



# TRUTH ON TOUGH TEXTS

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## READER QUESTIONS (10)

### SELECTED TEXTS

**O**NCE AGAIN WE TURN TO QUESTIONS OUR READERS have on certain texts of Scripture or specific issues. In this installment of a series that began way back in January of 2008, we address five questions.

#### What About Solomon's Lavish Sacrifice?

**Question:** 2 Chronicles 7:4–5 says, “Then the king and all the people offered sacrifices before the Lord. And king Solomon offered a sacrifice of twenty and two thousand oxen, and an hundred and twenty thousand sheep: so the king and all the people dedicated the house of God.” Did these lavish sacrifices please God more than ordinary sacrifices or were they an expression of human excitement and “if-a-little-is-good-a-lot-must-be-better” thinking? (CW)

**Answer:** I must admit, here is a thoughtful question I had never considered before. I would offer three thoughts (with the occasional reference to the parallel account in 1 Kings 8).

*First*, the setting of this incident is the dedication of the Temple built by Solomon (2 Chron. 6:2). After Solomon's lengthy prayer of dedication (6:12–42), God sent “fire . . . down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices” (7:1). In response, we read of the sacrifices the people offered.

*Second*, was the response “an expression of human excitement and ‘if-a-little-is-good-a-lot-must-be-better’ thinking?” Well, the reaction of the people, starting with Solomon himself, was profound, as “they bowed themselves with their faces to the ground upon the pavement, and worshipped, and praised the LORD, saying, For he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever” (v. 3). It is easy to see then that they were so stirred that “a-lot-must-be-better” thinking took over.

I should interject here, however, that some question whether these staggering numbers are actually true. One commentator, for example, makes this troubling statement:

The considerable number of animals, 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep, would require twenty sacrifices a minute for ten hours a day for twelve days. A hyperbole probably is intended (cf. the figures at the time of Hezekiah, 29:32–36, and Josiah, 35:7–9).<sup>1</sup>

I could not help but also be reminded here of those who insist that 1,000 doesn't really mean 1,000 when it specifies the length of Jesus' earthly Kingdom (Rev. 20:1–6). What this writer seems to overlook, however, is that the celebration actually lasted *14 days*, as stated in 1 Kings 8:65. This included not only the seven days of the Feast of Dedication but undoubtedly also the seven days of the Feast of Tabernacles, spoken of in the Chronicles account (“the feast of seven days,” v. 8, which occurred on the 15<sup>th</sup>–21<sup>st</sup> of the 7<sup>th</sup> month).

Additionally, as expositor John Gill points out, these numbers are not at all out of line, “since, as Josephus says, at a Passover celebrated in the times of Cestius the Roman governor, at the evening of the Passover, in two hours time 256,500 lambs were slain.”<sup>2</sup> Obviously, Solomon also had at his disposal an uncounted number of both priests and altars.

As for this being hyperbole, we must ask how many sacrifices were there then? Did the writer just get carried away and add a zero (or maybe even two). I would also point out that the figures at the time of Hezekiah (29:32–36; 70 bulls, 100 rams, 200 lambs) and Josiah (35:7–9; 30,000 sheep and goats and 3,000 cattle) are irrelevant. Those were separate incidents and have no bearing on this situation.

I am indeed, deeply troubled nowadays when interpreters question the text, regardless of how insignificant it might appear. If the text doesn't mean what it says, then we can have no idea what it does mean and undermine biblical authority.

*Third*, did it please God more? I am compelled here to say *yes*. I would submit, however, that it was not the *amount* that pleased God but rather the *attitude*. “God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7). “Cheerful” translates *hilaros*. While the English “hilarious” comes from this, that is *not* what the Greek means. Rather it denotes a joyful state of mind that reflects a “kindly eye” and a “cheerful countenance. . . . What is Christian is not the thought itself but the new motivation.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, God loves those who joyfully and generously give out of a heart that has been transformed by conversion (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17). So, it would seem that even in this OT situation God would have been pleased indeed at the joyful praise and sacrifices of His people. And He likewise is today!

