main verses on this is I Corinthians 3, that you know, and no matter what you do with it, you gotta do something because it's the idea that all people, including Christians, will be finding themselves before the judgment seat of Christ. And this particular one in I Corinthians 3 is talking about *believers*, and he says that our works will be tested, and that those that are like "hay and stubble" will be burned up, but those that are of "valuable metals and precious stones" will survive it. And, what the Catholics did is they said, "Why think that burning" (because it says it tests it as through fire)...and the Catholics said, "Why think that burning is going to take twenty minutes?" And that's their doctrine of purgatory; it could take thousands of years. You know, Protestants have tended to say, "No, the judgment seat of Christ, and that sort of testing, is a quick thing. And so, but there are a lot of texts that have raised this question of "What is God? What might happen on the other side of death that God's so involved with sin?"

Now back to this Lewis question: "Was Lewis a Universalist?" See the problem is, when Lewis, over time was "The Great Divorce", it's a *novel* he wrote. So to try to read, you know, straight doctrine from a piece of literary fiction is always dangerous. But what Lewis had is he had a bus ride, the people in hell could go on a bus ride to heaven. And it turned out when they got there they didn't want to stay. Which really fed into Lewis' theological point that he did make in "The Problem of Pain" which is hell is locked from the inside.

Greg: Well, one guy made it. One guy stayed.

Paul: Yeah, yeah. Most people, though, given the druthers, would rather go back to hell. You say, "Well, that doesn't make sense if hell is terrible". No, it's just that as terrible as hell is, heaven is even worse for people who don't want to love and worship God. In a sense, hell becomes a place, really the garbage dump thing fits really well here, it becomes the last place where what could have been human goes because the place that they were meant to be, heaven, just doesn't fit for them. They realize it and everyone there realizes it. It's an interesting...

Greg: And that's why C.S. Lewis says, "If hell is locked, and it is for some people but not necessarily for all, but if it's locked, it's locked from the inside"; the rebellion of the human heart.

Shawna: This is an anonymous question that says, "

My brother, a very caring and loving person, is leaving for Iraq soon. He is not saved but is always open for discussion about God. If anything were to happen to him and he died, does he go to hell?

Paul: [Paul and Greg give each other helpless looks, audience laughs] Did you get a word of knowledge on this one?

Greg: Uh, yeah, see that's...I would need a word of knowledge [Paul laughs] to answer that. Um, because, I don't see anything in the Bible that legitimizes any human being claiming to know that another person is definitively lost. See, it doesn't mean that it really is limiting, uh, the love of God, the grace of God, the power of God, to do that. You don't...I don't think you can know that. But, only one time in the New Testament does anyone ever claim to *know* that someone is in hell, and that's Jesus. He's talking about the rich man, and that's in the middle of a parable, which I don't think you should go looking in a parable for metaphysical details. So, only God, and we judge the outside, but only God knows the heart. I really don't believe, and we could get into this a lot more later on, but, that the God who's revealed in Jesus Christ would leverage someone's eternity on where they happen to be born, whether they've said a certain prayer, or whether the person who witnessed to them had bad breath or not. I mean there are so many things that go into whether or not a person, or whether they happen to come into some really jerky Christians and therefore reject the whole thing, only God can parse that all up. So we just gotta love and proclaim the Good News and let God do the rest.

Paul: Which is why God keeps, the scriptures, keep hitting over and over, our place is not to judge those sorts of things. Our place is to bless, our place is to...I think, following Paul's example, in I Corinthians 5 he's dealing with a pretty raw case, right, it's a man in the Corinthian church that had been apparently sleeping with his father's wife...

Greg: The mother-in-law.

Paul: Yeah.

Greg: The *step mother*, no not the mother-in-law.

Paul: We're not going to go deep into this...

Greg: Either way! [Audience laughs]

Paul: ...but what Paul says is, he says to turn this man over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh. Which sounds like, OK, this is done. But what's interesting, Paul's last words there, "so that his *soul* might be saved in the day of the Lord". Paul, even as he turns someone over to Satan for destruction, he still has hope that *that* might be the thing that turns this man around. So, I think following Paul's example, we need to always have hope because God is a God of hope. Now, how that hope will play out, we don't know. But that's God's business, not ours.

Woman: I want to remind you guys that we're gonna take 2-3 minutes to answer these questions because we have a lot of questions to answer.

Greg: Theoretically.

Shawna: In theory...so, OK. This next question is a kind of a two-for:

Are we to believe that all four views of hell have equal weight, simply because people have differing opinions? And, what is Woodland Hill's stance? Which of these four views does Woodland Hills hold to?

Greg: Hmm...All right.

Paul: [Unintelligible]

Greg: Yeah. You want to do that?

Paul: Go ahead.

Greg: OK, I'll do it. Well, see, it's unusual, and I may not answer the question, but to say that each of these views have the same weight; views don't have weight, people that believe the views, because they give different weight to scripture. And so, you really have to kind of like, how do you weigh scripture as you're putting all this together. But maybe the question is asking then, kind of like the official Woodland Hills Church stance, do we say all four of those views are equal? And the answer would be "no". Um, our statement of faith, which is, well first of all let me say this, we've always held as a very important value of ours, the distinction between dogma, doctrine, and opinion, which simply means that not all beliefs are equally important. There's this center, and we don't wanna, you know...major in the majors and minor in the minors. So much mental energy and animosity ad stuff gets built up over things that really we should be able to talk about very calmly and give grace to one another. We've always held as a strong conviction that we need to acknowledge the ambiguity in things and therefore give people space and grace to have different views as we process and dialogue these things. Having said that we have a statement of faith that lets people know where we as a church are officially standing, what we rally around is what goes forth from the pulpit, not that everyone agrees this. And at Woodland Hills I found that have...all those four views are represented here. But, our statement of faith comes out of II Thessalonians 1:9 Paul quotes a little bit earlier, that says we believe in everlasting life for those who are in Christ and the *eternal destruction* of those who reject Him. Um, and that phrase, as I mentioned earlier, can be taken as an Annihilationist View, which is how I *tend*, or it could be taken in a more Traditional View, it's compatible with the idea of eternal conscious suffering. Um, it certainly says that we are committed to warning people about the consequences; there are consequences for rejecting Christ. There's a strong warning there. I don't think that rules out the possibility of *hoping* that,

I never think we should limit God with our doctrine. We say this is what we believe but God, if God can find a way to save everybody, uh, he'll do it. And, I would hope it would be that way! I live in a hope, but in terms of how I'm going to live my life, how I'm going to preach, I think there's a real compulsion to warn about the reality of hell.

Paul: So what our statement would rule out is what you might call "dogmatic universalism", right?

Greg: Yeah, yeah.

Paul: Where we can be certain that God will save all people and that there's no, you know ultimately no threat of eternal hell. Our statement would rule that out. And we don't see any, um, you know, who was it, Miroslav Volf?

Greg: Oh yeah, "Exclusion and embrace".

Paul: Yeah. He's a well known theologian, Evangelical, said, "I'm not a Universalist, but God might be."

Greg: It's a great quote.

Paul: And it's like, for us to have hope that all people will someday say "yes" to Jesus, how can that be wrong? But for us to say we *know* that somehow God will sort of coerce or force everyone out of hell into heaven, you know, either on Biblical grounds or even logical grounds, if you take free will at all seriously, that's a problem.

Greg: And that's why I don't think Rob Bell is a Universalist. And I think it was unfair for people to accuse him of being a Universalist. Because he believes in free will. He's a strong believer in free will. And as long as you believe in free will you can't say that there's gonna be a time where God says, "Now you **MUST** get in". You always have a choice; so at least theoretically, it can go on forever and ever and ever.

Paul: That was just a minute, right?

Shawna: That was very, I am very proud of you guys. You get a lollipop after the Q&A. All right, so:

Where in the Bible does it say that a person must make a 'faith' choice, or a decision, before he or she dies? How does that concept cover infant deaths and people who die having never heard the Gospel message? Secondly, or thirdly, will there be opportunities for growth and maturity in the Lord after death?

