



# Truth

## On Tough Texts

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A MINISTRY OF GRACE BIBLE CHURCH

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### Reader Questions (2)

#### Selected Texts

**A**S MENTIONED BACK IN OUR JANUARY 2007 issue (#30), we receive many questions from readers and decided to dedicate an entire issue of TOTT periodically to answer such questions. This is our second installment, and we pray these questions and answers will be of blessing and help to many. Our thanks to each one of you who wrote, and we hope that this will generate questions from others.

#### *What is the Meaning Of Mathew 7:6?*

**Q:** I thank you greatly for your response to my last question on three days and three nights [see TOTT #30]. My question this time is on Matthew 7:6. I have read this verse many times and am in question about it. I know this is a book written with Jewish readers in mind, but I am confused as to what they would have understood. It almost seems to me to be out of place. (DP)

**A:** I am very thankful for this question. It addresses a verse that is much needed in our day: **Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.**

This verse is not at all “out of place.” On the contrary, it comes on the heels of a crucial passage on “judgment” and “discernment.” As mentioned way back in TOTT #10 in our series “Where Has Our Discernment Gone?” (#8–10), many today read verse 1—“Judge not, that ye be not judged”—and then immediately cry, “See there, Jesus says we are not supposed to be critical of anyone; we should not criticize what they believe or say.” That, of course, is always the cry of tolerance:

“Just leave me alone; don’t judge what I say; don’t ask any questions; just let things be.”

But that is clearly not what Jesus is saying when you take the time to read the context, verses 2–5. He says, in effect, we are not to judge and discern *hypocritically* or judge someone’s *motives and attitudes*, which have nothing to do with what someone *teaches*. They might have the purest motive and sweetest attitude, but that is never the issue; *the issue is what they teach*. Each of us is tempted to hold others to a higher standard than we hold ourselves, which is hypocrisy, so we must first make sure of our own life, make sure our standard is consistent, and *then* discern actions. In fact, that is exactly what Jesus says: “First, get the *log* out of your own eye and *then* you can remove the *splinter* that’s in your brother’s eye.” Our Lord did not say, “Leave the splinter where it is.” He said, “Deal with the error in your life first and then address the error in your brother.”

Now we come to verse 6, which clearly shows once again that Jesus did not forbid every kind of judgment (or discernment). He instructs His disciples here that when they discern certain people to be either **dogs** or **swine**, they should not cast before them things that are holy (**pearls**). In that day dogs were not the sweet, lovable pets we have in our homes today, rather most of them were wild, savage scavengers. Pigs also were wild, vicious scavengers and were the quintessential picture of filth and uncleanness. Jesus’ Jewish listeners (and readers), then, would have immediately understood His meaning. As unthinkable as it would be to cast anything of value to such animals—for they would just **trample** them into the filth—it is equally unimaginable that we

would continue to share the Gospel or other holy truths with people who do nothing but mock, malign, and molest such spiritual riches. People do enough of this without our giving them more opportunity and even an open forum.

This was, in fact, precisely the reason our Lord began to speak in parables. Read Matthew 13:10–15, 34, noting that Jesus deliberately chose to hide certain truths from unbelievers, thus fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 6:9–10.

There will, therefore, be times when you will witness to someone who reacts with abject scorn, from whom we should turn away and “shake off the dust of [our] feet” (Matt. 10:5–15). In his wonderful single-volume commentary, *The Believer’s Bible Commentary*, William MacDonald writes:

When we meet vicious people who treat divine truths with utter contempt and respond to our preaching of the claims of Christ with abuse and violence, we are not obligated to continue to share the gospel with them. To press the matter only brings increased condemnation to the offenders. Needless to say, it requires spiritual perception to discern these people. Perhaps that is why the next verses take up the subject of prayer, by which we can ask for wisdom.<sup>1</sup>

