



TRUTH ON TOUGH TEXTS

EXPOSITIONS OF CHALLENGING SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

WWW.THESCRPTUREALONE.COM

FROM SOLA SCRIPTURA PUBLICATIONS

ISSUE 120 (Sep./Oct. 2019)

MYSTICISM AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION

SELECTED TEXTS AND PSALM 19:7-9

A TERM WE ARE HEARING MORE AND MORE NOWADAYS is “Spiritual Formation.” But what does it mean? Is it something vital for our Christian life and experience? Are we missing something if we do not practice this? In response to and thanksgiving for a reader question (KK), I would like to share three points that I pray will be an encouragement and challenge to us all on an issue that has become extremely critical to true biblical Christianity.

The Character of Spiritual Formation

The term “Spiritual Formation” (SF) was originally rather generic. It was used in academic circles simply to refer broadly to spiritual growth and development. Something as simple as sending your children to a Christian school, for example, would be considered spiritual formation, that is, shaping, forming, and developing them as Christians. Other means of shaping, of course, include Bible study, prayer, worship, and service, all of which have been with us for centuries and have been considered by uncounted Christians as more than adequate to shape us into what God wants us to be.

What started as a *general* term, however, has frankly morphed into a *garish* one. It’s no longer fashionable (or even truly “spiritual,” it is argued) to grow and deepen through the *objective* Truth of God’s Word but rather by various *subjective* means that are far more insightful, intuitive, and even instinctive than the “old ways.” The new way is far more dazzling, dramatic, and dependable!

A major tenet of this is “Contemplative Prayer” (CP), which actually begins with “Centering Prayer.” To “center” oneself, one sits comfortably, closes his eyes, focuses on any sacred word he chooses (symbolizing the intention to consent to God’s presence and action), and then repeats that word over and over. Once “centered,” CP begins, during which one opens the mind, heart, and soul to God’s communication, thereby seeking mystical experience with God apart from anything outside, such as objective truth.

Now, some ask, “Well, what’s wrong with that?” to which we can lovingly respond, “What’s *right* with it?” There is not a shred of Scripture to support it and is nothing like the prayer described in Scripture. Prayer is not about *mindlessness*, but rather *mindfulness*. It is cognitive, involving thoughtful

thanksgiving and praise (Phil. 4:6; Col. 4:2; Rev. 7:12), intercession (1 Tim. 2:1), supplication (Eph. 6:18), and requests (Phil. 4:6; 1 Jn. 5:15). As we will see, CP is indisputably not of Christian origin. It is, in fact, virtually identical to the mystical, meditative exercises used in Eastern religions (e.g., Buddhism and Yoga), as well as New Age cults, and is pagan at its core.

Going even deeper into serious error is “Contemplative Spirituality” (CS), a mainstay of the Emerging Church Movement, notorious for its denial of absolute Truth and commitment to Relativism. Among the prominent leaders in CS is Ruth Haley Barton, founder of the Transforming Center,¹ as well as the former Associate Director of Spiritual Formation at Willow Creek Community Church. In light of her book, *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation*, she explained what she calls “spiritual rhythms” in an interview posted on their website:

The phrase “spiritual rhythms” is a way of talking about the traditional Christian practice of establishing a rule of life—an intentional arrangement of spiritual practices, attitudes and relationships by which I regularly and routinely make myself available for God’s work of transformation in my life. I have come to enjoy the language of rhythms because it provides relief from some of the more heavy-handed and rigid approaches to the spiritual life and instead draws upon the beauty and delight of the natural rhythms in the created order. The rhythms of the tide, the seasons, night and day, the beat in a good piece of music all connote beauty, variety, spontaneity, and yet there is also some basic understanding and mastery required (in the case of playing music or dancing in particular) to give oneself fully to it.

None of that is biblical, just New Age drivel. Note especially “heavy-handed and rigid approaches”—in other words, *doctrine!* At least one reviewer of Barton’s book on Amazon was discerning: “She [takes] God’s Word and [uses] it for her agenda. Beware. There is also a new age influence in her writing. . . . I was saved out of the new age movement and am very sensitive to its influences. This book disturbed me. Flee!”