## David or Messiah?

**Question:** How do we differentiate what was about David and what was about Jesus in Messianic Psalms? For example, Psalm 22. I can see how much of it is general enough to apply to David and then more fully be about Christ. But, what about verses like verse 16 where David says, "they have pierced my hands and feet"? David was never captured so I don't completely understand how it would be true of him. (PW)

**Answer:** David was clearly speaking prophetically, as he was, in fact, a prophet (cf. Acts 2:30–31). He was at no time in the severe circumstances described here. He was never: "despised of the people" (6); without a helper (11); in the exhausted, weak, and emaciated state here described (14–17); pierced either in his hands or feet (16); stripped of his clothes (17); gazed upon in contempt by the populace (17); or humiliated by having his garments parted among his persecutors by casting lots (18). Yes, there is an intense personal note in this psalm, no doubt wrung out of David through some bitter experience—though which one is not specified—but by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit the description goes far beyond anything David ever experienced. That is why both ancient Hebrew commentators and Christians alike have discerned a clear, careful, and colorful picture of what Messiah would suffer. That is also why there are no less than 15 messianic quotations of or allusions to this psalm in the NT. This psalm, therefore, is not about David at all. The Holy Spirit revealed to him what Messiah would suffer, starting with the very words Jesus spoke on the Cross: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

## Is Arminianism "Another Gospel"?

**Question:** Since this November was the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Synod of Dort, I desire to clarify the following: Has there been any ecumenical council in the last 400 years to overturn the ruling of 1618–19? Specifically, is Arminianism still considered a heresy? Is it considered "another gospel"? Is Arminianism a form of idolatry? Is the god of Arminianism worshipable? Thank you for your consideration and kind attention to this request. (BNA)

**Answer:** Before I share my reply to this brother, a little history is required.<sup>4</sup> Please bear with me; I will return to the question. About AD 400, Pelagius, a British monk and theologian, postulated his ideas of how man is saved. He believed each person has the same "free will" as Adam and, therefore, is able to choose good or evil because each person is created separately and uncontaminated by Adam's sin. Sin, therefore, is a matter of *will*, not *nature*. It is just as easy for a man to choose good as it is to choose evil. The obvious question that arises here is: why then, is there so much sin? Pelagius maintained that this is not a corruption of the will by original sin but rather by the simple weakness of human flesh. But even a cursory glance at this reveals its inconsistency. After all, if we can choose good over evil, but choose evil because of weakness, where does the weakness come from? How can we be only partially corrupt? To illustrate, if you have a glass of water and drop a single drop of strong acid into it, you corrupt all the water. Likewise, man is either sinful or he isn't. There is no *partial* corruption, only *total* corruption.

Therefore, Pelagius concluded, since each person is created with perfect freedom to do good or evil, a sinless life is possible, and salvation can ultimately come from good works, although the law, the Gospel, and divine nature greatly aid in attaining salvation. While redemption is an essential element of Christianity, Pelagianism says that man has no need of redemption. Full-blown Arminianism also departs from this central theme because ultimately man is only partly redeemed because he already has a little good in him. Those teachings were in direct conflict with those of Augustine, who strongly taught the Doctrines of Grace. Augustine, whom Pelagius met in 410, fought these teachings and finally won out over them, although, that was not the end of the story.

After the defeat of Pelagius' views at the Council of Ephesus in 431, John Cassianus (c.360–435) tried to find a compromise. Cassianus, also a monk, labored for a while with Pelagius in Rome, but later rejected Pelagius' errors. While he taught that all men are sinful because of the fall, and that the fall *weakened* the will, he still, like Pelagius, rejected that the fall *totally* corrupted the will. He taught that the will is partially free and can, therefore, cooperate with divine grace in salvation. In other words, the first movement is man's. The Semi-Pelagian maxim was, "It is mine to be willing to believe, and it is the part of God's grace to assist." Cassianus also rejected Augustine's doctrine of God's election and efficacious grace. But how incredulous it is to think that man could (or would) ever "cooperate" with God! This view was also rejected, however, being condemned at the Synod of Orange in 529 in favor of a moderate Augustinian view.

The next step in this history takes us about 1,000 years forward to James Arminius (1560–1609). By the time Arminius was born, John Calvin was only four years away from his death. Also by this time, Calvin's teachings on salvation, the "Doctrines of Grace," had been decisively victorious. Indeed, it was these Reformation (and far more importantly *biblical*) doctrines that led men out of the blindness that had prevailed in the Church for centuries.

Some of the ministers in Holland, however, did not accept the full significance of Calvin's doctrines of grace and election, and ultimately Arminius became their spokesman. He wanted to modify Calvinism so that, in his view, it didn't make God the author of sin and so that man was not just a robot in the hands of God (objections that are easily refuted). Essentially, however, Arminius rejected practically all the Doctrines of Grace, *since each truth builds on the former truth*. Reluctant to make his views public, he finally agreed to do so at a national synod. He died, however, nine years before it was called in 1618. His followers, therefore, presented his views in a five point statement, called the "Remonstrance" (protest, opposition). In essence, it said:

- 1) While man did inherit Adam's sin and is under God's wrath, he is still able to initiate his salvation after God grants him grace to cooperate.
- 2) God's election had "its foundation in the foreknowledge of God." Therefore, election is conditional on man's acceptance.
- 3) Christ's death did not actually save but made salvation *possible* to those who believe.
- 4) While God's grace is needed, God doesn't draw

man effectually, rather man believes only in his power and can resist the Holy Spirit's call.