If I may, I would dare apply this principle to an increasingly common practice today that is really quite appalling. More and more we see evangelicals (some calling themselves “Christian Apologists”) holding discussions and debates with atheists, evolutionists, Muslims, and every other apostate and enemy of Christ under the sun. While we most certainly do *not* doubt the pure motives and evangelistic zeal of such “apologists,” what else can we call this except “casting pearls before swine”? While Paul could have stood toe-to-toe with the Greek philosophers in Corinth and debated them right out of the forum, that is *not* what he did; rather he simply preached the Gospel (I Cor. 2:1–5). It is not our well-argued points or our refutation of the other person’s position that wins anyone to Christ, rather God’s power that does the work. It is “the gospel of Christ” *itself* that is “the power of God unto salvation” (Rom. 1:16).

### **What does Proverbs 8:22–31 Mean?**

**Q:** Proverbs 8:22–31 has frustrated me so much, and no one has been able to give me a direct answer. What does this mean? Is this talking about Christ, and if so, does this mean He was a created being? I believe in the always existent Triune Godhead. (WL)

**A:** Well, I will certainly try to give you a “direct answer,” and I do pray it will help alleviate your frustration.

While this passage has been interpreted as representing a picture of Christ, there is really no justification for doing so. The context is about the eternal character of *wisdom*, and there is no merit to the idea that it is Messianic. Yes, Christ is the Word (Jn. 1:1, 14), He is the revelation of God’s wisdom (1 Cor. 1:24), and He possesses all wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:3), but this passage is not prophetic.

One glaring reason that it is not a reference to Christ is that we are forced to conclude that He was **brought forth**, that is, created. Such an idea, of course is apostasy, for He “was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men” (Jn. 1:2–4). Another reason is if Christ is “wisdom” here, to be consistent every other reference to wisdom in Proverbs would also have to refer to Him, an odd idea to say the least.

The view that this is a reference to Christ is actually not at all new. The Targum—oral Aramaic paraphrases (not translations) of the Old Testament made from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century to about the 7<sup>th</sup> Century AD—makes this wisdom a living entity by translating the passage: “God created me in the beginning of his creatures.” As Commentator Adam Clarke observes, “This is as absurd and heretical as some modern glosses on the same passage.” This is also how the Septuagint—the Greek translation of the Old Testament—handles the passage, which is what Arius—a 4<sup>th</sup> Century parish priest in Alexandria—used to teach his apostate doctrine that Jesus was not coequal with God but was a created being. Arianism has been taught in numerous forms ever since, one of the most recent variations being the 2003 book, *The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown.

What we see here, then, is wisdom as a personification of God’s own attribute of wisdom. “The passage shows,” writes Charles Ryrie, “that wisdom is older than creation and is fundamental to it (v. 23), that it assisted in creation as a master workman (v. 30), and that it rejoiced in creation (vv. 30–31).”<sup>2</sup> This leads to a related question.

### **What Does Colossians 1:15 Mean ?**

**Q:** I need some clarification on Colossians 1:15. What does it mean in this context to be the firstborn of all creation? (WL)

**A:** At first glance, this verse is, indeed, troublesome: **[Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature.** Is this saying that Christ was a created being? If so, then God also gave Christ the power of creation, as verse 16 goes on to say: “by him were all things created.” Such an idea, of course, is fraught with problems. This would also mean that verses that ascribe worship to Christ (Jn. 13:13; Heb. 1:6; I cor. 1:2; etc.) are false and teach an apostate idea, for only

God can receive worship (Matt. 4:10; etc.), not something that God created.

So what about that word **firstborn**? This word is used in three distinct ways in Scripture. In the *literal* sense, it speaks of physical birth, as when Mary “brought forth her firstborn son” (Lk. 2:7). In the *figurative* sense, it is used to refer to a distinctive place that something has, as when God called Israel His “son, even my firstborn” (Ex. 4:22). Finally, it is also used to denote *superior or supremacy*, as when God said He would make David His “firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth” (Ps. 89:27).

