



THE BEREIA PAGE

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

Faith That Works - 3

Faith: To What End?

“There is no subtler perversion of Christian Faith than to treat it as a mere means to a worldly end, however admirable that end in itself may be. The Christian Faith is important because it is true. What it happens to achieve, in ourselves or in others, is another and, strictly speaking, secondary matter.” ~ Harry Blamires, *The Christian Mind* (Seabury Press, 1963), 104; in Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity Against the Challenges of Postmodernism* (InterVarsity Press, 2000), 80-81

Context Is King

“Context is really the king of interpretation because context is the historical and literary atmosphere in which communication takes place. All communication is contextual and is shaped by multiple contexts including the historical setting of a text, a text’s own literary environments, and the wider canonical context. ~ Michael F. Bird, *Seven Things I Wish Christians Knew About the Bible* (Zondervan Reflective, 2021), 133

“Did You Know?”

“The five Old Testament passages most cited and alluded to in the New Testament are the following:

1. Psalm 110:1
2. Leviticus 19:18
3. Psalm 2:6
4. Psalm 118:22-23
5. Daniel 7:13-14” ~ Bird, 141

You Need to Know Before You Trust

David Anguish

To stress the importance of evaluating all relevant evidence for and against the Christian faith, J. P. Moreland asked a conversation partner to imagine Moreland saw his wife holding hands with another man at a mall. Was it reasonable to conclude she was cheating on him? If the only available evidence was what he saw at the mall, he might be justified in doing so. But, Moreland said, that would be to ignore all the evidence from 25 years of marriage. He knew his wife and was sure she would never cheat on him. There must be another explanation.

Moreland went on to ask his interlocutor to imagine that, unbeknownst to him, his wife had received a call from a person she helped come to faith 20 years before. He was in town and since they had not seen each other in years, they met at the mall to share family pictures and reminisce. As he was taking his leave, the two innocently held hands like siblings.¹

Moreland’s story reminds us of a crucial feature of the Bible’s depiction of faith. While faith does involve a venture of trust in which we often find ourselves stepping forward without all the knowledge we would like to have, that venture always rests on some knowledge; we are given reasons to safely trust. For example, as we saw in [part 2](#), when Abraham was told to sacrifice Isaac, prior knowledge of the Lord and his ways led him to reason that God would raise his son from the dead (Jas 2.20-23; Heb 11.17-19).

Exemplifying the knowledge-then-trust order are several passages that use the phrase “believe that,” where the verb πιστεύω (*pisteuō*) is followed by a declarative use of the subordinate conjunction ὅτι (*hoti*).² I’ll note just a few examples, beginning with two blind men who followed Jesus, begging the “Son of David” for mercy. “Jesus said to them, ‘Do you believe that I am able to do this?’ They said to him, ‘Yes, Lord!’” (Matt 9.27-28). In reassuring farewell words to his disciples, Jesus affirmed that they “believed that [he] came from

“Is God the Cause?”

“I once attended a funeral service for a teen-age girl killed in a car accident. Her mother wailed, ‘The Lord took her home. He must have had some purpose. . . .

Thank You, Lord.’ I have been with sick Christian people who torment themselves with the question, ‘What is God trying to teach me?’ Or, they may writhe, ‘How can I muster up enough faith to get rid of this illness? How can I get God to rescue me?’

“Maybe they have it all wrong. Maybe God *isn’t trying to tell us anything specific* each time we hurt. Pain and suffering are part and parcel of our planet, and Christians are not exempt. Half the time we know why we get sick: too little exercise, a poor diet, contact with a germ. Do we really expect God to go around protecting us whenever we encounter something dangerous?” ~ Philip Yancey, *Where Is God When It Hurts?* (Zondervan Publishing House, 1977), 66-67

A Unique Role

“When the Scriptures are read, proclaimed, expounded, and studied as the living Word for the people of God, the possibility is created, once again, that the Christ of faith can be experienced anew. Even though the gospel of Christ may be encoded in the written words of Scripture, it is not reducible to the printed page. The community of faith may embody the gospel in its various practices, but it regularly gathers for worship to hear the words of Scripture activate the Living Word.” ~ Carl R. Holladay, *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament: Interpreting the Message and Meaning of Jesus Christ* (Abingdon Press, 2005), 592

God” (John 16.27, 30). Later, he prayed for unity among future disciples “so that the world may *believe that you have sent me*” (John 17.21). John told his readers he had written about Jesus’s signs “so that you may *believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God*” (John 20.31). Acts 9.26 reports the disciples’ fear when Saul tried to join them because “they did not *believe that he was a disciple*.” Paul said salvation would come to those who confess Jesus as Lord and “*believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead*” (Rom 10.9). He told the Thessalonians not to grieve over their deceased brothers like those with no hope because “*we believe that Jesus died and rose again*” (1 Thess 4.14). And the Hebrews writer said anyone who “would draw near to God must *believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him*” (Heb 11.6).³

The intrinsic connection seen in the “believe that” references in which trust is grounded in knowable facts or teaching that can be examined and evaluated is also evident in other passages that employ different phrasing (see Mark 1.15; Acts 26.24-26; Rom 1.2-4, 8; 8.1-39; 1 Cor 2.1-5; 15.1-11, 14, 17).

Like other critics, atheist Richard Robinson charged that Christian faith entails “a habit of flouting reason” and a “determination to believe . . . no matter what the evidence may be.”⁴ In the same context, he indicated that he had formed his understanding in part because of statements made by professing Christians. But, as faith is depicted in God’s word, both they and he were mistaken. Throughout Scripture, those who are invited to come to faith are consistently urged to believe, trust, and obey *because of what they could know*.

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Notes

¹ From Lee Strobel, *The Case for Faith: A Journalist Investigates the Toughest Objections to Christianity* (Zondervan, 2000), 248-249.

² *Hoti* immediately follows *pisteuō* 23 times (*pisteuō hoti*); 19 are declarative (“believe that . . .” - Matt 9.28; Mark 11.23-24; Luke 1.45; John 8.24; 11.15, 27, 42; 14.10; 16.27, 30; 17.8, 21; 20.31; Acts 9.26; Rom 6.8; 1 Thess 4.14; Jas 2.19; 1 John 5.1, 5); three are causal (“because” - John 10.26; 12.39; 2 Thess 1.10). In John 11.15, *hoti* immediately follows *pisteuō*, but goes with the following verb (“. . . that I was not there”). In six other references where *pisteuō* and *hoti* are used declaratively, they are separated in the Greek text by an other words (John 6.69; 9.18; 13.19; Acts 27.25; Rom 10.9; Heb 11.6).

³ In the Greek, *hoti* appears only once in Heb 11.6b, separate from *pisteuō* at the beginning of the clause; literally translated, it reads, “for he must believe, the one who is drawing near to God and that the ones who seek after him he rewards.”

⁴ Richard Robinson, “Religion and Reason,” in Peter Angeles, ed., *Critiques of God* (Prometheus Press, 1976), 121.

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