Further, the Transforming Center’s “highly ecumenical approach” is reflected in their “statement of faith,” which consists *solely* of the Apostle’s Creed, as stated at the beginning of

their downloadable pdf, *What We Believe & How We Live*. What's wrong with that? Well, while some evangelicals insist that this creed can be a foundation for unity, it's not even close. Yes, it states several core doctrines of Christianity, but completely absent are absolute essentials such as: the authority of Scripture, the deity of Christ, the depravity of man, and the very core doctrine of salvation—justification by faith alone. Equally troubling is the error that Jesus “descended into hell.” It is entirely unbiblical to even imply that Jesus went into “hell,” that is, the suffering side of *sheol* (Hebrew)/*hades* (Greek); His redemptive suffering was complete on the Cross—“It is finished,” He declared (Jn. 19:30).²

The creed is even wrongly titled—the apostles did not write it. Inexplicably, however, starting in the fourth century and then “for a long time it was believed (and is still believed by many in the Roman church) to be the product of the Apostles who prepared it as a summary of their teaching before parting from Jerusalem (each contributing one of the twelve articles by higher inspiration).” But if this were true, “it would have been scrupulously handled down without alteration” instead of experiencing the variations it went through.³ Further, it would have included more core doctrine and would not have included the glaring doctrinal error noted above.

So again, many run to the so-called Apostle's Creed and cry “Unity!” but it cannot be found there. Yes, it's *ecumenical* but that's because it's not thoroughly *biblical*. Ecumenical, indeed, as indicated by CS's being embraced by the United Methodist Church. One such church in Denver states, “Contemplative Spirituality is an ancient practice of bringing a deeper awareness of God's presence in our lives through prayer and contemplation.”⁴ It's extremely significant that CP and CS gurus love to drop the word “ancient,” as if that's the magic word that makes all this okay. But we have to discern ancient times as diligently as we do modern times. That church also has a School of Celtic Consciousness:

One of the most cherished images in the Celtic world is the memory of John the Beloved leaning against Jesus at the Last Supper. It was said of him that he therefore heard the heartbeat of God. He became a symbol of the practice of listening, listening for the beat of the Sacred deep within ourselves, within one another, and within the body of the earth.⁵

While that Denver group has a great passion for studying the writings of John Philip Newell, author of *Listening for the Heartbeat of God: A Celtic Spirituality*, any mention of *Scripture* and the study and exposition of that is nowhere to be found on their website.

Before going on to the real core of all this, we must observe that another practice is actually at the foundation of SF in general, namely, *lectio divina* (Latin for “divine reading”). One sits and clears the mind of the mundane, perhaps with the aid of a few cleansing breaths and repeating a cherished word or phrase. Then comes the reading of a Bible passage gently and slowly several times, not so much for what it actually says but how the “still small voice” speaks to the person. By opening the heart to God, we can then hear Him speak and even receive special revelation from Him.

Dear Reader, this is nothing but centuries-old Roman Catholic and Gnostic mysticism that emerged around AD 220.

In fact, it is “re-emerging” in Catholicism and the Emerging Church. In a 2005 speech, Pope Benedict XVI said:

I would like in particular to recall and recommend the ancient tradition of *Lectio divina*: the diligent reading of Sacred Scripture accompanied by prayer brings about that intimate dialogue in which the person reading hears God who is speaking, and in praying, responds to him with trusting openness of heart. If it is effectively promoted, this practice will bring to the Church—I am convinced of it—a new spiritual springtime.⁶

This dramatically demonstrates again how many professed evangelicals are aligning themselves with Catholic mysticism. Consider, for example, how many evangelicals embraced the movie *The Passion of Christ*, which is based exclusively on Medieval Roman Catholic mysticism. That leads us to . . .

The Core of Spiritual Formation

While we could consider further error, when we strip away all the rhetoric and pious platitudes, *what is really at the core of this issue is that from beginning to end it is all about mysticism*. Now, while *many* Christians today are not in the least fazed by that observation—after all, they think of the “Christian Mystics” as a good thing—it simply cannot be overstated that *mysticism is dire, dangerous, and destructive error*.

Mysticism is the belief that knowledge of God, spiritual truth, and ultimate reality can be gained through subjective experience, totally apart from anything objective. As we will detail later, however, such experiential knowledge immediately, fundamentally, and completely negates the authority of Scripture because each person experiences Truth in himself.

