

The Message that Turns the World Upside Down

A Five Part Series from Acts 16 & 17

Part III – The More Noble Bereans

(Acts 17:10-14)

Outline by Randy Wages

6/11/08

Note: The text below was prepared for oral delivery rather than for publication in print. As such, be aware that sentence fragments are intentionally used and that this document has not been edited to correct the errors in grammar, sentence structure, etc.

I. Introduction ó

- A. Today I'll bring to you the 3rd message of a 5 part series on "The Message that turns the world upside down." We're looking at this message, the Gospel, in the context of Acts 16 and 17 where Paul brings the Gospel to Macedonia (present day Greece) on his 2nd missionary journey. I've titled this 3rd sermon "The More Noble Bereans" for we will be considering this scriptural description of the Bereans from today's text, Acts 17:10-14.
- B. And this scriptural commendation causes most Bible teachers & preachers to rightly present the Bereans as models worthy of our imitation. But if we're to do that, it is important that we correctly understand this virtue. That is, why or on what basis the Bereans were deemed to be "more noble"?
- C. Review ó Recall that we began this series with Paul in jail at Philippi in Acts 16 and upon his release he proceeded to Thessalonica. Today we pick up with Paul's departure from Thessalonica and his arrival in the nearby town of Berea.

II. Exposition of Acts 17:10-14 ó I'll read over these 5 verses and then come back and comment on them verse by verse. Read Text (Acts 17:10-14)

A. Verse 10:

1. You will recall that the unbelieving Jews of Thessalonica had troubled the people and this had prompted the fellow believers of Paul and Silas to send them away under the cover of night.
2. It is interesting to see the pattern here repeating itself.
 - (a) Those who hate the light of truth (such as these unbelieving Thessalonians) would stir up the crowds against Paul. This had happened on 3 previous occasions on his 1st missionary journey and in today's text, we see the same pattern as he is run out of Thessalonica and then again out of Berea.
 - (b) In Matthew 10:16, Christ told His disciples, "***Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.***" Now I think we will see an aspect of heeding this command as we consider the nobility of the Bereans today.

And then down in verse 23 of Mt. 10 He continued saying, ***“But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another..”*** ó the implication being not for their own safety, but to preach there.

- (c) So we see the manifold wisdom of God in play here again as we see how persecution, inspired by Satan, designed to stop the progress of the Gospel is overruled by God so as to do accomplish the exact opposite ó to further it, upside down to their intentions.
- (d) Just as the imprisonment of Paul and Silas brought the Gospel the Philippian jailerø way, so here also the enemies of the Gospel, these unbelieving Jews, were unwittingly & unwillingly used by God as instruments to bring the Gospel to the Bereans.
- (e) God will get His Gospel to His people.

B. Verse 11:

1. These in Berea are said to be òmore noble than those in Thessalonica.ö Now in the context we see in vs. 13 how these same Jews of Thessalonica came to stir up the people. So we know here that he is contrasting the Berean Jews with the unbelieving Jews, the same ones who were moved with envy to incite trouble that caused Paul & Silas to flee Thessalonica.
2. So we have here a contrasting picture of a virtue (ñnobilityø in the sense meant here) that is attributed to believers (these Jews in Berea) that is not attributed to the unbelieving Jews in Thessalonica. So then this virtue of being òmore nobleö is to be considered as opposite to the vice of the unbelieving Thessalonians.
3. The word, ònobleö sometimes refers to oneøø breeding ó that is to one who is of a noble family / royalty perhaps. But it also may refer to one who is ònoble mindedö ó a commendable virtue we should seek to emulate.

(Be turning to I Cor. 2)

4. Yet we know from the context & from other scripture that the nobility for which the Bereans are commended is (1) not a result of their earthly blood line (not as in I Cor. 1 that speaks of ònot many nobleö / royalty being called.) nor (2) could it be a product of their natural mind.
5. Read I Cor 2:7-8, 12-14: So not the òprinces of this worldö nor the mind of the ònatural manö is spoke of here. No, the preaching of this word is foolishness to the natural man.
6. Instead, verse 11 (of Acts 17) tells us wherein lies this virtue of the more noble Bereans. It consists of 2 things:
 - (a) òThey received the word with all readiness of mind.ö AND
 - (b) òAnd searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.ö
7. Note here the distinction between òthe wordö they received and the òscripturesö they searched to determine whether those things (set forth in òthe wordö) were so or not. This òwordö then which they received cannot be the written word. But this òwordö would be that which was spoken (preached) by the apostle, the word of truth ó the Gospel of salvation by Godøø sovereign grace.
 - (a) So this teaches us that while many will rightly encourage us to emulate this nobility of the Bereans, hereby we see that to do so is impossible apart from a proper, God-given understanding of òthe wordö ó the message that turns our world upside down.

