

Abiding Fruit

John 15:16



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Being Certain About Things Taught Luke 1:4

Luke wrote his Gospel to an individual called Theophilus. The Acts of the Apostles is also addressed to him (Acts 1:1). The reason Luke wrote to Theophilus is that he wanted to place in the hands of Theophilus an account of everything that Jesus had begun *“to do and teach”* (Acts 1:1). This man Theophilus was highly regarded by Luke. He is referred to as *“most excellent Theophilus”* (Luke 1:3). Luke’s primary desire to record a history of both Jesus and the Apostles was that he wanted Theophilus to know for certain the things he had believed and had been taught. Paul would later say a similar thing to Timothy (2 Tim. 3:14, 15). Theophilus means *“loved by God.”* It is clear that Theophilus is a friend of Luke, and that Luke was concerned about what he had been taught. Luke wanted to confirm that Theophilus actually believed the things he had been taught.

Luke is either writing to confirm and strengthen the faith of Theophilus or he is writing to bring him to a decision by providing a record that is historically accurate and that can be trusted, believed and received. It is possible that Theophilus had been hearing all kinds of stories and rumors about Jesus, and was unsure as to what the truth really was (see similar comments in Acts 28:22). Luke’s Gospel and the Acts are designed to quell those stories and rumors and provide a detailed, systematic and accurate account of the life of Jesus. Accurate information enhances trustworthiness. Historical accuracy is paramount in seeking to prove anything.

We know from Scripture that when our Lord was on earth, there were individuals who listened to him and saw what he did and were *“astonished”*. They marveled at him. That doesn’t mean they believed in him. They were surprised by him. Sometimes when Jesus was further questioned by them, his answers provoked them to anger and they wanted to destroy the Lord. So, it’s possible to learn, listen, receive information about Jesus, but that’s the limit of the effect of Jesus’ words and deeds. Luke wants his record of the life of Jesus to mean something much more to Theophilus.

Luke’s record of geographical and historical points is exceptionally accurate. He makes minute observations that normally would escape our notice. For instance, Luke calls the Potter’s Field (Matt. 27:7, 10), Akeldama, Field of Blood as it came to be known (Acts 1:19). These accurate observations would only enhance the veracity of Luke’s record, and therefore, it would be something worthy of belief.

Luke acknowledges that there were many records in existence (Luke 1:1), but he says, *“it seemed good to me also...”* (Luke 1:3), to write an account for you. Many had compiled accounts of what had occurred in Jerusalem. Luke does not mean that others had done such a bad job that he was now going to do a better one. The church historian, Eusebius takes this view (*Ecclesiastical History, III. xxiv. 15*). He views Luke as saying, *“since you all have done such poor work, I’ll undertake to correct and do a better work.”* This is not what Luke is saying. He is simply acknowledging that he too, wants to write an account (it seemed good to me) about the life of Jesus. Not only have many undertaken to write a record, but in addition to them, there have been eye-witnesses who were with Jesus from the beginning of his ministry. Reliability is enhanced if you can go to some original sources. Luke probably had discussion with the disciples (apostles). He may have been able to use Matthew’s Gospel and /or Mark’s Gospel.

Luke indicates that the eye-witnesses' accounts had been "*delivered to us.*" This means that Luke does not regard himself as an eye-witness.

The transmission of information may have been in oral form or written form. The eye-witnesses are also described as "*ministers of the word.*" These witnesses not only saw, but they transmitted their information. Luke's approach is one of reverence. His desire to "*write an orderly account*" for Theophilus flows out of his careful and particular analysis of all the records, both those written by others and those given by the disciples of the Lord, and in this sense, Luke's record is historically accurate and reliable.

Why does Luke go to such great lengths to prove to Theophilus that the account he has given was historically reliable and accurate? He does it because he is concerned for his friend. In verse 4, Luke wants Theophilus to "*have certainty*" (to know exactly) about what (who) he believes. Luke is not giving Theophilus a confusing, haphazard account. He is giving a highly researched, theologically accurate and historically reliable account. One thing is certain. Theophilus would not be able to come away from reading Luke's Gospel and Acts without knowing that he was dealing with a great work, and that his response was required. Luke wanted that response to confirm belief in "*the things you have been taught.*"

The "*things*" that Luke is referring to are all the many accounts and eye-witness reports (and now also Luke's own record). Theophilus has all the information he needs, and with Luke's document before him, he will be compelled to either believe or not believe. Theophilus was "*taught*" in a specific way. The word "*taught*" or instructed is the word for catechize. It was an oral form of teaching primarily. The teacher would ask a question and the correct answer was expected. Frankly, contrary to all current fads about how to teach this is still the best method. It forces every pupil to interact seriously with his or her material and to verbally answer correctly. Wrong answers are corrected. Many times this involved the painful and hard task of memorization. Where did Jesus get his knowledge of the Law from? It was learned in this way. This is why he responds to Satan from Deuteronomy with penetrating authority during his Temptation. He was saturated with the Word of God. The Apostle Paul would have learned the Law in the same way. He would memorize and then be questioned thoroughly on his knowledge. This is why "Catechisms and Confessions of Faith" can be so powerful as instruments of learning. They drive home the truth over and over again. The power of a Christian's life is directly proportional to their intake of the Word of God. The more we learn, the more truth we have, to answer Satan, the world, loved ones and so on. Most beneficial of all, the more we store or treasure God's Word in our hearts, the less we sin (Ps. 119:11). As long as the Church desires to "dumb" down all aspects of the faith, it will in the end produce "dumber" Christians. What a monumental tragedy! We must swim against the tide of virtually all humanity and sad to say, the prevailing views of the Church as to how we must learn and teach. The results in the end however, will be beyond price.

"*O Theophilus,*" is the heart cry of Luke (Acts 1:1) – what you have poured over in learning; what you have been instructed in, you can believe it with all your heart. It matters what we teach and what we learn. If we teach shallow theology we produce shallow believers who believe in a shallow kind of God. If we teach error, we produce "believers" who will not know the truth, but will believe a lie – how dangerous is that! They may still be sons and daughters of hell if we teach error. Every teacher of the Word must endeavor to be accurate, must painstakingly work through the Scriptures checking and rechecking to ensure that he or she communicates truth reliably. Every Christian is a learner, a disciple. We need to speak the truth to each other so that we can learn it – catechize each other. Only when we do this will be able to say with Luke – "*that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.*" More than anything that is what I desire. To know what I believe because it is the truth.