

Scripture Reading: Acts 17:10- “10 [after the violence in Thessalonica] the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. 11 These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. 12 Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men. 13 But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was preached by Paul at Berea, they came there also and stirred up the crowds. 14 Then immediately the brethren sent Paul away...”

"Lessons from Berea"

My topical sermons in ordinary time this year have included a study of a single verse in Proverbs to see how important meditating on God’s Word can be for guiding our lives;

considering a converted tax collector as a good example for Christian living, studying a favorite chapter to teach us about history and now I want to turn to a short account found in the journeys of the Apostle Paul:

- **An account where we find great faith and a standard by which to judge what we read or hear about our Gracious salvation.**

Paul’s journey brings him to Berea:

A city where a faithful church was planted that we know little about and yet is regarded fondly as we seek to be “good Bereans” even down to our day.

Before I dig into our major lesson, I want to note that this short account is surrounded or bookended by trials faced by the Apostle Paul.

He had caused a riot in Thessalonica and the mobsters soon followed and caused more trouble here Berea.

In both cases Paul quickly left to avoid further trouble. In isolation, this passage could have us think that fleeing is always the best option when things get tough!

However when we consider some other reports from Paul’s life we know that he was no stranger to conflicts and often did not flee or avoid them.

Listen to some of his other experiences listed in his 2nd letter to the Corinthians: “ 24 From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked;

a night and a day I have been in the deep; 26 in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren;...”

A careful reader would see that there are times for flight and there are times to take a stand, no matter what the consequences. So how do we know when to do what? Flee or Stay?

- **Making the right choices requires being in the Lord’s will which comes with maturity and wisdom!**
- **We will often face such decisions in our own lives and only such maturity and wisdom will keep us from being anxious for EVERYTHING! *[how much should we be anxious for?]***

As our country has moved rapidly toward being a post-Christian nation, more and more Christians will face some tough decisions: Some places are becoming financially hostile to families and thus some folks may choose others places to live. We might one day have a state or states requiring that Christian children MUST attend secular schools and many would then choose to flee as Paul and Silas have done here.

However, we must be ready to balance such decisions with calls to persevere, commands to be light in a dark place & to be sure we are not just running to make things easier at the expense of the Kingdom work God may have called us to do.

- Again, there are no simple formulas to follow: We need to grow in wisdom and maturity so we can understand how God is directing us in our lives.

Many will rightly and wrongly tell us things we should or should not do, and so being good Bereans is of vital importance for us to stay in the Lord's will.

Flight was their option for leaving Thessalonica and now Paul & Silas come to Berea proclaiming that Jesus was the promised Messiah of the Old Testament.

They reminded these Berean Jews that the Messiah had to suffer to pay the price for sin and as Paul often saw in other cities these concepts have shaken up the popular thinking among the Jews of that day...

Luke tells us that the reaction in Berea was much different than the reaction he saw in Thessalonica..

Acts 17:11 "These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so."

- This passage is what is referred to when a person says someone is being a good Berean.
- So just what does it mean to be a good Berean?
- First & foremost, it is having a real trust in the authority of the Bible: Believing that it IS the Word of God.

It is NOT being just a skeptic but rather being those who search for truth.

I think it is also safe to say that being a Good Berean requires a good knowledge of the Scriptures...

- How can you take what someone says back to the Scriptures if you do not know them well?

When a Mormon missionary tries to tell you that God the Father has a body just like we do and cites a passage that talks about the arm of God, you should not have to spend much time refuting them!

- IF you know your Bible well!

You simply take them to where Jesus taught the women at the well that the Father is Spirit and that those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and truth.

However, defending the truth is not always that simple:

- What if your parents send you off to what they thought was a good Bible college and your run into the Framework theology?

Here someone tells you that Genesis chapters one to eleven are NOT giving us literal historical accounts, but just a poetic framework to help us understand how God works in all of history.

This view rejects six day creation and an historical Adam: which they argue is no problem...NOT if you are a good Berean!

Now you might have to do a bit more study to show how this does not agree with all of Scripture!

- Of course the better the training you have received AND the more faithful you have been in learning the Bible, the easier this task would be.

We also can look to Church history and traditions as a guide, but not without always trusting Scripture as the final authority. *[mention why we read the creation account regularly]*

However, trusting only Church history or Church traditions can get us into the same trouble as those who rejected the truth about Jesus at Jerusalem or Thessalonica:

- All of these are important BUT they must all be subject to the final authority of the Scriptures.

In the time of the Reformation the Church had driven into the ditch on one side of the road where whatever the Church said about the Bible was what we had to believe about the Bible.

The leaders of the Roman Catholic Church demanded that Luther and Calvin and others recant or renounce their teachings NOT because they had shown that they were unbiblical...

- But rather because they did not agree with what the Church taught at that time.

