



# TRUTH ON TOUGH TEXTS

EXPOSITIONS OF CHALLENGING SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

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FROM SOLA SCRIPTURA PUBLICATIONS

ISSUE 133 (Jan./Feb. 2022)

## PERPLEXING PASSAGES (5)

### SELECTED TEXTS

**B**ACK IN ISSUE 113 (JULY/AUG. 2018), WE BEGAN A NEW category of TOTT articles that combines the other two categories, a “tough text” (or important topic) and reader questions. Like the first, this installment addresses three such matters.

#### Speaking the Truth in Love

Our first passage is one that is sometimes misunderstood. What does Paul mean by **speaking the truth in love** (Eph. 5:15)? Let us first note the *command* and then the *control*.

#### The Command (“speaking the truth”)

**Speaking the truth** is not optional, not just “one approach to ministry among many.” It is *the single mandated method to building and maintaining a church*. **Truth** (*alētheia*) is a key word of the NT. It refers to what really is, what is factual. It is not opinion, conjecture, hypothesis, or theory. Rather, it is “telling it like it is.” If something is true, it is absolutely reliable, incontrovertible, irrefutable, incontestable, unarguable, and unchanging. It cannot change because to do so would mean it is not true, not reliable. It is *always* true and can *never* be untrue, no matter what the circumstances.

The Greek here, however, is the verb form *alētheuō*, which actually translates all three words, **speaking the truth**. Some expositors view this word as hard or even “almost impossible to express satisfactorily in English.”<sup>1</sup> There are others who agree and erroneously translate it in various ways: “grow up in the truth,” “followers of truth,” “holding or following the truth,” “professing the truth,” and even “adhere to the truth, that is, practice integrity.” Some modern Bible translations also get it wrong, as does the *New Living Translation*: “hold to the truth.” Any such translation, however, is inaccurate for three basic reasons.

*First*, one expositor who writes that this word is “not normally translated ‘speaking’” is in error because that is precisely how it is usually translated. As one Greek authority, based upon Classical Greek usage, writes: “The verb *alētheuō* usually means simply to speak the truth. For example, Plato argues that he who commends justice speaks the truth (*alētheuei*), and this is parallel to his earlier statement that such a man speaks truly, whilst he who commends injustice speaks falsely (*pseudoito*, *The Republic*, 589c).”<sup>2</sup> With that in

mind, the same authority later adds that Paul here “insists that the Christian speaks the truth in love.”<sup>3</sup> Specifically, the form of the verb here is *alētheuontes* (a nominative plural masculine present participle), which in English is like adding “ing” to a present tense verb. Paul is, therefore, clearly saying we are to be “continually speaking the truth.”

*Second*, such alternative translations ignore the context in which this statement appears. Paul has been discussing the speaking gifts and now makes the obvious assertion that the men called to those offices are to speak the Truth.

*Third*, such alternative translations also ignore the interpretation principle *analogia scripturae* (“the analogy of Scripture”), comparing Scripture with Scripture to allow it to interpret itself. Applying that principle here takes us to the only other instance of *alētheuō* in the NT, Galatians 4:16: “Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?” This is another present participle (*alētheuōn*, nominative singular masculine), yielding the idea, “Have I become your enemy because I am continually telling you the truth?” Of course the answer is a resounding “yes.” Most people do not wish to be told the **truth at all**, much less *continually*.

So, what are we to be **speaking**? The **truth**, that which is reliable and unchanging. Commentator Albert Barnes makes this excellent statement, which includes not only preachers but all true Christians:

The truth is to be spoken—the simple, unvarnished truth. This is the way to avoid error, and this is the way to preserve others from error. In opposition to all trick, and art, and cunning, and fraud, and deception, Christians are to speak the simple truth, and nothing but the truth. Every statement which they make should be unvarnished truth; every promise which they make should be true; every representation which they make of the sentiments of others should be simple truth. Truth is the representation of things as they are; and there is no virtue that is more valuable in a Christian than the love of simple truth.

But that is anything but the norm today. The vocabulary of much of the Church is politically correct catch-phrases, sentimental expressions, and psycho-babble. Instead of confronting false teachers with their error, we embrace them with such schmaltziness as, “Our brother brings up an intriguing, thought-provoking point,” or “Our brother is entitled to his

own ideas, to which we should be open.” No, we are supposed to speak the **truth**.

What is so difficult about this principle? Why do so many people avoid, redefine, or ignore the **truth**? The answer is simple: *knowing the truth makes us responsible*. If we do not know the **truth**, we have no responsibility to it, and thus do not have to act accordingly. Most people do not want to hear the truth because they are comfortable in their own ideas and philosophy and want to continue in them without challenge.