Paul: All right. Um, where does it say that we need a faith decision? Um, you know, you think of some of the summary statements of Jesus' ministry, I think of Mark 1:15, for example, that I take to be sort of a summary of what Jesus would preach every time he went to another town in Galilee. And it says He would come in and say, "The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the Gospel". Mark uses sort of a summary of Jesus' constant message. And that "believe" there, that word that we translate "belief", "pistos" in Greek, is more than just "give intellectual assent to". It really is a covenant term and, I think a much better term is "have covenant trust in God". That's what "belief" means in the Christian context. And Greg's preached that a lot at this church, that it's not just *mental*, it's your life. It's putting trust in God. So really all over the scriptures you have this idea that faith is involved. Paul says in Romans, is it 10, 9 and 10...

Greg: 10:9.

Paul: That section of scripture there...

Greg: I don't know what you're going to say...

Paul: Yeah, it's true. It's a word of knowledge. [Laughing]

Greg: "What am I going to say, Greg?" [Said with swagger]

Paul: You probably can quote this from memory, "How shall they hear if they don't have a preacher..." You know. It's a whole thing where it sounds like "unless you hear"...

Greg: "If you believe with your heart and confess with your mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord and you shall be saved."

Paul: Yep. So there are a lot of texts that people will point to there. Now, that being said, that does not solve the question of what happens to infants who die and never have a chance to hear about Jesus. And it certainly doesn't solve the question of "what about those who are born in other places, other times, other, or even *now* but in other contexts where they don't hear about the Gospel. Those questions have been wrestled with for two thousand years by Christians, and they've realized there's something potentially, something else going on there. I think one answer we can rule out with regard to people of other faiths, and other times and places, is what's often called "pluralism" today.

Greg: Yeah.

Paul: And that's the view that there are many saviors. Well, if a Buddhist in Sri Lanka doesn't hear about Jesus that's OK, as long as they hear about Buddha. And a lot of people are kind of going in that direction. Greg said it earlier tonight, sort of this, well, you know, whatever path...

Greg: [Unintelligible interjection]

Paul: There's just *no* basis for that in the scriptures. There just really isn't! As much as you might hope that...for people, there's gotta be some other way of expressing hope for people than saying, "There are other saviors". That's just clear. Jesus is the only Savior if you're going to take the New Testament seriously. But that leaves a lot of other options. And from the second century on, Christians have explored these other options. I'll just kind of tell you four real quick ones of what Christians have thought about what, scripturally, what could happen to those who don't know about Jesus, who have never heard the Gospel. Some have said, which is often called "Restrictivism", have said, in a sense, "That's unfortunate, but that's the way it is. And if you don't hear, that's means you're not going to be in heaven."

Greg: [quietly/meekly interjects] Sorry...

Paul: And, just to me, this view is usually attached to Calvinism, which holds that God *ordains* or *elects* who will be saved. And so it's really not a problem for a Calvinist, because if a person doesn't hear the Gospel, it wouldn't have mattered if they *had* heard it because if they're not elect, they're not elect, whether they hear it or not. So for Calvinists there's less tension around this issue. If you're an Armenian, which means you believe that *free will* really comes into play with regard to questions, then you got other possibilities to explore. One is called Universal Opportunity which says that God knows and can see every heart. And if there's any human heart that God sees would say "yes" to the Gospel, God always finds a way of getting the message to that person. Whether it's in a dream, or a vision, or a missionary, or...it doesn't matter, God will do it. There won't be anyone in hell who says to God, "I would have been in heaven if you just would have let me know that". That won't happen. There's another view called Inclusivism that says that although Jesus is the only Savior, that doesn't mean you need to know He's saving you in order to be saved by Him. And this is the way a lot of people explain how David and Abraham and all the Old Testament saints were saved. They...Jesus was never even born yet. They didn't know the name of Jesus, but they had faith in God, and God applied the blood of Jesus to people whose hearts He saw had a simple faith in what they did know. And so Inclusivism has been held by a wide range of Christians; John Wesley, C.S. Lewis seems to have held to Inclusivist View, even Billy Graham says that he held to Inclusivism. So, there's a number of ways that Christians have responded to the very tough question of "What about those that don't hear the Gospel".

Greg: It seems to me that if, you know, you have to wrestle with those texts about "As all were in Adam, so all were in Christ". Whatever else you make about them, it seems to me that God's certainly Inclusive. I mean, He's got this bear hug around everybody, "You're MINE!" And I don't know why our default setting would be, "Unless a person has prayed the prayer that we think we should pray, that they're necessarily lost". And so, that's an Inclusive, wider hope. If

you're saved, you're saved through Jesus, but to say that isn't to say that only those people who confess Jesus are the ones who are included in the saving work of Jesus. Because then you have to get rid of disabled people, and little babies, and the Old Testament, and a lot of other things.

Did that get within 2 minutes?

Paul: Absolutely. [Laughing]

Shawna: Sure. We'll say, "Sure". OK, how about this:

In view three (which let me remind you is the Annihilationist View) how does that view explain any consequences for someone who was extremely evil but did not experience many negative consequences here on earth?

Paul: OK, go Greg.

Greg: OK, good. That's a really good question. There have been Annihilationists who have held that, um, that if you're outside of Christ, if you're wicked, you're hopelessly in rebellion against God that you just *die* and that's it. But most Annihilationists have not held that, at least as I research church history, most Annihilationists haven't held that, or at least I don't hold that. Because you find in scripture, there *is*, there's a proportionality that's given here. And a lot of Jesus' teachings have to do with that. There's *less* and *more* and things of that sort. And there is, I think, intuitively, a sense of moral justice. Like if Hitler, if there's no consequences for Hitler, for example, you know for all of the evil he did, or if the consequences are the same as they are for just the "run of the mill sinner" ...

Paul: [chuckles lightly]

Greg: ... if you can speak that way, it's like the moral scales of the universe haven't been balanced. And there's something intuitive about saying, "There's a reason why most people agree with still searching for Nazi war criminals even though they're 98 years old and are gonna die tomorrow anyway!" [Laughter] It's like, "No, they need to be brought to justice!" And so, this isn't to say ...I mean you could hold that there will be some sort of consequence suffered, maybe for thousands of years, but *eventually*, if they're in a state of hopelessness, uh, then God would annihilate them, put them out of existence. Good question, thanks.

Shawna: All right.

So, what about this resurrection thing? What's that all about?

Paul: People rise from the dead...no [laughs].

Greg: All right, like "What's it about"? Is that what it's asking?

Paul: Wha...[talking over each other]

Greg: What up with the resurrection!

Shawna: What's up with this resurrection thing! [Laughing]

Greg: Paul, you tell us "what up!?" with the resurrection thing!

Paul: That's actually a good question because our culture, um, even Christians in our culture aren't inclined to think of the afterlife in terms of resurrection.

Greg: That's true.

Paul: I think since early on in Christian history, early church, we began to be influenced by the Platonic and other Greco-Roman philosophical traditions and so if you talk to most Christians today about, "What do you imagine heaven's going to be like?", and you listen to what they say, it sounds far more like what Plato says than what the New Testament says. You know, you talk to people, and quickly images of clouds, and harps and fat little babies with wings...

Greg: [imitating harp music] Da da da da da....

Paul: boredom, and a lot of...it just doesn't seem like a place you want to hang out for a billion years! Uh, that is NOT the way the New Testament....

Greg: Annihilate me now! [Audience laughs] *Please* annihilate me! [Laughing] I can't stand these little cherubs!

Paul: I just saw this one picture, this cartoon, this guy floating on a cloud in heaven and all he's thinking is, "I wish I'd brought a magazine..." [Audience laughs] It's like...

Greg: I wonder what they're doing in hell. [Laughing]

Paul: For so many Christians, it's this Platonic, weird, ghostly world. The New Testament talks about resurrection, that means it isn't just disembodied spirits floating around up there; but rather, for us to be "un-embodied", to be "disembodied" is unnatural. Now, you do go through this period if you die on earth, your spirit and your soul...your spirit and your body are separated, but what's natural for the spirit and body to come back together. That's called "resurrection". That happens to all people, according to the New Testament, at the end of

time. This was a very common scholarly rooted Jewish view in Jesus' day. Resurrection was what everyone hoped for for the future. And that meant you had *bodies*. Now they were, of course, bodies that couldn't get sick or die...