Neither Luther nor Calvin were being arrogant about what they taught but simply said they were convinced by the Scriptures that it was true:

Had the Church leaders been able to show them from the Bible where they were wrong, they would have recanted.

Today, much of the Church has driven off into the ditch on the other side of the Berean road...

- Thinking that the highest form of spiritual life is getting off by ourselves and meditating on God's Word to see what He wants to reveal to us today.

Thus the younger generation does not think that the older folks understand them because they are stuck in their old ways & do not see the fresh understandings of the Bible that are being discovered today!

- Yes, young people should be good Bereans taking all that they are taught back to the Scriptures, but they must remember that they are the students and not the teachers.

It is very popular in many churches today to have the "young marrieds" classes...

Now this would be fine IF you had older mature married people instructing those who are younger, but this is usually not the case...

- Again, the attitude is often what do these older folks really know about what it is like to be a young married couple in today's world?
- They could not even do Facetime back then!
- So sadly, in the end you have a group of struggling young couples who simply spend a lot of time sitting around sharing their ignorance or at best their limited experiences.

Tragically, we have done the same with what the Bible teaches us about the raising of children. No longer can older women instruct young mothers about the wisdom given to us in Proverbs and elsewhere, because now we have modern studies & techniques.

Far too many churches have done the same with most good Church traditions, creeds, and confessions.

And, much of this is done with the proud attitude that we are being good Bereans...

- Saying they only look to the Bible for true guidance while NOT respecting all of these other authorities.

That may sound very spiritual, but it is in fact a VERY dangerous ditch:

- IF you ignore, disrespect or have problems with other authorities, then you will have a problem with trusting the authority of the Bible! *[allow me to repeat that]*

Children who rebel against the authority of their parents will NOT get much right when it comes to understanding the Bible.

You will not find many young women who have no use for the teaching given by older Godly women growing in Biblical wisdom and maturity.

You will not find many men who have no use for the authority of the Church able to be the leaders they should be.

On the other hand, if you have the respect for these authorities that is commanded in the Bible, then you will be able to be a good Berean with ALL the authorities that God may place over you: Whether they be weak or strong.

Children can ask honest questions of their parents and take what they are taught back to the Scriptures. Those young women can also ask honest questions or even seek advice about things that the older women might not have faced like how to control the use of video games.

Godly men do not blindly follow whatever is taught at any church, but they are respectful of how they question an area they might not be sure they agree with.

IN all of these cases, those who are being good Bereans remember that God has put these people in authority over them and will use them to guide and direct them... Which is why the Bereans listened to the Apostle Paul!

- **A VITAL principle that is clearly taught in the very Scriptures which we say are the final authority.**
- **So just as we saw with flight, having the faith to be good Bereans requires maturity and Godly wisdom.**

The extremes are pretty easy to spot: --- If your elders started passing out the Books of Mormon next week, we would all be gone in short order.

-- When we ask everyone to confess the Apostle's Creed there is a lot of Church history and tradition that says we are on safe ground.

- **However, as we bring you new sermons each week, it is very appropriate for there to be a time for questions as we enjoy our fellowship meals.**

There is a place for you to follow through with any homework we might have suggested or take a conclusion drawn back to the Scriptures to see if what was said was true.

- **If the Bereans could do this with the Apostle Paul, then I think it is very appropriate for any of my sermons!**

And we will be blessed by doing so as long as we have the same motivation as these faithful Bereans:

- **They searched the Scriptures to see if what was taught was true!**

-- They were not questioning the authority of the Apostle Paul: He was a respected Pharisee from Jerusalem and a new leader in the Church.

-- They were not trying to win a debate, they were searching for truth.

-- They were not trying to defend their prejudices or preconceived beliefs, they were searching for the truth.

- We now have God's completed revelation where we can search out all truth!
- Having the completed cannon does not eliminate our need to be good Bereans...
[give examples of teachers impacting our lives: Schaeffer, Bahnsen, Jordon and now Pastors Wilson & Leithart]
- May we be Saints who have the same furfur and respect as we see in these Saints at Berea.

As we do so, we should remember the warning that Jesus gave to the proud religious leaders of His day:

John 5:37 "3And the Father Himself, who sent Me, has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form.

38 But you do not have His word abiding in you, because whom He sent, Him you do not believe. **39**You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me."

May we rather be like those disciples on the road to Emmaus, who after Jesus had revealed Himself to them said, "'Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?'"

The writer of Hebrews declares that today God speaks to us through His Son...

- May the Spirit give us ears to hear & eyes to see all that the Spirit reveals to us from the Word of God!

Communion Meditation: Isaiah 1:

18 "Come now, and let us reason together," Says Jehovah, "Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool. **19** If you are willing and obedient, You shall eat the good of the land; **20** But if you refuse and rebel, You shall be devoured by the sword"; For the mouth of the Lord has spoken."