Once again, we see that true doctrine is essential in the face of “every wind of [false] doctrine” (v. 14). Speaking on the importance of doctrinal preaching, one writer comments: “If you take away the doctrine, you have taken away the backbone of the manhood of Christianity—its sinew, muscle, strength, and glory.” He goes on to illustrate that those who wish to abandon doctrine can be compared to sailors who would go to sea without charts:

Burn the charts; what is the use of charts? What we want is a powerful engine, a good A-1 copper-bottomed ship, an experienced captain, and strong, able-bodied mariners. Charts! Ridiculous nonsense—antiquated things—we want no charts, destroy every one of them. Our fathers used to navigate the sea by them, but we are wiser than they were. We have pilots who know every sand and sunken rock, who can smell them beneath the water—or by some means find them out. So they put out to sea without charts; and, looking across the waters, we may expect to witness the shipwreck of those who thought themselves so wise, and fear sometimes lest we should hear their last gasp as they sink and perish. Professing themselves to be wise, they become fools.<sup>4</sup>

What an accurate portrait of our day! Wanted today are showy churches and glitzy ministries, but shunned is the preaching of Truth. Many Christian leaders think they know more than God, more than the inspired Apostle Paul, more than many solid leaders in church history who came later. What arrogance! As a result we are already seeing the shipwrecks left behind on the rocky shore.

### The Control (“in love”)

While he wrote many strong, sometimes even scathing, rebukes to the Corinthian believers, for example, no one could have accused Paul of being unkind or unloving. Likewise, to keep us from speaking rudely, unkindly, insensitively, arrogantly, or overbearingly when we speak the Truth, Paul puts a control on it—we are always to speak the Truth **in love**. A pastor must never “brow beat” God’s people; neither should any believer be arrogant, overbearing, or use “high pressure techniques” in personal witnessing. Our goal is to humbly and lovingly point people to the Lord. Further, love is the balancing agent of conviction and courage. When the child of God has convictions and courageously stands on them, he will be called “closed minded,” “intolerant,” and many other things, but when **love** is the balancing agent, people will take notice. John Phillips well demonstrates the comparison of **love** and “Truth” by pointing out that speaking the Truth without **love** makes us *ungracious*, while speaking only **love** with no Truth makes us *unfaithful*.<sup>5</sup> In other words, “raw Truth” can alienate the people we are trying to reach, while “uncontrolled love” can suppress the very truth we need to speak.

To illustrate, a certain skillful physician, having to treat

an abscess but finding the person to be afraid of lancing, privately wrapped up his knife in a sponge and then while gently smoothing the affected area, lanced it. Likewise, when we encounter an offender, “we must not openly carry the dagger in our hand, but with words of sweetness administer our reproof, and so effect the cure.”<sup>6</sup>

Famous early nineteenth century missionary to China and translator Robert Morrison (1782–1834) tells another story. When he was a young student, perhaps about 16 years of age, he once ate breakfast with Caesar Malan, a Swiss Reformed preacher in Geneva. Upon discovering that Morrison was a young student of divinity, he said, “Well, my young friend, see that you hold up the lamp of truth to let the people see. Hold it up, hold it up, and trim it well. But remember this: you must not dash the lamp in people’s faces; that would not help them to see.” Morrison adds that he remembered those words often throughout his life.<sup>7</sup>

Before leaving this principle, we should again note that this **love** does not constitute some syrupy sentimentality that sets aside doctrine for the sake of unity. This is the common notion and practice in our day, when **love** is viewed as supreme over all else. But that is not what Paul is saying. Such a view makes a mockery of verse 14. This challenge from Martyn Lloyd-Jones, preached several decades ago, should be heeded by every evangelical of our day:

To put life, or “spirit,” or niceness, or anything else, before truth is to deny essential NT teaching; and in addition is to contradict directly the Apostle’s solemn warning in verse 14. It is to set up ourselves, and the modern world, and the twentieth century man, as the authority rather than the “called apostle” Paul and all others whom the Lord has set in the Church to warn us against, and to save us from, this attitude which dislikes discrimination and judgment. Never was it more important to assert that friendliness or niceness or sentimental notions of brotherliness do not constitute Christianity. You can have all such qualities without and apart from Christianity, and even in men who deny it, but you cannot have Christianity without “truth.” So that, whatever else it may mean, “holding the truth in love” does not mean a vague, flabby, sentimental notion of niceness and fellowship and brotherhood.<sup>8</sup>

Later Lloyd-Jones touches on another matter that is common in our day and is, if I may share a burden, one of my own “pet peeves” about modern ministry:

