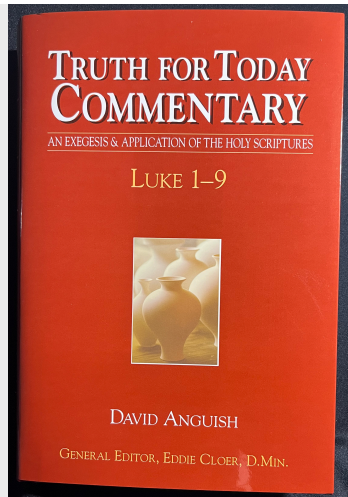




THE BEREA PAGE

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



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When Loss Occurs

"Persons who have lost loved ones experience the wrenching pain between knowing one reality but desperately craving another reality. To know what is real does not mean to like it or even to be prepared at this moment to accept it. Grievors even may try to undo the reality of a loved one's death. To act this way is understandable and may be necessary before they can finally say goodbye." - Randy Becton, *Everyday Comfort: Readings for the First Month of Grief* (Baker Books, 1993), 9

Learning from a Bad Example

David Anguish

Israel broke the treaty and God sent a prophet to prosecute: "Hear the word of the LORD, people of Israel, for the LORD has a *case* against the inhabitants of the land" (Hos 4.1a).¹

Verses 1b-2 list the charges. Knowledge of God, truth, and faithful love had been supplanted by cursing, lying, murder, stealing, adultery, and repeated acts of bloodshed.

The problem was not lack of religion. They consulted idols and offered sacrifices on high places and under trees. But they were disloyal to Yahweh. Their religion was sensual, not spiritual, their faith defined by culture, not God (vv. 12-19).

Having received the teaching they needed to succeed (Deut 4.40), why had they failed so completely? The LORD answered:

... My case is against you priests. You will stumble by day; the prophet will also stumble with you by night. And I will destroy your mother. My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I will reject you from serving as my priest. Since you have forgotten the law of your God, I will also forget your sons. (vv. 4b-6).

While both the people and priests were accountable (v. 9), the people were victims of spiritual malpractice. They didn't know the law because those who were supposed to teach them had not done their job (cf. Deut 31.9-13, 19-21).

* * * * *

I thought of Hosea 4 while reading the introduction to Michael Kruger's assessment—noted in a previous [article](#)—of the trend that sees so many faith-professing students who leave for college "return (often in a short time) with a substantially different worldview than when they left."² I also recalled an article from several years ago by Thomas Long who observed that "it is more and more evident that the preacher stands before a congregation that does not know the content of the Christian faith" and lacks "the capacity to employ theological language."³

“Lack of Knowledge”

“The problem, though, is that it is more and more evident that the preacher stands before a congregation that does not know the content of the Christian faith. Except for a few narratives from the Bible that retain some wider cultural currency—the stories of Adam and Eve, David and Goliath, and the Lukan account of the nativity, for example—the biblical materials have largely faded from the memory of many congregations (there are exceptions to this rule, of course). Moreover, it is not only biblical awareness that has been damaged, but also the capacity to employ theological language. 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 *agape* have been edged out by the vocabulary of codependency and self-actualization.” - Thomas Long (see note ³ at right)

One Is Unlike the Other

“Christian worship is the most momentous, the most urgent, the most glorious action that can take place in human life.” - Karl Barth, in Scott Elliott, “Some Collected Quotes on Worship,” *Resurrected Living* ([blog](#)), June 11, 2013

“Though lamentable, it is not at all surprising to me that the church in a trivial culture becomes a trivial church with trivial liturgy.” - T. David Gordon, *Why Johnny Can't Preach: The Media Have Shaped the Messengers* (P&R Publishing), 59

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Are they unwilling to learn? Overwhelmed by cultural messaging that drowns out the theological lessons? Left adrift by teachers who are not inculcating the breadth and depth of knowledge they need? All of the above? Or something else?

We gain some clarity from Jon Nielson who asked the question from the opposite direction: why do students who don't leave stay? He identified three reasons.

- *They are converted:* there is more to their practice of faith than being a pretty good kid, having a good heart, attending youth group and fun retreats, etc.
- *They have been equipped, not entertained:* Ephesians 4.11-12 is taken seriously to prepare students to share the gospel, disciple others, and lead a Bible study [activities requiring at least some of the intellectual training endorsed by Kruger].
- *Their parents preached the gospel to them:* they did not leave it to youth ministers to nurture and keep them in church.⁴

At the least, the concerns expressed by Kruger, Long, Nielson, and others—in light of the implicit warning in Hosea 4—should prompt us to periodically take stock of our teaching endeavors and ask: (1) How well are we equipping disciples to answer the *current* intellectual and practical challenges presented by our society? (2) Are our efforts sufficient, both in terms of texts and topics discussed and time allotted to expound on them, to comprehensively teach God's whole will? (3) Are we encouraging and making it easier for believers to overcome culturally induced sluggishness and go beyond “elementary truths” (Heb 5.12 NIV) to explore deeper things that help us grow more mature? (Acts 20.27; 1 Cor 2.6-16; 10.6, 11; Eph 4.11-16; Heb 5.11-6.3; Jas 3.1; 1 Pet 3.15)

Let us think on these things.

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Notes

¹ “Case” translates רִיבָּ (rib'), “to strive, struggle; to conduct (decide) a legal case” (Koehler, Baumgartner, and Richardson, eds. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Accordance electronic ed., version 3.6, Brill, 2000). A note in the NET says, “the term . . . refers to a covenant lawsuit in which Yahweh the suzerain lodges a legal case against his disobedient vassal, accusing Israel . . . of breach of covenant that will elicit the covenant curses.” See also J. Carl Laney, “The Role of the Prophets in God's Case Against Israel” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 138, 552 (Oct-Dec, 1981): 313-325.

² Michael J. Kruger, *Surviving Religion 101: Letters to a Christian Student on Keeping the Faith in College* (Crossway, 2021), 12.

³ Thomas G. Long, “When the Preacher Is a Teacher,” *Journal for Preachers* 16, 2 (Lent 1993): 22. See the sidebar at left for the entirety of Long's statement.

⁴ Jon Nielson, “3 Common Traits of Youth Who Don't Leave the Church,” February 6, 2020; <https://churchleaders.com/youth/youth-leaders-articles/159175-3-common-traits-of-youth-who-don-t-leave-the-church.html> (accessed April 12, 2021).

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