

# The gospel essay sample



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

“ The Gospel was written to help believers to understand the nature of the love of God for all people” Discuss and access this view of the purpose for Luke’s Gospel. To investigate whether this statement, attempting to describe Luke’s reason for writing, is correct, the first place to look would seem to be his prologue. Because this has been written by Luke himself this would seem to be the most reliable source. Information from his prologue referring that he is writing to ‘ believers’ is quite limited however. The only possible believer that Luke could be writing for is “... you, most excellent Theoph’ilus”.

As this is the only person mentioned throughout the prologue. Since Luke has called this man a person that is ‘ most excellent’ it can only be presumed that this man is of a high status. Whether he is a religious believer can only be determined on the fact that this man should “ know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed”. These ‘ things’ could be thought of as the accounts that have already been written about Jesus or things he has heard about him. Two theologians, Bruce and Neil, believe differently. They state that Theoph’ilus could have been a non-Christian being converted to a Christian by Luke.

They also state that Theoph’ilus are many Christians (as explained below) whose faith is wavering, however this does not explain why Luke address a fellow Christian most excellent. This would be strange as the teaching of Jesus was that all of us were equal, to address a Christian as higher than your status would therefore be wrong. They also theory that Theoph’ilus could be a magistrate. Possible identifications of ‘ Theoph’ilus’ are that he is

a Roman official persecuting Christians and Luke is writing the 'truth' about the Christian community.

If this were for a Roman magistrate then addressing him so highly would make sense. The fact that Luke's 'Act's' is written to this man also makes this a possible reason for writing, as during Act's the imprisonment of Paul took place. This gives a reason to write to this man to maybe convince him to release Paul. The meaning of the name Theoph'ilus could hold a different twist on the audience Luke is writing to however. Theo gives the meaning God and philio the meaning love. So the whole meaning of this word could be interpreted as 'lover of God' .

This could conclude that this Theoph'ilus is not a real person at all, and that it is simply a short term for believers. This would then give some sort of back up to he statement that his Gospel was for believers. Any evidence, in the prologue that Luke has written for all people is only supported by the above explanation. On a first look at Luke's prologue it could be deduced that he is just writing for one person, this being Theop'ilus, but as I have already explained this word also means 'lover of God' and could mean to a large amount of people who are believers of God.

The next part of the statement that will be looked at is " to help believers to understand the nature of the love of God... ". There are many theorys which support the statement as a reason for Luke writing his Gospal. An example of a theologian who supported that Luke wrote for an audience inside the church was Conzelmann. Conzelmann pointed out that a specific theme in Luke's Gospel was the ' Kingdom of God'. Conzelmann believed that a crisis

had arisen due to the 'delay of the Parousia' (delay in the coming of God). In the year 33 Jesus had told the Christians that he would come again to rule on earth.

The fact that 40 years later he had still not come would have started to cause doubt of his coming among his believers. Conzelmann then goes on to say that Luke, still being an undoubted believer in Jesus, realised he had to stop this loss in faith and this is why he wrote his Gospel. The source of this theory had come from reading Marks and Matthews Gospel and realising that they, unlike Luke, had made the parousia seem like it would come soon. But in Luke's Gospel he had made the Parousia seem to be coming much later.

This would restore the faith in Luke's Christian community, as they would not be expecting Jesus to come so soon. Criticisms of this theory are firstly that there are still a number of incidences where Jesus states that the Kingdom of God is here already. Theologians Mattill and Bartich who call this imminent eschatology point this out. Wilson another theologian also criticises this theory; he says that Luke's community would have had two different responses. The first being what Luke tackled, the people who where told the Kingdom of God would arrive soon are told that it will come at a much later date.

But the others who thought that Jesus was never going to come need to be told that it could be come at any time to restore their faith. Other theories that support that Luke was writing for believers are Talberts theory of Gnosticism, the persecution of Christians by Brown and Tieda, and the question of who is the church? From Maddox and Wilson. The false teaching

of Gnosticism (gnosis meaning knowledge) was believed to come from a group of Christians who had acquired 'secret knowledge' from passers down who had been told by Jesus himself.

