

Scripture Reading:

Acts 17:1 “5 But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. 6 But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, "These who have turned the world upside down have come here too. 7 Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king--Jesus." 8 And they troubled the crowd and the rulers of the city when they heard these things. 9 So when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.10 Then 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, to go to the sea; but both Silas and Timothy remained there. 15 So those who conducted Paul brought him to Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him with all speed, they departed.”

"Being Good Bereans"

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. This has been a term of endearment in the Christian Church down through the ages as we seek to be faithful to God’s Word...

- **We should always ask are we being good Bereans?**

This morning we want to consider just what that means and look at a few other things in our text...

- **Lord-wiling we will consider faith, females and flight!**

The seminary professors would be proud of this message: I have three alliterated points!

I want to begin with the issue of flight. We have seen Paul and Silas driven from Philippi, Thessalonica and now Paul will leave Berea.

- **I think it is proper to ask whether they are following the Spirit’s leading or just running scared.**

Not only should we see all of this as part of the Spirit’s leading, but we must also see how the Spirit’s is doing His work: We know from Paul’s epistles that strong churches were planted in Philippi and Thessalonica. We have no further mention of the Saints here in Berea, but Luke makes a point of saying they were the most faithful, so I think we can assume a strong church planted here as well. We also need to remember that Luke is moving quickly through many of these events, but we know from things mentioned in Paul’s letters that a good deal of time was involved with planting these works.

- **We have Silas and Timothy moving between these church and even Athens several times!**

An important lesson here is to remember that being in the Lord’s will requires maturity and wisdom:

- **There are times for flight and there are times to take a stand.**

Paul and Silas were beaten and jailed in Philippi and now here at Berea Paul has an escort to the next city. We read in Paul’s epistles how there were many blessings that he received from his ministry to these young churches AND many accounts of trials and tribulations.

- **Such will be the case in our lives as well and this is why we are to be anxious for nothing!**

As our country has moved rapidly toward being a post-Christian nation, more and more Christians will face some of these sorts of 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, to be light in a dark place and 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.
- Another complex issue that is raised again here at Berea is the mention of prominent females!

Luke makes a point, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, of telling us that many prominent women were converted at both Thessalonica and here at Berea. I would argue this follows a pattern established in the Old Testament, and lived out by Jesus in the Gospel accounts where we see women having a prominent role in the story of God's salvation. We considered at length last week the fact that the New Creation is turning the fallen world upside down, putting things back the way they should be!

This includes the proper role of women: Going back to the garden where men and women are made in the image of God and function as one-flesh in marriage and in taking dominion. In the world turned upside-down by the fall, women had come to be considered as slaves, property or toys.

- And that was among the more gentle cultures.

We need to remember this in order to rightly understand how radical the Gospels and now Acts would have been in those pagan times...

- And sadly, more and more so even in our own day as well!

It is easy to point to the pagans and say they did not treat women well: With Muslim cultures where women are treated as lower than the animals, or in India where the tradition was for a widow to be burned alive with her husband's body, we can certainly see examples of cruelty toward women.

Modern feminist would like to return to the pagan days of worshipping goddesses but a real study of history shows that women were just playthings serving as Temple prostitutes and always as second class citizens. We have sadly returned too much of this today with pornography at epidemic levels in our nation and unborn children slaughtered by the millions so men can have their fun.

Now, while the Church should be the voice crying out against such sins against women, we have often joined the chorus in some subtle ways... How often have we picked up the world's ways by referring to a loving wife as "my old lady" or whatever the more modern version of that 60's lingo might be today?

There are too many in the Church who come across with an attitude that we need to keep women in their place... Women certainly do have their place and it should look nothing like "being barefoot & pregnant" and certainly they are NOT to be looking dowdy.

- While we affirm the blessing of having children, I would defy anyone to find such a picture in Proverbs 31 or with ANY of the women we see portrayed as Godly in the Scriptures.

While we may rightly condemn the world's treatment of women we need to be sure that we are not adding fuel to the fire with sins of our own.

- We need look no further than the example of our Savior during His earthly ministry to get this right:

Jesus ministered to and spent a great deal of time with women in need and others who served Him: From the woman caught in adultery or the prostitute who washed His feet to Mary & Martha...

