

The Bereans

by Paris Reidhead

The sermon emphasizes the importance of Bible study, taking personal responsibility for our understanding of the word, and coming to the word of God with an open mind and heart.

Duration: 35:54

Scripture: Acts 17:10

Topics: "Bereans"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of being men and women of the book, who diligently study and meditate on the scriptures. He prays for God to give them disciplined minds, yielded hearts, and open wills, so they can be vessels for the revelation of God's glory. The speaker encourages the congregation to search the scriptures with open minds and hearts, allowing God to speak to them. He warns against the bondage of intellectual chains that hinder understanding of God's word, citing the example of the Pharisees who prioritized traditions over the word of God.

Transcript

Will you turn, please, to Acts, chapter 17. Our scripture, foundation for the message via Berean, is found in the three verses, 10 through 12, in this seventeenth chapter of Acts. Let me read them for you.

And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea, who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed, also of honorable women, which were Greeks, and of men not a few.

This portion of scripture, three verses, introduces us to one of the most important principles of a happy, fruitful, youthful Christian life, namely that of Bible study, Bible reading, and Bible meditation. It might be fairly stated that you are today as mature a Christian, as your understanding of the word is mature. You have grown in relation to not just your intellectual comprehension of what the pages teach, but insight into the scripture, and obedience to what you've seen.

The text tells us a great deal about the Jews, about the speaker Paul, and about the people. Do you remember that our Lord Jesus Christ spoke of the Jews and their avid hunger for the word of God, the Bible? He said, Ye search the scriptures, for ye think that in them ye have eternal life. Rather feeling that eternal life consisted in the fact that they had the oracles of God, that they had the prophets, that they had

the writings, that God had committed to this nation Israel his revelation, and that since they had that revelation, in it was life.

But you will understand that there was a condemnation, an indictment, in the word that our Lord said, Ye search the scriptures, for ye think that in them ye have eternal life. And he had come to say that life was in him and not in the scripture. And we recognize this to be a principle.

Salvation does not consist in a verse, nor a structure of verses. It doesn't consist in a doctrine, nor does it consist in explanations of verses or doctrines, nor does it even consist in a decision or a religious ceremony. Salvation is a person.

This do the Jews fail to see. David saw it. He said, Jehovah is my light and my salvation.

The Jews didn't see it. They thought that the writings of David were their salvation. They thought that salvation consisted in the inscriptions made by the faithful pen of the writers, the scribes of other days, that had carefully recorded what Moses had said.

And perhaps even the very process of communicating the word of God contributed to this. For you realize that in the day of Christ, all the scriptures that they had, had been hand copied. One, and it was on large scroll, many feet long.

One error was sufficient to have the whole scroll destroyed. And you can recognize that in this, there would be very, very few copies of the scripture available. Therefore, it would be treasured by them.

It would be held as their greatest national asset, this revelation from God, and so be considered by the leaders of the people, as well as by the people themselves. But I'm confident that our Lord not only was indicting them because they failed to recognize that the scripture revealed God, whom they were to know, and had short sightedly stopped with just the impression of ink on paper, parchment. But he also had a further indictment when he said the tradition of the elders has made the word of God of none effect.

For you will see in searching the scriptures, they were not necessarily trying to find out what God said, but they were trying to prove the point of view of their particular commentator. The Talmud, as you may recollect, was a writing or collection of the comments that had been made by the rabbis in centuries past. If you want to go to sleep and you're having trouble and you don't feel as though you are going to profit from a sleeping pill, your conscience won't allow you to take it.

If you were to read a few pages of the Talmud, I am confident that it would have the same soporific effect and you'd shortly be asleep. Because there's something quite deadening about reading that Rabbi Ben Israel said, but Rabbi Ben Joseph said that what he said wasn't right. And so, and on and on it goes in the infinitesimal argument around obscure points of law.

I haven't yet found where they actually debated whether how many angels could stand on the head of a pin, but there were points as meaningless as this that had engaged the best minds of Israel as through the years they had constructed a substitute for the pure word of God. That substitute was the comments of the learned and men who either to achieve a name for themselves disagreed with the ones that had preceded them, or to avoid moral responsibility, tried to explain away the clear intent of the word. But whatever the motivation, they had multiplied words to almost no end and had given to Israel a body of teaching which had destroyed the effectiveness of the word of God.

