



Truth

On Tough Texts

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A MINISTRY OF GRACE BIBLE CHURCH

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Reader Questions (4)

Selected Scriptures

WE LOVE RECEIVING CORRESPONDENCE, whether e-mail or snail mail. Some of that is thanks for the ministry and some are questions on various verses or issues. From time to time, therefore, we like to dedicate an entire issue to such questions (see TOTT #30, 36, and 57). As always, we pray these questions and answers will be of blessing and help to many. Our thanks to each one of you who wrote, and we hope that this will generate questions from others.

Kingdom of Heaven and Kingdom of God

Q: “What is the difference between the Kingdom of Heaven and the Kingdom of God?” (MH)

A: Various Bible teachers have made a huge issue of this by insisting they are distinct. I am convinced, however, that there is no difference in these terms. Here’s why.

During the Intertestament Period—the 400 years between the events of the Old Testament and the New—the Jewish people developed a superstitious fear of using God’s name. Because they believed it was too holy, they didn’t use the covenant name of God (Yahweh or Jehovah, indicated by the word LORD (note the small capital letters) in most English Bibles. As a result, they substituted other words for the name of God, and “heaven” became a common substitute. By New Testament times, in fact, that practice was so ingrained that the Jewish people instantly understood any reference to the kingdom of *heaven* as a reference to the kingdom of *God*.

Again, while some Bible teachers insist these two terms speak of two different things, they simply do not. Matthew is the *only* writer who uses Kingdom of Heaven” (32 times) because his audience was Jewish and would have been offended by the term *God*. While I do believe in certain dis-

tinctions in Scripture, I am convinced that this one has been needlessly manufactured. Scripture simply does not say they are different.

Parallel accounts in the other Gospels prove this beyond any doubt. Matthew 4:17, for example, recounts that Jesus preached, “Repent: for the kingdom of *heaven* [*ouranos*] is at hand,” while Mark’s account (1:15) of the same scene states that Jesus preached, “The kingdom of *God* [*theos*] is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.” If these terms refer to two totally different things, then the inescapable conclusion is that either Matthew or Mark misspoke. Likewise, in the Beatitudes, Matthew records Jesus saying: “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of *heaven* [*ouranos*]” (5:3), while Luke’s account reads, “Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of *God* [*theos*]” (6:20). If I may be so blunt, arguing over these terms is just silly and even counterproductive.

So, to what do these refer? Both refer to the sphere of God’s dominion over His people. While presently that is God’s rule over the hearts of believers (Luke 17:21), it will be fully realized in the literal, earthly millennial kingdom (Rev. 20:4–6).

Knowing the Moment of Salvation

Q: “If a Christian doesn’t remember the exact time in their life when they were saved, is that bad? Is that detrimental to their testimony? And if one does not remember, should they ‘renew their vows’?” (AC)

A: That is a touchy question and one that many Christians have had. The camp of Christianity in which I grew up staunchly insists that a person must know the “precise moment in time when he or she asked Jesus into their heart.” In

over 36 years of ministry, however, I have met people who simply do not remember that “moment in time” but their lives are no less a clear testimony of the reality of Christ.

I think a fair illustration can be found in marriage. Is there an exact moment when a couple is “married”? Is it at the point in the ceremony when they exchange vows? Most of us would say, “Nope, not yet.” Some argue, “It’s when the pastor says, ‘I now pronounce you husband and wife.’” Legally, however, that’s not true either, since the marriage license hasn’t been signed and witnessed. The true romantic says, “Ah, it’s the kiss that seals the deal.” Others view the wedding night consummation as the moment when they become “one flesh.” But in the final analysis, none of that is the real issue because marriage is far more than just “a moment in time.”

Similarly, the issue of salvation is infinitely more than just “a moment in time.” Whether one remembers the microsecond when they received Christ is far less important than if their life now demonstrates that Christ *is* their Savior and Lord. Tragically, I have met many people who profess Christ and trace it back to the day they “walked the aisle” or “asked Jesus into their heart,” but whose lives are little different now than before they supposedly “accepted Christ.” That is why 1 John, James, and 2 Peter 1:3–10 are so critical. They methodically demonstrate the transformed behavior that exists in the true believer.

As for the idea of “renewing our vows,” such a concept, along with others, such as “rededicating my life to Christ,” are not biblical. Such ideas have no biblical precedent, rather were invented by well-meaning folks who simply misunderstand salvation and Christian living.

