

The Nature of Truth

Pilate said to Him, "So You are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?"

– John 18:37-38b

If you used to be in the UPC then let me ask you, How many times have you heard someone say that they are thankful "for the Truth"? Or perhaps they said that they were thankful that God revealed "the Truth" to them. Or maybe they talked about how anointed a non-UPC singer or minister was, and then they said that it was a shame that the person they were talking about "did not have the Truth."

I used to hear those statements all the time! I think that we all have. But I am one of those people who likes to ask "Why" about everything. As a matter of fact, one of my favorite quotes says this:

"Millions saw the apple fall, but Newton was the one who asked why" (Bernard Baruch).

One of the things that many Christians do is rattle off a Scripture or a phrase without stopping to think about what it actually means. I think that we all do that; that's certainly not something that's limited to the UPC! But one thing that you do hear the UPC talk a lot about is "having the Truth." So in this article I want to examine this question: *What does it mean for something to be true?* Once I have investigated the meaning of truth then I will look at two central UPC doctrines to see whether or not they really are "true."

Now, a lot of people might be thinking that I'm silly for

asking what it means for something to be true. After all, if something is true then it is...true! But what does that word mean? More specifically, how does the word apply to us Christians?

One good definition of truth is that *it is consistent and it corresponds to reality*. That is the definition that my systematic theology professor repeated until we practically had it coming out our ears! And it is certainly a good definition. Notice that the definition says that truth corresponds to reality, not to itself. The reason it says that is because there are plenty of people who teach and believe that truth just needs to correspond to itself. The problem with this is obvious: If a person starts with an untrue starting point then the rest of their system (whatever it might be) will also be untrue.

My philosophy professor used evolution as an example of a view of truth that corresponds with itself instead of corresponding to reality. He called it a "mesh" system, meaning that if any one point of it was proven false then a new theory was made to account for the portion that was proven false. In other words, there's no way to prove evolution false to someone who believes strongly in the theory. Why? Because it corresponds with itself, even though many scientists would argue that the actual points of the theory are incorrect. (I believe that the UPC also has a "mesh" view of truth, but that is not the subject that I am discussing in this article!)

The point is this: There is more than one view of truth and knowledge that exists in the world today. For instance, many different religions believe that there is no one correct way to God; they believe that all paths are equally valid ((This is known as "[religious pluralism](#)")). The Christian view stands in opposition to this because it claims that Jesus is the only way to God, but the religious pluralist responds by saying that the Christian view is right for the Christians but the Muslim view is right for the Muslims, etc.

So with that in mind let us return to the original question: What is truth?

Well, as I already said, my systematic theology professor defined truth as *that which is consistent and corresponds with reality*. I do believe that is a very good view of truth, so I want to use that for a starting point and break this subject down a little farther. Specifically, I want to explain why truth must be consistent and why it must correspond with itself. To do this we must look at three fundamental laws of logic. These are:

1. The law of non-contradiction
2. The law of the excluded middle
3. The law of identity

Please bear with me here! I know it's easy to zone out as soon as someone writes or says "fundamental laws," but this is important to understanding exactly what truth is! And I promise that it's not that complicated either. Actually, these three laws are very simple and even intuitive.

The law of non-contradiction simply says: *Something cannot both be and not be at the same time and in the same respect*. Example: Something cannot be green and not green at the same time and in the same way. That's pretty simple, right? Similarly, I cannot be in my chair and out of my chair at this very moment in time. I am sitting in my chair, and it's impossible for me to not be sitting in my chair at the same time.

The second law, the law of the excluded middle, says: *Something either is or is not*. In other words, something either exists or it does not exist. Something cannot exist and not exist at the same time. Very simple and intuitive!

Finally, the law of identity says: *Something is what it is*. This is very similar to the first law. Something cannot be what it is and what it is not at the same time.

These laws seem very intuitive (and they are) but the reason they are given names is because they serve as a starting point for all discussions. Even if a person does not know the laws by name they know them intuitively. Furthermore, these laws cannot be refuted. It's impossible! Why? Because a person must use one the laws in order to refute the laws! Give it a try, it's kind of fun! (I tried it when my philosophy professor presented these laws to us, and I found out that they are impossible to refute. I guess all those Ph.D.'s were right after all; at least on this point.)

