

# **The Bereans — Nobility in the Eyes of God**

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*[All Scriptures are quoted from the American Standard Version unless otherwise stated. - tlm]*

A young lady from Illinois had moved to San Diego, California. Soon after settling in, she went on a retreat with some members of the church she attended. One day as they were walking along a trail, the young lady became fascinated with the different kinds of vegetation. She kept stopping and asking about the different plants. Having lived in the middle of the United States where there was a much different climate, she had never seen these plants before. Those with her could not answer many of her questions. They knew names of some of the plants, but they had never really taken the time to examine them closely and learn more about them. If a botanist had been along, he would have probably been able to answer every question the young lady had about those plants. Why? The botanist has an interest in the study of plant life. The botanist will study and investigate every little detail about different plants and learn all they can about them. The ordinary person might look at a plant and see beauty. He might have questions or he might look in amazement at the design and delicacy of the plant. The ordinary person might enjoy the aesthetic value, functional value, or some other value of the plant. Yet, that is as far as it goes. He is not like the botanist. He does not have the mind that opens up with curiosity to all of the wonders of the plant. He does not have the mind to investigate, study, and learn all he can about the plant.

When it comes to the Word of God, there are many who have only an ordinary interest. They are like those who see plants along the pathway and pay little attention. Yet there are others who, like the botanist regarding plant life, have a mind to investigate, to study, and to learn all they can about and from God's Word.

Consider those who assembled at the synagogue in Berea, a city visited by Paul on his second missionary journey. They were considered more noble than those who had assembled at the synagogue at Thessalonica (Acts 17:11). "Noble" is from the Greek word *eugenees*, meaning "of high or noble birth; of high social status; open minded" (Newman). "It came to signify, however, a noble-minded person, i.e., one who had high intellectual and ethical traits. It suggests one who is open to the evidence" (Jackson 215). Just how were those of Berea described that enabled the Holy Spirit, through Luke the writer, to call them noble? They received the word with all readiness of mind and they examined the scriptures daily (Acts 17:11). These two phrases will now be carefully observed and application will be made.

## **They Received the Word with All Readiness of Mind**

The manner in which one hears is extremely important. Jesus often said, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Luke 8:8). He continually warned others to take heed how they heard and what they heard (e.g., Luke 8:18; Mark 4:24). The Bereans are an example of how one should hear. They received the word with all readiness of mind.

Note first that the Bereans were noble because they received something (Acts 17:11). "Received" is from the Greek word, *dechomai*. Thayer defines it as "to receive favorably, give ear to, embrace, make one's own, approve, not to reject." Vine writes of it, "'to receive by deliberate and ready reception of what is offered,' is used of...the favorable reception of testimony and teaching... 'ye accepted,' ...adding

the idea of appropriation, to the heart.” James uses it in his epistle, “Wherefore putting away all filthiness and overflowing of wickedness, **receive** [emphasis - TLM] with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls” (James 1:21).

What was it that the Bereans received? They received the word preached by Paul. That word was the same word he preached wherever he went. Earlier, Paul preached to those at Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-9). Many did not receive that word. However, Paul later wrote to those at Thessalonica who did receive his word,\

And for this cause we also thank God without ceasing, that, when Ye received from us the word of the message, (even the word) of God, Ye accepted (it) not (as) the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God, which also worketh in you that believe (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

They had accepted, or had received (it is from the same Greek word as used by Luke in Acts 17:11), that which Paul had preached unto them as the very Word of God. Therefore, the Bereans, also, received the Word of God.

How did the Bereans receive that which Paul delivered unto them? They received it with all readiness of mind. That phrase is from *prothumia*, meaning “readiness, willingness, eagerness, zeal” (Liddell). Jackson wrote, “with ‘all readiness of mind’ (*prothumia* - *pro*, forward and *thumos*, mind — almost like stretching the mind forward, i.e., anxious to learn)” (216). The wisdom of receiving teaching with a ready mind is seen from the Proverbs (Proverbs 15:14; Proverbs 18:15; Proverbs 24:5).

There are, however, those who are not like the Bereans. They do not have the heart and mind to willingly and eagerly receive instruction.

There are those who are “dull of hearing.” For instance, consider the Jewish Christians, the Hebrews to which the epistle was written. Being “dull of hearing,” the matter of Jesus being High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek was “hard of interpretation (Hebrews 5:11cf.),” or “hard to explain (NKJV),” to the Hebrews. To be “dull of hearing” “implies a deterioration on the hearer’s part” (Vincent), or “slow and sluggish in mind as well as in the ears” (Robertson). Therefore, to be dull of hearing means to be slow, sluggish in hearing. It wasn’t that the author had difficulty expressing himself. It was that they had difficulty understanding what he expressed because of their sluggishness of hearing. There are many reasons for one becoming dull of hearing. Some become dull of hearing due to prejudice, preconceived ideas, such as the Jews who sought to kill Jesus after He healed the man at the Pool of Bethesda (John 5:38-40cf.). Others are dull of hearing due to a lack of study and knowledge, such as the Sadducees who asked Jesus about the resurrection (Matthew 22:29). As a result of their dull hearing, they rejected the idea of the resurrection, of angels, and of the heavenly existence. Undoubtedly, there are other reasons, as well, for being dull of hearing.

