

The Berean principles

(Acts 17:10-12)

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The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men.

In Acts 17 the Apostle Paul is on his second missionary journey. In the first part of the chapter Paul and Silas have traveled to a city named Thessalonica and preached the gospel. At first some responded, but at last there was an uprising that caused them to flee the city. During this uprising, in Acts 17:6, those accusing and attacking shouted out these words to the city authorities, ***“These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also!”*** Paul and his co-laborers had not been in Macedonia that long and yet they already had gained the reputation as those who were “turning the world upside down”. Their teachings were so counter cultural that they seemed to be opposite or contrary to the world as the Thessalonians knew it to be. But is that not the gospel that we know from scripture?

As A.W. Tozer suggests, with good reason:

“A real Christian . . . empties himself in order to be full, admits he is wrong so he can be declared right, goes down in order to get up, is strongest when he is weakest, richest when he is poorest ... He dies so he can live, forsakes in order to have, gives away so he can keep.”

Oh, that we would be used to turn our home, our workplace, our neighborhood and even this country upside down for the sake of Christ.

In Acts 17:10-12, after fleeing Thessalonica, Paul and Silas have arrived in a city named Berea. Berea was smaller than many of the crossroad cities that Paul had visited before. Berea was 80 km from Thessalonica. Paul had been persecuted and abused for preaching the gospel in multiple cities before, yet he continued to preach.

As was their custom, Paul and Silas went into the synagogue to teach about Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah. The scripture says this of those in Berea, ***“Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.”***

In Thessalonica, scriptures tell how only some of the Jews were persuaded to join Paul and Silas. This word, “persuaded,” in the original language meant to be convinced in spite of their initial opposing beliefs, desires and misconceptions. There were only some Jews in Thessalonica who believed, and those who did were not initially open to the teachings about Christ. We see in Thessalonians 1 that the gospel came to the Thessalonians not only in word but also in power. It also came with joy, turning many to God from idols. This description was likely true of the many Gentiles who came to Christ in Thessalonica.

In Berea, however, Paul and Silas found Jews who were immediately open to their teachings. The teachings of Paul and Silas were always centered on Christ and Him crucified and based on the Old Testament scriptures. This likely included teachings from passages such as **Isaiah 53**, that were contrary to the common belief that the messiah would come to liberate the Jews from the Romans:

“He was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.”

We see more proofs in **Psalm 22**:

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? ⁷All who see me mock me; ⁸‘He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!’ ¹⁶they have pierced my hands and feet—¹⁷I can count all my bones— they stare and gloat over me; ¹⁸ they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.”

These Jews of Berea were not only open, but eager to know the truths of God. The scriptures tell that they were so open and eager that each day they would examine the scriptures to see if what Paul was teaching was from God. They took it upon themselves to understand God’s Word, believing that the Word of God was the ultimate authority in regards to truth. They appreciated Paul’s teaching, but even his teaching had to be reconciled to scripture if it was going to be accepted as truth.

This meant that they would open the Old Testament scriptures and look for verification that these teachings about Jesus being the Messiah were true. This word for “examining” was commonly used for judicial investigation, like searching for evidence at a crime scene. One would never determine guilt or innocence without studying the evidence first. It is the same with scripture. We cannot move on to the meaning and interpretation of scripture without first taking the time to

observe and gather all the relevant information. It would be with the intensity that a fiancée looks for a lost wedding ring, or the intensity with which parents look for a lost child at the mall.

This idea reminds of us Matthew 7:7-8 where Christ says, *“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.”* Those who seek for God and His truth will find it. Proverbs 2:1-6 describes it in these words:

“My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, ² making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; ³ yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, ⁴ if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, ⁵ then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God. ⁶ For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.”

The Bereans were eager to know the truth of God’s Word. The Word of God was their authority. They were diligent in seeking this truth. As a result the Holy Spirit revealed truth to them in such a way that it resulted in saving faith, *“For faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ”* (Romans 10:17).

As we seek to be Berean as we study the Bible we must remember to ask, “What did these verses mean to the original hearers?” If we forget this question we will be tempted to read a verse from our perspective and often miss its real intention. One must consider the who, when, where and why. Who was the author and who was the recipient? What was the situation and the context of the writing? Where did it take place? Why was this being written?

After we observe and gather the facts, only then can we seek to interpret and understand the meaning of the passage. Once we understand its meaning then we can take the principles and apply them to our lives.

Let me pause for a moment and speak a word of warning. Not all religious teachers or pastors are doing the work of the Bereans. Beware. If a pastor, teacher or author is not submitting his understanding first to the authority of scripture, then turn away from His teaching. If a pastor is using scripture to further his agenda, to reinforce his predetermined doctrine, or taking scripture out of context or away from its intended meaning, do not sit under his teaching any longer. If he is teaching what people want to hear, to grow the church or bring in more offerings, find a better source of biblical teaching.

Examples of that would be teachings that twist one verse to teach a false doctrine even though it violates the larger teachings of scriptures. It could be a verse that supposedly supports a twisted definition of marriage, a guarantee of health and wealth, the removal of the existence of hell, or many other teachings that have been presented erroneously.

As one seeks the Word of God there are right ways and wrong ways. Our ultimate goal is to find out what God intended for us to know and how to apply it to our lives.

We must now consider another “level” of Bible study. Like the Bereans, we have the responsibility to examine the scriptures, but even this is only the beginning. Our academic study of a passage is

not sufficient to understand the revelations of God. Only the Holy Spirit can guide us into all truth (John 16:13).

The first reason that our examining the scriptures is not sufficient is because the sinfulness of our hearts. Ephesians 4:17b-18 tells us that we are naturally futile in our minds, darkened in our understanding, alienated from the life of God because of ignorance, due to the hardness of our hearts. Because of this, only God can bring the supernatural revelation that we each desperately need.

In Luke 24:45 we read, *"Then He (Jesus) opened their minds to understand the scriptures."*

In Psalm 119:12, it is God who teaches us His statutes. In Psalm 119:27, *"It is God who makes us understand the way of His precepts."* In Psalm 119:36, it is even God who *"inclines our hearts to His testimonies"*.

Psalm 119:18 says this, *"Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from your law."*

It is similar to a person looking towards the sun with their eyes closed. They can appreciate the warmth and some indication of brightness, but they cannot truly appreciate its light and everything else that it illumines and makes clear.

The reason that we are even considering these truths today is so that God would awaken in each of us an insatiable appetite for Him and His Word. That we would cry out, even beg God to give us more of Himself.

This is the key to receiving God's truths from His Word. We must join with the Bereans in examining and seeking with all of our heart. At the same time we must ask God to reveal His supernatural truths and to incline our hearts towards them. This is how prayer and Bible study come together. It is then that we finally see the wonderful things in His law and the beauty that is found in His Son. Only then will He become our greatest desire and will sin decrease in our lives.

The Holy Spirit reveals the truths of His Word, and together the Holy Spirit and the Word reveal the eternal worth of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.