



# THE BEREA PAGE

*“Examining . . . to see if these things are so” ~ Acts 17.11*

## A Disturbing Trend

“Now that this volume is complete, I realize that my own tardiness is perhaps part of a larger trend—and truthfully, a larger problem—within evangelicalism. The frequency with which Christian students head off to college and return (often in a short time) with a substantially different worldview than when they left should have occasioned some serious soul-searching within the evangelical church. Indeed, more than soul-searching, it should have occasioned a substantive response to address the problem. But it seems that such a response, except in a few isolated places, is largely yet to come.” ~ Michael J. Kruger, *Surviving Religion 101: Letters to a Christian Student on Keeping the Faith in College* (Crossway, 2021), 12

## Staging a God Experience

“Increasingly you find people talking about the worship *experience* rather than the worship *service*. That reflects what’s happening in the outside world. I’m dismayed to see churches abandon the means of grace that God ordains simply to conform to the patterns of the world.” ~ John Gilmore, “No Experience Necessary,” *Leadership*, in *Christian Studies* 18 (2000/2001): 77-78

## Thinking Faith in a World of Feelings

David Anguish

In recent essays, I’ve focused on: challenges presented by our world ([here](#)); some similarities between modern and ancient cultures ([here](#)); T. R. Glover’s observation that one reason for the Christian conquest of Roman culture was that they out-thought their world ([here](#)); and emulation of the New Testament emphasis on thinking and engaging the minds of their neighbors ([here](#)). Just as ancient Christians did the thinking of their world (Glover 1917, 205), contemporary disciples should aim to lead the thinking of ours.

Also worth thinking about from Glover’s survey of Roman culture is his observation about the prominence of emotion in the various deity cults of the time (e.g., Cybele, Isis).

All of these cults made deep impressions on the worshipers, as our records tell us. The appeal of religious emotion was noticed by Aristotle, who remarked, however, that it was rather feeling than intellect that was touched—a shrewd criticism that deserves to be remembered still (Glover 1917, 189).

Half a century later, John Stott noted a similar tendency among Christian worshipers, illustrating it with the following:

I am rather fond of the story . . . which used to be told by an American minister, the late Dr. Rufus M. Jones. He believed in the important place of the intellect in preaching. But one of his congregation objected to his emphasis and wrote to him to complain. “Whenever I go to church,” said his critic, “I feel like unscrewing my head and placing it under the seat, because in a religious meeting I never have any use for anything above my collar button” (Stott 1972, rev. ed., 44).

Stott used Jones’s story to introduce a discussion of intellectually based worship, comparing the critic’s sentiment to the “mindless worship . . . offered in pagan Athens where Paul found an altar dedicated ‘to an unknown god.’” Half a century after Stott’s appeal to recognize the importance of the mind for true worship, faith, holiness, Christian guidance, presenting the gospel, and ministry (sub-topics of his chapter, “The Mind in the Christian Life”), Glover’s now century-old observation about the shrewdness of Aristotle’s criticism bears

## Emotional Pragmatism

“When an individual ceases to grapple intellectually with the problems posed by his religion, feeling takes the place of thought.... The individual no longer asks, ‘What is the truth?’ Instead, he asks, ‘What do I feel?’ And that is but one step to the next question: ‘How does this make me feel?’ Emotional pragmatism now takes the place of honest confrontation with the Christian message. The way is opened for the attitude of the religious consumer, who shops around the denominational supermarket for just the right combination of spiritual kicks and thrills to meet his particular psychological needs. The question of truth loses all significance.” ~ Peter Berger, *The Noise of Solemn Assemblies*, in *Christian Studies* 18 (2000/2001): 76

## Thinking Worthy of God

*Titles in a lesson series I developed, adapting and expanding on ideas in John Stott’s Your Mind Matters*

- Why people act this way
- Created to think God’s thoughts
- Minds redeemed and judged
- Thoughtful worship
- Thoughtful faith
- Holy minds
- Seeking a seat at the [culture’s] table
- Now that you know . . .

*“For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.”*

~ 2 Cor 10.3–5

repeating, for in modern culture—and in too many churches—it is “feeling rather than intellect that is touched” (Glover).<sup>1</sup>

This is not to say that emotion has no place in worship, or the practice of faith generally. As James Packer wrote, also in the early 1970s, “knowing God is an emotional relationship,” but, as he quickly added, it is “also an intellectual and volitional one.” Ironically, when we don’t see that and subjugate the intellect to the emotional, what results is the “maudlin self-absorption” that Packer cited as the reason the emotional side of knowing God had been played down (Packer 1973, 35). Clearly, a healthy balance is needed.

As a practical matter, teachers desiring to help believers be countercultural against the contemporary prioritizing of sensory and emotional experience will need to be intentional in study and teaching to equip and prepare disciples for the world that now is (cf. Eph 4.11–12; 1 Pet 3.15). This can be done in different ways, of course, and I mention the following in the hope of prompting brainstorming about approaches that fit your world.

- Read sources that encourage and facilitate more rigorous thought about the ideas we face and how they developed.<sup>2</sup>
- Present thoughtful expositions of New Testament texts to help believers understand the biblical emphasis on thinking and the way ideas form the basis and motivation for godly living and service (e.g., Rom 1.18–23; 2 Cor 10.3–5; Eph 4.17–24).
- Alternately, consider utilizing and developing teaching materials from Bible-based resources that facilitate teaching of the biblical emphasis on thinking.<sup>3</sup>
- Intentionally include discussion of themes to help disciples, especially teens and college students, know there is another side to what they hear from culture and begin to become familiar with the answers we can give.<sup>4</sup>

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## Works Cited & Notes

- T. R. Glover. 1917. *The Jesus of History*. New York: Association Press; New York Public Library reprint.
- James I. Packer. 1973. *Knowing God*. Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.
- John R. W. Stott. 1972. *Your Mind Matters: The Place of the Mind in the Christian Life*. IVP Classics ed., 2006. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books.

<sup>1</sup> See Peter Berger’s observation about “emotional pragmatism” at left.

<sup>2</sup> A resource I’ve begun reading to broaden my perspective is Peter Kreeft’s recently released *Socrates’ Children*, a multivolume popular-level introduction to the history of philosophy (vol. 1 Kindle edition available [here](#)). Apologetics-related podcasts and videos are another useful resource.

<sup>3</sup> At left, see the titles for “Thinking Worthy of God,” an eight-part series I developed in which I drew from and expanded on ideas in John Stott’s *Your Mind Matters*.

<sup>4</sup> See Michael J. Kruger, *Surviving Religion 101: Letters to a Christian Student on Keeping the Faith in College* (Crossway, 2021).

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