Greg: Not these bodies. The good bodies.

Paul: Different kinds of bodies.

Greg: Glorified bodies.

Paul: But they were *bodies* and that meant they lived in a real world, real stuff. And heaven is described very "earthy". It's not this earth as it is now, but it's very much like this earth, rejuvenated.

Greg: "New heaven and a new earth."

Paul: New heavens and new earth. So, resurrection is absolutely *crucial*. I just read a poem not that many years ago that was a poll of Christians in America asking the question about "how many were Christian" and that year, I think it was like 84% said they were born again Christians. And then another question, "do you believe in reincarnation", 40% of the people said "yes" to that poll. If you overlay those two polls you got a good chunk of Christians buying into reincarnation which is very not...it's not compatible with the idea of resurrection; two very different world views.

Greg: Excellent. I have nothing to add.

Shawna: OK, perfect. So:

How do we view the accounts of people being shown heaven and hell when they die and come back to life? How can we discern if these are true?

Paul: Near death experiences? Is that what kind of it's getting at?

Shawna: I would say [affirming].

Greg: I wouldn't put a lot of stake in it if I were you. [Paul laughs] I really wouldn't. No! You know because...

Paul: There's a book that's at like number one on the...

Greg: Oh, the little boy?

Paul: Yeah.

Greg: The six year old guy.

Paul: My son, Justin, read that.

Greg: Justin, come up here and give us a report. [Audience laughs] No, you know what, the thing is if you have other reasons for believing what you do about the afterlife, this in-between stage between now and the resurrection, and the book kind of confirms that, it might be good. But the thing is, you know hit it with these best sellers every once in a while, I think it was “Embraced by the Light” a few years ago or something like that and her view of the afterlife was, I bet most people in this room wouldn’t agree with it. But she claims to have experienced it! It was very “Mormonish”; because she’s a Mormon and so that’s how she envisioned it. I don’t know what happened with her and I don’t know what happens with any of these folks. I *do* know that when I read those accounts I have other reasons for thinking that some of what they say is not accurate. I don’t doubt at all their genuineness and their sincerity, but I wouldn’t ever base any belief on what they say. If what they say confirms something, or God speaks to you through it or something, that’s *fine*. But I wouldn’t change what you believe because someone said, “Oh, I had a vision of hell” or “I had a vision of heaven”...I mean psychotic people have visions all the time, you know. I’m just saying. So... [Paul laughs] And they’re very sincere and very real!

Shawna: [Laughing] We don’t want those!

Greg: No, I mean...we should have just taken it from dreams, nightmare, LSD trips...I’ve had some visions.... [Audience laughs] I once saw this Christmas tree melt...no let’s not talk about that.

Shawna: [Interjects, laughing] OK...Paul? Please! Quickly!

Paul: Yes, quickly. With that being said, I want to put on plug in for a certain kind of near death experience. It’s what research would call “corroborative” or “evidential” near death experiences. Greg and I happen to find these fascinating and we have a friend, Gary Habermas, a Christian scholar, who part of his life’s work is to collect as many of these as he can. And the way you tell the difference between the ones Greg is a little concerned about and this kind, is a corroborative or evidential, is one where you have a near death experience not of another world, or bright light tunnel or anything like that, but actually of this world while you’re dead. And people can corroborate what you experienced while you were dead. This doesn’t happen often, but it happens often enough that some really interesting cases have been made. Probably the most startling one that I’ve heard of is a woman died on the operating table. They revived her and while she was, when she came back to, she said, “I left my body”, and she

recounted some conversations going on in the room. But not only that, she left. She floated out of the operating room, floated up out of the hospital, over the hospital and had a bird's view eye of the hospital and noticed what she called a 'big, blue tennis shoe' up on the roof of the hospital that you couldn't see from any of the windows. And when she came back this is one of the things she recounted. Well, someone went up on the roof and found this big, blue tennis shoe up on the roof just like she had said. Why we find these fascinating is we think this is pretty powerful evidence for not only the ability of a soul to be separated from the body, but for the idea that the soul can survive physical death; that there is corroborative evidence for the soul to exist beyond death. So *that* kind of near death experience I find fascinating.

Greg: Yeah, but if the evidence wouldn't warrant accepting everything they say about what they see on the other side as true.

Paul: It would have to be corroborated.

Greg: It does show that something survives death.

Paul: Right, right.

Greg: I still wouldn't trust the reports

Shawna: [Laughs]

Paul: Unless you see the blue tennis shoe.

Greg: Unless you have other reasons to believe what they're saying is true. [Laughter on stage]

Shawna: OK, this is from Grant, he's from Missouri.

Greg: Hello Brant. Grant?

Shawna: He said...Grant.

Greg: Grant, from Missouri.

Shawna: He asked:

Some non-Christians I know don't want to go to heaven because there won't be mistakes and mistakes are what make life "life". I personally could not imagine a heaven that doesn't include learning. Can there be learning or mistakes in heaven?

Greg: Hmm...Does learning have to entail that you make mistakes? Maybe it does. And does making mistakes mean that you are sinning?

Paul: Right.

Greg: Because if doesn't involve sin then there could be that.

Paul: Absolutely.

Greg: I suspect that this friend of Grant's is probably affected by, or worried about the kind of heaven that Paul was just talking about. Where it is just gonna be like you know, "Stiffville" or... "Stiffville", yes, that's exactly...

Paul: [Laughs]

Greg: Like "stiff" people! "Everything's perfect". "Stepford Wife" kind of thing...yeah, that would be...No and I can't remember the verse right now but there are some things about "growing from glory to glory", what's that verse? And you know there's this constant idea of expansion. Gregory of Nyssa, a great fourth century theologian, said this that "Heaven will be perpetual growth and a perpetual adventure because you could never exhaust the glory and beauty of God." A finite being could never exhaust the glory of God so there will always be an infinite more to learn and to enjoy and experience in God no matter how far down the road we go, there's always more. And so it would be a perpetual adventure. And I agree. I can't conceive of a joyful, blissful state that didn't have some kind of adventure, some kind of learning and growing.

Paul: Absolutely! I mean we think about what scripture says that won't be in heaven is *sin*. But that doesn't say....I mean it would decidedly count against the idea that once human beings get to heaven that we're perfect in the sense of somehow *infinite*. Like infinitely smart all of a sudden. God's the only one who's infinite. We'll be perfect, but perfect *humans*. And humans are, by definition, *finite*! We're limited in knowledge, we're limited in strength, we're limited in a whole lot of ways, which means I don't see any reason why there wouldn't be what you might call "mistakes" as we continue to exercise our limitations as humans and learn about the infinite God a lot of other things.

Greg: A couple weeks ago, I'll just throw this in here, a couple weeks ago I mentioned this in a message. It was a quote from C.S. Lewis. We quote C.S. Lewis a lot around here. But he said it's a little bit like a young boy, 6 year old or so, who asks...was just learning about sex and then asks his parents (and he's eating a little chocolate bar) and he goes, "Well, can you eat chocolate while you have sex?" and upon hearing the answer "No", although I don't know why C.S. Lewis assumed "no", but anyway... [Audience laughs] anyway he was saying "no"...

Shawna: Next question, please. [Laughing]

Greg: That, uh...the analogy works anyways. But on hearing “no” he would think that the chief characteristic of sex is the absence of chocolate. He said, “I don’t want anything to do with it!” But, of course, as he would grow a little bit he might change his mind as he is in adulthood and he gets married. So, also, we hear sometimes you know, we think that, we *assume* the temporal things we enjoy now; it’s not going to be taking place in heaven. In fact, here C.S. Lewis was saying, he assumes there’s nothing like sex in heaven, so he’s saying that we think that would be just terrible! But we’re like the little boy in the position who’s eating chocolate and we just can’t conceive of the better thing that is ruling this out. Did that make any sense? I don’t know, all right.

Paul: [Laughs lightly]

Shawna: So, Yamid from China wants to know:

Why do you think that as followers of Jesus we tend to care more about the afterlife than the hell that is around us and that is waiting for reconciliation?

