



THE BEREA PAGE

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

Mistakenly Exalted

“Man may be made in the image of God; but it is not sufficient to conceive God as nothing more than an infinitely magnified man.”
~ J. B. Phillips, *Your God Is Too Small* (Macmillan, 1961), 42

God, In a Person

“The philosophers located the divine ‘word of life’ [*logos*] in an idea and sought it through an intellectual quest. John declares that the divine life was manifested in a person whom ‘we have looked upon and touched with our hands.’ He calls his readers back from vain speculations about ‘being’ and ‘reality’ to the person in whom God’s being and reality are disclosed.” ~ E. Earle Ellis, *The World of St. John: The Gospels and the Epistles*, 1984 repr. (University Press of America, 1995), 85

Law on the Heart

“The law written on the heart’ [Jer 31:31-34] means much more than a new upsurge of sincerity in keeping it. We have already seen that the Old Testament from the beginning had called for obedience from the heart. The popular parody of the Old Testament as a religion of external legalism is far from the truth.” ~ Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing Jesus through the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (InterVarsity Press, 2014), 104

Loving Truth: Easier to Say than Do

David Anguish

The wayfarer,
Perceiving the pathway to truth,
Was struck with astonishment:
It was thickly grown with weeds.
“Ha,” he said,
“I see that none has passed here
In a long time.”
Later he saw that each weed
Was a singular knife.
“Well,” he mumbled at last,
“Doubtless there are other roads.”¹

What was surely an uncomfortable exchange between Peter and Paul provides us with a case study for considering the challenges involved in loving the truth ([see issue 3/14](#)).

Background for the episode begins with the events that led Peter to internalize the meaning of his statement that the promise realized in Jesus was “for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself,” not just his Jewish hearers and their children (Acts 2.39). In Acts 10, he resisted the Lord’s command to “kill and eat” (vv. 13-14) the unclean animals presented to him before preaching to and welcoming the Gentile Cornelius as a disciple. He said the chapter’s events had led him to “understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him” (vv. 34-35).

His visit with and acceptance of Cornelius were not without consequences, however. On his return to Jerusalem, “the circumcision party criticized him, saying, ‘You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them’” (Acts 11.2-3). Peter explained about his vision and assured his accusers he had resisted God’s command to eat the unclean animals. But what was he to do? After all, the Spirit had sent him and fallen on the Gentiles. He concluded, “if then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God’s way?” (v. 17). Later, at the meeting in Jerusalem, he reviewed the events and

A World of Doubt

"[There is an] almost universal epidemic kind of doubt.... [where] the mood is not to regard Christianity as craftsmanship, but much more to regard it as craftiness. Consequently, before we can make any impression upon those to whom we seek to preach today, we have to recognize that they are already in a resistant frame of mind. They have been encouraged to think very largely in terms of doubt, and the more authoritatively we claim to speak, the more likely we are to produce an ambivalent, if not a contrary, effect to that which we desire. This is the outstanding characteristic of the hearer." ~ Donald Soper, "The Setting for Making Christians Today," in George Hunter, ed., *Focus on Evangelism: Readings for Thinking It Through* (Discipleship Resources, 1978) 76

Image Impact

"It might be that one of the reasons there is so little in the way of shared norms in our society is that our shared mode of knowledge, television, works *against* the communication of norms. A culture that is rooted more in images than in words will find it increasingly difficult to sustain any broad commitment to *any* truth, since truth is an abstraction requiring language." ~ Kenneth A. Myers, *All God's Children and Blue Suede Shoes: Christians and Popular Culture* (Crossway Books, 1989), 164

Necessary, Not Easy

"Forgiveness is not an elective in the curriculum of servanthood. It is a required course, and the exams are always tough to pass." ~ Charles R. Swindoll, *Improving Your Serve: The Art of Unselfish Living* (Word Books, 1981), 54

then said, "we believe that we [Jews] will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they [Gentiles] will" (Acts 15.11). Having been thus enlightened, Peter became more inclusive in his choice of dinner companions (cf. Gal 2.12).

But then some believers who argued that Gentiles had to become Jews before they could be saved arrived in Antioch (Acts 15.1, 5). Out of fear, Peter reverted to his pre-Cornelius attitudes and went back to the Jews-only table. Barnabas also gave in and separated from his Gentile brothers (Gal 2.11-14).

Paul was having none of it. Identifying the interlopers and those they influenced, including Barnabas, as hypocrites, he confronted "Cephas" (Peter's Jewish name): "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?" He opposed them because their conduct "was *not in step with the truth* of the gospel" (Gal 2.14).

The above is a flesh and bones example that shows the reality of Stephen Crane's point in "The wayfarer": loving truth is easier to say than do. Since that is so, we should take steps to prepare to resist the pressures to give in—the subtle as well as the overt—that challenge our love of truth.

As an aid to the periodic self-evaluation I have found necessary, I have from time to time returned to the checklist one of my teachers distributed. Perhaps you too will find it useful.

You do not love truth unless ...

- You are willing to admit, "I was wrong."
- You are willing to accept the truth when those you love do not.
- You accept it when you first recognize it.
- You are willing to let others know of your change in thinking
- You are willing to conform your life to its demands.
- You are willing to set aside many years of commitment to the opposite view.
- You are willing to hear both sides fairly before making up your mind.
- You are willing to examine the evidence of a contrary view before you condemn it.
- You are willing to abandon any previously held notion that cannot be supported by the evidence.
- You are willing to be criticized for changing.
- You are willing to endure ridicule and mockery for the change.
- You are willing to see that your "always having believed it that way" does not necessarily make it true.

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Notes

¹ Stephen Crane, "The wayfarer," *War Is Kind and Other Lines* (1899). <https://www.americanpoems.com/poets/stephencrane/the-wayfarer/>. Accessed August 12, 2022.

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