Part of this issue stems from one’s assurance of salvation. This is why, in fact, God commands us to “examine [ourselves], whether [we] be in the faith” (2 Cor. 14:5) and to “give diligence to make [our] calling and election sure” (2 Pet. 1:10). Assurance of salvation is not a feeling; it’s not because we did something. Rather, assurance of salvation comes by objective proof of living a Christ-like life. We know we are Christians not because we remember that “crisis moment,” but because we have the objective proof of obedience to our Sovereign Lord. It’s not the *moment* of salvation that is important, rather it’s the *manifestation* of salvation that is crucial.

Authentic Christianity

Q: I was speaking to someone recently who brought up the idea that there is *an authentic Christianity*. Can you tell me what you think it is. In other words, what do the people in authentic Christianity believe? Thanks. (JB)

A: You know, I have yet to find a better summary of authentic Christianity than what we recently presented in a two-part TOTT article (#60 & 61) on “The Five Solas of the Reformation.” As stated there: “It is *Scripture* alone that declares that salvation comes by *grace* alone, through *faith* alone, in *Christ* alone, by which *God* alone is glorified.”

I believe that well summarizes True, Biblical Christianity itself, and differentiates it from every other religion, cult,

philosophy, or faith. As we went on to examine in TOTT #62 (“Target: Historical Evangelical Christianity”), it is also this that is (and has been) attacked more violently than any other faith in human history, for Truth is seldom embraced, and only then by the sovereign will of God.

The Spirits in Prison (and Baptism)

Q: What does 1 Peter 3:19–22 mean? I have read this several times and just don’t understand it. (CH)

A: This is, indeed one of the most debated passages in Scripture. There are actually two “tough texts” in this passage.

First, there is the identity of **the spirits in prison** to whom Christ **went and preached**. The verb behind **preached** is *kērussō*, which referred to the imperial herald. In the ancient world, heralds would come to town as representatives of the rulers to make public announcements or precede generals and kings in the processions celebrating military triumphs, announcing victories won in battle.

To whom, however, did Christ make proclamation? That is the debate. Some believe Peter here referred to the descent of Christ’s Spirit into *hades* between His death and resurrection to offer people who lived before the Flood a second chance for salvation. However, this interpretation is no less than heresy. After death there is eternal judgment, and there is no longer any hope of salvation.

Others also insist this passage refers to Christ’s descent into *hades* after His crucifixion but only to proclaim His victory to the imprisoned fallen angels, but as John Gill says of this, it is “absurd, vain, and needless.” This very popular notion is based upon the idea that these were the fallen angels of Genesis 6 who supposedly had sexual relations with women, which in-turn produced a race of giants. As we detailed in three issues of TOTT (5, 6, 7), however, the fallen angel theory is based exclusively in pagan myth, not biblical precedent.

Both of those views are also bothersome, in fact, because they flirt with the teaching of Roman Catholicism on this passage. This is a text used to prop up the heresy of *limbus patrum*, that is, “limbo of fathers.” As detailed in TOTT #24, the literal idea of *limbus* is “fringe or border,” and the basic idea in the word “limbo” is “a state or place of confinement.” So the teaching in the term *limbus patrum*, which was chosen in the Middle Ages, refers to a place on the border of Hell that, as the *Catholic Encyclopedia* puts it, the place where “the just who had lived under the Old Dispensation, and who, either at death or after a course of purgatorial discipline, had attained the perfect holiness required for entrance into glory, were obliged to await the coming of the Incarnate Son of God and the full accomplishment of His visible earthly mission. Meanwhile they were ‘in prison’ awaiting ‘the higher bliss to which they looked forward.’”¹ But Scripture simply nowhere teaches that Christ, after his resurrection and prior to his ascension, descended into hell. Such an idea is appalling. It continues to grieve me how often modern teachers and expositors allow themselves to be influenced by pagan ideas and Roman Catholic tradition.

Still others think the phrase **to the spirits** should be understood of Christ's going to preach, through his apostles, to the Gentiles, as in Ephesians 2:17. But one problem here is that living men are not called "spirits" in Scripture. Another is that it seems very odd that Peter, while speaking of the apostles, would then suddenly, as though forgetting himself, refer back to the time of Noah.