Greg: Thank you!! Thank you. That was a great, that’s a great one. That’s...I almost don’t want to comment on that.

Paul: You wrote a book on this, didn’t you?

Greg: I did?

Paul: Oh, I’m sure you did.

[Audience laughs]

Greg: No! See you know, he...maybe we should. You know, but the thing, and this is something I appreciate about Rob Bell’s book is that he’s saying that the whole idea of the eschatology, the afterlife, in the New Testament (and really throughout the whole Bible, it’s much more than the New Testament) is that it’s simply the consequence of *now*, but it starts *now*! I mean, our job is to be living heaven on earth *now*! And there are people who are making hell on earth *now*. That’s just an etcetera, etcetera of what’s going on now. So, I’m, and this is exactly where the New Testament is at, I think it’s one of the values of Jesus using “gehenna” this dump as a reality indicator for what hell’s all about, is he’s making it concrete. This is here and now! And what Jesus is calling us to is to repent *now*! Turn from our way of living that leads to destruction and turn to *life* now and that means you start *living* life. And so you start caring about the hell around you and you start demonstrating the love of God and the justice of God by living a counter-cultural way, by serving people, by basically having the life of

Christ planted in you and flowing through you as you serve the world and love your enemies and begin to try to eradicate hell now. Because it's starting now, heaven is starting now, and the two are in flux. How we live, how we decide to take our domain of influence, our kingdom, and bring it under God's domain, that makes a difference. It makes a difference. And that's really the calling of the Gospel. That should be far more emphasis than the details about what happens once a person dies or once history wraps up. Thanks for asking that great question.

Paul: Yeah, if the only question is "Am I going to heaven or hell?" well then we can create a really convenient Gospel about that. One that takes about a five second sinner's prayer and then we're done! And then you kind of live life however you want for the next fifty years or whatever and your deal's signed. And that is so not the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It's a convenient, consumeristic Gospel that gives me my "fire insurance" but it's not what Jesus was after when he called people to follow Him, and trust Him, and walk in the ways of his covenant Father.

Greg: I thought....part of the problem is that we have, we've so 'centerized' this court of law way of thinking about our relationship with God: the judge, we're the defendant, and Jesus is our attorney and there's some of that language, but it's not the dominant language in the New Testament. The idea of salvation, or "shalom", is so holistic and organic and full of life and the main analogy is a *marriage* and living out a marriage and you just ask a totally different set of questions when you're in a marriage than you do when you're before a judge. Like, you're not thinking, "how much can I get away with without losing my probation?" I'm hoping in a marriage you don't ask that question. You might in a court of law, but in a marriage you're not asking "how close to the edge can I get before I lose my salvation?" no "before you'll divorce me?" No, you should be asking "how do I pursue you more?" and "how do we grow together more?" Unfortunately, because we've centralized this court of law thing it's just set in motion all sorts of...you now "buy" your way out of prison with this "get out of hell free" card then you just sort of coast and it has nothing to do with real life. Unfortunate.

Shawna: OK, so:

I've heard about heaven being on earth, for example God restoring His creation, so if that's true, where are the dead people now? Roaming on this earth, in a waiting cell until Jesus returns, floating in the sky like I was taught as a child?

Greg: Or, option "D". [Paul and Shawna laugh] Well, you're the specialist on this [nodding toward Paul].

Paul: Oh, um, you know Paul says in Philippians that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. And that has...that verse and others like it, he talks about this in II Corinthians 5 and some other places; that traditional Christian view has always been that where someone is, particularly we're talking about believers here, when someone's a believer and dies they go to be present with God. Now, they're still in a "disembodied" state and so Paul almost talks about it in, I think it's II Corinthians 5, it's not a *natural* state.

Greg: It's like being "naked".

Paul: Yeah, he says your soul is longing to be "clothed" again with a body but you're there, you're with Jesus, you're with God, waiting for that resurrection that's coming in the future. That's been the dominant view. There's been some...I probably should mention this, because this is actually a point that's growing in certain conversations today where science and theology are being discussed and in a highly, physically, kind of centered conversation around science, some people are saying that there isn't evidence that the soul *can* survive the body. And there's even some Evangelical Christians now arguing there that when you die physically your soul, in a sense, dies with your body. But that's OK, because at the end of time when God resurrects you, he resurrects your whole "soul/body" unit. And so, the next thing you know is you're alive again. And that is a view that...certainly a minority view, but it's one that's being increasingly entertained as the science/theology dialogue moves along. For the very reasons about the near death experiences we talked about earlier, the corroborative type, Greg and I don't find that very plausible. We think there *is* good evidence that the soul *can* survive a bodily death.

Greg: I know a few verses that are really hard to get around if you just...the one you just mentioned, II Corinthians 5...

Paul: II Corinthians 5, Philippians is one...

Greg: The other thing I will just say about this question is that it's important to, for followers of Jesus at least, to acknowledge what we don't know, which is almost *everything* [laughs] when it comes to this question. The reason, in fact the reason why that's important is because there is a spiritual world, we are in this war zone really. Human beings aren't the only conscious, sentient beings in the creation. There are angelic beings, some good some bad. There's a spirit world out there and we're not told much about that which means we gotta be very careful about dabbling in that. You find in the New Testament some real warnings about divination and mediums, Old Testament and New Testament, about not entertaining angels and things like that. You're dealing with trouble there and the reason why...and I know that even in Christian circles (conservative Christian circles) there's been a lot more curiosity about those kind of things and kind of making the compatible like "Hey, the spirits might still be around, can

we talk to them?” and I would really caution against that. You’re dialing up a phone number and you don’t know who’s on the other line. And it can be, it may be, demonic and they can be very crafty and deceptive and I would just stick with what you know and live out the faith, the kingdom of God.

Shawna: So we’ve got a few questions regarding things in Revelation... you ready?

Paul: Greg is, yeah!

Greg: [Teasing] Go away!

Shawna: [Laughs]

What is “Armageddon” and is that when Jesus comes and slaughters humans?

[Audience laughs]

Greg: YES! Finally! Well, OK [pregnant pause] to answer that question completely depends on how you frame the book of Revelation. We can’t possibly get into that very much. I’ll say this, OK this...

Paul: He did just write a chapter...

Greg: I wrote a chapter on this for a book that will be coming out next year...maybe [laughs] but the thing is there are different views of Revelation. I would argue that it’s *not* a snapshot of what’s going to happen in the last seven years, or seven days of history or anything of the sort. I know that is a very Evangelical way of looking at it, “It was written just for the folks who are at the very end of the age and it’s gonna tell us...there’s an anti-Christ and battle of Armageddon and Jesus comes and slaughters all these folks.” I wouldn’t take it like that at all. It has a prophetic edge to it, it does talk about *ultimate* ends but really I would argue, and this... [To Paul] would you say most critical scholars are in this camp? Apocalyptic literature is a symbolic expression about realities that are present now and will culminate in the end but it is present *now*. And so it is talking about, in a symbolic way (which is what apocalyptic literature does) about realities that are taking place right here and right now. I would argue that, with regard to Jesus slaughtering people at the end...I know someone said that the book of Revelation presents this “Macho Jesus” who is gonna come, He’s got a tattoo running down his thigh and a sword in His hand with a commitment to make somebody bleed. And it’s like, how is that compatible with what we find revealed in Jesus Christ when He’s here on earth? He dies on the cross and He tells his disciples not to use violence. The thing that’s interesting about John, this is the only thing I can say about that [question] right now is he takes traditional apocalyptic

imagery, which is very violent, VERY violent...gore...traditional apocalyptic imagery and he turns it all on its head. It's really genius when you get into it and you'll just *have* to buy my book when it comes out. [Audience laughs] No, but so he uses this lion, ferocious right? Lion, predator, 'roar', angry lion...but the lion (read Revelation 5) turns out to be the lamb. And it's this gentle lamb, and the lamb does warfare. But the lamb does warfare not by making people bleed but by bleeding. So probably the most violent looking passages in the Bible is Revelation 19, where the lamb comes back with the martyrs and they're gonna come and there's blood everywhere, they're slaughtering everywhere. But what's interesting, if you read it in its original context and you look at the way John just subverts this violence...the lamb is blood-soaked, which was an imagery in the Old Testament of just a person who just slaughtered everybody and now they're all full of blood. But he's blood-soaked *before* he goes into battle! It's because he's bloody with his *own* blood. And he does battle with a sword that comes out of his mouth [imitates thrashing a sword from his mouth]. Samurai! No, but see, it's the "word of truth"! You find this throughout...and the saints, "We do warfare; mighty warfare!" But we do it by the blood of the lamb, and by living by the blood of the lamb and by the word of our testimony. And so I think the book of Revelation, it's like a war scroll like they had in Qumran. But it's a tract on non-violent warfare to Christians who are in an empire, a Roman empire, that's increasingly persecuting them. And it's a way of saying "Do warfare! Do warfare! Stand valiant! Do not compromise!" But the way you do it is not by killing your enemies but by, if necessary, letting them kill you. But to flesh out and prove that it would take, it would take a whole chapter and that'll come out next year [smirks]. What a sales pitch! [Laughter]

Paul: I don't compliment Greg often, but this is gonna be a good book. I'll buy it, so...

