



# THE BEREA PAGE

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

*Faith That Works - 4*

## Crucial Question

“Throughout the Bible the question is never whether God is real (only ‘the fool has said ... “There is no God”’) or whether God is all powerful (only a pagan polytheist or a modern naturalist would question that), but whether God is good and trustable; what he is up to and what we are supposed to be up to. Job is a biblical book not only in the sense that it is in the Bible but also in the sense that it assumes the theology of the rest of the Bible.” ~ Peter Kreeft, *Three Philosophies of Life: Ecclesiastes ... Job ... Song of Solomon* (Ignatius Press, 1989), 68

## Informed Endurance

“We must learn to live by revelation rather than reasoned judgments about the relationship between God and humanity. We must learn to live by faith and not by sight. For in revelation God is not silent. He speaks, and he reveals himself in ways that assure of us his faithfulness and love. There we find the God who cares, loves, and reigns. There we find God’s comforting presence. Only in the knowledge, contemplation, and experience of that God can we come to endure misery with faith, integrity, and hope.” ~ John Mark Hicks, *Yet Will I Trust Him: Understanding God in a Suffering World* (College Press Publishing Company, 1999), 179

## The God We Trust

David Anguish

“Trust me!” What comes to mind when you hear that? What image (or TV commercial!)? How inclined are you to trust those who say it? Does your willingness to trust depend on who says it? My guess? Whether you trust depends on how well you know them and the nature of your relationship.

No, deciding to trust doesn’t require you to know everything about them or the circumstances that will result if you do. But it does require knowing enough of or about the people and circumstances to feel secure in going forward.

James 2.20-23 shows that the trust aspect of faith is like that. Since Abraham knew God, including things (though hardly everything) about him, he was confident he could trust him even when he heard the shocking order to sacrifice his son. Indeed, James reminds us that Abraham was considered God’s friend (v. 23). As we look closer at the wider context of Scripture generally, and James specifically, we see why.

Recall, first, that the Bible is about knowing God. That’s how Jesus defined eternal life—“that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17.3). It’s what the prophets said the LORD wanted from Israel (cf. Jer 9.23-24; Hos 6.6), and what the apostles pointed to as the aim of the believer’s life (cf. Col 1.10; 2 Pet 1.2; 3.18). James Packer famously summarized the point when he wrote,

What were we made for? To know God. What aim should we set ourselves in life? To know God. What is the ‘eternal life’ that Jesus gives? Knowledge of God.... What is the best thing in life, bringing more joy, delight, and contentment than anything else? Knowledge of God.... What, of all the states God ever sees man in, gives Him most pleasure? Knowledge of Himself.<sup>1</sup>

Packer helps us see that knowing God is one of the most practical things we can do. To illustrate just one aspect of its relevance, consider the case of the Christian woman I once knew—reared and faithful in the church—whose husband

## Of Teaching & Ethics

“False teaching, in time, produces unethical practice and, in turn, defective ethics are evidence of warped doctrine.” ~ E. Earle Ellis, *The World of St. John: The Gospels and the Epistles*, 1984 repr. (University Press of America, 1995), 84

## Covenant Relationship

“A covenant, based on the promises of God and requiring the appropriate conduct by the people in response, describes the relationship of God and his people. God’s covenants are not so much legal relationships as love relationships, a fact shown by the marriage analogies employed by the prophets (Jer. 2:2; Ezek. 16:8-14; Hos. 2:1-3:1).” ~ Everett Ferguson, *The Church of Christ: A Biblical Ecclesiology for Today* (Eerdmans, 1996), 18

## Our Present Crisis

“Yet when the cheering died away [after the Berlin Wall fell], many Westerners never stopped to ask whether truth is sufficiently strong to make such a stand in the West. In fact, it doesn’t appear to be. Today we are experiencing a severe crisis of truth on both theoretical and practical levels. Any traditional notion that truth is objective, absolute, and independent of the mind of the knower is said to be naïve and obscurantist. Instead, truth is ‘relative’ and ‘socially constructed,’ so ‘knowledge is power’ and claims about truth must be dismantled to expose underlying agendas of class, race, gender, or generation.” ~ Os Guinness and Richard W. Ohman, “The Crisis of Truth,” in Guinness, ed., *Unriddling Our Times: Reflections on the Gathering Cultural Crisis* (Baker Books, 1999), 62

victimized her and their daughter by immorality, betrayal, and then abandonment. That led to a crisis of faith wherein she thought God had let her down and forsaken her. In conversations over several weeks, it became clear that her distress owed much to an inadequate understanding of God’s nature and promises. She was counting on God to do things he never said he would do. Her diminutive knowledge of God made her problems worse. She was a living illustration of Packer’s insight that “ignorance of God—ignorance both of his ways and of the practice of communion with him—lies at the root of so much of the church’s weakness today” (Packer, 6).

As in any relationship, knowledge of God necessarily includes knowing *about* him. James understood that, as seen in how much he had to say about God as he spoke to his readers’ circumstances. He mentioned God nearly 30 times, using θεός (*theos*) 16 times (1.1, 5, 13, 20, 27; 2.5, 19, 23; 3.9; 4.4, 6-8) and “Father” (πατήρ, *patēr*) to refer to God three times (1.17, 27; 3.9). He used “Lord” (κύριος, *kyrios*) to refer to God the Father eight times (1.7; 3.9; 4.10, 15; 5.4, 10-11); and two other ambiguous references probably also refer to the Father, though they could refer to the Lord Jesus (5.14-15).

James wove in references to specific aspects of God’s nature as he called his readers to a high behavioral standard. God is one, unique in every way (2.19). God is pure, neither corrupt nor corruptible (1.13). God is unchanging, never fickle like people (1.16-17; cf. 1.5-8; 4.8); thus, we can count on his promises (cf. 1.12; 2.5). God is always concerned for the less fortunate, so often neglected in our world (1.26-27; 2.1-7; 5.1-11). God is the source of all that’s good and right (1.17; 3.13-18). God is uncompromising: we are either his friends or enemies; completely loyal to him or spiritually adulterous (2.23; 4.4).

These allusions are integral to James’s exhortations to trust God when we face trouble. Will we trust that our trials will produce steadfastness (1.3-4)? Trust him when facing sickness (5.13-16)? Trust him to supply the wisdom needed to deal with our trials (1.5-6)? Trust that he will never act malevolently or try us with evil (1.12-15)?<sup>2</sup>

It depends on how well we know the God we trust.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (InterVarsity Press, 1973), 29.

<sup>2</sup> In the Greek text, the words for “trials” and “tempt” (Jas 1.2-4, 12-15) are cognates: the noun, πειρασμός (*peirasmos*); and verb, πειράζω (*peirazō*).

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