Another group different from the Bereans are those who do not hear at all. The Jews to whom Jesus spoke in the temple did not allow His word to have free course in them (John 8:37, 43). That His word did not have free course indicates they had no room, or made no room, for His word. They did not hear Jesus’ words. It was not a physical problem. They heard the words physically. However, they were unable to hear by reason of their state of mind. It was a spiritual problem. They refused to hear. They

had closed their eyes to the truth. Such a problem was also demonstrated when Stephen spoke to the Jewish council (Acts 7:51cf.). There are many today who have the same problem. They close their eyes to the truth of God's Word. All of these are described by the parable of the soils. The seeds that fell upon the pathway would not take root but were scooped up by the birds. That hardened ground describes the hardened heart that will not receive God's word. (Luke 8:4-15).

Those who are not like the Bereans, i.e., they do not willingly accept the instruction of the preaching of God's Word, fit the description of God's people of the Old Testament as described by Hosea. They are destroyed for lack of knowledge (Hosea 4:6).

Men today must develop hearts that are receptive to God's Word. They must be willing, ready, to receive instruction. For man must be obedient to God if he is to receive salvation (Hebrews 5:9). Those who refuse to obey will be lost (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9). There must be an adherence to the words of James, "Wherefore putting away all filthiness and overflowing of wickedness, receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls" (James 1:21). One must also realize, however, that once he has received the Word of God and been baptized into Christ (Acts 2:41), he has merely begun the process. He has been forgiven of his sins (Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16), but he is a babe in Christ. The process of salvation continues. Consider the words of Peter, "...as newborn babes, long for the spiritual milk which is without guile, that ye may grow thereby unto salvation" (1 Peter 2:2).

### **They Examined the Scriptures Daily**

In the second place, the Bereans were noble because they examined the Scriptures daily (Acts 17:11). The word translated "examined" is from the Greek *anakrino*. Thayer says of this word, "(*anakrino*) properly, by looking through a series (*ana*) of objects or particulars to distinguish (*krino*) or search after; a. to investigate, examine, inquire into, scrutinize, sift, question." Vine describes the noun form, *anakrasis* as follows: "from *ana*, 'up or through,' and *krino*, 'to distinguish,' was a legal term among the Greeks, denoting the preliminary investigation for gathering evidence for the information of the judges." Thus, the Bereans were investigating and scrutinizing the Scriptures. "Scriptures" refers to those Sacred Writings of the Old Testament Scriptures that Timothy was taught (2 Timothy 3:15). These were the Scriptures that were read and taught in the synagogues of the Jews. Recall Jesus, when he returned to Nazareth during His ministry, stood in the synagogue on the Sabbath day and read from the book of the prophet Isaiah (Luke 4:16ff). The Bereans would have been familiar with these as they were read weekly on the Sabbath.

The Bereans were diligent in their investigation. They searched the Scriptures daily, literally, during the day. The Greek phrase is translated "daily" or "every day." It is used in English translations as an adverb meaning "occurring, made, or acted upon every day" (Webster).

It can be seen from this that the examination of the Scriptures by the Bereans was more than a mere cursory reading of the Scriptures daily. It was a thorough examination, an investigation, of the Scriptures. And what was the purpose of the investigation? It was to see whether the things being preached were correct (Acts 17:11). It would be noble indeed if people today would examine the Scriptures daily. There are too many who leave the examination to other men, preachers and other religious leaders. They then rely upon them to tell them God's Word, to tell them what to do. Those

Bereans did not even leave such to the inspired apostle Paul, but they “examined the Scriptures daily” to see that the things he was preaching were according to the Word of God. People would do well to do likewise today. After all, on the day of judgment each individual will be responsible before God (Romans 14:12).

Other noble reasons can be found in God’s Word for “examining the Scriptures.” Joshua was told by God, “This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate thereon day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success” (Joshua 1:8). Joshua was to be obedient to all the Law, to all of God’s Word. Doing such would make his life before God prosperous and successful. In order to do that, he was instructed to not only read the law recorded by Moses, but he was to meditate day and night upon it. Today, disciples of Christ are expected to observe all that Jesus commands (Matthew 28:19-20). How can one expect to do that without thoroughly examining His word and meditating upon it daily? Another noble reason for meditating on God’s Word is that it gives understanding. As the Psalmist recorded, “I have more understanding than all my teachers; for thy testimonies are my meditation” (Psalm 119:99). A third noble reason is also found in the Psalms. “I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word” (Psalm 119:16). In the parable of the soils (Luke 8), those described by the seed falling on both the rocky ground and on the thorny ground failed to exhibit this principle. They did not delight themselves in the Word of God.

### Conclusion

What application can be made from observing the nobility of the Bereans? When the Word of God is properly received, it will bear fruit (Luke 8:15; Isaiah 55:10-11). For the one who is not already a Christian, Christians will be produced. That is exactly what happened at Berea (Acts 17:12). Today, when one investigates God’s plan of salvation as revealed in the Scriptures, it will produce faith (Romans 10:17). It will produce one who will confess that faith that Jesus is the resurrected Christ (Romans 10:9-10). It will produce one who will obediently submit to baptism that his sins can be washed away (Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16). When one who is already a Christian continues to examine the Scriptures, he will be better prepared to live the Christian life (Hebrews 5:12-14). In the words of Peter, “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18).

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