➤ We see Jesus relating to women in ways that greatly upset the religious leaders of His day.

➤ Women are often the good examples!

-- We see Mary, the mother of Jesus rightly hearing the angel Gabriel while Zacharias has to be punished for his arrogance.

-- We see various women faithfully serving Jesus throughout His earthly ministry while the male disciples spend much of their time trying to figure out how to be the top dog.

➤ And of course on Easter morning it was the women who went to the tomb & believed while the men were hiding in fear and doubted!

➤ And now here in the Book of Acts we are told that prominent women have been converted!

Sadly, today ALL of this is often overshadowed by the verses where Paul reminds us about the original creation and how men and women are to properly relate to each other.

➤ Sadly these verses have been abused by many both outside and even inside the Church.

-- The Biblical command that women are not to be in Church leadership does not make them second class Christians any more than Eve was a second class creature because Adam was created first and then she as his helpmeet.

-- A woman having detailed theological discussions at home with her husband rather than with the pastor at church does not make her a second class church member any more than the Proverbs women, whose works were praised in the gates where her husband actually sat, was a second class citizen.

-- Women created to be helpmeets to men are no more second class persons than is Jesus because He is the eternally begotten Son to the Father.

➤ The creation of men and women in the image of God and how they properly relate to one another is a glorious reflection of the nature of the one true God!

➤ And Paul goes on to teach that the love of a man & a woman in their proper marriage roles demonstrates the Savior's love for His bride the Church.

➤ So we need to get all this right!

We need have no fear of seeing strong prominent women in the Scriptures!

As men, we should rejoice that God has given us the helpmeets that we need! *[tell the story of Evangelical Free]*

We ask you to pray for your church leaders on a regular basis and I trust you remember all ten of us when you do so because I can assure you that I, or Theron or Dennis, or Roger or Mark would serve you very poorly without the strong women that God has blessed us with... Linda and Annie and Christine and Susan and Rita are the helpmeets who allow us as men to serve in the gates, and we forget this at our own peril. While in some churches the wives are excluded from all the "church business" we look to their wisdom and counsel because they are the helpmeets that God has placed in our midst. When we work with marriage relationships or marriage counseling for young people we firmly believe this should be done as one flesh...

➤ **Perhaps the Church struggles so much with relationships today because we have put the men forward by themselves as counselors?**

Now of course, it would be just as grave a problem to put just the women forward or to place them in positions of leadership to see if they can do better!

How men and women are to properly relate and what roles they should play is certainly a controversial subject in our nation today, within and without the Church.

- And it serves as a good example for the final lesson of faithfulness that we need to learn from these Saints here at Berea.

Paul & Silas came 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 we have seen in the other cities these concepts would have shaken up the popular thinking among the Jews of that day...

- Just as talking about the proper role for women can do today!

Luke tells us that the reaction in Berea was much different than what we 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 is what is being 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 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!

But 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 framework to help us understand how God works in all of history.

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

Of course the better the training is that 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. Trusting our own individual interpretations, or 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 we had driven into the ditch on this 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 other side of the 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. Thus the younger generation does not think that the older folks understand them because they are not young anymore and they do not understand what is really going on in THEIR lives!

- 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 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.
- In the end you have a group of struggling young couples who simply spend a lot of time sitting around sharing their ignorance.

And of course the old folks get no respect from anyone: What do they know? They are old fashioned and did not even have the Internet when they were young and can't figure out how to use an I-pad!

- Sadly, we 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 have problems with other authority, 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 who grow 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...

- 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 and females, having the faith to be good Bereans requires maturity and Godly wisdom.

The extremes are pretty easy to spot: --- If Theron and I started passing out the Book of Mormon next week, you would all be gone in short order. On the other hand, 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 I might have suggested or take a conclusion that I have drawn back to the Scriptures to see if what I 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 canon does not eliminate our need to be good Bereans
[give examples of teachers impacting our lives: Schaeffer, Bahnsen, Jordon and now Pastors Wilson & Liethart]

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:

"'Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, 17 Learn to do good; Seek justice, Rebuke the oppressor; Defend the fatherless, Plead for the widow. 18 "Come now, and let us reason together," Says the Lord, "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."