It is, therefore, in that last sense that Paul asserts that Christ, as the eternal Son, holds the position of supremacy in relation to all creation. He was *before* all things (v. 17), He *created* all things (v. 16), and He *sustains* all things (v. 17).

### ***Should We Pray to Jesus?***

**Q:** How would you respond (or would you respond) to those who address prayers to Jesus instead of God the Father when praying aloud? (BM)

**A:** In case other readers need clarification, the biblical method for prayer is: pray *to* the Father *through* the Son *in* the power of the Holy Spirit.

*First*, Scripture is clear that we are to pray *to* the Father; He is the *Object*. This is the guideline in “The Model Prayer” (Matt. 6:9–13). After saying, “After this manner [or, “in this way”] therefore pray ye,” the first principle Jesus states is: “Father, Who art in heaven. Hallowed be Thy name.” This is foundational.

*Second*, Jesus then is the *Mediator*. We could not pray in the way we do if it were not for Him. It is by His merits and through His work that we can even approach the Father. John 14:13 declares: “And whatever ye shall ask in My Name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.” We read again in 16:23–24: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.”

The Beloved J. Vernon McGee insightfully observes, “Someone may ask whether we can’t pray to Jesus. I think you can if you wish to, but why do you rob yourself of an intercessor? Jesus is up there at God’s right hand for you, praying for you. That is the reason that we should pray to the Father in the name of Jesus.”<sup>3</sup>

*Third*, The Holy Spirit then is the *Interpreter*. Romans 8:26–27 explains: “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered [or, “dismayed sighs that cannot be expressed in words”]. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints

according to the will of God.” It is the Holy Spirit Who gives us the power to pray. He takes our prayers to the Father; He interprets them because we do not know all there is to know about prayer. How could we possibly approach God without the Holy Spirit to interpret?

If we may add briefly, Paul writes elsewhere, “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit” (Eph. 6:18). Without question, praying “in the Spirit” is the master key to an effective prayer life. It means we are yielded to the Spirit’s wishes, not our own (cf. 1 Jn. 5:14). As one commentator writes, we are to pray “not in a perfunctory manner, not by reciting our favorite syllable or empty repetitions, but praying from the depths of our souls. To pray in concert with the Holy Spirit means that the communication is earnest in its origin and its passion.”<sup>4</sup>

Now, with all that in mind, it is always awkward (and can be offensive) to “criticize” how someone prays, even when we are trying to help. Prayer is a *very* personal activity, so telling someone they’re “doing it wrong” can make for hard feelings to say the least. I certainly would not mention it right after someone prays or anytime soon thereafter. One way to approach it would be to do so indirectly during a discussion of Scripture. For example, you could bring up the subject of prayer, talk about its wonderful privileges and blessings, and then at some point insert the correct model without even mentioning what you heard the person say. Another approach would be to give the person a copy of this article as a sample of TOTT to see if they might be interested in subscribing, or you could recommend a good book on prayer that deals with this subject.

### ***What are the Origins of “Pope”***

**Q:** What are the origins and meaning of “Pope.” (BM)

**A:** The word “pope” itself is from the Latin *pāpa*, which in-turn is from the Greek *pappas*, “father.” It refers, of course, to the leader of the Roman Catholic “church.” While the Pope is referred to as “Holy Father,” the Lord Jesus expressly forbade His disciples from calling any man “father” in the spiritual sense: “Call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven” (Matt. 23:9).

