



THE BEREIA PAGE

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

It’s Still Necessary

“As the church grew, it became necessary to instruct believers for their spiritual growth and edification of the body of Christ. . . . New converts needed instruction in Christian doctrine and practice in order to understand the changes that had taken place in their lives so that they could accept the privileges and responsibilities of belonging to the body of Christ” ~ Arthur G. Patzia, *The Making of the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (IVP Academic, 2011), 65

One Story

“A central conviction in the Christian understanding of Scripture should be that Jesus fulfills what was promised to Israel about the Messiah in the Old Testament and Jesus remains the primary subject matter of the New Testament.” ~ Michael F. Bird, *Seven Things I Wish Christians Knew About the Bible* (Zondervan Reflective, 2021), 176

One Plan

“Jesus’ plan was to leave the message of the gospel in the hands of flawed, bumbling men. He limited Himself as the head of the church. He left the arms, legs, ears, eyes, and voice to a disheveled group of disciples . . . and to you and me.” ~ Philip Yancey, *Where Is God When It Hurts?* (Zondervan Publishing House, 1977), 168

Loving the Truth

David Anguish

Let’s think again about the story of the transformation of Saul the persecutor of a fledgling messianic movement to Paul the apostle of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles. He was the ultimate insider in one of the major Jewish religio-political parties in Roman-controlled Judea. His credentials were impeccable: properly circumcised; unassailable national and tribal heritage; descended from a family that valued the Hebrew language and had resisted assimilation with Greek culture;¹ singularly focused on defending the law. His zeal was exceptional, as seen in his effort to eliminate the Jesus followers he saw as apostates. And, oh yes, his religious devotion and morality were top shelf: his conscience was clean and he was blameless (Phil 3.3-6; cf. Acts 22.3-4; 23.1).

But he exchanged it all for a spot atop official Judaism’s most wanted list. He didn’t change his heritage, supernatural Pharisaical beliefs, or love for his people (Acts 23.6-9; Rom 10.1). Nor did his zeal relax. The signal difference between persecutor Saul and apostle Paul was the reality he came to accept about Jesus of Nazareth: he really was the Christ the Jews had been awaiting for centuries and the Lord at whose name every knee should bow and tongue confess—just as Paul’s ancestors had revered YHWH (Phil 2.5-11; cf. Isa 45.23-25). In short, he knew the truth that persuaded him to trust and zealously serve Jesus (2 Tim 1.12).

We know the story well. But please do not allow your familiarity with it to cause you to gloss over details of what Paul’s decision entailed. Here’s his own review, part of his reply to critics who had disparaged his apostolic credentials.

²² Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the descendants of Abraham? So am I. ²³ Are they servants of Christ? I’m talking like a madman—I’m a better one: with far more labors, many more imprisonments, far worse beatings, many times near death.

²⁴ Five times I received the forty lashes minus one from the

Worship Focus

“In many cases [our worship] songs focus on the singer (his hopes, joys, fears, etc.). In opening a hymnal at random, this author found that the first song read used the first person singular (I, me, my, mine) fourteen times and referred to God and Christ only seven times. In the adjacent hymn, these first person singular pronouns occurred a dozen times, compared with the same seven times for deity. This raises a question of focus. Do such individualistic ‘testimonial’ hymns center on the worship of God or on the worshiper?”

~ Wendell Willis, *Worship* (Sweet Publishing, 1973), 59

An Awakening

“But there are, no doubt, many out there who think the church might need to awaken from its own slumber of sorts. Maybe the church is not asleep in terms of well-run programs or social activity or community engagement (though I am sure all these areas could be contested). But it might just be asleep intellectually. It might be time for a new doctrinal-theological-intellectual awakening in which the church recaptures her rich heritage of the Christian mind—and then considers various ways to pass that heritage down to the next generation. ~ Michael J. Kruger, *Surviving Religion 101: Letters to a Christian Student on Keeping the Faith in College* (Crossway, 2021), 13

Did It Happen?

“The Gospels claim to be historical narratives, and so it is legitimate to investigate them from the perspective of what actually happened.” ~ Mark L. Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus: A Survey of Jesus and the Gospels* (Zondervan, 2007), 35

Jews. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked. I have spent a night and a day in the open sea. ²⁶ On frequent journeys, I faced dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my own people, dangers from Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers at sea, and dangers among false brothers; ²⁷ toil and hardship, many sleepless nights, hunger and thirst, often without food, cold, and without clothing. ²⁸ Not to mention other things, there is the daily pressure on me: my concern for all the churches. ²⁹ Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation? (2 Cor 11.22-29 CSB).²

When we let these details sink in, we may have greater appreciation for another of Paul’s statements. In one of his earliest letters, he noted that Satan’s deception, fostered by a “lawless one,” will lead to the condemnation of those who will “not believe the truth” (2 Thess 2.9-12). But don’t miss this: the unbelieving were deceived and perishing “because they refused to *love the truth* and so be saved” (v. 10).

The Greek word for love in verse 10 is *agapē* (ἀγάπη), a word seldom used outside biblical Greek. “The verb *agapaō* [ἀγαπάω] most often means ‘value, set great store by, hold in high esteem’” as demonstrated “in appropriate words and deeds.”³ So, as we think of loving truth, we need to think in terms of *esteem* for and *action* in practicing truth.

In other words, it is one thing to say we believe and value the truth, but something more to have an *agapē* of truth. Proof of our love will be seen in the price we are willing to pay to pursue and practice truth. The Thessalonians would have readily understood the point, having begun their walk with Jesus by witnessing and experiencing suffering on par with their fellow Judean believers (1 Thess 2.1-15).

We will do well to think more about what loving truth will entail for us.

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Notes

¹ The likely meaning of Paul’s self-description as “a Hebrew of Hebrews” (Phil 3.5); see F. F. Bruce, *Philippians*, New International Biblical Commentary (Hendrickson Publishers, 1983, 1989), 108.

² For examples, see Acts 9.23; 13.50; 14.5, 19; 16.22-23; 17.5; 18.12; 19.23; 20.3; 21.27, 31; 23.10-12; 25.3; 27.39-44; 1 Cor 15.30-32; 1 Thess 2.15.

³ Ceslas Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, trans. & ed. James D. Ernest (Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 1:11-15. Except in the Septuagint (LXX), the noun *agapē* did not enter Greek literary usage before the first century AD. The verb *agapaō* appeared as early as Homer (ca. 8th cent. BC), but “when it is attested before the Christian era, it is almost exclusively in Hellenic [Greek] Judaism, and in each case it has a religious meaning” (Spicq, 14-15). A search on the term reveals that 66% of biblical uses of *agapaō* are in the LXX (276 of 419).

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