5) Finally, God gives believers the ability to win out over all sin and not fall from grace, but Scripture also seems to indicate that it is possible for a believer to fall away from salvation.

But once again, these views were totally rejected, this time at the Synod of Dort in 1618. Of the 130 present, only 13 defended these views. Is it not instructive that on three separate occasions false doctrine on the same subject was overwhelmingly rejected? Three times men tried to water down the Gospel, and three times those who wanted a pure Gospel "earnestly contended for the faith once for all delivered to the saints." "No," they cried, "it is all of God!"

It was also at this very synod that the so-called "five points" of Calvinism were presented. A common error is that these five points were first, when, in fact, they were drawn up in response to the error of the five points of Arminianism. Unfortunately, of course, saying (and proving) that something is wrong doesn't make it go away, and the same was true of Arminianism. On the contrary, Arminianism deeply imbedded itself into theological thought. In his Introduction to Martin Luther's classic *The Bondage of the Will*, J. I. Packer wrote: "the present-day Evangelical Christian has semi-Pelagianism in his blood."<sup>5</sup> Indeed, countless evangelicals hold the Arminian view because they fail to stop and think what the words "for by grace are you saved" really mean.

We now return to this reader's question and my two-fold answer.

*First*, no, nothing ever overturned Dort's victory, although given the alliance of church and state and the political upheaval of the time, the aftermath casts a sad shadow. In the name of religious tolerance, Dutch statesman Johan van Oldenbarnevelt aided the Remonstrants. While the Calvinists insisted that any synod that was called should involve only the Church, the Arminians were backed by the state. Things quickly got out of hand as both sides were militarized. When the dust settled after Dort, van Oldenbarnevelt was beheaded for the crime of "general perturbation in the state of the nation, both in Church and State" (i.e., treason). The Arminians were also ordered to sign the Act of Cessation, an agreement to stop their ministry. When they refused to sign it, they were ejected from their homeland as "disturbers of the peace."

That aside, in light of the biblical Theology, there is no denying that Arminianism is heresy, always has been, always will be. Indeed, as John Owen submitted, so-called "free will" is an "idol" to the Arminians.<sup>6</sup> The term is a symbol of man's pride in thinking that He can in and of himself choose God when his entire history proves that he chooses sin.

*Second*, however, it is crucial that we are very careful how we speak. As Paul told the Galatians, if anyone preaches "another Gospel," let him be accursed (Gal. 1:8-9), but that was specifically aimed at the Judaizers who were adding something to grace. I know many Arminians who believe in grace alone, so I simply cannot say they believe another Gospel. They simply need to be taught the extent of the fall and the full meaning of the principle "all of grace" (Eph. 2:1-10; etc). As a dear pastor friend of mine puts it, "We all started out Arminians," and he's right. Everyone grows at different rates.

Patient teaching and speaking the Truth in love is always the right approach.

## Is There a Difference between Heresy and Apostasy?

**Question:** Is there a difference between "heresy" and "apostasy"? I hear these terms a lot and sometimes even in the same context. Is there a difference between them or are they just synonymous? (RP)

**Answer:** This question is a perfect follow-up to the previous one. While there is a fine line between these two doctrinal deviations (and perhaps even a little overlap), there is a basic distinction.<sup>7</sup>

*First*, there is *apostasy*. This is a direct transliteration of the Greek *apostasia*, which refers to a revolt, a state of rebellion, or a falling away. A key verse here is 1 Timothy 4:1: "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from [*apostasia*] the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils." This vividly describes the last days before Christ's return. Those days will be (and are!) inundated with apostates, those who have revolted against and departed from Christian truth. In other words, it is *professed* Christianity but actually a denial of it. This might consist of all Christian truth or just a single truth (such as Christ's deity or salvation by grace alone) that is so pivotal that it results in the destruction of all biblical truth. *An apostate, therefore, is not a Christian*. One historical example is Arius, a fourth-century parish priest in Alexandria who taught that Jesus was not coequal with God and was, in fact, a created being. Arianism has existed in various forms ever since, such as Unitarianism, Mormonism, and Jehovah's Witness. Added to this are many today who do not preach the true Gospel but rather works and other departures.