The entire shaky foundation for this title is based upon only two texts of Scripture, according the *Catholic Encyclopedia*. The first is Matthew 16:16–19. For 1500 years Rome has taught, “Here then Christ teaches plainly that in the future the Church will be the society of those who acknowledge Him, and that this Church will be built on Peter.” It goes on to say, “The word for Peter and for rock in the original Aramaic is one and the same; this renders it evident that the various attempts to explain the term ‘rock’ as having reference not to Peter himself but to something else are misinterpretations.”<sup>5</sup>

*This teaching, however, is not faithful to the Greek text.* The words behind “Peter” and “rock” in the Greek are most certainly *not* the same. In Classical Greek, *petra* (“rock”) refers to a large rock, such as a boulder, cliff, bedrock, or even a mountain chain. It (with *petros*, “Peter,” a smaller stone that a man can throw) is, of course, where we get English words such as *petrify* (turning organic matter into rock) and *petroleum* (oil that comes from the earth or even from rock, as in the case of oil shale). It also carries the figurative meaning, as Homer used it in his *Odyssey*, of firmness and immovability of character. Aeschylus and Euripides also used it to denote hardheartedness.

Using a play on words, then, our Lord is plainly saying that He will build His church, *not* on Peter (*Petros*, a throwable stone), as Catholicism teaches, but on Himself, Who is the large rock, the bedrock, the foundation stone, the “cornerstone,” (Eph. 2:20; 1 Pet. 2:4–8; cf. I Cor. 3:11). Jesus then adds that it is because of that foundation that nothing will ever “prevail against” (*katischuō*, “overcome, overpower, vanquish”) His church, not “Peter’s church.”

The other text on which the “Papacy” (the name for the Pope’s office) is built is John 21:15–17, and this teaching is even more absurd than that on the Matthew passage. It insists that the Greek *poimainō*, “feed” in verse 16, which also means “rule,” fulfills the promise Jesus made to Peter in the Matthew passage. Such a conclusion is transparent conjecture, concocted to prop up a feeble theory. There is not a single word in this passage that states, or even implies, Peter’s supremacy, rather that he, like all other pastors, will teach and lead God’s people (cf. Acts. 20:28; Eph. 4:11–12; etc.).

As mentioned earlier, Rome’s teaching has existed for 1500 years. So what about before that time? A fact Rome tries to downplay is that the Papacy did not even exist until 590, when Gregory I (590–604) was the first bishop to be appointed “supreme bishop.” In order then

to defend the idea of “apostolic succession”—the tracing of the Papacy back to Peter—Rome went back through history picking certain bishops and dubbing them as links in the chain back to the supposed “first pope.” That list, which has been revised several times and is currently at 63 bishops,<sup>6</sup> is questionable at best. A quick glance at the first ten, for example, confirms that very little is known about them, and several of those that follow are not even clearly defined figures of history.

To say, therefore, that the Roman Catholic papacy can be traced back through history to Peter is one of the most patently ridiculous, blatantly dishonest, and appallingly unscholarly statements to be made in the history of the world. Does that surprise us? Not in the least. Roman Catholicism is the most evil perversion of Christianity Satan could devise. It is pagan, wicked, and deceptive. It is a works-oriented system that perverts the work of Christ in many blasphemous ways (the Papacy being one) and was the reason the Protestant Reformation was necessary. How sad it is that many “evangelicals” today are trying to undo it.<sup>7</sup>

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> William MacDonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), p.1228.

<sup>2</sup> *Ryrie Study Bible*.

<sup>3</sup> J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible* (comment on Jn. 16:23–24).

<sup>4</sup> R. C. Sproul, *The Purpose of God: An Exposition of Ephesians* (Christian Focus Publications, 1994), p. 153.

<sup>5</sup> *Catholic Encyclopedia*. You can read the entire article at: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12260a.htm>.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12272b.htm>.

<sup>7</sup> The reader might want to listen to *The Five Solas of the Reformation* series on our website, available there in MP3 media.

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This monthly publication is intended to address Scriptures that have historically been debated, are particularly difficult to understand, or have generated questions among Believers. We hope it will be an encouragement and challenge to God’s people to carefully examine and discern Truth. While the positions presented here are based on years of careful Biblical research, we recognize that other respected men of God differ.

If you have a question that perplexes you, please send it along so that we might address it either in an article or in our “Q & A” section. Other comments are also warmly welcomed, and letters to the editor will be published.

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