While many think mysticism first arose in medieval times and gave us the so-called Christian Mystics, it actually arose centuries earlier simply because it was rooted in Greek philosophy, even Plato himself. Please bear with me as we go a little deep. Yes, Plato is considered “an arch rationalist,” writes one philosophy scholar, but “on the other hand, his dialogues are replete with outbreaks of mythology . . . [and] he seems to have a pronounced strain of mysticism.” Amazingly, he “thought that love in general and the love of wisdom in particular is a kind of madness (*mania*) and attributed religious and at times mystical significance to the intuition of forms—even comparing it to Dionysian [i.e., drunken] frenzy.” His “most mystical dialogue, the *Phaedrus*,” in fact, begins with the words “The greatest blessings come to us by way of madness that is a gift sent by God.”⁷

The writer also goes on to mention the “mystical rites practiced at Eleusis,” a city 11 miles northwest of Athens that became the site of the Eleusinian Mysteries (or the Mysteries of Demeter and Kore), which appeared as early as 600 BC and became widely popular in the Greek speaking world. They attracted participants even during the Roman Empire before declining in the mid to late fourth century AD. “These rites began with a holy procession from Athens to Eleusis. Along the way, participants engaged in a variety of rituals intended to cleanse or purify the soul. The procession ended when worshippers approached a temple where they beheld a sacred vision.” He then demonstrates that Plato applied this and other images so as to “compare the search for and eventual acquisition of knowledge with religious ecstasy.”⁸ In other

words, just as people are claiming today, ultimate knowledge comes *experientially*, not *cognitively*.

So, as another secular source puts it, in general, mysticism (*wherever it is found*) can be defined as “the practice of religious ecstasies (religious experiences during alternate states of consciousness), together with whatever ideologies, ethics, rites, myths, legends, and magic may be related to them” (*Encyclopedia Britannica*). Or, as one philosophy textbook puts it, “All mystics agree that man’s most important activity is the cultivation of this unique inner experience. They also agree that its revelations have priority over all other sources of knowledge. The experience is . . . absolute.”⁹

Ultimately, then, it’s *intuition* that is the true friend of the mystic. Personal experience trumps the rational every time, revealing perspectives that the rational cannot perceive. Mystics tend to avoid (if not abhor) strict doctrines, dogmas, and declarations, and totally ignore principles, precepts, and precedents. Because of their own innate intuition, they implicitly trust their inner self. Their intuitive perceptions, in fact, offer a deeper form of insight and understanding than anything else possibly can. Mark this down: *Mysticism is governed by nothing objective—NOTHING!* It is totally subjective in the most extreme sense that that word can be used. Subjectivity by its very nature is one-sided, biased, skewed, and slanted because it is based solely on each person’s experience.

A graphic example is the endorsement of such mysticism by Focus on the Family, a professed evangelical parachurch organization that has nonetheless deeply burdened me for decades on several issues (e.g., an abortion exception¹⁰). “There is nothing unbiblical or anti-Christian about solitude, silence, and contemplative prayer,” they maintain.

On the basis of this biblical foundation, a strong tradition of Christian contemplation and mysticism has grown up within the church over the past 2,000 years. Many of the early church fathers of the first three centuries of the Christian era—men like Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory Nazianzus, Basil of Caesarea, John Chrysostom, and Anthony of Egypt—were contemplatives who had mystical experiences in prayer.¹¹

That demonstrates not only grave theological weakness but also great historical ignorance. Yes, that was *tradition*, but not *Truth*. In fact, every individual listed above (plus Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Augustine) were all tainted by Greek philosophy. Gregory of Nyssa is a case in point; he spent much time studying Platonists and Neo-Platonists, thinking he could combine the best of it all with Christian teaching. The same idea exists today among those who think we can blend the world with the Church to make it “more relevant” or mix philosophy, sociology, and psychology with Scripture to make it more applicable. But the only result of such synergism is the weakening of God’s Truth. Further, Gregory “had [such] a strong mystical bent” that he supposedly “experienced dreams and visions and spiritual experiences that transcended intellectual explanation.”¹² It’s not surprising then that we also see in him a “sometimes utterly extravagant allegorical method of interpretation,” which, in fact, placed him the “nearest to Origen” (see TOTT 118) of all the “Church teachers of the Nicene age.”¹³