Therefore, in view of the context, this simply refers to the preincarnate Christ's preaching through Noah to those who, because they rejected that message, are now (in Peter's day) **spirits in prison**. John Gill again well puts it, "The plain and easy sense of the words is, that Christ, by his Spirit . . . went in the ministry of Noah, the preacher of righteousness, and preached both by words and deeds, by the personal ministry of Noah." Albert Barnes also well illustrates using the 17th-century minister of New Haven Colony, John Davenport. He writes: "Thus it would be proper to say that . . . Davenport came from England to preach to the dead men around us." That is, indeed, "the plain and easy sense of the words," not the fanciful ideas that seem popular to modern thought. Puritan Matthew Henry is equally good, emphasizing, in fact, the false teaching of Catholicism:

He went and preached, by his Spirit striving with them, and inspiring and enabling Enoch and Noah to plead with them, and **preach righteousness to them**, as 2 Pet. 2:5. . . . The hearers . . . were dead and disembodied when the apostle speaks of them, therefore he properly calls them spirits now **in prison**; not that they were *in prison when Christ preached to them*, as the vulgar Latin translation and the popish expositors pretend.

Some expositors object to such a view because they insist that if Peter meant to imply preaching the Gospel He would have used *euangelizō* (to announce good news, to evangelize). By using *kērussō*, they insist, Peter is saying that Christ was heralding something else. But such an idea is not quite accurate. Paul used *kērussō*, in fact, in 1 Corinthians 1:23 when he wrote, "We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness" It's hard to fathom how one is not heralding the Gospel when he is preaching Christ crucified. *Kērussō* is also used to refer to preaching the word of faith (Rom. 10:8), preaching the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:12), and even preaching the Gospel (Gal. 2:2; Col. 1:23; 1 Thess. 2:9). Romans 10:14 is also significant: "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" What exactly is the preacher heralding here if not the Gospel?

So, if we may say once more, "the plain and easy sense of the words" is best. This is consistently the view of older expositors, in contrast to modern opinion. Happily, some today do agree with this view, such as *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*: "The Spirit of Christ preached through Noah to the ungodly humans who, at the time of Peter's writing, were 'spirits in prison' awaiting final judgment." In fact, it goes on to add that this matches the theme of the letter:

This interpretation seems to fit the general theme of this section (1 Peter 3:13–22)—keeping a good conscience in unjust persecution. Noah is presented as an example of one who committed himself to a course of action for the sake of a clear conscience before God, though it meant enduring harsh ridicule. Noah did not fear men but obeyed God and proclaimed His message.

Second, there is also debate over the idea that **baptism doth also now save us**. The setting is that Peter saw here an analogy not only of the proclamation of truth, as we discussed earlier, but also the triumphant salvation provided through Christ. He, therefore, writes, **eight souls were saved by water**. The word **by** translates the Greek preposition *dia*, which in the present construction speaks of "intermediate agency," that is, it was by the intermediate working of the water in lifting up the ark that brought the eight survivors safely through the flood.

Now, the advocate of baptismal regeneration pounces here and says, "Aha! See there? It was water that saved them and it is water that saves us now, since Peter goes on to say, **The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us**."

But hold on a minute. It is just such hasty "interpretation" that produces apostasy. If we may interject, in fact, baptismal regeneration was one of the earliest heresies to enter the church. Tertullian (c.160–c.220) was one of the earliest church fathers to teach it, and Roman Catholicism has always held it. Incredulously, even some *Protestant* churches teach this, which is especially contradictory because it is one of the doctrines they should be *protesting!* Zacchaeus (Luke 19:9), the thief on the cross (Luke 23:42–43), new believers at Pentecost (Acts 2:41), Paul (9:17–18), and Cornelius (10:47) all were declared saved *before* baptism. Salvation is by grace *alone*. Any other "gospel" is *not* the Gospel (Gal. 1:6–9).

The phrase **like figure**, therefore, is *antitupon*, from which is derived the theological term "antitype." Literally, *tupos*, "type," means "to strike with repeated strokes." From that came the idea of an image, impression, or mark created by such repeated strokes. Figuratively, then "a type is a model of some reality which was yet to appear, a prototype of that which was yet to be developed and evolved."² Specifically, certain Old Testament persons and events anticipate Christ or specific New Testament teachings. Joseph, for example, was a type, a model, of Christ as the rejected kinsman who becomes their Savior (Gen. 37:1–50:26; Acts 7:9–14). An antitype, therefore (*anti* meaning against or instead of), corresponds to, resembles, or is similar to a type. So, is Peter saying that just as water saved Noah it now saves us? No he is not. He's saying that all this is a *resemblance*, not that it is identical.