And our Lord condemned this. And I am confident that he condemns it to the present, for I am sure that the ills of that day have not been exterminated by the change of the calendar, but they continue until the present. I am sure that today there are many Christians who I would much rather be told what they believe than to search the scripture and find out what it teaches.

I was guest in a home in Jacksonville, Florida some years ago. And the lady in the home had been wonderfully healed. God had touched her body in a marvelous way.

And neighbors moved in from another part of the city. And so one day in conversation, she testified to what the Lord had done in her body. And the woman next door was delighted with it.

But she said, well, that's good. Let me think about it and let me talk with my pastor. So she came back a little while later and said, you know, we, and she named our church, that church, said, we in our church don't believe in healing.

And therefore, I don't want to talk to you about it anymore because we don't believe in it. She hadn't gone to the scripture to find out what it was. She had allowed the fact that she was somehow identified with the group to have closed her mind to a whole body of clear teaching in the word.

And of course, to the subsequent blessing that God might have brought into her life. But let me understand this, that when the case of her need, when she is brought face to face with the fact that the doctors have said, well, there's nothing more we can do. She's going to remember where it was she talked with whom about what, and all of a sudden it's going to become strikingly important to her to find out more.

But at this particular time, she's prepared to allow group thinking to replace the personal responsibility of finding out what the word of God says. This of course was the crime of the Pharisees. This was the thing that God condemned, that they were absolutely unprepared to go to the word and they were prepared to accept rather what rabbi so-and-so had said rather than what God said.

And where this occurs today in your life or mine, whenever our personal prejudice obscures the word of God, we are guilty with the sin of the Pharisees and the sin of Israel. We recognize that there's always this possibility. I have related to some of you the chains in which unconsciously, for I'm sure that my teachers were in no sense blacksmiths, they weren't deliberately forging chains.

But nevertheless, I drank quite deeply of what I received in instruction. And it turned out that what I had was molten steel that did form chains around my mind and heart. But as a pastor in Little Falls, Minnesota, I was quite impressed with the portion of scripture that I had read and so prepared a message I thought to deliver the following Lord's Day.

But all of a sudden I began to realize that this was a little discordant note with some of my teaching. And so just to check on can I say whether or not it was kosher, I turned to one of the books that was there and sought to find out whether my interpretation was borne out by these writers whom I esteemed so highly. And to my grief and chagrin, I discovered that it wasn't, that I had indulged unconsciously and unwittingly in mild heresy.

And so I destroyed the text. I destroyed the manuscript of the message. I tore it in two and threw it in the wastebasket.

But later, I began to fear that someone might, or first I put it in a pigeonhole in my roll top desk and left it there. But then I realized that something might happen to me and my effects be viewed by one of my colleagues who would find this little evidence of heresy and that might obscure my memory if I should happen to die in the interim and not dispose of it. So I tore it in two.

But then again, I thought that some eagle eye might find this in the refuge as it was carried away and still would involve me with heresy. So without realizing that I was shaking my chains and clanking them so that all could hear, I took up half of it and tore it into small pieces, left it in that wastebasket, tore the other in small pieces, and deposited it in a waste barrel down the hall, knowing now that I'd destroyed once and for all the evidence of my heresy. And never realized at the time what intolerable bondage had afflicted me, for I assure you that chains around the ankle are infinitely easier to bear than chains around the intellect.

Chains around the mind and chains around the spirit are a burden too heavy for humans to have to carry. Infinitely better to be in stocks in the deepest dungeon than to have chains around your mind that obscure the word of God and keep you from finding out what it says, because so-and-so might not agree with my point of view. And this was the crime of the Pharisees, the traditions, the teachings of the elders that made the word of God of none effect, and consequently they were closed to what God would say and what God would do.

And if I speak to any who are suffering from such bondage, I pity you. I remember the days when ankles of my mind and heart were galled by the insufferable burden of such chains, and I thank God that he's delivered me from them. I covet for you similar liberty, that you can say, I want the word, all of it, nothing more, don't take me past it, nothing less, don't stop short of it, nothing else, don't substitute for it, I want the word.