Obviously we must know exactly what the truth is. We are not to spend the whole of our time arguing about preliminaries and presuppositions; we are to start with the revealed truth and expound it. Every one of us is to understand, to believe, and the “hold the truth,” not to speculate philosophically about life and its meaning and its problems. It is not for any preacher to stand in a pulpit and say, “I think this,” or “I have come to this conclusion,” but rather “Thus saith the Lord.”<sup>9</sup>

Oh, how true that is nowadays! “Preaching” is filled with opinion and psychobabble, but Truth is often absent. Let us never hesitate to speak the Truth, but let us also never fail to speak it **in love**. To reverse the emphasis, we must always be loving, but never at the compromise of the Truth.

### Separation of Church and State

The matter of the relationship between the Church and the State has been a perennial problem through the ages and

still is today. Sadly, this issue is fraught with misunderstanding and misinformation. I would submit that Scripture provides us with two balancing principles.

### Separate in Position

While there is not a verse of Scripture that says, “Keep the Church separate from the State,” the principle is nonetheless unambiguous. The Lord Jesus Himself clearly demonstrated these the two separate realms when He declared, “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s” (Matt. 22:21). He stated that, in fact, to the religious leaders, demonstrating that there is a difference. Further, He never took a coin from Caesar or sought Herod’s help in His ministry, so neither should the Church He founded.

The Apostle Paul further clarified this in Romans 13, as does Peter in 1 Peter 2:13–15. It is the state that is divinely ordained to resist evil and keep order in society. This is not the Church’s function. Its purpose is to spread the Gospel (Acts 1:8), teach doctrine (Matt. 28:20; 2 Tim. 4:2; etc.), and equip believers for service (Eph. 4:11–13).

Further still, the Church discipline Jesus outlined (Matt. 18:15–17) and Paul practiced (1 Cor. 5:1–8) in no way implies any connection whatsoever with the State. These matters are handled strictly by believers in the Church.

### Harmonious in Practice

With the above made clear, the term “separation of Church and State” has been so perverted that ungodly people insist that God, the Bible, and His people have no say whatsoever in society. They loudly declare that none of this can be allowed in our schools or courtrooms. An illustration in American government will be helpful.

As reported a few years ago in the local newspaper where I live, there was a controversy over when the High School prom would take place. As it reported, “a priest, a pastor and roughly eight parents” caused a change of date to take place on religious grounds, to which an irate County Commissioner addressed a scathing editorial, which in part read: “There is no room here for the church to enter into the issue. There is a constitutional separation of church and state, and it is not only wrong what happened here, it is illegal.” In addition to the ridiculous statement that this was illegal, here is one of the most serious misstatements in American history, one we have sadly heard many times.

Feeling compelled to publish a response to that in the next issue of the paper, I first asked, “Does the First Amendment actually say that?” Let’s read it: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” Not only are the words “separation of church and state” not found in the First Amendment (or anywhere else in the Constitution), but *they do not appear in any founding document*, not a single one.

First, then, what does the First Amendment mean? The U.S. Congressional Records of June 7–September 25, 1789 (the dates in which the Founders framed the First Amendment) clearly demonstrate the Founders’ intent. They wanted to ensure that what happened in England did not happen in America, that the federal government would not be allowed to establish a national denomination to the excluding of all

others. The records show that in all the discussions and early wordings of the First Amendment, the Founders used the word “religion” interchangeably with “denomination.” *They had absolutely no intention whatsoever of excluding biblical principles and religious (i.e., Christian) values in public affairs.*

Just one example of many was Fisher Ames (1758–1808) who, according to the Congressional Record of September 20, 1789, was the man who actually offered the final wording of the First Amendment. In an article in a national magazine dated January, 1801, Ames wrote of his concern about all the new textbooks that were appearing. He said that while these are good, the Bible still must never be replaced as the number one textbook in our schools: “Why then, if these books for children must be retained, as they will be, should not the Bible regain the place it once held as a school book? Its morals are pure, its examples captivating and noble.”

So, the Bible did not violate Fisher Ames’ view of the First Amendment. On the contrary, several other Founding Fathers, such as Benjamin Rush (1746–1813), Noah Webster (1758–1843), John Adams (1735–1826), and George Washington (1732–99) all warned that removing religious and moral principles from the classroom would result in serious social problems. Is that not precisely what has happened in America since we kicked Him out of our schools in the 1960s? That is probably why the priest, pastor (not me, by the way), and parents voiced their concern.

