



THE BEREA PAGE

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

Core Teaching

“The books within the New Testament *do* reflect a level of diversity, but they also have a core theology that holds them together; that is, that Jesus Christ is Lord and is the key to redemption through his person, teaching, and work.” ~ Darrell L. Bock & Daniel B. Wallace, *Dethroning Jesus: Exposing Popular Culture’s Quest to Unseat the Biblical Christ* (Thomas Nelson, 2007), 81

Hymn Analysis

“David Wells analyzed hundreds of modern hymns and praise songs in relation to classic hymns. He concluded that recent worship lyrics express a ‘post-modernist spirituality’ that emphasizes the individual over the church, felt needs over God’s requirements and power over truth (in *Losing Our Virtue: Why the Church Must Recover Its Moral Values* [Eerdmans, 1988], 21).

“Sadly, much postmodernist spirituality expressed in music never addresses God as God at all, let alone reveling in his attributes and praising his person. It simply recites feelings and asks God to bestow certain psychological or social benefits to meet the felt needs of the singer (‘worshiper’ is not the appropriate term here at all).” ~ Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity Against the Challenges of Postmodernism* (InterVarsity Press, 2000), 272-273

“If Only I Could See What They Saw”

David Anguish

I’ve occasionally heard people say something to the effect that if they could only see and hear Jesus like the people who lived during his ministry did, they would find it easier to believe. They apparently assume firsthand empirical evidence is superior to all other types and always leads to faith.

In response, consider, first, that personal experience of Jesus’s deeds did not lead all who experienced them to believe. Judas saw and heard the same things the other eleven did (see Luke 6.16; 22.3); he betrayed Jesus anyway. Some who saw Lazarus walk out of his tomb “went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done” (John 11.46). As a result,

the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, “What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.’ . . . So from that day on they made plans to put him to death” (John 11.47-48, 53).

They acknowledged the authenticity of Jesus’s signs, but didn’t believe. More than empirical evidence was needed.

Second, even in the first century, not all who came to faith did so because of firsthand sense experience. When he referred to “the things . . . accomplished among us,” Luke included himself in the group among whom God had done his work. But he separated himself from the “eyewitnesses” (Luke 1.1-2). The Hebrews writer said he was among those who benefitted from testimony “by those who heard” (Heb 2.3). Peter assured readers who, separated by both time and distance from Jesus’s ministry, had not seen him and yet loved him, believed in him, and rejoiced in their faith (1 Pet 1.8). Empirical evidence was never the only or necessary prerequisite to belief.

Third, the New Testament repeatedly stresses the vital place of testimony in coming to belief. Jesus sent the disciples as “witnesses” and the preaching in Acts featured their

Progress vs. Reaction

“For those who subscribe to progressivism—and in a sense technology makes us all progressives now—progress by definition is good, always good, self-evidently good, unquestionably good. Reaction, by definition, is bad. According to the improvement myth of the Enlightenment creed, the world is getting better and better. Whatever is today is not only right but a great deal better than what was yesterday. And of course, whatever is coming must be a great deal better still. The word progress simply makes it so and tells us so. We are not asked to think. We are not even given the opportunity or the criteria to judge for ourselves. If it’s progressive, by definition it must be good. If it’s reactionary, it obviously must be bad, and that’s the end of it. Discussion over.” - Os Guinness, *Carpe Diem Redeemed: Seizing the Day, Discerning the Times* (InterVarsity Press, 2019), 62

Coming in Issue # 3/12
We Need to
Talk About Truth

Lost without Lament

“A clear consequence of banishing the many moods of the psalms of lament—among them, anguish, remorse, fury, protest, even hatred—is that we lose an essential resource in confronting the very emotions that terrify us in a context where we might receive some help in admitting them, understanding, and coping with them.” ~ Kathleen D. Billman and Daniel L. Migliore, *Rachel’s Cry: Prayer of Lament and Rebirth of Hope* (United Church Press, 1999), 14

testimony (Acts 1.8; 2.32; 3.15; 5.32; 10.39, 41; 13.31). Paul referred to hundreds who saw the risen Jesus (1 Cor 15.5-8). And John said he was one of several who had “heard,” “seen,” “looked upon,” and “touched” “the word of life” who had been “made manifest” (1 John 1.1-3).¹

That their testimony comes to us in written form does not diminish its evidential value. As Bernard Ramm argued,

If miracles are capable of sensory presentation, they can be made matters of testimony. If they are adequately testified to, then the recorded testimony has the same validity for evidence as the experience of beholding the event. No matter what [David] Hume said at this point, *legal procedure in thousands of courts of the world, as well as scientific historiography*, is conducted on the grounds of reliable testimony by word of mouth or by written document. For purposes of evidence the courts treat the testimony of a man who saw a crime as if the court itself saw it, if they have no reason to doubt the integrity of the witness. Furthermore, the mere passage of time does make them increasingly difficult of examination. But once an event is recorded reliably in document form, the reliability of the document is not at all changed by the mere passage of time. If the raising of Lazarus was actually witnessed by John and recorded faithfully by him when still in soundness of faculties and memory, *for purposes of evidence*, it is the same as if we were there and saw it.²

John 20 famously tells of two occasions, a week apart, when Jesus’s disciples saw him after his resurrection. The first time, when just ten were present, Jesus showed them his hands and his side. “The disciples therefore [οὐὐν οὐν] were glad, when they saw the Lord” (v. 20 ASV). When they later reported their experience to Thomas, who had not been present, he was understandably skeptical and said he would not believe without the same empirical evidence the others had experienced (vv. 24-25).

A week later, Jesus obliged him and Thomas confessed him as Lord and God. Then “Jesus said to him, ‘Have you believed because you have seen me? *Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed!*’” (John 20.29, emphasis mine).

May it ever be.

www.davidanguish.com

Notes

¹ This emphasis on testimony was in line with the expectations of their culture. As David E. Garland observed, “Hellenistic historians believed that writing history required either being an eyewitness or having access to eyewitnesses.” In *Luke*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2011), 53.

² Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Christian Evidences* (Moody Press, 1953), 140-141.

All Scripture quotations not otherwise designated are from the ESV. Permission is granted to reprint original materials with the credit line, “Reprinted from David Anguish, ‘The Berea Page,’ June 7, 2022.”