This kind of stuff is also reflected in more recent philoso-

phers. For example, the French existentialist (not to mention Marxist) Jean Paul Sartre (1905–80)—who wrote such riveting prose as *Nausea* and *Being and Nothingness*—insisted that Truth is grounded in human subjectivity and any knowledge beyond that is uncertain. That is exactly what the mystic also believes and longs after, but *IT IS NOT CHRISTIAN* and has no place in a true believer’s life. Theologian and Christian philosopher Gordon Clark (1902–85) well stated:

A non-doctrinal religion of passionate subjectivity cannot be Christianity. . . . [Christianity] is intellectual in nature. . . . The verbal inspiration of the Bible solves the problems of epistemology [i.e., the study of knowledge], history, ethics and religion. . . . It banishes, mysticism, emotionalism, and despair.¹⁴

The expression “Christian mysticism” is, therefore, a glaringly obvious contradiction in terms. *True biblical Christianity has nothing whatsoever to do with mysticism*. Why? Again, because mysticism is entirely *subjective* while Christianity is wholly *objective*. The Christian faith is based solely upon the revealed Truth of Scripture (Pss. 19:7–9; 119:160; Matt. 4:4; Jn. 8:31–32; 10:35; 17:17; Acts 17:10–11; 2 Tim. 3:16–17; 4:1–4; 2 Pet. 1:17–21; etc.), which appeals directly to our mind and thinking process. Mysticism, however, seeks to discover spiritual truths that are inaccessible intellectually. The mystic seeks something that is not in the text, bypassing (or even replacing) what God says in His Word, *and that is error!*

There is no better example of this than the horrendous abuse that the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper has suffered through the centuries.¹⁵ Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 11:23–26 mean what they say and we must not read anything into them, add anything to them, or *reinterpret them mystically*. “Remembrance” (*anamnēsis*) simply cannot be overemphasized as the definitive key. This (and its synonyms) refers not only to the mental capability to recall something, but also “being mindful,” and “taking [it] into account.” Other concepts include: remind oneself, consider, ponder, and reflect.¹⁶ It is derived from the verb *mimnēskō*, which is best rendered “to be mindful” (e.g., Heb. 13:3). In other words, think about, reflect upon, and ponder the significance of something.

The same is true of *mnēmoneuō*, which appears several times. “Remember Lot’s wife” (Lk. 17:32) is an obvious warning to reflect on and consider the consequence of disobeying God. Several other instances underscore how we should be mindful of and reflect on something (Gal. 2:10; Col. 4:18; 2 Tim. 2:8; Heb. 13:7). “*Mnēmoneuō* therefore means to use the faculty of memory given by God and to keep in one’s mind people, things, and circumstances, because memory is the basis of learning and prevention of the dangers of life.”¹⁷

It is, therefore, beyond any doubt whatsoever that any mystic idea or implication of Christ’s so-called presence in the Lord’s Supper (either literally or spiritually) simply cannot be defended. Even some of the Reformers taught some kind of special presence of Christ, but Scripture nowhere even implies that. For the Holy Spirit indwelt believer, Jesus is no more present in the Supper than He is at any other time. He’s *in us*—how could He be closer? Neither is the Supper some kind of “sacrifice.” The language could not be clearer, but due to the philosophy and mysticism that affected the Early Fathers, their teaching on this subject is riddled with mystic

error that they read into the text. The much touted *Didache's* use of "sacrifice" is one example, but more error appeared in Ignatius, Justin, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Cyprian, and Origen.

It was in Cyprian (c. 200–c. 258), in fact, that we see the seed of transubstantiation planted, the ultimate in mysticism in which the bread and wine become the literal body and blood of Christ. His fullest explanation appears in his Epistle 63.14, where we read that the priest (as the representative of Christ) is to reenact the sacrifice Christ originally presented to the Father. In another giant leap of mystical allegory, Cyprian also mixed water with the wine. Why? Some saw this as still another way to make the Lord's Supper more symbolic, in which water symbolizes people while wine symbolizes Christ (63.13). Not even the tiniest hint of that, of course, appears in Scripture. It is fertile imagination, not biblical exposition.

I should also interject that the only crippled leg transubstantiation has to stand on is the phrase "take eat, this is my body," a statement that is obviously metaphorical language. "Is" (*eimi*, the simple verb meaning "to be") here means "signifies" or "represents." Other examples of this are numerous: "ye *are* the salt of the earth" and "*are* the light of the world" (Matt. 5:13–14); "he *is* my brother and my sister and my mother" (12:50); "the seed *is* the Word of God" (13:37–39); "the life *was* the light of men" (Jn. 1:4; emphasis added in all); and many others, including His numerous "I Am" statements (Jn. 6:35; 8:12; 10:7, 9, 11, 14).

