



THE BEREIA PAGE

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

Thinking Matters

In his essay, “Miracles,” C. S. Lewis said that the only person he ever knew who claimed to have seen a ghost had previously disbelieved in the immortality of the soul—and continued to do so afterward.

“In other words,” he wrote, “seeing is not believing. This is the first thing to get clear in talking about miracles.

Whatever experiences we may have, we shall not regard them as miraculous if we already hold a philosophy which excludes the supernatural.” - *God in the Dock* (Eerdmans, 1970), 25.

From a teacher I learned a statement that became a refrain in my own teaching: *People act the way they do because they think the way they do.*

Lewis’s story illustrates that reality. So do our news stories (and our own actions). We can, and should, address actions that need correction. But for lasting change, we *must* think about thinking and how to influence the thoughts behind the actions.

“If the younger generation have never been told what Christians say and never heard any arguments in defense of it, then their agnosticism or indifference is fully explained.”

C. S. Lewis, “On the Transmission of Christianity,” *God in the Dock*, 115

Teaching Disciples

David Anguish

In view of the New Testament’s emphasis and what it demonstrates, we should not be surprised by Clement of Rome’s thorough knowledge and extensive use of Scripture in his letter to the Corinthians (see issue 1/10, June 1, 2020).

Jesus was called “Teacher” (45) or “Rabbi” (13) fifty-eight times in the Gospels (per the ESV; see issue 1/9, May 4, 2020). He said his disciples were right to call him that (John 13.13) and told them they should be like their teacher (Matt 10.24; Luke 6.40; John 13.16). Just before he ascended, he told them that the disciple-making process should include “teaching them [the ones they would baptize as they were going] to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt 28.20).

That surely explains why teaching was the apostles’ first order of business after Pentecost. The NASB brings out the ongoing nature of their instruction, translating the phrase that joins the Greek imperfect form of “to be” and the present participle “devoting” as follows: “They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching. . .” (Acts 2.42).

The apostles’ devotion to teaching became typical of the spreading church. When the body faced persecution after Stephen’s death, the apostles remained in Jerusalem as the others dispersed and took the word across Judea and Samaria (Acts 8.1, 4) and then to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Syrian Antioch, teaching Jews first and then Greeks (Acts 11.19-20). Two of the “prophets and teachers” who served at Antioch were set apart for extended mission trips (Acts 13.1-3).

Two passages from the accounts of those trips in Acts are worth a closer look. The first trip concluded with Paul and Barnabas returning to the cities previously evangelized to strengthen the disciples, encourage them to continue in the faith, and appoint elders in every church (Acts 14.21-23). In other words, they evidently taught beyond the basics.

“Our Father . . .”

At a personal level, a good thing in the experience of our new normal the last few months has been the chance to listen and have my thinking stretched by the reflections of some teachers from whom I am physically separated by hundreds of miles. I’ve heard good sermons and Bible class presentations, but also some faith-related lectures, panel discussions, and Q & As on theology, history, and science.

This benefit stems from more widespread use of streaming and similar media as well as a more open schedule because I’ve been home longer than normal on Sunday and Wednesday.

Among the church services I’ve visited virtually are those of the Brentwood Hills church in Nashville where Walt Leaver serves as preacher. On June 21, his sermon focused on the phrase “Our Father” (Matt 6.9). In concise expositions of four texts, he noted that, because God is our Father we can know:

1. Who we are - Rom 8.14-17.
2. What is happening to us - Heb 12.5-11.
3. Why we are here - Luke 12.27-34.
4. Where we are headed - 1 John 3.1-3.

The list of outline points and Scripture texts doesn’t begin to do justice to this good sermon. The service is archived on the church’s website, brentwoodhills.org, and is also accessible on their Facebook page or as a Vimeo video.

If your current situation affords time to listen, I commend brother Leaver’s sermon to you.

On his third trip, Paul settled in Ephesus, the port city and regional hub of Western Asia Minor (Acts 18.18-21). After teaching and baptizing a group who had experienced only John’s baptism (19.1-7), he preached for three months in the synagogue before resistance forced his withdrawal. Taking the disciples, he “conducted discussions every day in the lecture hall of Tyrannus,” a practice that “went on for two years, so that all the residents of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord” (vv. 9-10 CSB).

More specific information about the effects of the Tyrannus teaching is probably evident in Paul’s letter to Colossae, a town about 100 miles inland from Ephesus. The town is not named in Acts and Paul indicates he had previously been to neither Colossae nor its neighbor Laodicea (Col 2.1). The Colossians had “learned” the gospel from his “fellow servant” Epaphras (Col 1.6-7). We are not told when it occurred, but it is reasonable to think Epaphras’s preaching was one result of Paul’s Tyrannus lectures.

Given the time devoted to them, it is also reasonable to think the lectures probably covered more than first principles. We are told that Paul later reminded the Ephesus elders of his efforts to present “anything that was profitable” for them, teaching “in public and from house to house” (Acts 20.20).

It is also plausible that among the things he taught them was the need to abandon the futile thinking that led to typical pagan behaviors in favor of imitating God’s likeness in “true righteousness and holiness” (Eph 4.17-24). The call to change their thinking and behavior was apparently among the things they had previously heard and been taught (v. 21).

Ephesians 4.20 is where the focus of the paragraph pivots from old life to new. It also reminds us of Jesus’ great invitation. The Ephesians’ thinking should have changed because of how they had “learned Christ,” the same word (*μανθάνω*; *manthanō*) used when Jesus invited the weary and burdened to “come learn from me” (Matt 11.29).

That *manthanō* is a cognate of the noun disciple (*μαθητής*; *mathētēs*) suggests something about the early church’s success and an emphasis we should prioritize now.

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All Scripture quotations not otherwise designated are from the ESV.

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