There has always been the plague of false teaching and teachers. That is why discernment is so crucial. The main thrust of Peter's second epistle is a warning against false teachers who will infiltrate the church. That is best summarized in 2:1: "There shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction." We see here at least three principles.

*First*, false teaching is *deceitful*. "Privily" is *pareisagō*, to bring in by the side of, to bring something in by smuggling it. False teaching has to be "brought in the side door" lest someone see it for what it really is. Jude 1:4 expands on the same truth: "For there are certain men crept in unawares [*pareisdō*, 'to enter in craftily, secretly, without notice, like a thief'<sup>8</sup>] who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ." *Second*, false teaching is *degrading*. False teachers deny the Lord and His work in one way or another and in so doing degrade and blaspheme Him. *Third*, false teaching is *destructive*. "Damnable" is *apōleia*, to destroy fully. False teaching not only destroys right doctrine and the lives of its victims, but it also destroys the propagators themselves ("swift destruction").

*Second*, there is *heresy*. This too is a direct transliteration from the Greek. The literal meaning of the interesting noun *hairesis* in Classical Greek is "seizure, taking, acquisition,

choice, desire for something, and purposeful decision.” Later in Hellenistic Greek, it “denotes the teaching or the school of a particular philosopher with which a person identifies himself by his choice.”<sup>9</sup> The NT usage follows that idea. So, *heresy is a choice*, a deliberate decision to “seize” upon a particular teaching that is not orthodox. Acts 5:17, for example, mentions “the sect [*hairesis*] of the Sadducees,” a Jewish faction that denied the doctrine of resurrection. Acts 15:5 refers to another sect, the Judaizers, who taught salvation by works, such as adding circumcision as a requirement. That issue prompted the Jerusalem Council, as the following verses describe, which definitively stated the principle of salvation by grace alone through faith alone.

Titus 3:10 is another significant verse. After describing those who wish to fuss over “foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions” (v. 9), Paul writes to that pastor, “A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject.” Divisive heresy cannot be tolerated in a church.

Heresy, therefore, as used today, is somewhat broader than apostasy and can be committed by a true Christian. It occurs when, while holding to the foundational doctrines of Scripture, one deviates on a particular doctrine. One example is the use of images in Church History. While any use whatsoever of images was *never* used by the Apostolic Church *because God forbid it*, they slowly came into use through emblems such as the dove, fish, anchor, vine, and lamb. Gradually this increased through paintings, sculptures, and jewelry that depicted biblical events, items, saints, martyrs, and even Christ Himself. So, while some folks get upset by this observation, such practices of hanging pictures of Jesus on the wall, plastering Christian symbols on our cars, and wearing jewelry with religious symbols is actually heresy. It violates a *very specific* command of God to make no images (Ex. 20:3–5; cf. Matt. 22:36–38).

There are many such examples. The so-called Christian Crusades were based on the heretical teaching that Christians can use force against unbelievers. There’s the heretical teaching that God demands poverty from Christians, as well as the other extreme, “prosperity teaching,” that God returns our “investment” and makes us rich. The “seeker-sensitive” movement that appeals to people’s “felt needs” to lure them into the church is heresy; the NT nowhere teaches that approach. The spirit of “tolerance” in the church today is heretical, because God commands that we discern truth from error and strongly condemn false teaching in no uncertain terms.

Yes, these are “hard sayings” (cf. John 6:60), but as Puritan John Trapp wrote, “Truth seldom goes without a scratched face.”<sup>10</sup>

### Is There a “Gift of Singleness”?

**Question:** Is it “more spiritual” to remain single instead of getting married? It seems that some Christians think this is true. I would appreciate hearing your view of this. (BP)

**Answer:** Scripture is explicit on the meaning (Mal. 2:14), motives (Gen. 2:18; 1 Cor. 7:2–3; etc.), and model of marriage (Eph. 5:18–33; Song of Solomon).<sup>11</sup> But are there not exceptions to this? Does not God’s Word talk about people remaining single? Yes, this is mentioned in Matthew 19:11–12 and 1 Corinthians 7:7. We do see that there are some whom God

leads and empowers never to marry so they can more fully devote themselves to the Lord’s work. Paul was certainly one of those. He was either never married, was widowed, or as some speculate, his wife might have divorced him when he chose to preach the Gospel. Some Bible teachers call this “the gift of singleness,” and view it as another of God’s “spiritual gifts,” along with those of Romans 12:6–8, etc. I would submit, however, two problems. First, no text ever says this is a “spiritual gift.” Second, every spiritual gift is given plentifully to Christians, but celibacy is rare. While it is certainly a very special empowerment, it doesn’t appear correct to include it with the general spiritual gifts.