Those early trends not only continued but intensified in the following centuries (e.g., Eusebius, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory Nazianzen, Chrysostom, and Augustine), which demonstrates that error always propagates more (and usually worse) error. From there on, in fact, right into the Middle Ages (e.g., Paschasius Radbert, Gerbert, Humbert, and Hilbert of Tours), any sort of *spiritual* sense gave way almost everywhere to the *material* sense that the elements were actually converted to our Lord's literal body and blood. Then along came Thomas Aquinas (1225–74). His affinity for Aristotle is well known. That very affection, in fact, comes shining through in Aquinas' thinking on the Lord's Supper. He actually "used the philosophy of Aristotle to give a theological explanation of what happened when the bread and wine were transubstantiated."¹⁸ But wait just a moment. Why do we need the philosophy of a pagan Greek to explain what supposedly occurs at the Lord's Supper? There is no mistake about it: the Lord's Supper is among the most abused doctrines in Scripture. The results of ancient mysticism on this simple, precious ordinance have been absolutely horrific.¹⁹

There is no escaping the pointed application of this. I do not mean to scold or upset anyone, but we need to face the irrefutable fact of just how pervasive mysticism has become. If you hold to any kind of *special* presence of Jesus that is *over and above* His indwelling through the Holy Spirit, you are embracing a mystic idea that is nowhere in Scripture.

The Correction of Spiritual Formation

My Dear Reader, from the depths of a burdened and grieved pastor's heart, I lovingly encourage you to recognize that this issue is just one more symptom of today's almost wholesale abandonment of the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. Everywhere we look, we hear people say, "I want more. I want a word from God. I want an experience. I want

devotion not *doctrine*." But all this is Satanic deception and delusion. From the Garden of Eden on, the one thing Satan does not want you to do is to believe fully, firmly, and faithfully *in* and rely consciously, completely, and categorically on Scripture alone—anything but that! And "anything" is exactly what we are seeing. We need to take a stand and say without apology that anyone who says Scripture alone is not enough, and anyone who says they receive new revelation, is a false teacher and should be avoided not accepted (Matt. 24:24; 2 Cor. 11:13–15; Gal. 1:6–9; Eph. 4:14; 5:6; Col. 2:8; 1 Tim. 6:3–5, 20–21; 2 Tim. 4:1–4; 1 Jn. 4:1; Jude 4; etc.).

Now, is there a place for meditation? Absolutely, and wonderfully so! As Puritan Thomas Watson observed, "The reason we come away so cold from reading the Word is because we do not warm ourselves at the fire of meditation."²⁰ But this is not the empty mindedness of the mystic. It is conscious, cognitive, and concentrated focus on what Scripture says. One of the most profound appearances of the word "meditate" appears in 1 Timothy 4. Paul first exhorts Timothy on several issues: false teachers (vv. 1–5), teaching doctrine (v. 6), avoiding myths and legends (v. 7), godliness (vv. 7–8), and exposition (v. 13). He then urges his "son in the faith" (1:2) to: "Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all" (v. 15). While modern translations prefer "be diligent" (NIV), "take pains" (NASB), or "practice" (ESV), they're only half right. "Meditate" (KJV, NKJV) is both accurate and more appropriate. The Greek *meletaō* means, "To consider, weigh, or ponder over something so as to be able to perform well; equal to meditate."²¹

So again, meditation is not *mindlessness*, but rather *mindfulness*. It is not *emptying* the mind, rather *filling* the mind. The obvious question, of course, is: with *what* do we fill our mind? But the answer is equally obvious: we fill our minds with God's Word (Josh. 1:8; Ps. 1:2; 119:15, 23, 48, 78, 97, 99, 148). The Hebrew words behind meditate in those verses reflect quiet and concentrated thought on the specific object, not the mindless musing of the mystic.