These Gnosticists major 'secret' was that Jesus apparently was only a spiritual being and that he wasn't a man, that he just looked like one. These Gnosticists also believed that flesh was evil and sinful because of the evil that was carried out in them in the world. So to believe that Jesus had his own body would be impossible for them to believe as they thought if Jesus did indeed have a body he would be polluting himself with this sinful flesh. The suffering and death of Jesus is therefore explained, Jesus didn't suffer or die and this is how the Gnosticists could explain the resurrection, because he never died in the first place.

Therefore salvation was seen as an escape from the wretchedness of their body. The danger then is that Christians, if they believed the Gnosticism, would be lead to believe that Jesus never suffered or died for them. This would result in the loss of faith. Talbert then believes that Luke wrote the Gospel for the Christians who were taken in by the Gnosticists, to restore their faith and the truth of who Jesus really was. Hence the statement 'so that you may know the truth' in Luke's prologue. Evidence of this being a motive for Luke's Gospel is such things like the emphasis of the humanity of Jesus.

For example the infancy narratives, not included in the other Gospels, show that Jesus was born of a woman and that he lived like any other human. The fact that Luke homes in on the suffering and death of Jesus also gives

support to this theory. The theory of persecution of Christians as evidence in Luke's Gospel are examples such as the parable of the sower, where Jesus warns his disciple that people will reject them for their beliefs. This shows that being a Christian will not be easy and that they face hard times for it.

Brown believed that this was the purpose for Luke to write his Gospel, that he was writing to help those in time of persecution. During Luke's Gospel Brown points out that he is trying to encourage the Christians to remain faithful and that they must face and get through hard times. An example to the differing teachings in Mark and Luke's Gospel is the Garden of Gethsemane. In Mark's version he shows the people running away in fear but in Luke's version he shows the people standing by Jesus. However Luke also shows the weakness of Jesus' disciples, for example Peter's Denial and Judas' betrayal.

Yet Luke does emphasise the suffering that Christians will have to endure. Maddox says that the big question for Luke is how Gentile Christianity is related to Judaism. He says that Luke is writing for Gentile Christians only who are asking how they are related to Christianity and to Jesus. During Luke's day the Gentile Christians would have faced a lot of criticism from Jews of how they were entitled to the promises of Abraham (given by God) who was Jewish and not Christian. The Jews literally said that the only reason they were passed on at all was because Jesus was a Jew himself.

So therefore Maddox claims that Luke was writing to show that the Gentile Christians had as much right as the Jews to the new Israel. Luke wrote to show that God accepted Gentile Christians because they accepted his son,

Jesus. So they were rightly inheritors of Gods promises. Therefore they were more than entitled to the promises, probably more so than the Jews. Many scholars accept this theory because they believe that Jesus was a Gentile and that Christianity was mostly a Gentile religion. The fact that the Jews rejected Jesus supports this even more so, as by rejecting Jesus the Jews should have lost all entitlement to Gods promises.

Luke therefore believes that Gentile Christians are the true people of God. All these theories, in conclusion do, to some extent show that Luke wrote to help believers but does it show that Luke wrote to help believers to understand the nature of Gods love for all people? To some extent yes, during the Gospel Luke shows Jesus reaching out to such people as Outcast, Sinners, and Women. An example of this is the story of Jairus daughter, were a woman with a haemorrhage touches Jesus cloak “ Daughter your faith has made you well; go in peace” this shows Jesus reaching out to a woman in need who would have otherwise have been rejected by others.

The fact that Jesus also says he has come for everyone and God will love that those who accept him. On the other hand Luke seems to mainly be responding to problems in the community that has arisen and doesn't focus wholly on expressing the nature of Gods love for all people. What can be deduced from this information is that Luke may have written for the reason in the statement to some extent. It is inevitable that Luke most probably wrote for believers and not non-believers. As he has responded to the problems that have arisen in their community and not others.

But whether or not Luke has written to show the nature of Gods love for all people is debatable. As I have mentioned previously Luke mentions many parables and stories of Jesus reaching out to the needy to show that God cares for them even if others do not. But this is not focused on as much as other themes in the Gospel. Themes of showing Jesus humanity and the Kingdom of God have stronger roles than this in the Gospel. Therefore in my opinion Luke wrote for believers but not necessarily to focus on showing the nature of Gods love, rather to help believers with the struggles they were faced with.