Greg: [Loud stage whisper in joking] I'll give you a royalty check later on...

Shawna: That was not a planted question [Laughing]. All right, so:

Since this present time is before the rapture, when Christians die do they go straight to heaven? And, are they aware of what's going on with their loved ones still living here on earth?

Paul: Wow...[Pause] to put the "rapture" point in there raises a lot of issues...

Shawna: Yes.

Paul: But I think the question stands whether you had the rapture piece in there or not, right? It's still a question of "When a Christian dies, what is their experience then and do they....are *they* aware of what's going on with loved ones on earth?" I'm not aware of anywhere in

scripture that really speaks to the question of whether someone in heaven is aware of...conscious of things on earth. Are you? [To Greg]

Greg: I don't think so. There's the "great cloud of witnesses" that can sometimes be translated like "they're watching us"...

Paul: Yeah, yeah, that's Hebrews 12.

Greg: But that's the imagery of running in a stadium and it comes out of Hebrews 11... [to Paul] 12...

Paul: 12 [Nodding].

Greg: 12:3

Paul: 12: 1-2

Greg: Yeah, 1 and 2, 3...and you talk about the "great cloud of witnesses" so "run the race". But it's the imagery of running in a stadium and they're cheering us on. I wouldn't press that for metaphysical details...I don't know. I don't think we have a clue as to who's conscious of what and what therefore and to and there unto [throwing out words for affect]...The only thing about the rapture...

Paul: [Laughs]

Greg: ...is, here's the thing, and this is kind of a paradigmatic thing where the Christianity I inherited when I first became a follower of Jesus at 17, we tend to put a premium (and this is where a lot of us come from) on knowing things. We have to know things and we have to be right about them. And our sense of security and well being was in having the right opinions about things. And when your sense of security and standing before God is rooted in knowing things and being right about those things, then you can get very agitated when people question those things, which makes it very hard to learn. And I imagine as we've talked about hell and as I'm going to say something about the rapture a person could get fairly irritated. That's why we have people on a fairly regular basis get up and walk out of the service. And it's like, "I know, I understand that." I remember how angry I got when I first went to Yale Divinity School, first semester. I was learning a little bit about church history and learned that the whole idea of the rapture wasn't around until the beginning of the 19th Century. It's like, "What! What is wrong with those people!?" You know, what took them so long!?! But it was like...I thought that was just standard stuff. It's all pretty much related to one verse in I Thessalonians 4, "We shall be caught up to meet Him in the air", and then I began to read that there's some scholars who would argue that was kind of just customary imagery, again apocalyptic imagery, standing for God's glory and people in church history didn't take that literally. In fact, they argued that the

New Testament folks wouldn't have taken that literally. Starting in Scotland in the early 19th Century they started to take that literally and that's why most Evangelicals today, or at least a good percentage, have believed in a *literal* rapture. And I don't...you know they could be right. But I wouldn't invest too much in the "rightness" of that. Because I don't know the details about how this thing's going to wrap up and I don't know that it matters. I'm just trusting that the Lord's going to come back and establish His kingdom sooner or later. And I say "Maranatha, come quickly!"

Paul: Amen.

Shawna: Amen.

So if salvation is not about a prayer how can we know for sure that we're saved?

Greg: Do you ask that in a "court of law" context or do you ask that in a "marital" context? It makes all the difference in the world.

Paul: Absolutely.

Greg: If you're asking in the "court of law" context, it's like, "OK. There's the judge, and I'm the defendant and Jesus is doing the intercession, so what are the terms of acquittal? I want to know the terms of acquittal; how can I know that I am for sure acquitted!?" And the presupposition is, "I know that judge would just as soon throw me to hell as he would get me acquitted so I gotta really be careful about this. The prayer I gotta prayer, the way I gotta live, the rules I gotta obey and how close to the edge can I get before he revokes my acquittal?" And all those questions. Whereas if you see this as a relationship....I don't tend to question my wife, "How do I know for sure that you are still married to me? How do I know for sure that you love me?" No, everyday you just ask the question, "How can I express my love?" and I trust the character of my wife. And so here, you trust the character of your heavenly spouse! We're the bride of Christ and He promises to betroth us. You have faith in Him. And faith is exemplified, covenantal faith, is illustrated by the direction of your life. Like, you know I'm married by how I live. I don't walk around with a piece of paper saying, "Here's my marriage certificate! Proof! Here's the proof! Hah hah!" It's like, "I was baptized. I said the sinner's prayer!" No, you don't walk around with....it's pretty pathetic if you gotta walk around and prove to people you're married by your marriage certificate. It should be manifested in how you live. You conduct yourself different than a single person would. So also, to be faithful to Christ and to trust in His faithfulness, means that now we're gonna move in this direction. We're gonna live in a way that reflects His Lordship. It's not about going inside your head and asking the question, "How certain am I? Do I have enough faith? I *do* believe, I *do* believe!"

Like there's some kind of psychological faith-o-meter in your head. No, that's...I wouldn't look *inside* to find this answer this question I would look at your life. Knowing that you're a sinner, so it's not gonna be perfect, but is there direction, is there intentionality? Are you in fact living as the spouse of Jesus Christ? Stop asking questions! Just stop asking and start loving people.

Paul: Yeah [nodding].

[One clap heard in the audience]

Greg: Thank you!

Shawna: [Laughing] One clap...

Paul: One clap... [Laughing] *One* person liked it!

Greg: I'll take it!

Shawna: [still laughing]

Are salvation, going to heaven and forgiveness of sins the same thing?

Paul: Well, I mean, when you get in the scripture, you put the Old and New Testaments together, there are almost an endless number of metaphors, descriptors, ways in which salvation is expressed, and different Christian traditions kind of latch onto certain ones of them. But if you look at all the Bible, there's just this amazing array of forgiveness of sins, yeah absolutely. Is that equal to salvation? That's an absolutely essential core part of it. [To Shawna] What was the other one?

Shawna: Uh... [Papers rustling]

Paul: Going to heaven!

Shawna: Yeah.

Paul: Is going to heaven? Well, if by that we mean not Plato's fairy world but actually to God's, the place where God will rule and reign, absolutely! That's part of the salvation...that's the existence for eternity. But it doesn't stop there! Being liberated from sin, being set free from the power of the devil, I mean this goes on and on. It's almost like this multi-sided diamond, salvation is. I think salvation is sort of the core idea, and you can look at all the ways in which salvation can be understood, expressed, its implications, it's just endless. But those are two of the ways that salvation is expressed. But what that suggests is we gotta be very clear with the New Testament that salvation is not simply a single-tensed word.

Greg: Yes.