To be thorough, I would also interject the absolutely unscriptural practice of the mandatory celibacy of the clergy, which historically followed on the heels of monasticism and asceticism. Since monks and nuns are ascetic, it was reasoned, shouldn’t the clergy be? Further, the more exalted the clergy became over the laity, the higher the demands were for a so-called special sanctity. What is so destructive about such thinking, however, is that it views even marital sex as *sensuous*, not *sanctified*, which directly contradicts Scripture: “Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled” (Heb. 13:4). “Undefiled” is *amiantos*, “that which has nothing in it that defiles; unpolluted, unstained, unsoiled; chaste.” Further, Scripture unambiguously states that bishops (elders and pastors) are married (1 Tim. 3:2, 4; Titus 1:6; cf. 1 Cor. 9:5). Beginning in the third and fourth centuries, asceticism and monasticism then increased exponentially in the centuries to come.

With all that understood, such choosing and empowering to remain single, however, also means that a person can live happily and satisfied and can live without loneliness or thoughts of sex and marriage. This principle discounts much of the “singles craze” that was once prevalent in Christianity and still is to an extent. As another hold-over from Roman Catholic asceticism and monasticism, some Christians think it is “more spiritual” to remain single. Paul, in fact, addresses this very specifically: “But I speak this by permission, and not of commandment. For I would that all men were even as I myself. But every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that” (1 Cor. 7:6–7). The statement, “But I speak this by permission, and not of commandment,” has puzzled many a student of Scripture. A common interpretation is that Paul is saying, “I am allowed to say this; I have no express command on the subject; I give it as my opinion; I do not speak it directly under the influence of Divine inspiration.” But that view has an obvious, not to mention damaging, flaw—are we to conclude that Paul is actually saying something in God’s inspired Word that is not inspired?

Greek-born and educated scholar Spiros Zodhiatus has the best explanation I have read. The word “permission” is the Greek *suggnōmē*, which occurs only here in the NT. It is a compound made from *sun*, “with,” and *gnōmē*, “to think alike or agree.” In ancient Greek it meant “concession, permission, or leave.” It is actually used in Modern Greek the same way: “Excuse me; please forgive me.” In other words, Paul is saying, “Please indulge me here. Excuse me for having to discuss such intimacies.” And that is precisely the attitude we should have today. Often such matters are discussed in public meetings in such frank terms that it is embarrassing. When such matters need to be addressed, it should be done as discreetly as pos-

sible. As for the word “commandment,” Paul is saying that there is no command to be married and no command to be single. This is between each individual and God. His point here and in the context is: “If you are single that is good, and if you are married or get married, stay married and retain normal marital relations, for that is of God. Spirituality has nothing to do with marital status.”

So while there are some Christians who think they are supposed to remain single, some actually end up quite lonely and miserable. In addition, there are many who remain single, not to serve God, but because it better suits their career choice, which sadly is increasingly prevalent.

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**NOTES**

- <sup>1</sup> J. A. Thompson, *New American Commentary: 1st & 2nd Chronicles* (B&H Books, 1994).
- <sup>2</sup> *John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible*, comment on 1 Kings 8:65.
- <sup>3</sup> Gerhard Kittel (Ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Eerdmans, 1965, 2006), Vol. III, 298-99.

- <sup>4</sup> The following taken from the author’s book, *Salvation Is of the Lord: An Exposition of the Doctrines of Grace by a Former Arminian* (Sola Scriptura Publications, 2015), 266-68.
- <sup>5</sup> J. I. Packer, “Historical and Theological Introduction,” in Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* (Revell, 1957, 1992), 58.
- <sup>6</sup> John Owen, *A Display of Arminianism* (Still Waters Revival Books, 1989 reprint of original 1642 text), 12.
- <sup>7</sup> The following was adapted and expanded from the author’s *A Word for the Day: Key Words from the New Testament* (AMG Publishers, 2006), 329-30.
- <sup>8</sup> Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary* (AMG Publishers, 1993), entry #G3921.
- <sup>9</sup> Colin Brown (Ed.), *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Zondervan, 1967, 1969, 1971), Vol. 1, 533. Also, in the Septuagint, it speaks of choice, as it translates the Hebrew *nedābāh* in Leviticus 22:18 and 21 (“freewill offering”).
- <sup>10</sup> I. D. E. Thomas, *The Golden Treasury of Puritan Quotations* (Banner of Truth Trust, 1989 reprint), 300.
- <sup>11</sup> All this is addressed in depth in the author’s upcoming two-volume work, *The Christian’s Wealth and Walk: An Expository Commentary on Ephesians* (Sola Scriptura Publications).

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