What, then, is the resemblance? How does it correspond? The key, of course, is the word **baptism**. While some insist this is water and therefore part of salvation, it can't possibly refer to that since Peter himself repudiates such an idea with his very next statement: **not the putting away of the filth of the flesh** (body). More basic than that is the misunder-

standing many have over the word *baptizō* (**baptism**). While many read that word and immediately assume it implies water, that simply is not the case. The word simply means “immerse; place into.” The verb *baptō* originally referred to dipping clothes into dye or drawing water by placing the container into the water.

First Corinthians 12:13, for example, declares, “By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.” This has nothing to do with water, rather the placing of every true believer *into* the Body of Christ. The same is true of the “one baptism” of Ephesians 5:5, where Paul is dealing with a single, definitive placing into, not something that has to do with our experience but with what God has accomplished (see TOTT #35, June 2008, for a detailed exposition of this text).

Peter’s meaning, therefore, seems clear. He uses **baptism** in a figurative sense. As Noah and his companions were immersed in water, we are immersed in **the resurrection of Jesus Christ**, as Peter goes on to specify. It is *that* immersion that is our salvation, not one in water.

Absence of “Murders” in Galatians 5:21

Q: I have a question as to why the New King James Version includes a notation about the word “murders” in Galatians 5:21, saying “murders” is left out of NU. I found that NU refers to the prominent modern Critical Text of the Greek New Testament. I noticed the word “murders” is also left out of other versions of the Bible in this verse. Thanks for your insight. (CH)

A: This is one of those questions that opens the proverbial can of worms, for it brings up the controversial issue of textual criticism and Bible translations. As we have noted before (TOTT #52), while there are godly men on both sides of the issue, I do defend the historic (and what I believe is the providentially preserved) text of the New Testament (i.e., Traditional or Ecclesiastical Text) instead of the modern Critical Text. I know some TOTT readers embrace the Critical Text and the modern translations based on it, so I do not wish to offend or inflame.

That said, virtually every modern translation (NIV,

NASB, ESV, etc.) is, indeed, based upon the Critical Text, which does not contain certain words, phrases, and sometimes entire verses and even whole passages that *do* appear in the Traditional (or Ecclesiastical) Text. (We have also discussed the reasons for this in two previous issues of TOTT: 13 & 14.)

Now, as for the New King James Version, it *is* based on the Traditional Text (also called the *Textus Receptus*, Received Text), which itself is based upon a textual tradition that is represented by thousands of manuscripts, in contrast to the Critical Text that is, in point of fact, based upon a very few so-called “older manuscripts.” The reason for the marginal notes in the NKJV, however, is that the editors chose to include data from the Critical Text, thereby telling the reader that certain words, phrases, verses, and passages that are in the English translation they are reading do not actually appear “in the best Greek manuscripts.” (The acronym “NU” refers to the 27th edition of the Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament [N] and the United Bible Society’s 4th edition [U]).

So what is the practical result? Well, perhaps there are two possibilities. As the last paragraph in the NKJV’s Preface states, “The textual notes reflect the scholarship of the past 150 years and will assist the reader to observe the variations between the different manuscript traditions of the New Testament.” On the other hand, could such a mixture actually betray both sides of the controversy? I guess it depends upon your perspective.

Again, we thank each one who wrote us and look forward to hearing from others. May God richly bless each of our faithful readers and fellow servants.

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NOTES

¹ “Limbo” in *Catholic Encyclopedia*, Classic 1914 Edition (<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen>).

² Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (AMG Publishers, entry #5179).

NEW BOOK: *A Hebrew Word for the Day*

After several delays, Pastor Watson’s new book has finally been released by AMG Publishers. You can read more about it and view several sample pages on our website:

www.thescripturealone.com/HWFTD.html. If you like what you see, the best places to purchase it are at Amazon (www.amazon.com) and Christian Book Distributors (www.christianbook.com).

We hope this book, as well as its predecessor (*A Word for the Day*, www.thescripturealone.com/WFTD.html), will be a blessing to many.

We greatly appreciate your support.

Like many ministries, TOTT is feeling the impact of these tough economic times. We continue to ask our readers for their support in meeting these needs so that this ministry can continue. We thank those who have responded and sent along such support, which is helping to keep it going.