Second, so where does the phrase “separation of church and state” come from? It first appeared in a letter written by Thomas Jefferson in 1801, who was then President. This letter was a reply to the Danbury Baptist Association of Danbury, Connecticut, which heard a rumor that the Congregationalist denomination was going to be made the national religion and wrote Jefferson in protest. In his reply, Jefferson assured them that they should have no fear of this because:

I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislation should ‘make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof’ [i.e., The First Amendment], thus building a wall of separation between church and state.<sup>10</sup>

The context and intent of Jefferson’s letter had nothing whatsoever to do with removing the Bible and morality from government, rather it dealt with the original intent of the First Amendment, namely, that there would never be a national denomination.

It was then in 1962 that the phrase “separation of church and state” was violently ripped completely from its context and intent. On June 25, in the court case *Engel vs. Vitale*, the Supreme Court used that phrase to redefine “church.” *For 170 years before this case*, the court defined “church” as being a federally established denomination (which once again was the clear intent of the First Amendment), but it now meant any religious activity performed in public. And as we have been witnessing for several decades, that ruling set America on its downward course.

My dear reader, it is *historical fact* that the Founding Fathers wove *God’s law* into the very fabric of *American law*, but when that was removed, America began to spiral into the abyss. Now, some evangelicals are quick to point out, “Most of

the founders were not biblical believers, rather Deists," but while that is true, it is not the point here. They still stood on the moral principles of Christianity. Even the world-renowned *secular* historians (and 1968 Pulitzer Prize winners) Will and Ariel Durant pointed this out in the same year:

There is no significant example in history, before our time, of a society successfully maintaining moral life without the aid of religion. France, the United States [as stated in the First Amendment], and some other nations have divorced their government from all churches, but they have had the help of religion in keeping social order.<sup>11</sup>

So, no, Church and State do not join in governing society (as they did disastrously in the Middle Ages), but the State that ignores God's Truth and those who proclaim it does so at its own peril. Mark it down: Once we remove God from our *consciousness*, His law from our *courtrooms*, and even basic morality from our *culture*, replacing it all with complete spiritual indifference, we are doomed as a nation.

### Infant Baptism

As I continue to research and write on church history, it becomes increasingly burdensome to discover how much both doctrine and practice in the Church are the result not of what Scripture alone says but rather other influences such as: philosophy, psychology, allegory, spiritualizing, tradition, and even mysticism.

One such doctrine, which developed early, is *infant baptism*, which actually flowed *directly* from the fountain of *baptismal regeneration* (see TOTT #112). Since baptism saves, it was argued, infants should be baptized for the remission of sins. While this was alluded to as far back as Irenaeus (*Against Heresies*, 2:22:4, AD 189), it was stated without ambiguity once again by Origen. In his *Homilies on Leviticus*, after first quoting Psalm 51:5 and Job 14:4, he then wrote on Leviticus 8:3, 6: "These verses may be adduced when it is asked why, since the baptism of the Church is given for the remission of sins, baptism according to the practice of the Church is given even to infants." The error here is glaringly obvious: how can he go to the OT to teach baptism in the NT Church? This is faulty hermeneutics. But, of course, this was easy for Origen because he allegorized virtually everything on which he wrote (which we will return to below).

Elsewhere he states with bold authority, "The Church received from the apostles the tradition of giving baptism even to infants" (*Commentaries on Romans* [5:9]), a statement that has not a shred of biblical *proof*, although there is much *conjecture*. Verses used to prop up this teaching again demonstrate faulty exegesis. It is argued, for example, parents brought young children to Jesus so He could touch them, and His statement "for of such is the kingdom of God" (Mk. 10:13-16; cf. Matt. 19:13-15; Lk. 18:15-17) implies the baptism of young children to make them inheritors of the kingdom. But it obviously says nothing of the sort. The children were brought to *Jesus*, not a river, lake, or baptistery. "There is not a drop of water in the passage," as one commentator puts it. Such interpretation reads something into the passage that is not there. It was common for Jewish children to receive a blessing from the elders of the synagogue or prominent rabbis.

If I may also lovingly add here, neither does this passage

teach the idea of "children's church," as some insist today. Is it not instructive that we do not find the 12-year-old Jesus in "Children's Temple," "Junior Passover," or some other youth program, rather we see Him with His parents at that great worship event (Luke 2:41-42)? Without exception, in fact, when we see God's people worshipping in Scripture, the family is together.<sup>12</sup>

So, what our Lord assures here is that even children can believe and enter the Kingdom, that it requires, in fact, child-like faith. Faith *alone* (which included repentance) was *always* His message for Kingdom entrance (Matt. 21:31-32; Mk. 1:15; Jn. 1:12; 3:14-21; 11:25-26; Acts 2:21; 16:31; Rom. 3:21-30; 4:5; 10:1-21; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8-9; Phil. 3:9).

