



THE BEREHA PAGE

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

Gospels, Apologetics

“Matthew’s Gospel met all the apologetic needs of the Jerusalem church in the years immediately following the resurrection when its doctrines were under attack—namely, Jesus’ ancestry as a son of David, his being born of a virgin, his birth in Bethlehem, his commendation by John the Baptist, his miracles, his teaching with authority in the temple, his coming to fulfill the law of Moses and not to destroy it, his suffering like the Servant of Isaiah, his rejection by his own nation, and his miraculous resurrection from the dead. - David Alan Black, *Why Four Gospels? The Historical Origins of the Gospels* (Kregel Publications 2001), 17

Off-Course

“When pressed to describe the most urgent and profound realities of their lives, many now reach more readily for the language of therapy rather than the language of theology. Notions of sin, hope, sacrifice, and *agapē* have been edged out by the vocabulary of co-dependency and self-actualization.” - Thomas G. Long, “When the Preacher Is a Teacher,” *Journal for Preachers* 16/2, Lent 1993, 22

The Bible’s Reason to Believe Anything

David Anguish

The late Christopher Hitchens enumerated multiple “extremely commonplace” objections to faith (e.g., “with all this continual prayer, why no result?”). But, as discrediting as he found them to be, he said all were surpassed by “another, larger one,” illustrated with a story from his time in a school where students were led in daily services and prayers.

The headmaster, who led the daily services and prayers and held the Book, . . . was giving a no-nonsense talk to some of us one evening. “You may not see the point of all this faith now,” he said. “But you will one day, when you start to lose loved ones.”

Again, I experienced a stab of sheer indignation as well as disbelief. Why, that would be as much as saying that religion might not be true, but never mind that, since it can be relied upon for comfort. How contemptible. I was then nearing thirteen, and becoming quite the insufferable intellectual. I had never heard of Sigmund Freud . . . but I had just been given a glimpse of his essay, *The Future of An Illusion*.¹

Hitchens is not alone in charging believers with “preferring comfort to truth,”² confusing the *reason* for belief with one of its *results*. And believers are not alone in adopting a casual approach to finding truth. Regarding William James, for example, philosopher Walter Kaufmann wrote:

James’s apology for eccentric beliefs on the ground that after all they might conceivably be right, strikes at the roots of all intellectual discipline and the foundations of our civilization. When it comes to his beloved “right to believe,” he failed to grasp the distinction between a legal right and an intellectual right. Legally, I have the right to believe not only without sufficient evidence but even what is demonstrably false; and many of us are prepared to defend this right. But intellectually, I have no such right; intellectually it is not reputable: indeed, it is proof of my irrationality. And while a great deal can be said for tolerance of irrationality by the state, no less can be said

Overcoming Distractions

“The weight, and noise, and pace of modern secular life are almost overwhelming. Only those who desire to know everything of God that a fallen human being can stand to know and still live will be able to keep an eternal perspective and so decide what is truly relevant.” - Os Guinness, *Prophetic Untimeliness: A Challenge to the Idol of Relevance* (Baker Books, 2003), 112.

Romans 13.1-7

“Paul does not envisage the possibility of a Christian political party or a Christian state [in this text]. At that point a different set of theological principles would probably come into play. For Paul would certainly be fearful lest any other political or national entity made the same mistake as his fellow countrymen had—that of identifying God’s purpose of salvation with one particular nation’s well-being and political dominance. Nor does he speak to the issue of whether civil disobedience or nonviolent resistance can be Christian. Here we must recall that his advocacy of political quietism is in the context of the political powerlessness of most members of the ancient state. In contrast, our modern democratic traditions make it possible for individuals to exercise some political power and to pass judgment on whether rulers are operating for the good of their citizens.” - James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, Word Biblical Commentary 38B (Word Books, Publisher, 1988), 773-774.

against tolerance of irrationality by philosophers.³

The reason to believe anything is because it is true. This is one area where Scripture and skeptics like Hitchens agree. Forms of the Greek noun “truth” and three cognates appear 165 times in the New Testament. Louw and Nida define the adjectives, “pertaining to being *real* and not imaginary” (my emphasis).⁴ Only two New Testament books do not use at least one of the words (Philemon and Jude).

Recall that Jesus said it is truth that frees and that he is the truth (John 8.31-32; 14.6). Paul affirmed that truth can be known (1 Tim 4.3) and should be loved and believed (2 Thess 2.10, 12-13), obeyed (Rom 2.8), the standard for right living (Gal 2.14), supported by God’s people (1 Tim 3.15), and carefully handled (2 Tim 2.15). Following the error of false prophets leads to deception, lack of love for God, and eternal separation from his glory (Matt 24.4-12; 2 Pet 3.17). Thus, teachers are warned to be careful about what they teach (Gal 1.6-9; Jas 3.1; 1 John 4.1).

In light of the potential consequences, Hitchens was right to criticize the preference of comfort over truth. To borrow Paul’s language regarding the reversal of Cephas and Barnabas on Gentile fellowship, those who prefer comfort to truth are “not in step with the truth of the gospel” (Gal 2.14).

In or out of the church, people now find it hard to hear that reality above the voices that tell us image and feelings matter most; truth is created, not discovered; and the broad consensus is that “‘grey is the color of truth’” (George McBundy).⁵

All the more reason why we must say more about truth.

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Notes

¹ Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (Twelve Books, 2007), 3-4.

² Richard Robinson, “Religion and Reason,” *Critiques of God*, Edited by Peter Angeles (Prometheus Books, 1976), 118. See a longer excerpt of Robinson’s criticism [here](#).

³ Walter A. Kaufmann, *Critique of Religion and Philosophy* (Princeton University Press, 1958), 131.

⁴ The words include the noun, ἀλήθεια, (*alētheia*) [109]; adjectives ἀληθής (*alēthēs*) [26], and ἀληθινός (*alēthinós*) [28]; and verb ἀληθεύω (*alētheuō*) [2]. Word counts are from a search of the UBS5 Greek text in the Accordance software. The definition is from Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd Accordance electronic ed., version 4.4. United Bible Societies, 1989.

⁵ Os Guinness, *Time for Truth: Living Free in a World of Lies, Hype, & Spin* (Baker Books, 2000), 11-12, 27.

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