



# THE BEREHA PAGE

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

Faith That Works - 1

## Postmodern Consensus

“Truth, declares a growing collective consciousness, is *relative*: what is true, right, or beautiful for one person isn’t necessarily true, right, or beautiful for another. *Relativism* says that truth isn’t fixed by outside reality, but is decided by a group or individual for themselves. Truth isn’t discovered, but manufactured. Truth is ever-changing not only in insignificant matters of taste or fashion, but in crucial matters of spirituality, morality, and reality itself. This is the postmodern consensus—that truth is a slippery thing. ~ Jim Jeffel, “Our New Challenge, Postmodernism,” in Dennis McCallum, ed., *The Death of Truth* (Bethany House, 1996), 31

## When We Suffer

“In the dark hours of suffering, Christians want more than the assurance that their beliefs are consistent. They draw comfort only from the living Lord himself, from the Spirit whom he has graciously given, from a renewed grasp, a felt experience, of the love of God in Christ Jesus (Eph. 3:14-21). That is not to say . . . that a set of beliefs is irrelevant. It is to say that, in addition to holding that Christian beliefs are true and consistent, the Christian, to find comfort in them, must learn how to use them.” ~ D. A. Carson, *How Long, O Lord? Reflections on Suffering and Evil* (Baker Books, 1990), 20-21

## “Now Faith Is . . .”

David Anguish

Years ago, I added to my files a story, from a source long since forgotten, of a little boy who defined faith as “believing what you know ain’t so.” Bertrand Russell, the renowned atheist of a previous generation, would have approved. He said, “We may define *faith* as a firm belief in something for which there is no evidence. When there is evidence, no one speaks of *faith*.” H. L. Mencken similarly defined “faith [as] an illogical belief in the occurrence of the improbable.”<sup>1</sup>

William Barclay held a different view, commending the conviction of the writer to the Hebrews who saw faith as

a hope that is absolutely certain that what it believes is true, and what it expects will come. It is not the hope which looks forward with wistful longing; it is the hope which looks forward with utter certainty. It is not the hope which takes refuge in a perhaps; it is the hope which is founded on a conviction.<sup>2</sup>

Since “faith” (πίστις, *pistis*; 243) and “believe” (πιστεύω, *pisteuō*; 241) are prominently featured in the New Testament, appearing a combined 484 times, we should define faith in light of Greek meanings and biblical use.

We note first that *pistis* is derived from πείθομαι (*peithomai*; “be persuaded, have confidence, obey”) and thus “connotes persuasion, conviction, and commitment, and always implies confidence.” In popular-level writings (the papyri), the word was used as a legal term with the predominant meaning, “guarantee, security.” It entailed respect for a commitment and fulfillment of an obligation, and was also used to describe complete loyalty and fidelity.<sup>3</sup>

The nearest thing to a dictionary-like definition of faith in the New Testament is Hebrews 11.1. As translated in the NIV 1984, it says, “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”<sup>4</sup>

“Being sure of” translates ὑπόστασις (*hypostasis*) which referred to (1) the essential nature or actual being of something

## Theological Gospels

“While the Gospels are meant to be historical, they are more than unbiased news reports. They are theological documents written to instruct and encourage believers of the truth of their message. This is evident in that they focus especially on the saving work accomplished through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

~ Mark L. Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus: A Survey of Jesus and the Gospels*, 1st ed. (Zondervan, 2007), 29

## Christian Exclusivity

“Like Luke, we declare that we are not teaching just another way, but ‘the Way’ (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 24:14; see 16:17; 18:25). Jesus initiated this exclusive claim (Jn. 14:6), and the apostles insisted that ‘there is salvation in no one else; . . .’ (Acts 4:12). Such exclusivity threatens a viewpoint that considers all ideas equally valid. Consequently, many people who hold to pluralism resist the idea of an exclusive way.

“As a result, we face much the same challenge that Luke and his contemporaries faced. Unlike the first believers, we generally do not have to show why the Christian faith has a right to exist; however, increasingly, it seems we must fight that battle over certain features of our faith. More often, we must face the question, ‘Is [the Christian] claim of exclusivity for Jesus something that can be sustained in a world of instant communication and of multiple religious presence?’ [Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, The NIV Application Commentary, 43]” ~ David Anguish, *Luke 1-9, Truth for Today* Commentary, (Resource Publications, 2021), 556-557

and had (2) a secondary meaning involving the ideas of a guarantee or title deed that bore evidence of ownership.<sup>5</sup> Noting that *hypostasis* referred to something that “underlies visible conditions and guarantees a future possession,” Moulton and Milligan, who examined the papyri, proposed the translation, “‘Faith is the *title deed* of things hoped for.’”<sup>6</sup> Spicq concurred: “Thus faith is the true title attesting to one’s ownership of the heavenly property that one hopes for, and thus the guarantee that one will obtain them in the future.”<sup>7</sup>

“Certain” (ἔλεγχος, *elengchos*) conveys a similar sense of confidence, referring to a presentation of evidence for proving. It is the kind of evidence a lawyer would present in court.<sup>8</sup>

At a time when many assume that evidence from the physical senses is the only way something can really be proved, it is important to notice that Scripture’s emphasis is not that the confidence we have is that which comes by sight; it is that which comes by faith, that is, testimony (2 Cor 5.7; Rom 10.17). Yes, it is possible for someone’s testimony to be false—just as it is possible for sight and the other senses to be fooled. But, just as sense experiences can also be confirmed, so it is possible for testimony to be verified and thus lead to knowledge—exactly what the New Testament writers claim about the things they affirmed (cf. John 20.30-31; 1 John 1.1-3).

Thus, as the Bible views it, faith is not the result of a lack of evidence (Russell; Mencken), or the result of ignoring evidence and believing what you know is not so (the little boy). It is a confident conviction based on adequate evidence.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Both are as cited in Laurence J. Peter, *Peter’s Quotations: Ideas for Our Time* (Bantam Books, 1977), 178-179.

<sup>2</sup> William Barclay, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 2nd ed. (Westminster Press, 1957), 144-145.

<sup>3</sup> Ceslas Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, vol. 3, trans. & ed. James D. Ernest (Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 110-114, 116.

<sup>4</sup> NIV 2011 translates, “Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.” ESV reads, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

<sup>5</sup> Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1040-1041.

<sup>6</sup> James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*, repr. (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), 660.

<sup>7</sup> Spicq, 112.

<sup>8</sup> Bauer, 315.

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