Lydia is also used for "proof" of infant baptism. When she was saved, it is argued, "she was baptized, and her household" (Acts 16:14-15), so that must have included children. But that is again an obvious assumption, since the text does not specify who the members of her household were. On the contrary, verse 40 speaks of "the brethren" who were there. Let us remember, she was a business woman, so this could refer to men who worked for her who also believed and were baptized. It is also insisted that since Paul "baptized also the household of Stephanas," that implies children as well (1 Cor. 1:16). But again, it implies no such thing. The same can be said of other "proof" texts (Acts 11:14; 16:31-34; 18:8). They simply do not *say* what these teachers insist that they *imply*.

In the final analysis, however, this issue is really not about "proof texts"—*it is about hermeneutics, basic biblical interpretation*. This brings us back to the practice of allegorizing and spiritualizing Scripture, which is actually the real heart of the issue. While various advocates of infant baptism (paedobaptists) disagree on certain particulars, they all agree that paedobaptism is the NT counterpart to OT circumcision. But again, this is a giant leap of assumption and simply spiritualizes circumcision. Nowhere does Scripture indicate this idea. It is the equivalent of pounding a square peg into a round hole with a sledgehammer. Interestingly, covenant theologian Louis Berkhof admits, "It may be said at the outset that there is no explicit command in the Bible to baptize children, and that there is not a single instance in which we are plainly told that children were baptized," but he then adds, "But this does not necessarily make infant baptism unbiblical" and goes on at great length to give its "Scriptural ground."<sup>13</sup> But this teaching is based entirely on assumption and inference, although Colossians 2:11-12 is appealed to for support: "In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead." But as that very clearly states, "baptism with water . . . is [not] analogous to physical circumcision, but to circumcision of the heart,"<sup>14</sup> a concept that is, in fact, stated in both testaments (cf. Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4; 9:26; Acts 7:51; Rom. 2:29).

Finally, it needs to be repeated that this concept was the direct result of the teaching of baptismal regeneration, which is itself serious heresy. Various Christian denominations have modified its *meaning* but sadly ignore its original *intent*. So apostate, in fact, did this idea become that the Roman Church created the idea of *limbus infantium* ("children's limbo"), which

is the place where unbaptized infants go; since they were not baptized, they cannot go to heaven, but because they have done no wickedness, they go a place of happiness and no “positive pain.” This is why infant baptism is so strongly emphasized to parents, so that they will be able to see their children again in Heaven. So, it cannot be emphasized too strongly: Baptism does not infuse grace, it does not save, it does not make a baby a member of the Church, and it does not even “dedicate a baby to God.” Baptism is an outward, public testimony that one has repented of their sin and received Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, and an infant cannot make that decision. Paedobaptism, I lovingly submit, is based entirely on the *tradition* of the Church, not the *Truth* of Scripture. Nonetheless, it is a tragic error that continued through the ages and caused manifold strife.

Dr. J. D. Watson  
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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Expositor's Greek Testament*.

<sup>2</sup> Colin Brown, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Zondervan), Vol. 3, 877. The remainder of the quotation

is: “However, sometimes *alētheuō* means to prove true; or in the passive, to be fulfilled (Xenophon, *Institutio Cyri* 4, 6–10).” But neither of these meanings would make sense in the context.

<sup>3</sup> Brown, 886.

<sup>4</sup> Attributed to Spurgeon in *The Biblical Illustrator*, but that could not be confirmed.

<sup>5</sup> *Exploring Ephesians* (Loizeaux Brothers, 1993).

<sup>6</sup> *The Biblical Illustrator*.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Christian Unity* (Baker, 1980), 244. I must disagree, however, with “holding,” as explained earlier in the text.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 249.

<sup>10</sup> *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson, Memorial Edition* (Washington: The Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association of the United States, 1903), 281–82).

<sup>11</sup> Will and Ariel Durant, *The Lessons of History* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), 51.

<sup>12</sup> Lev. 23:3, 14; Deut 29:10–13; Josh. 8:35; 2 Chron. 20:13; Neh. 12:43; Joel 2:15–16; Matt. 18:1–5; Mk. 10:13–14; Lk. 2:41–42; Acts 2:46; 20:20.

<sup>13</sup> Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Eerdmans), 633.

<sup>14</sup> Mark Dever in Daniel Akin, *A Theology for the Church* (B&H Publishing, 2014), 619.

### Solemn Sentences: The Seven Statements of Christ on the Cross

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