Paul: Salvation comes with three tenses: past, present and future. And so Paul will say, “I *have been saved*” (past), Paul will say in I Corinthians 1:18, “I *am being saved*” (ongoing present), and he’ll say, “We *will be saved*” (in the future). And I think for a lot of us we love that ‘past’ word, “I was saved on January 17th, 1973 when I prayed the sinner’s prayer!” But no one, at least rarely in Evangelical Christianity do people talk about that “I am today *being saved*.” Because that would mean I would have to look at my life now and I have to ask the question, as Greg just said, it’s not just some certificate I had back in 1973, but is my life today reflecting an ongoing covenant relationship with Jesus Christ? Now that doesn’t mean today I’m perfect but is there a direction, as Greg said, to my life that’s headed in a marriage-like direction with Jesus. If not, are we just really looking for “fire insurance” from something that happened twenty years ago? That’s the thing we can fall into if we’re not clear about the multi-dimensions of this thing called “salvation”.

Greg: That was good. Not to beat a dead horse, but...

Paul: Go ahead.

Greg: But it kind of goes back to the whole, “Do you see it as a court of law or marriage” thing! You know, because if you’re seeing it as “court of law” then salvation is being acquitted. And that’s all you care about. So, you say the sinners prayer and then, done! And that’s why we see in all the polls that there’s this massive disjunct between people’s profession of faith and their life. Their life reflects very little different from just “American-ville”. Whereas if you see it in the marriage context, which is I think the really organic way of looking at it in the Bible, of course it’s not just about the end, in fact it’s not primarily about the end. It’s about here and now. It’s about the road that we’re traversing. Heaven and hell are simply the end games or the destinies of the road we’re on. The Bible’s all about changing the *roads*. And the fact that this one leads to destruction or however you want to spin it, that is...the important thing is the road you’re on is leading you there. So get off the road, not try to do some legal deal to change consequences.

Paul: Yeah, yeah.

Shawna: [Pause] Just making sure you’re done.

Greg: I’m done!

Shawna: OK, good [Laughs]. So:

If marriage is the predominant analogy for heaven, why do most Christians think we won't be married to our earthly spouses in heaven?

Paul: Mmm...Because Jesus said we won't. [Audience laughs]

Greg: Nah nah nah, boo boo! [Joking]

Paul: Jesus was asked one day, by some religious leaders who were trying to trip him...the Sadducees, they didn't believe in the resurrection, so they had this really interesting question to pin him down because Jesus *did* believe in the resurrection. They said, "Well what happens if you know one guy marries a woman and then he dies and she married his brother (I think it's brother) and there's like seven brothers in a row? Who's she going to be married to in the afterlife?"

Greg: Why are all...how come all of her husbands died?

Paul: Yeah, yeah, right. [Audience laughs] And Jesus says, "You don't understand..."

Greg: She's dangerous! [Shawna laughs]

Paul: [Laughs] Jesus said, "You don't understand because there is...we're going to be like angels, we don't give in marriage." But I think if you look, if you take that verse and understand what Jesus is saying through the lens of the rest of the New Testament, it's not that there won't be *marriage*; it's that we won't be married to *each other*. "We", plural, the body of Christ, are the bride who will be married to Jesus Christ. So there'll be marriage, it's just that the marriage is going to be of the people of God, the bride, to the groom, Jesus Christ. What our relationship will be as members within that bride sounds to me more like members of a body or maybe brothers and sisters, certainly intimate relationships, loving relationships. It's just that "marriage" analogy for heaven is saved for us as a people and Jesus as the groom.

Greg: But here's the classic case of the C.S. Lewis "chocolate" deal. Because you can hear that and think, "Man, that is boring. Brothers and sisters... [Sarcastically] woo hoo!" [Audience laughs] "Frankly I'd rather have the marriage!" Well and it should be the case that right now what makes relationships really profound and good and rich is that you don't have them with *everybody*! The relationship I have with my wife I have with my wife and no one else. And you have some friends who you let it...it's because you have a closeness to really core friends that you really don't have with everybody that makes that special. And so, hearing about this, you know, kind of...if you get a picture of heaven as sort of this "all sameness" it can really sound like it's all loss; like, all loss. Now, whatever else you think about the details of this, it's not gonna be loss. It will be the richness of the most precious relationships you have now, but better. I don't know, I doubt, because we're gonna still be finite beings that we're gonna have

the same relationship with everybody. Paul says, "We'll know even as we're known." So I think I'll still know that my wife was my wife and there will be some residue uniqueness, I don't know how...I have no idea how it's going to work but I do know it's gonna be much better than it is now. It won't be less. So, if you're thinking about, "Oh, gosh, that doesn't sound very good", just think you're a little six year old with chocolate trying to figure out sex.

Shawna: Again! [Laughing]

Paul: Or not...

Shawna: Or not! Thank you Paul! [Laughing]

Greg: You quote me out of context on that one I'll be in a lot of trouble, so don't. [Audience laughs]

Shawna: Wowza!

Greg: I've got enough problems.

Shawna: Let's go back to Rob Bell's book:

Rob Bell mentions in his book that Jesus only speaks of hell to the Pharisees. Should that re-frame how we spread the word to unbelievers?

Greg: Can you say the question again?

Paul: Rob Bell in the book says Jesus only talks about hell to Pharisees...

Greg: Oh!

Paul: ...not to your average pagan on the street.

Shawna: Should that re-frame how we spread the word to unbelievers?

Greg: I'm not quite sure he's accurate on that. I think he's claiming more...it's true that the focus was *primarily* towards Pharisees, Sadducees, and lawyers, the Jewish group, but there are other times where He makes teachings, warnings about hell that it's not indicated that they're the only specific audience. I may be wrong about that but I suspect that Rob is *slightly* overstating it. But, I would however say this, the primary warning (I think this is interesting) the primary warnings in the New Testament are towards the people that are *confident* they're on the inside. And you have all these interesting parables and teaching of Jesus where everything's reversed. The outsiders who were sure that they didn't have a chance are in, and

those who are just so “in” [with swagger], and they’re “in” because they’re righteous (unlike ‘those’ people) and they have the right opinions (unlike ‘those’ people), and also nationalism played into that somewhat, all three of which pertain a lot to the church today. If that’s what makes you confident you’re an insider, we need to hear the warnings that those are the ones that end up being on the outside. And then Jesus says crazy things like, “The prostitutes and the tax collectors are going into heaven before you!” That’s what got him crucified. You talk to religious folks like that they don’t like it very much. [Light laughter]

Shawna:

How do we have respectful and loving conversations with people who believe the world is ending very soon?

[Sparse laughter]

Paul: Not easily. [Louder laughter] I mean, you know, hopefully it’s the same basic principle of any love-centered dialogue. When it comes to religion on this planet, there’s an amazing array of differences of opinion, even within the same segment of a particular religious body, ie. Evangelical Christians who believe the Bible, right? And sometimes it’s those “in house” or almost “family” squabbles that get more intense than any. Now, from my perspective, if you’re having a conversation with someone who thinks the world’s ending next Tuesday, or next October 21st, or whenever [said with a smirk, laughter] you know, the first thing that comes to my mind is, “Well, OK, maybe...but haven’t there been a lot of dates set for centuries now by very Godly, apparently, Bible believing people.” And haven’t they all sort of come and gone? And doesn’t that verse in, I think, several Gospels, Mark at least, where Jesus says, “The Son of Man (He himself) doesn’t know the day or the hour, but only the Father who is in heaven.” And if Jesus doesn’t know it, wouldn’t that be a good starting point to say, “Probably we don’t either!” And you don’t have to do that sarcastically or anything, but just sort of lovingly challenge each other around a host of theological issues and be able to do that in love. And to the glory of God as opposed to me being right or you being right. I mean Greg has mentioned several times that this stuff...what does your mom and dad tell you never to talk about in public for the rest of your life if you want friends? Religion and politics. Why? Because religion goes to the heart of the deepest most profound things we believe and politics goes to the heart of how we think humans should interact on this planet. What does Jesus tell us? “Love God and love others.” This gets down, religion and politics, to the very core of who we are in terms of relationships with God and other people. And it can trigger amygdala, that reptilian part of your brain, so quickly when someone disagrees with you on the stuff that we hold so dear. And, I think, one of the chief spiritual disciplines of a follower of Jesus is to learn how to hear

someone challenge us, theologically, politically (these things that trigger us so easily) and to learn to not find our worth there. And just to let go, not letting go of truth, you're just letting go of having to prove to this person that you're the right one now and you enter in a dialogue. And do that in a way that doesn't invest your worth in the outcome of that conversation.