Finally, whether it be mysticism in general or *lectio divina*, centering prayer, contemplative prayer, and contemplative spirituality in particular, it all is completely and categorically unbiblical because it attacks the sufficiency of Scripture. There is no more definitive statement about that sufficiency than Psalm 19:7–9. I have previously detailed this passage,²² but briefly, first, God's **law** is **perfect** (*tāmiym*, blameless, complete, and without blemish). Second, God's **testimony** is **sure** (*āman*, to be firm, build up, support, nurture, establish, providing stability and confidence). Third, God's **statutes** are **right** (*yāšār*, straight, just, and correct). Fourth, every **commandment** of God is **pure** (*bar*, clean and radiant) and **enlightening**. Fifth, God's Word [**endures**] **for ever**. Sixth, God's **judgments** are **true** (*emeth* carries the idea of certainty and includes such concepts as truth, right, and faithful).

How can anyone think their "new revelation" can add anything to God's *perfect* Word? Scripture is complete and is there for us to study, meditate on, and memorize for the objective knowledge it contains. We don't need *subjective mystical thoughts*; we need the *objective message of Truth*.

Dr. J. D. Watson – Pastor-Teacher, Grace Bible Church
Director, Sola Scriptura Publications, a ministry of GBC

NOTES

- ¹ Website: <https://transformingcenter.org>.
- ² For more on this issue, see chapter 17, "What Does the Phrase 'Led Captivity Captive' Mean? (Eph. 4:8-10)," in the author's book *Truth on Tough Texts* (180-86).
- ³ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. II, 530-31.
- ⁴ <https://trinityumc.org/connect/contemplative-spirituality/>.
- ⁵ <https://trinityumc.org/connect/contemplative-spirituality/school-of-celtic-consciousness/>.
- ⁶ *Address Of His Holiness Benedict XVI To The Participants In The International Congress Organized To Commemorate The 40th Anniversary Of The Dogmatic Constitution On Divine Revelation "Dei Verbum"* (Castel Gandolfo; Sept. 16, 2005). This address commemorated Pope Paul VI's *Dogmatic Constitution On Divine Revelation (Dei Verbum, "Word of God)* on Nov. 18, 1965.
- ⁷ Kenneth R. Seeskin, "Platonism, Mysticism, and Madness" in *The Monist*, Vol. 59, No. 4, "The Philosophy of Mysticism" (Oxford University Press; October, 1976), 574. Seeskin (PhD, Yale) is the Philip M. and Ethel Klutznick Professor of Jewish Civilization, in the Department of Philosophy at Northwestern University (Evanston, IL).
- ⁸ *Ibid*, 579-80.
- ⁹ Hunter Mead, *Types and Problems of Philosophy, Third Edition* (Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1946, 1953), 180.
- ¹⁰ With no biblical support whatsoever, James Dobson wrote: "Only in rare instances when the life of the mother is literally at stake do I feel we have the moral authority to destroy a developing fetus" (Focus on the Family magazine, March 1993, 13).
- ¹¹ See their website: <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/family-q-and-a/faith/questions-and-concerns-about-contemplative-prayer>.
- ¹² Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform* (IVP Academic, 1999), 179.
- ¹³ Philip Schaff, Vol. III, 907. See TOTT 118, "The Lessons of David and Goliath" (May/June 2019) for a discussion of Origen.
- ¹⁴ Gordon H. Clark, *An Introduction to Christian Philosophy* (The Trinity Foundation, 1968), 122.
- ¹⁵ See the author's upcoming book, *"In Remembrance of Me": The Doctrine and Duty of the Lord's Supper* (2020 release from Sola Scriptura Publications).
- ¹⁶ Colin Brown (Gen. Ed), *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Zondervan, 1967, 1971), Vol. 3, 230.
- ¹⁷ Spiros Zodhiates, *Word Study Dictionary*, entry #G3421.
- ¹⁸ Nick Needham, *2000 Years of Christ's Power: Volume 2, The Middle Ages* (Christian Focus Publications, 1998, 2016), 288. Aristotle distinguished between the "substance" and "accidents" of an object. While the "substance" is the inner reality that gives any object its particular form and identity, the "accidents" are the various physical properties that make an object appear the way it does to our bodily senses.
- ¹⁹ For a deeper study, see the author's, *"In Remembrance of Me": A Theology of the Lords Supper* (scheduled for 2020).
- ²⁰ Thomas Watson, "How We May Read the Scriptures With Most Spiritual Profit" (Direction IX).
- ²¹ Zodhiates, entry #G3191. M. R. Vincent adds: "Most translators reject the AV *meditate*, and substitute *be diligent in*, or *practice*, or *take care for*. *Meditate*, however, is legitimate. . . . *Exercise* or *practice* applied to the mind becomes *thinking* or *meditation*" (*Vincent's Word Studies*, comment on 1 Tim. 4:15).
- ²² See TOTT Issue 80, "God's Sufficient Word" (Nov./Dec. 2012) on our website. This will also appear in the book, *Truth On Tough Texts II* (scheduled for 2020).