Now that I've given these three laws let me bring it to a practical level by looking briefly at the UPC's view of baptism. The UPC view of baptism is that a person must be baptized in the Name of Jesus in order to be saved (["Why We Baptize In Jesus' Name"](#), Accessed 8/12/2007)). However, it is my experience that many people in the UPC find it hard to accept the idea that God is sending almost every believer for the last 2,000 years to hell because they were baptized the wrong way. So, when backed into a corner, many in the UPC will say something like this:

"I refuse to put anyone in hell; I believe that God might let people into Heaven if they were baptized in the Titles and that was all they knew, but if they see the necessity of being baptized in the Name of Jesus and they refuse to obey 'the Truth' then they are responsible for their disobedience."

That statement sounds really good on the surface, but let's apply the fundamental laws of logic to it. First, this statement is effectively saying that "the Truth" only becomes true once a person sees that it is true.

Think about that for a moment. That is like saying that the speed limit in front of my apartment only becomes 30 miles per hour when I see the sign, and that if I do not see that it is

30 miles per hour then the speed limit does not exist (or that it is not 30 miles per hour). See the fallacy? If the speed limit is 30 miles per hour then it is 30 miles per hour whether or not I realize that it is. In the same way, if baptism in the Name of Jesus is necessary for salvation then it is necessary whether or not a person realizes that it is. On the other hand, if a person can get into Heaven without being baptized in the Name of Jesus then baptism in the Name of Jesus is not necessary for salvation.

Put quite simply: Baptism in the Name of Jesus cannot simultaneously be necessary and unnecessary at the same time.

I believe that the illustration I just gave makes it easier to understand why the three fundamental laws of logic are so important! A doctrine or belief can sound really good on the surface, but it might not hold up when put to the logical test.

For instance, earlier in this article I commented on the Hindu believe that all paths to God are equally valid. This is what Dr. Norman Geisler has to say about that idea in his book "Worlds Apart: A Handbook on World Views" (the italics and bold print are added by me for emphasis):

How does one decide on a world view? They cannot all be true, for they hold mutually exclusive views on many essential points. For example, atheism and theism cannot both be true, for atheism affirms that "God does not exist" and theism affirms that "God does exist." Likewise, God cannot be both finite (finite godism) and infinite (theism). Nor can miracles be possible (theism) and impossible (deism, atheism). The opposite of truth is falsehood. Hence, if one view is true, then the opposite must be false, unless, of course, one claims that there is no such thing as truth. But the problem with such a statement is that it claims to be true, thereby defeating its own claim that nothing is true ((Worlds Apart: A Handbook On World Views". Geisler, Norman

L., Watkins, William D)).

The last sentence is the most important. Did you catch the problem that Dr. Geisler is pointing out? He is saying that when a person says that all truths are equally valid (such as the pluralist belief that all paths lead to God) then they are claiming absolutely that there is no absolute truth! In other words, they are breaking the law of non-contradiction because they are claiming that there are absolutely no absolutes! They are making a statement that they claim is true, but the statement claims that there can be no truth!

So the pluralist claim that all paths lead to God sounds very good, just like it sounds good when someone in the UPC claims that baptism in Jesus' Name only becomes necessary once a person realizes it is necessary. But when put to the test we find that both of these views are equally impossible from a logical standpoint. Of course, a person can still choose to believe these things, but they need to recognize that they are believing them purely because of faith and that there is no logical basis (nor can there be) for their view.

So let me summarize what we have covered so far, and then we will move on to examining two central UPC doctrines to see whether or not they are true.

For a general definition of truth I have chosen the definition given by my systematic theology professor: *Truth is that which is consistent and corresponds to reality.* For the rest of this article I am going to use a more specific definition for determining biblical truth:

Biblical truth is that which is consistent and does not conflict with other Scripture.