Greg: For me there's always a little bit of a tension between on the one hand how I would respond to someone personally, if a person is saying...and I didn't know anyone who thought that...was it May 21st that was supposed to be the rapture date? I didn't know anyone personally who was doing that. But I have known people who have believed some very interesting things and so you have to enter into that and love them and ascribe worth to them and how you talk about it...On the other hand, as someone who's a leader in a church, I feel a sense of responsibility to always, when there's some stuff that is done publically that represents a kind of Christianity that is in my opinion not "Kingdom" and is helping to discredit Christianity, I feel an obligation to say, "Hey you know what, there's some of us who don't believe that. In fact we think it's as silly as you do." Or sometimes when the church has done stuff that's evil I feel the need to say, "You know we think that's as evil as you do." Sometimes the way to evangelize, in fact a lot of times the way to evangelize today, I think, is to side with the unbeliever against the church. Because most of the criticisms are legitimate. And you do that...and you say, "You know what? It's interesting, Jesus wasn't at all like that." So to me there's kind of a tension there. Whether we're in a personal relationship or just talking personally with somebody, it's...however crazy the belief might strike you, it's always important to...the way you talk and respond to them has to be consistent with ascribing to them unsurpassable worth; which is what Jesus did by dying for them.

Shawna: OK, so...

Paul: Go...

Shawna: Can I go?

Paul: You can go ahead.

Shawna: So...

If not everyone will end up being saved how do you explain Universalist sounding passages like, "Every knee will bow and confess" and "As all were in Adam all will be in Christ"?

Greg: Very good question. I think, and I mentioned this a little bit earlier, that is...one of the values of Rob Bell's book, and there's a number of others who have done this as well, but it

forces us to grapple with those texts! And there are quite a number of them. From my perspective it is...going to...we're not going far enough if we don't say that God, that at least expresses God's intention. That God is not willing that any should perish but wants everybody to come to everlasting life and that in Christ, God's intention, He's put a bear-hug around everybody and He's said, "You're mine." In fact, I would say that it's not going too far to say that everybody is, as we were corporately in Adam, now we are corporately in Christ. That doesn't mean that you don't have the free will to choose against it, I think you do! But you're living in unreality, in fact I would define hell as that, as choosing your own reality over God. God says "You're in Christ", God says, "You belong to me", God says, "I forgive you." Now if you want to keep pretending that that's not true, well it's to your own detriment. You're bringing hell upon *yourself*. But I think those passages express God's intention. Personally, I think it's going too far to say that because of those verses we can now just be confident that everyone is going to be saved. I know that God will keep on trying as long as there's any hope, but the minute you conclude *that* then there's the danger of saying, "Therefore, nothing really matters." And the warnings now start to be minimized. And so I gotta balance those passages that express God's intention for Universality with the warning passages that there's hell to pay, literally, for setting up your own lordship in competition with God's Lordship.

Shawna: OK, Joshua from Minneapolis asks:

How do you respond to the verse in Revelation about being cast into the lake of fire if your name isn't written in the Lamb's Book of Life?

Greg: [To Paul] I took the last Revelation one, you take this one.

Paul: Read that again.

Shawna: "How do you respond to the verse in Revelation about being cast into the lake of fire if your name isn't written in the Lamb's Book of Life?"

Greg: Revelation 14:11.

Paul: Yeah, so as Greg has talked about earlier tonight, this category of "apocalyptic literature", the two main books in the Bible that are this type of literature are the books Revelation and a big chunk of the book of Daniel. And so, again, this is a *kind* of literature. It's not a kind that we tend to write today and so when we come to it we're not quite sure what to do with it in terms of "What are the rules of interpretation?" In the ancient Jewish world, this is a very common type of literature they would have been familiar with. What that means is we have to do some sort of historical study to ask the question, "What's going on in 'apocalyptic'?" Turns out that

what *is* going on in apocalyptic is things like this: a lot of visual imagery designed to make theological points with vivid imagery, that's one thing. The other thing is a lot of symbolism and a lot of numbers often times that refer or make reference to symbolical theological points. And you find that all over Revelation. Now when it comes to...when you know those things and now you read a verse like this, this lake of fire, that everyone's going to be thrown into it whose name isn't written in the Lamb's Book of Life, you've got the difficult question of saying, "When you find this in an 'apocalyptic' text, how *literal* do you take that?", right? And now you'll see the four views, and how they would respond to this text. The Traditional View would say, "Yes, 'apocalyptic' has a lot of symbolism but that fire is literal, because it's not only in Revelation that that's talked about, *Jesus* talks about a 'furnace of fire'. It's found in the Gospels. Paul talks about a burning in I Corinthians 3." So it isn't just here, therefore this could be taken literally and that's how you have the Traditional View that says fire is a literal thing, and everyone who's not written in that book of heaven, the Book of Life will be cast in there. Now, an Annihilationist is going to come to that very same text and say, "You know what, I can take that fire literally, just as literally as you can, but what does fire do? Fire *consumes*." And they will not look at the 'destruction' texts and say, "They will be cast in a lake of fire but that fire is going to ultimately destroy them." A Universalist comes along and is going to affirm that fire, maybe not as literally, but can still say, "We can take it seriously." Because what the fire does is it can work like a 'refiner's fire'. And they can show a lot of Old Testament texts where fire works to *refine* people, not destroy them or punish them forever but to burn the dross, the 'impurement', out of their life. The Universalist is going to say, "Yeah, they're thrown into a lake of fire to be purified so that one day they can hopefully enter heaven." So, again, it's a tough type of literature to interpret in the first place and all three of those positions can take it seriously if not literally.

Greg: It's important to remember that the book of Revelation, like all apocalyptic texts in the ancient world, it would have been read, *performed*, for congregations.

Paul: Out loud.

Greg: Out loud! In fact it says in the beginning of Revelation, "Let the reader..." what is it...?

Paul: "understand..."

Greg: "...understand and let those who *hear* be blessed..." Or something like that. But there's a *reader* and *hearer*, so the best way...you gotta put yourself in the position of a first century person and know a little bit about apocalyptic symbolism and have someone read the book to you to get the way it was intended to be heard. And the thing about 'apocalyptic imagery' is it's kind of like surrealistic poetry. I mean, it's intended to evoke strong emotions but I don't believe it's intended to communicate literal details on metaphysics. It's intended to evoke

action. And so I wouldn't press it too much for details. One more thing and that is that sometimes folks point out that in Revelations 14 it says, "The smoke of their torment went up forever and ever and ever." And that's used to try to prove eternal conscious torment. You gotta be very careful not only because you're dealing with apocalyptic imagery but because *that* imagery you find several places throughout the Bible. If you look at Isaiah chapter 34, verse 10, for example, you have the destruction of the city of Edom and there it says, "And the smoke of their destruction will ascend forever and ever and ever." But if you go back to Edom now you're not gonna find any smoke. I think, I never checked that out actually [smiles]. I'm assuming! But it's meant to be a graphic imagery, so even outside of apocalyptic literature you find that kind of symbolism. It's meant as a memorial, it's like they'll always remember the judgment that took place here. And remember the fire, our God is a consuming fire, I don't think the fire of God's wrath is any different than the fire of God's love. What's different is what kind of material goes into that fire and what the state of the heart is as you enter into the fire of God's love.

Shawna:

Is there Biblical support for a "combo" of Annihilation and the Universal view?

Greg: Well, I don't know if there's Biblical support for a combo, but there's Biblical support that you can find for both...And so, one might try to combine them! [Laughter] No, I think that's a legitimate theological enterprise, in fact, I'm thinking through that right now. I mean it's....the *you* that stands against God will be annihilated but it's possible, God could hardwire it into being a human being that there's always something left for God to work with. And so, He'll keep on 'turning up the flames' so to speak (but remember the flames aren't anything different than God's love) but as long as you hold out God will make it as miserable as necessary for you to come to the point where you realize there's nothing in it for you to hold out. I think God's doing that right now! When we insist on going our own ways there's things that happen to us, ways that he's trying to teach us. There's a refining fire that goes on *now*. So it *may* be that that would be a possible combination. On the other hand it may be nonsense to try that, I don't know [Laughter on stage].