Verse 11 (Con't)

- (b) This is the same word of the Lord spoken by Paul & Silas to the Philippian jailer back in 16:32.
 - (c) It's the same word, the gospel that Paul set forth in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-3) where we read how he reasoned with them out of the scriptures (read Acts 17:3).
 - (d) It's the word that hath quickened me as the Psalmist says. It is the word of the gospel that is the power of God unto salvation in for therein is the righteousness of God revealed. (Rom. 1:16-17)
8. The Gospel wherein we see the necessity of Christ's Person & work for perfect satisfaction must be made for God to be reconciled to a sinner. For there we see the standard of judgment or righteousness is laid to the plummet (Isa 28). There is our plumb line.
 9. This Gospel that turns one's world upside down, Paul's one message of Christ and Him crucified (I Cor. 2:2), is what was received
 10. And so we see that 1st, this embracing of the Gospel is part and parcel to their designation as being more noble for they received the word of the gospel with all readiness of mind.
 11. But there is an important word here in verse 11 or the word "and." As such these 2 aspects of their nobility are not to be considered separately. It reads, "...**and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.**" So we see here, that they were not at all foolish or gullible in their eagerness and willingness to listen. They depended not on any man, but searched the scriptures to see if this Gospel wherein the righteousness of God was revealed stood up to the scrutiny of scripture or the standard by which we judge true and false.
 12. Like me, you may have seen this latter phrase used with the intent of shutting off any and all dissent, discussion, or consideration of anything contrary to one's own persuasions. And in subtle ways, the suggestion to be like the Bereans may promote a suspicious, hard to convince attitude rather than a teachable spirit, receptive to the Gospel.
 13. We should be discerning, not "**...tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine....** But stubborn, unreasoning, hard heartedness is not to be justified by disguising it as something it is not or as if it is this commendable virtue of a discerning mind.
 14. If we emphasize that the Berean nobility consisted exclusively in their scriptural scrutiny, we risk fostering such a hard-hearted attitude of resistance to the truth of the Gospel. Now in that this message is so foreign as to be upside down to every natural persuasion or and therefore we certainly need to be brought to repentance from the way that seemed right to us or we can see how detrimental developing such an attitude can be.
 15. And likewise to a regenerated, believing sinner (but one who is still plagued with remaining sin) such a narrow interpretation of this "nobility" risks fostering a resistance to the teaching we need to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ or as if there's nothing more for me to see of the majesty of Christ's Person and work.

Verse 11 (Con't)

16. In the context, we see that their virtue could not lie solely in their having checked up on the preaching of the apostles for that would imply that the vice of the Thessalonians to whom the contrast is being made here, would be that they were too quick to believe the Gospel. That could not be said of these same unbelieving Jews who followed them here to stir up more trouble. So we know that is not the case. Nor could it be referring to those believing Jews in Thessalonica, for recall that Paul reasoned with them out of the scriptures for 3 Sabbaths consecutively.
 17. No, the contrast between the Bereans and the Thessalonians must include the fact that the Bereans also “...**received the word with all readiness of mind.**” That is, they listened objectively with an open mind and teachable spirit, even with eagerness in contrast to these unbelieving Jews of Thessalonica. So they did not prejudge what they heard nor did they move with envy against the messengers. Instead they were teachable and receptive to the gospel.
 18. AND, they searched the scriptures to see whether they were so ó they did not take the word of a man, but looked to the word of God, the scriptures, to judge the validity of what they had been told.
 19. And note that their research was not lackadaisical, but rather they searched daily. This is a commendable discipline all of us would do well to adopt. They apparently knew enough scripture to concur with God’s word given through Isaiah the prophet when he said in Isa. 8:20, “**To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.**” So we see that their open-mindedness was restricted to a standard ó a rationale ó so as to exclude any non-biblical doctrine.
 20. So they tried (or tested) the spirits as we’re commanded to do in I John 4 to see “...**whether they are of God.**”)
 21. Their critical ear was not seeking to find fault, but the product of an eagerness and determination to know the truth.
 22. So their nobility consisted of the facts that not only were they willing to hear and receive the Gospel but also in that they weren’t negligent to do their due diligence ó to examine it by the standard of truth ó the scriptures.
- C. Verse 12 ó We read, “**Therefore...**”
1. Here, seeing that because there “**unbelieving**” sprang from this “**nobility**,” we can conclude that this noble virtue is a necessary grace for one who comes to grips with and embraces the gospel. And we need that grace because it is a message that is upside down from the way that seems right to us.
 2. But I also will suggest to you today that this is a grace born again believers should also continually seek to cultivate for it’s likewise necessary if we’re to continue to grow in grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 12(Con't)

3. Consider how our Lord commands us: “...seek, and ye shall find.” (Mt. 7:7). Our problem is that none of us will seek salvation God’s way. It takes a miracle of God’s grace and yet we are responsible to seek. Likewise, we are responsible to not reject the true Gospel teaching of others, and yet we can do no other apart from God’s grace. The scriptures declare of us all in Romans 3, “***There is none that understandeth. There is none that seeketh after God. They have all gone out of the way.***” It requires a miraculous work of God’s spirit ó He makes us noble and without this gift of grace (this fruit and effect of what Christ purchases for His people at Calvary), there is nothing noble about any of us.
4. But if God grants us eyes to see, makes us willing in the day of His power, then - THEREFORE ó we, like the many Bereans, believe.
5. We see that Paul and Silas had nothing to fear by the Bereans diligently searching the scriptures. And so it should be with all of God’s preachers for it is His word (seeing it is God’s truth) by the power of the Holy Spirit that gives life.