We will not allow ourselves to be brought into the bondage of the Jews that the Lord condemned. We will not allow ourselves to be brought in bondage to writers of the past. I'm grateful for them, but if it had been that one had had the last insight into all of the word of God, there would have been no reason for any of the rest of us having obeyed the injunction which says, search the scriptures or study to show thyself approved under God, or give attendance to reading or meditate in these things.

I do not believe that the sum of truth of the word of God is comprised in any or all of the writings of the past. Personally, I found great nourishment of heart and encouragement of mind by reading the Puritans. But some of my brethren have become almost in bondage to the Puritans, which bondage I again reject.

And I do not care whether I may disagree with Charles Spurgeon, if he'd lived to my day, he'd have agreed with me, I will assume. And so I will be nourished by what he wrote, but I will not be bound by what he taught. And the same is true with anyone else, whoever noble they may be.

I utterly refuse, categorically refuse to accept the writings of the finest of the teachers as being the last word to be said on any subject. Now, mind you, with this, there are certain subjects which are completely closed, as far as I'm concerned. Don't come to me and say, let's get into a discussion as to whether or not the Bible is the inspired word of God.

Years ago, I realized that this issue was one that would have to be settled on the basis of my relationship to the Lord, and I settled it there. And it's not open for discussion. I have no argument with anyone.

I frankly feel that the polemic discussion on this, the epistemological battle that's gone on for so many years in Christendom is long past due and men are shouting at their shadows. The ones who believe that the Bible is the word of God will not be swayed. And the ones who don't, won't be taught until they meet God in some crisis of revelation.

And then all of a sudden they begin to say, well, if that was true, then this may be true. So I can't even be involved in discussion on this. I've passed that point.

As Paul said, I have there in my body, the marks of the Lord Jesus trouble me no more. I, this is settled. I am convinced that holy men of old spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

I don't understand how, but God didn't ask me to understand how. And as long as the physicists have not defined electricity to their satisfaction, mine, I'm satisfied, but they don't seem to be, then I'm not going to be troubled about the fact that I can't explain how, but I know this is the word of God. Furthermore, I believe that Jesus Christ is God come in the flesh.

This isn't open to discussion or debate or question or argument. I'm not even in a position to even countenance the question in regard to it. I am convinced that that holy child born of Mary was none other than the eternal God by whom all things were made and in him dwelt the fullness of the Godhead.

Now this, this bears no place of argument. I have passed that point. I believe in the bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead that he was laid in the tomb, cold and death, and that he was raised bodily from the dead.

And there's that body at the right hand of the father bearing all the five marks of his suffering. And it's, don't ask me how, I don't know how, but I know that this is so, and I'm past the point of discussion or argument or debate. I don't even need to bring the matter up as far as I'm concerned.

And if anyone does, let them speculate as they will. But if they had reached the place of certainty that I have, then there would be a similar rejection of any discussion. Now there's a great many things in the Scripture that I hold as opinions.

Do you? Do you make a distinction between your convictions and your opinions? You know, most of the major splits in church history came because men elevated opinions to the rank of convictions and fought for their opinions as though they were convictions. It's a good thing to have some convictions for which you're prepared to die. And it's another thing to have some opinions that you're prepared to discuss.

And I have tried to keep the two separate because I don't want to die for a will of the wisp. I don't want to die for something that I'll find out a little later wasn't as so as I thought it was. There are some things for which I'm prepared to die.

There's some things that we can discuss. For we only see through a glass darkly in respect to these. So let's keep them separate, shall we? Let's then approach the Word of God from the standpoint of not so much trying to prove other things of which we're certain or to disprove the arguments of others.

This seems a waste of time. Let's come to the Word of God as did the Bereans. Let's recognize that the Word of God was given by inspiration of God for a purpose.

Paul describes that purpose when he says all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, truly furnished unto every good word. Let's recognize that this is the purpose of the Word of God. It is to bring you to that place in your own personal pilgrimage where you know him whom to know is life eternal, where you come past the point of guessing or hoping or thinking but you know.

This is the first thing that the Bereans were expected to find out, that since Jesus Christ is God, since he died for sinners and since he has been raised from the dead, he is alive to save all that come unto God by him. Now if I speak to someone that is a sinner and uncertain of your relationship with God, I commend to you the pattern of the Bereans. I am sure that as you read the Word of God you're going to discover how holy God is.