With that definition in mind let's look at two UPC beliefs to see whether or not they are true. In other words, let's see if

these two beliefs *are consistent and do not conflict with other Scripture.*

The first belief that I have chosen to examine is the belief that a person must repent in order to be saved. The official UPC position says:

Luke 13:5...reads, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish". [sic] Plainly, then, the tragic alternative to repentance is eternal perdition (["Except Ye Repent"](#), Accessed 8/12/2007)).

The question that we need to ask is this: Does the UPC belief that a person needs to repent of their sins in order to be saved contradict other Scriptures? Specifically, does that belief contradict other Scriptures such as Acts 2:21 and Romans 10:13, which say that everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved?

On the surface it appears that there is a contradiction, but I am convinced that this contradiction is only an apparent one. I feel that repentance is indeed necessary for salvation. The reason that I believe this is simple: It is impossible to accept Jesus as Savior if a person does not believe that they are in need of saving. In other words, if I do not realize that I am a sinner then why would I call on the Name of the Lord and ask Him for salvation?

On top of this, Jesus commanded repentance (cf. Mat. 4:17, Luke 13:5). If a person blatantly refuses to obey Jesus and repent then I propose that they do not truly believe He is Lord. When a person truly accepts that someone is their Lord then it requires that they admit that they are not Lord. Put bluntly, the most difficult barrier to getting people to come to Christ is getting them to admit that He is God and that they are not.

So, once again, I do not believe there is a real contradiction

between the UPC view that repentance is necessary for salvation and the Scriptures that say that a person just needs to call upon the Name of the Lord to be saved. I am convinced that calling on the Name of the Lord involves repentance, so the contradiction is only *apparent*, not *real*.

The score is therefore 1-0 for the UPC. Now let us look at another doctrine that is central to the UPC: The doctrine that says that speaking in tongues is necessary for salvation.

(Before I begin I should point out that the UPC view is that the Holy Ghost is necessary for salvation, and on this point I agree with them, just like every other evangelical Christian does. However, speaking in tongues is synonymous with the Holy Ghost to the UPC (since they believe that the initial evidence of receiving the Holy Ghost is that a person speaks in tongues (["The Gift of the Holy Ghost"](#), Accessed 8/12/2007))), so that is why I say that I am examining the UPC doctrine that says that speaking in tongues is necessary for salvation.)

The UPC uses three Scripture passages to "prove" that speaking in tongues is the evidence of receiving the Holy Ghost: Acts 2:1-4, Acts 10:44-48, and Acts 19:1-6 ((Ibid.)). From these three passages the UPC extracts the doctrine that "The initial, outward evidence [of receiving the Holy Ghost] is speaking in tongues, which means speaking miraculously in languages the speaker does not know ((Ibid.))."

But is this doctrine true, or does it contradict other Scripture? Specifically, does it contradict 1 Cor. 12:28-30, which says:

1Co 12:28-30 (NASB, bold print added for emphasis)

(28) And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues.

(29) All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers

of miracles, are they?

*(30) All do not have gifts of healings, do they? **All do not speak with tongues, do they?** All do not interpret, do they?*

It is obvious from the context that Paul is asking rhetorical questions and that the answer to each question is "No." It is very important that Paul did **not** ask, "**All do not have the gift of tongues**"; Instead, he asked, "**All do not speak with tongues, do they?**" (This is a crucial difference since the UPC believes that Paul was talking about the gift of tongues in this passage, which the UPC believes is separate from "tongues as the initial evidence of the Holy Ghost." It is my opinion that if every believer who received the Holy Ghost was speaking in tongues *then Paul never would have worded his question in the matter that he did.* His goal was to cut down on confusion in the church at Corinth, not add to it!)

So at this point in the discussion the UPC has three Scripture passages that they claim are examples of people speaking in tongues when they initially received the gift of the Holy Ghost. From this they extrapolate the doctrine that all believers speak in tongues when they receive the Holy Ghost. In contrast to this we have a direct statement from Paul saying that all believers do not speak with tongues.

This definitely appears to be a true contradiction, but let us keep looking.