D. Verse 13 ó Well, here again we see that this message incites the enemies of God. So again they stirred the people up.

E. Verse 14 ó And then in verse 14, we see that Paul was essentially run out of town, but all in accordance with where God purposed for the Gospel to be preached next.

F. Verse 15 ó Notice that Silas and Timothy stayed behind for now, presumably to continue to minister to the new believers in Berea and to establish a church.

III. How are we to emulate this nobility of the Bereans, when we consider it in the context of the Gospel of grace whereby we know that no virtue in us plays a causal role in our salvation? This message turns things upside down so as to permeate our reasoning as it pertains to all spiritual things.

A. We see that it’s the word, the gospel of grace ó of salvation conditioned on Christ alone and so it is not conditioned on the sinner in any way or to any degree ó There’s nothing you can do to save yourself and now I stand here and tell you, that apart from God’s grace ó you cannot emulate this nobility of the Bereans.

B. So, our natural reasoning cries out ó What am I to do?

1. You tell me to be more noble, but then you tell me I can’t and won’t apart from or unless God so determines and moves. And so our tendency is to ignore the commands and urgings of God to seek, to come, to believe, to receive this word with readiness of mind, etc. when we find no apparent valid motive as we discover that compliance to these commands play no causal role in our salvation or in our finding favor with God.

III. How are we to emulate / B. Natural Reasoning... (Con't.):

2. But this mindset is an indictment in and of itself in that we cannot imagine any valid (or noble) motive to seek to obey God if these things do not play a causal role so as to merit me some favor before God or keep me from His disfavor. As selfish sinners, apart from the noble graces God grants in the new birth, we just cannot see any reason to act apart from some self serving motive whereby I gain something in return.
 3. That is the religion of man is man centered, all about me. Consider what is denied if your teachable spirit is deemed to possess merit rather than be a direct fruit and effect of what Christ alone merited. That would deny that salvation was finished by Christ alone. And “...**if righteousness come by the law, Christ is dead in vain.**” (Gal.2:21). So that would be a denial of the necessity of His death and resurrection as it equates to imagining Christ actually died in vain. He did not get the job done.
- C. But hereby, we see how God is just in His condemnation of all those whom He leaves to their own sinful desserts.
1. Is there any area of our day to day life where reasonable men applaud those who refuse to listen and reason, who will not be noble minded about anything? Why no and if they suffer consequences as a result of their refusal to consider instructions and information valuable to their well being, we conclude they got what they deserved.
 2. Likewise, is there any area of our day to day life where men are applauded for buying whatever comes along so as to be subject to any and every scam artist or quack without doing any due diligence to check things out? No, such lazy, gullibility would be condemned, not considered noble at all. And likewise, if such a one suffers the predictable consequences, we again would rightly conclude they too got what they deserved. They are responsible.
 3. But when it comes to spiritual reasoning according to truth, reasonable men are by nature, anything but. And the very vices we would condemn in all other matters, we manifest, excuse, and fail to see being manifested in this realm in contrast to the virtue of the noble Bereans.
 4. So, whether (1) it is because of our unwillingness to objectively consider the Gospel or (2) our laziness to search the scriptures to test it is In either case, we can see God is just in leaving us to suffer the consequences as we cling to the way that seems right to us.

IV. Closing:

- A. Consider that all who receive the word of the Gospel who love it and embrace Christ and Him crucified as their only hope for salvation consider that such have been made noble in another sense as in royalty. For only children of the king will exhibit this sort of nobility of mind in receiving the Gospel as God is pleased to unfold it to them in the preaching of the Gospel confirmed in the scriptures.

B. For therein, by His word, He quickens them says the Psalmist. Thereby, the Holy Spirit births them so that like the more noble Bereans, they embrace the truth and indeed discover their nobility in Christ ó for thereby they discover they are heirs of all that Jesus Christ, the prince of peace, could and did earn for them ó spiritual life that makes them likewise noble, eternal life, the kingdom of heaven and all its glory.

So pray that God will make us all objective, receptive listeners, eager to know more about Him and our Savior, yet with discernment based upon the sole standard of God's truth ó scripture ó God's word.

I pray God's blessing will be upon you just as it was upon the more noble Bereans.

Footnote from the author: While this sermon was prepared and delivered by me, I often utilize the commentaries, study helps, and teachings of others to supplement my own prayerful study of the scriptures. Since this document was not originally prepared for publication in print, please excuse and recognize that it was unfeasible to properly identify and credit all of the various original sources used to develop the content herein. Ultimately, it is my sincere and foremost objective to accurately present the gospel of God's grace found in the only infallible source, God's word itself ó the Bible.