Seek Him Early: Daily Devotional Studies on Knowing, Loving, and Serving Our Lord Jesus Christ

This daily devotional truly comes from the depths of Pastor Watson's heart. Endorsed by Phil Johnson, Joel Beeke, Todd Friel, and many others, it's divided into the three distinct parts specified in the sub-title (each encompassing four months of devotional/theological studies). The reader is first encouraged to know the Lord in a personal way, then to love Him like never before, and finally to be driven to more passionately serve Him. Each daily reading is 450-500 words in length, meaty, theological, and homiletical. Each day also includes a "Scriptures for Study" section, which lists other related verses for you to explore and lends itself to personal journaling. [Single Copy, \$15.00; 2-3 copies, \$14.00 ea.; 4-5 copies, \$13.00; 6+, \$12.00 ea. Also available on Amazon.com and for Kindle Reader.]

Seek Him Early Podcast

Based on the above book, a new episode is posted every Monday on our website, iTunes, Google Play, and Stitcher.

***** ANNOUNCING *****

The Christian's Wealth and Walk: An Expository Commentary on Ephesians

After his many years of studying, writing, and preaching on the Apostle Paul's true masterpiece, pastor Watson's two-volume, 3-1/3 year exposition of Ephesians has been released. Dedicated to the memory of Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones—whose own eight-volume exposition of Ephesians, as well as his book *Preaching and Preachers*, have had enormous influence—the aim of this work is to offer to the True Evangelical Church a comprehensive and readable exposition and application of the grandest, most awe-inspiring piece of writing known to man.

As the subtitle of this work indicates, it is an "expository commentary." But what exactly is that? Most Christians today know what a "commentary" is. As Webster defines it: "An explanatory treatise; a systematic series of explanations or interpretations (as of a writing)." In short, a commentary explains the text, telling what it means. "Exposition," however, is a concept that is often misunderstood, and, tragically, avoided in many churches. Instead of majoring on God's absolute mandate on preaching, today's churches are filled with entertainment and other substitutes. Author and well-known authority on preach-

ing, Haddon Robinson, offers this definition of “expository preaching”: “Expository preaching is the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through him to his hearers.”

Exposition, therefore, goes further than just commenting on the text. While it is similar to the commentary in examining historical setting, grammar, literary style, context, and other aspects of the text to find the *meaning*, it goes deeper by *applying* the truth of the text to the life of the hearer and *exhorting* the hearer to obedience. Commentaries are certainly valuable, some even priceless, but application is vital. As noted in the “Introduction and Overview” of Volume 1, in fact, the Apostle Paul invariably practiced this in his epistles by presenting *doctrine* (or truth) in the first half of the letter and *duty* (or application) in the second. Without application, knowledge is merely academic and ultimately useless.

This work, then, attempts to be an “expository commentary,” offering not only the precise meaning of the text of this great epistle, but also challenging each of us to what its truth demands from us. With the aid of 79 commentaries and expositions of this epistle, as well as 46 other reference and language works, and based on a 171-message series preached on consecutive Lord’s Day mornings from February 2003 through August 2006 (all of which are posted on our website), this work is the result of the author’s passion *for* and immersion *in* this great epistle for more than 20 years. This is not meant to imply that this exposition is exhaustive. God forbid! (Lloyd-Jones would not have thought that even of his labors!) No matter how many hours or days one spends studying a text (sometimes even weeks or months), he never feels like it is enough. The author, therefore, can only pray that what is here will be a blessing. There have been many good treatments of this epistle, and we can only pray that this one will add to that number; it certainly will not replace any.