Shawna: Thank you for *that*. [Laughing]

What do you make of Jesus going to hell after He was crucified and how would and Annihilationist explain this?

Paul: Hmm...Yeah, I mean some of the central creeds of the Christian faith is Jesus ascended into hell and after three days rose. The text that that 'creedal' statement is drawing from is primarily, I think, Ephesians 4 and I Peter 3 where it says Jesus went to this place where the spirits from Noah's day (this is the way I Peter 3 puts it), the spirits from Noah's day were held captive. And that He proclaimed...really, *preached* to them, that's really the language there in I Peter 3. A lot of theology has been spun out of that that Jesus went into hell, but it doesn't say 'hell' there. In neither Ephesians 4 or I Peter 3 does it say 'hell' there, I don't think, right?

Greg: Tartarus...it uses that weird word.

Paul: Yeah, Tartarus. So we're not quite sure what they're getting at but I would say those two verses are two of the most disputed verses in the interpretive history of the New Testament as to what's being talked about there. Greg's actually written about this in "God at War", I think you did some stuff on this... [To Greg] and I happen to agree with where Greg went on this. What Greg thinks is going on is that the spirits...first you gotta ask, "Who's the 'spirits' in Noah's day?" Because it wasn't all spirits, it was the spirits in Noah's day it says.

Greg: It's a very odd verse.

Paul: Well if you look to Genesis 6:1-4 you have this, possibly the weirdest four verses in the Bible, that talk about during Noah's day right around the flood time these, what they called "Sons of God" ...

Greg: "Ben Elohim".

Paul: "Ben Elohim", Sons of God who came and took daughters of men as wives and produced children with them and these children were these giant creatures.

Greg: Are you following this!? [Laughing]

Paul: And the best Jewish, the Jewish interpreters of the ancient world were very clear what they thought this was, that *angels* were the Sons of God who came and had sex with human women and the angelic/human hybrid offspring were these giant "Nephilim" they're called. And it seems that, because this theme runs through a lot of Jewish literature of Jesus' day, this story...In fact if you look at the book of I Enoch, we have four verses in our Bible on this, they have 36 chapters on this story in the book of I Enoch during this time. It seems that what Peter's saying, is that these spirits, these demonic spirits, these spirits who are not of God had Jesus come to them and preach to them, Greg argues for proclaiming victory over them. This is a spiritual warfare moment where Jesus comes into the place where demons are and proclaims to them that they no longer have the power over humanity that they once had. So it isn't about

going into hell like the 'lake of fire' hell. It's about going into perhaps that realm where spirit, angelic creatures exist and proclaiming spiritual warfare victory over them.

Greg: That's...an educated guess. [Greg and Paul laugh] I'm probably less confident of that...in fact I forgot that I wrote that. I'm glad you answered that because I could have offered an opinion that is very different than that [Audience laughs]. But, yeah, that's one way of looking at it.

Paul: You've changed your mind.

Greg: But this is the Nicene Creed and I think the gist of it is...there really isn't any compatibility with Annihilationism and that because not all Annihilationists are committed to the view that when a human being dies there's nothing there. There can be life after death it's just that the ultimate state of anyone who becomes hopeless is annihilation. So there really isn't any compatibility there. And I think the gist of the Nicene Creed is, however you interpret the metaphysics of it, is that Jesus went through hell for us. I mean, "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?" ...whatever happened after He died, you know...I don't know. But there was an experience of, He was surrendered over to the principalities and the powers and the hellish consequences of God forsakenness God, Himself, brought on Himself. And that act of love is what destroyed the principalities and powers. I think that's the gist of it. The metaphysics I'm not too sure about. We got time for one more!

Shawna: One more?

Greg: I think we do.

Shawna: OK, we got:

If there will be free will in heaven could there ever be another fall?

Paul: Good, this is a *great* question. It all depends on your view of free will. Greg's written a book... [Audience laughs]...

Shawna: Of course!

Greg: He's my walking advertisement!

Paul: [Laughs] Pretty good book, "Satan and the Problem of Evil", in which Greg talks about free will. And his last claim, he has six theses he puts out about free will, the last one is that free will is *finite*, it runs out. And his point is, and I agree with Greg on this, that free will has an absolutely essential purpose for us as humans. But it isn't a purpose that lasts forever. Free

will is sort of a 'probationary' period for us. It's a period to make a decision as whether we will enter into a covenant relationship with God and others, choose the path of love, or whether we will reject that and basically choose the path of 'self': self-orientation, self-centeredness, and all the things that come with that sort of broken life. And once that decision is made and lived out...if you're a Christian you choose the path of life, the Holy Spirit comes in, eventually you are solidified in that. And on the other hand, once you choose the path of self-centeredness and live that out to the point of death and beyond, you're eventually solidified in that path too. And that ultimately, Greg put it this way once, I don't know if you remember this, but you said, "In the beginning, we make our choices..."

Greg: That was Aristotle, I didn't say that...

Paul: You plagiarized, whatever... [Joking]

Shawna: [Laughs]

Greg: According to Aristotle...

Paul: But in the end our choices make us. We think we're free, and we are, but eventually once you keep digging the same rut and the same path of your life, eventually one day you just wake up and you realize you've just become your choices. That means in heaven love is absolutely real but it's the kind of love that you've *become*, and there is no longer a freedom to choose against it because you've allowed God to use your freedom while on earth to form you into a loving being. And I think that's precisely how we can appreciate the value of free will now, but realize heaven won't be a place where we can threaten it again with multiple falls over and over again through eternity.

Greg: Yeah, the full quote is, "We start by making our choices, our choices become habits. Our habits, if we persevere in them, become our character. And our character becomes our destiny." And that you can actually trace back to Heraclitus in 6th Century B.C. It's really been a piece of ancient wisdom and found throughout church theology as well that the whole point is *character development*. So free will isn't an end in itself...this perspective, its purpose is to, from God's perspective, its purpose is a necessary stepping stone to a much greater kind of freedom. And that's the freedom to no longer *have to* choose. When we have to choose between love or its antithesis, that is a necessary thing, it could be programmed into us but that is in its own way...compared to being a loving person that's a form of *bondage*. Imagine a person who has not had their character formed in love in a marriage and so they're always tempted. They're always wrestling with the temptation, "Should I be faithful or not." Well that person is not nearly as free as the person who has repeatedly made the choice to be faithful and now they do it instinctively. It becomes a habit, they say 'no' to temptation, it becomes a habit, then it becomes their character and now, even if they don't know this, God would know

that their character is such that they're never gonna fall. They still choose not to but the choice is now a part of their character. And see this is I think, it's a good way to end it, and this is, I think, the end game for everything: God wanted to create a *bride* who would become like Him in terms of being 'Godly'. God's essence is love. Love as reflected in Calvary. That's His very essence. God isn't up there making the choice between good and evil, it's His *eternal being*. We are created beings who by definition could be otherwise, so for us if it was programmed into us then it would be like a "Stepford Wife" thing. There would be no genuine love in that. There has to be free will, which involved kind of a risk. But the point of the free will isn't in and of itself like, "Oh, good! You get to choose against me if you want!" The point is Him saying, "Please choose for me and I will do *everything* in heaven and earth and in hell to win you over with that choice. The goal is to become like me in terms of becoming 'Godly' beings. No longer beings who happen to choose love, but *loving beings*." And so throughout eternity will reflect the Godliness of the love and the joy and the ecstasy and the bliss of the Triune God as we set up the Kingdom of God, live out and dance out the Kingdom of God and the new heavens and the new earth in our glorified bodies.

Paul: Amen!

Greg: Amen and amen!

Shawna: Thank you!

Greg: [To Shawna] Thank you! And you guys [to audience] thanks for coming!

Shawna: [Audience begins to applaud] Thanks guys. Thank you for coming.

Greg: Appreciate all you who tuned in live stream. Appreciated it! [Standing and shaking shirt] It's a sauna in here! Man alive, it's hot!

Shawna: Hell... [Laughing]

Greg: Hot topic!

END