The question that we need to ask next is this: Are there any examples of people being filled with the Holy Ghost or receiving the Holy Ghost when they did *not* speak with tongues? Interestingly enough, there is one example: Paul himself.

Act 9:17-19a NASB (bold print added for emphasis)

*(17) So Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may **regain your sight and be filled with***

the Holy Spirit."

(18) And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he got up and was baptized;

(19) and he took food and was strengthened.

Apparently Ananias did not plan on wasting any time. He walked in the door and told Paul that he had been sent for two reasons: 1) that Paul would regain his sight and 2) that Paul would be filled with the Holy Spirit. Then Ananias gets right down to business; he lays his hands on Paul and Paul's vision is restored. Then what happened? Paul got baptized. Then what happened? He ate a meal.

And that's it.

No mention of tongues.

So it appears that the UPC's claim that "Speaking with other tongues has been connected with Spirit baptism since the beginning of the church age" ((Ibid.)) commits the sin of omission by failing to include every applicable example of people being filled with the Holy Ghost. It is also interesting that there is no mention of any of the (approximately) 3,000 believers baptized on the Day of Pentecost speaking in tongues (Acts 2:41).

(Another example of someone being filled with the Holy Ghost and not speaking in tongues is when John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Ghost. According to Luke 1:15 he was filled with the Spirit while still in his mother's womb, and, while it is possible that he spoke in tongues, I find it rather unlikely.)

Also, on closer inspection of the UPC's "proof Scriptures" for tongues being the initial evidence of a person receiving the Holy Ghost we find that one of the passages does not even qualify! Which one? Acts 19:1-6. The careful reader will note

that the passage does not say that the 12 disciples were **filled** with the Holy Ghost, it says that the Holy Ghost **came upon** them. This seems like a small difference, but it is a very important one. It was quite common all throughout the Old Testament for the Holy Spirit to "come upon" a person or group of people, yet we know from John 7:39 that the Spirit was not given until Jesus was glorified. (For examples of the Holy Ghost coming upon people in the Old Testament see the following Scriptures: Numbers 11:25, 24:2, Judges 3:10, 6:34, 11:29, 14:6, 14:19, 15:14, 1 Samuel 10:10, 11:6, 16:13, 19:20, 19:23, 1 Chronicles 12:18, 2 Chronicles 20:14.)

Finally, we have Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 14:22 which says that tongues is a sign to the *unbeliever*, not the *believer*. The UPC view of tongues stands in direct opposition to Paul's statement, because the UPC teaches that tongues is the initial evidence to the believer (and by extension to those around him or her) that they have received the Holy Ghost. So the UPC makes tongues a sign to the believer when it is actually meant to be a sign to the unbeliever.

So, to summarize, we actually have two Scripture passages showing where people spoke in tongues when they received the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:1-6 and Acts 10:44-48). In contrast to this we have a direct statement by Paul saying that not all believers speak in tongues (1 Cor. 12:30) and the absence of any record of Paul himself speaking in tongues when he received the Holy Ghost. Last but not least, we have the fact that tongues is supposed to be a sign to the unbeliever, not the believer.

In light of all of this evidence I am forced to conclude that there is a *real* contradiction between the UPC view and the biblical view of tongues. In other words, *the UPC view of tongues is consistent with itself but it is not consistent with the entirety of Scripture*. The fact that the UPC view is consistent with itself makes it sound very good, but when the entirety of Scripture is examined then one finds out that the

UPC view is not consistent with the rest of Scripture.

So the score is now UPC 1 – Bible 1.

What can we learn from all of this? Well, if you are reading this article and you have never taken a philosophy course or a course in logic then you probably learned that an idea that seems so simple (like truth) can actually be quite complicated! In all seriousness, though, I am hoping that those who read this article will have a better idea of what truth actually is and that they will know how to apply the basic principles of logic to other doctrines and teachings to find out whether or not they are correct.

It is my hope and prayer that readers will always remember to check out the entirety of Scripture when examining doctrines to find out whether or not the doctrine conflicts with itself logically and whether or not it conflicts with other Scripture.