As noted in the 48-page “Introduction and Overview,” there are two distinct parts to Ephesians, but we also observe that the two parts are in perfect balance. In fact, one of the most outstanding features of all Paul’s epistles is again their perfect balance of *doctrine* and *duty*. Other non-Pauline epistles demonstrate this, but Paul’s are the most vivid. Colossians 1–2, for example, present doctrine while 3–4 present practice. The same is true of Galatians 1–3 and 4–6. Even Romans demonstrates this: chapters 1–8 are Paul’s great doctrinal treatise, chapters 9–11 are a parenthetical section on Israel, and chapters 12–16 then specify conduct and duty. But Ephesians is the most dramatic example. We can demonstrate this contrast in several ways:

- Chapters 1–3 *delineate* our riches in Christ; 4–6 *describe* our responsibilities in Christ.
- Chapters 1–3 *detail* our wealth in Christ; 4–6 *demonstrate* our walk in Christ.
- Chapters 1–3 *contain* the truth *stated*; 4–6 *command* the truth *applied*.
- Chapters 1–3 *present* our heritage in Christ; 4–6 *portray* our life in Christ.
- Chapters 1–3 *exposit* what we *have* in Christ; 4–6 *exhort* us in what we are to *do* in Christ.

In 4:1, Paul wrote: **I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.** Some preachers emphasize only “doing right,” “serving the Lord,” or “being practical” but fail to give the doctrinal teaching on how to do it. This is often characterized by “legalism,” that is, the keeping of some law or code as the producer of spirituality. Others concentrate only on deep teaching but fail to apply it to practical living. But either extreme results in failure in the Christian life. Thankfully, Paul gives us the balance. He first gives us *doctrine*, for this is the foundation. We can never do right without first having Truth. Paul then gives us *duty*, for this is how doctrine is applied; it shows us how to live. Knowledge without application is worthless. To put this contrast simply: *duty without doctrine is LEGALISM but doctrine without duty is LIFELESSNESS.* How wonderful, indeed, Ephesians is in showing us the things that are “in the heavenlies.” But at

the same time, it does not “let us off easy,” for it specifies what God demands in our daily walk. True Christianity is not *theoretical*; it is *practical*. In short: *Ephesians demands that we WALK according to our WEALTH.*

The above structure and emphasis provides a natural outline of the book. While a detailed outline is also included (which is followed throughout the entire exposition), the basic outline in the box at left gives us a strategic grasp of the book.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones quotes an unnamed writer: “The distilled essence of Christianity, the most authoritative and most consummate compendium of our holy Christian faith.” What a statement! Ah, but what about Romans? Comparing Romans to Ephesians, Lloyd-Jones then adds in his own words, “If Romans is the purest expression of the Gospel [as Luther said], the Epistle to the Ephesians is the sublimest and most majestic expression of it.” Yes, Romans says *more*, but Ephesians says it *best*. Indeed, Ephesians, unlike any other epistle, is the best statement of basic Christian doctrine and practice in

all of Scripture. Should we study Romans? Absolutely! But we should master Ephesians first. No other epistle is more basic to living the Christian life. As one writer puts it, “With strong wings it soars among the heights of theological thought and glides upon the winds of the greatest of truths.” Another writer truly captures the foundational aspect of Ephesians: “Ephesians contains a carefully reasoned and precisely worded theology presented in systematic way. There is no letter in the Pauline corpus that more precisely and succinctly presents the rudimentary elements of his understanding of salvation history than this one.”

Basic Outline of Ephesians

- I. The Christian’s Wealth in Christ (1–3) (*Vol. 1*)
 - A. Riches in Christ (1)
 - B. Reconciliation to God (2)
 - C. Rank in God’s Plan (3)
- II. The Christian’s Walk in Christ (4–6) (*Vol. 2*)
 - A. Walk in Unity (4:1–16)
 - B. Walk in Purity (4:17–32)
 - C. Walk in Love (5:1–7)
 - D. Walk in Light (5:8–14)
 - E. Walk in Wisdom (5:15–17)
 - F. Walk in Submission (5:18–6:9)
 - G. Walk in Victory (6:10–20)
- III. Benediction (6:21–24)

TRUTH ON TOUGH TEXTS

A Ministry of
Grace Bible Church
P.O. Box 235
Meeker, CO 81641
www.TheScriptureAlone.com
dwatson@thescripturealone.com
A F.I.R.E. Church
www.FireFellowship.org

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 we might address it either in a full length article or in a "Reader Questions" issue. Other comments are also warmly welcomed, and letters to the editor will be published.

This publication is sent free of charge to anyone who requests it. To aid in the ministry, donations will be greatly appreciated, but never demanded. If you know someone you think would enjoy TOTT, please send along their address.