



# THE BEREA PAGE

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

## For Berea Page Readers

In the last issue, I introduced the book of sermons on worship I’ve recently completed, entitled, *The Glory Due His Name*. The book is available as a pdf download from my website. Through the end of 2020, Berea Page readers who would like a copy may download it free of charge. Just click [here](#), complete the Digital Publications Order Form and enter the **Coupon Code “BP2020”** in the box at the bottom of the form. Submit the form and I’ll email you a link to download the book.

## Our Work of Thinking

“Clearly, for followers of Christ and all who appreciate the Jewish and Christian roots of our Western civilization, there is work to do done and thinking to be thought. The trends of several generations cannot be protested out of existence in five minutes—especially when we face a double problem. *Various parts of the foundation of our civilization have not only been assaulted by certain critics but have grown hollow even to their guardians....*” - Os Guinness, “Introduction,” *Character Counts: Leadership Qualities in Washington, Wilberforce, Lincoln, and Solzhenitsyn*, (Baker Books, 1999), 9-10; emphasis mine.

## Reasoning in the Marketplace

David Anguish

In response to believers who “perpetually urged [others] to adopt the Christian creed not because it’s true but because it is beneficial, or to hold that it must be true just because it is beneficial,” atheist Richard Robinson argued that religion’s “main irrationality is preferring comfort to truth” leaving it “gravely infected with intellectual dishonesty.” He added:

“Have faith” in the Christian sense, means “make yourself believe that there is a god without regard to evidence.”

Christian faith is a habit of flouting reason in forming and maintaining one’s answer to the question whether there is a god. *Its essence is the determination to believe that there is a god no matter what the evidence may be* (emphasis mine).<sup>1</sup>

Those statements in a reprinted excerpt from a 1964 book show the importance of C. S. Lewis’s advice in 1945 to would-be apologists to base their case on truth, not benefits.

One of the great difficulties is to keep before the audience’s mind the question of Truth. They always think you are recommending Christianity, not because it is *true* but because it is *good*. And in the discussion they will at every moment try to escape the issue ‘True—or False’ into stuff about a good society, or morals, or the incomes of Bishops, or the Spanish Inquisition, or France, or Poland—or anything whatever. You have to keep forcing them back, and again back, to the real point. . . . *One must keep on pointing out that Christianity is a statement which, if false, is of no importance, and, if true, is of infinite importance. The one thing it cannot be is moderately important* (emphasis at the end is mine).<sup>2</sup>

Based on what he wrote about the faith’s most significant truth claim, we think Paul would have sympathized with Robinson’s criticism and Lewis’s advice. “If Christ has not been raised,” he wrote, “your faith is futile.” And if it’s futile, we should pursue a different way: “If the dead are not raised, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die’” (1 Cor 15.17, 32).

We do not find it surprising, then, that a feature of Paul’s

## Stay Focused: Exalt God

“The wellspring of Jesus’ life and activity was his relationship with the God he called ‘Father.’ He devoted himself to this God and to the mission he believed he had been given by him. This God, the God whose rule Jesus announced and enacted, was, without reservation, the God of the Hebrew Scriptures. He was the God who created all things and who exercised sovereignty over all things. Further, he was the God who chose Israel to be his special people, required them to live lives devoted to him alone, and gave them his law, the Torah, to enable them to do so.” - Richard Bauckham, *Jesus: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 62.

“The recent emphasis on sensitivity, community, and getting to know each other which certainly has its good qualities if developed within the limits of reason and common sense, has been carried too far in defining the Christian’s relation to God. Suddenly, God is no longer “The Holy One of Israel”; He’s just “of Israel.” He is no longer the God of wrath and judgment, just our buddy, our pal, our friend. When you need “somebody to love”—He’s there. When lonely and down—He’s there. If you need a friend, Jesus is always available. These notions, while they contain some truth, have been so overworked and oversentimentalized ... that they border on blasphemy.... The end result of this kind of familiarity is not relevance, but a loss of awe and respect due God.  
- Robert Webber, *Common Roots: A Call for Evangelical Maturity*, in “Obiter Dicta,” *Christian Studies* 14 (1994): 85.

preaching was “reasoning,” a translation of a verb (*dialegomai*; διαλέγομαι) that referred to “presenting a reasoned position in public.”<sup>3</sup> One of several New Testament terms that include an element of rational justification, it appears ten times in Acts, eight in chapters 17-20, the record of Paul’s preaching in Greece and western Asia Minor (17.2, 17; 18.4, 19; 19.8-9; 20.7, 9; see also 24.12, 25).<sup>4</sup>

When he first used it, Luke said Paul’s reasoned preaching was his “custom” (17.2; *eiōtha*, εἰωθα; elsewhere only in Matt 27.15; Mark 10.1; Luke 4.16) and entailed “*explaining* and *proving*” the necessity of Christ’s suffering and resurrection. As a result, some were “*persuaded*” (17.3-4; emphasis mine).

Paul continued his custom in Athens, the “small university town more concerned with ideas than commerce,”<sup>5</sup> making his case to synagogue Jews and devout persons and then every day to people in the marketplace where Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were among those present (17.17-18).

That Paul continued his reasoning custom in pluralistic Athens is instructive, first, because it shows he did not limit his preaching to people whose prior views made them more likely to accept it. Despite the pluralists’ struggle to even fathom concepts like monotheism and resurrection (17.18), Paul thought it was important to reason with them too.

That did not mean he made his case the same way he did elsewhere. He began where the Athenians were, tapped into an issue of particular significance to them, and drew on relevant truths expressed in sources that were familiar to them (17.16, 22-23, 28). But his effort to adapt his method did not mean he compromised his main message. “Jesus and the resurrection” remained central (17.3-4, 18, 32).

In our intellectually diverse world, we should aim to be as discerning, thoughtful, adaptable, and purposeful as Paul.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Richard Robinson, “Religion and Reason,” Peter Angeles, ed., *Critiques of God* (Prometheus Press, 1976), 118-121.

<sup>2</sup> C. S. Lewis, “Christian Apologetics,” *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Eerdmans, 1970), 101.

<sup>3</sup> Frederick William Danker, with Kathryn Krug, *The Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 91.

<sup>4</sup> *Dialegomai* appears three others times in the New Testament—in Mark 9.34; Heb 12.5; and Jude 9.

<sup>5</sup> John McRay, *Archaeology and the New Testament* (Baker Academic, 1991), 299-300. See my article, “[A City with Many Gods](#),” Vol. 2, No. 1, Oct. 19, 2020.

All Scripture quotations not otherwise designated are from the ESV.

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