



THE BEREA PAGE

"Examining . . . to see if these things are so" ~ Acts 17.11

God Is Relevant

John Piper once decided to preach a sermon from Isaiah 6:1-4 in which he aimed to stress the glory and majesty of God without a word of application. But, accustomed as he was to adding application points, he had second thoughts, wondering whether "the passionate portrayal of the greatness of God in and of itself [would] meet the needs of the people."

Weeks later, a young father told him that, on the day Piper preached that sermon, he and his wife had just discovered their child was being sexually abused by a close relative. Upon hearing this, Piper again second guessed his decision to omit specific points of application.

What the man said next changed his outlook: "John, these have been the hardest months of our lives. Do you know what has gotten me through? *The vision of the greatness of God's holiness that you gave me the first week of January. It has been the rock that we stand on*" (my italics).

Piper's application of that story is succinct: "The greatness and the glory of God are relevant" - *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, Baker Books, 1990, 2004; 9-10.

Excerpt from my, "[God Is Relevant](#)"

John's Stand for Jesus (2)

He Kept Teaching About Jesus

David Anguish

Charlene Hios was grown when her parents began attending church. Visiting them one weekend, she consented to go with them and found a church that welcomed her, loved her, and waited patiently for her to give up the arguments she offered to defend her lifestyle. In her words, the church "loved me with the love of Jesus Christ with their compassionate truth-telling, and God used them to mend me, mold me, and eventually send me out into ministry."¹

Hios's main story is that, because the church acted this way, she gave up her homosexual lifestyle. But it was a passing comment within her account that especially grabbed my attention. After that first service, her parents invited her to an afternoon Bible study. She reluctantly agreed, really wanting to go home and watch the NFL. She wrote,

I quickly got over not being able to watch the game. The study had my attention. It was about God's son, Jesus, the man on the cross who died for the sins of the world. I was familiar with the cross, but I hadn't known the name of the man on it nor the significance of it.

"I was familiar with the cross, but I hadn't known the name of the man on it. . ." Bear in mind, despite not being raised in the church, even before she went with her parents Hios had attended a few times. She lived in a country full of churches.

How was it possible she had not learned the name of Jesus? How many others are like her? Hundreds? Thousands? More? Could it be partly because many believers have *assumed*, but not taught our world—or the church—the things about Jesus we all most need to know?

As we saw in part 1, we are not the first to live in a society where information about Jesus is unknown or distorted, where Christians are suspect, ridiculed, or ostracized. John lived in

God Is Practical

The epistle of James includes 108 verses. The letter is well known for its urgent practicality; James used 55 imperative verbs (about one every other verse). Some today might say that James “gets in your face.”

Would it surprise you to learn that James also includes more than 20 direct references to *God*?

He didn't write a systematic theology. He did something better: he applied his understanding of God to the matters that concerned him. Immersed as he was in his Jewish heritage, James would have seen God as *creational*, *covenantal*, and *providential* (see C. C. Newman, “God,” *Dict. of the Later New Testament & Its Developments*, IVP Academic, 1997; 413). Each trait is at least indirectly evident in James.

He affirmed God's uniqueness (2.19), purity (1.13ff.), unchanging nature (1.5-8, 16-17; 4.8), concern for the marginalized (1.26-27; 2.1-7; 5.1-11), and originator of the good and wise (3.13-18). His call for undivided loyalty to God (4.4-6) must be seen against his understanding of God's nature.

One of James's primary concerns was with how God's people handle “trials,” a general term covering multiple difficulties that were the result of both misfortune and malevolence (see 1.2-4, 9-11, 13-15; 2.1-7; 4.1-3; 5.1-11).

James's readers faced BIG troubles. His counsel was rooted in the BIGGEST of ideas.

What does that suggest for handling the trouble we face?

For an introduction to James's emphasis on God, see my “[James: Practical Teaching About God](#).”

such a world and wrote to believers who were influenced or tested by it. His epistles reveal a method for responding.

Let's review his community's condition and challenges. They faced “antichrists” (ἀντίχριστοι, *antichristoi*; plural) people who were against Christ (1 John 2.18, 22; 4.3; 2 John 7). Some had deserted the faith. “They went out from us,” John wrote, “but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us” (1 John 2.19 NIV). They were influenced by—or were among—“many false prophets [who] have gone out into the world” (4.1).²

“Antichrists” is the right word. Those who troubled the church did not believe the fundamental truths about Jesus. About them, John wrote, “Who is the liar? It is whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ” (2.22; 5.1). They would not “acknowledge that Jesus is the Son of God” (4.15; 5.5) who had “come in the flesh” (4.2, 14).

Despite the seriousness of the challenge, and its effect on the church's membership, John didn't adjust his teaching. He kept stressing Jesus' preexistence (1.2; 2.13-14) and said eternal life was possible only because Jesus appeared in the flesh (1.2; 3.8; 4.2, 9; cf. 2 John 7). He insisted that Jesus “is the atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 2.2; cf. 1.7; 2.12; 3.8, 16; 4.10, 14) because Jesus Christ was God's “one and only Son”³ (4.9; cf. 2.22-24; 5.12).

His defense began with his first words, in 1 John 1.1-3. His point is summed up in verse 2: “The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.”

We'll take a closer look at those words in part 3. For now, we'll simply say we doubt those around John would have said, “I was familiar with the cross, but I hadn't known the name of the man on it. . .”

www.davidanguish.com

Notes

¹ Charlene E. Hios, “Leaving My Lesbian Past: The church that walked me away from homosexuality,” *Leadership Journal*, Fall 2013, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2013/fall/leaving-my-lesbian-past.html>. Accessed October 30, 2013; April 8, 2020. Note: a subscription is required to read the article in its entirety.

² “Gone out” in 2.19 and 4.1 is ἐξέρχουμαι *exerchomai*; cf. 2 John 7; 3 John 7.

³ “One and only” translates μονογενής, *monogenēs*, “being the only one of a kind . . . unique” (Frederick William Danker with Kathryn Krug, *The Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* [The University of Chicago Press, 2009], 236).

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