For on every page this is reaffirmed, it's stated in every way that God can think to say it to the minds of men, that God is holy. Then you're going to discover that you're a sinner. This is going to be the results of the Bereans and you coming to the Word of God.

For as you read this book you will find that it has unveiled to you your heart. Maybe the panaceas of men and the inventions of men have obscured the depths of iniquity in your spirit, but God proposes to bring you in transparent honesty to see yourself. And so if you will read the Word of God you will discover that it shows you your sin.

It was that company of people in Africa listening as the missionary read Romans 1 that said, Jehovah has been looking into our huts at night. He knows us. He's seen us.

And it is as you read the Word of God, as you search the Scripture, that you're going to discover the abysmal depths of iniquity in your heart. If you have not seen that then it is simply that somehow in all of religious activity and participation you have kept yourself from the Word of God. Many times this happens.

Many times children are grown up and raised in Christian homes, taken through the formula of Church membership and introduction into the Christian community, know a few verses of Scripture, but they never actually expose their hearts to the Word of God and they never see themselves. Then there may come a time in some future ministry when they're oppressed again to the Word and the Word does its work and they see themselves. I've had some that after years of professing to be Christians, pressed to the Word of God, have cried out, how can anyone with such a wicked heart be a Christian? Well, the answer isn't that they weren't necessarily born again.

I have no questions to that because subsequent attitudes reveal this. But you see they had come in in such a way that they had missed one of the functions of the Word of God. They had never seen themselves.

And before there could be any further spiritual progress, it was necessary for them to see themselves. There were some here that would bear witness to the fact that after years, after they had been brought into the relationship of the Church as professing and real Christians, no question, as far as their attitude was concerned, they for the first time saw their hearts. Because somehow in the process of getting into the Church they had avoided doing what the Bereans did.

Oh, how valuable it would be if in our evangelism we could take the unsaved as did our forefathers of other generations and bring them face to face with the God of the Bible so that they saw that he is holy.

And the teachings of the Bible, that they saw that they were sinners until slain by the truth of God, crushed by the revelation of their unworthiness, smitten through by the arrow of God's truth, they cry out as did sinners of other days, God be merciful to me, a sinner, and save me for Jesus' sake. This we long for and pray for.

With this we believe every preacher should be a preacher of righteousness to the effect of seeing people slain by the truth of God. This is the first effect of it. Or if we could recognize that our generation is biblically illiterate, as we think of this vast city in which we're engaged in the responsibility of evangelism.

It's imperative if we're to see a reaping that we have a sowing. When evangelism awakens to the fact that there cannot be a reaping without a sowing, then we are in the way where we'll engage in the laborious task of pulling stumps, hauling rocks, and piling up the fallow ground of human hearts and sowing the word of God. If we could go into every home in a mile radius of the church and month after month carry truth exalting the righteousness of God, and the holiness of God, and the majesty of God, and the sinfulness of sin, and the lost estate of sinners, and do that month after month after month, and not even tell them how to be saved, except to say, when you're in trouble, come here.

Perhaps we'd have the door hearing a knock again, and the phone hearing a ring again, and smitten sinners crying out as they did in Acts 1 and 2, what shall I do to be saved? Unfortunately, we try to tell them how before they know why, and so they're short-circuited because they haven't found any reason for the how, and thus they lose all interest in it, and close their minds to the entrance of his truth. This is the first effect of it, a revelation of ourselves in the light of how holy God is. And of course, searching the scripture invariably brings to us a revelation of how gracious God is in Jesus Christ.

How tragic it is that so many have seen that Christ died for them, and this is the fullness of what they've seen. I am confident that with what Paul tells us of his teaching, that when these Bereans went home, they not only went home to find out from the scriptures which to them, remember, was the Old Testament, that Jesus Christ died for them, but they also would have been told and taught that they died with him. For when he wrote to the Church of Rome, similar pagans for the most part, that had been brought out of death into life, he said, knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Christ, I am confident that he wanted them to know as the very outset, that the Lord Jesus Christ was not only interested in saving them from the result of what they had done, but saving them from him themselves.

I am sure from everything I learned of Paul's preaching, that he preached a message of full salvation, not only from the penalty of sin as something apart from the power of sin, but just as the Lord Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost, and came to save his people from their sins, they went home to search the scripture and see if it was true, that Jesus Christ could have died, that the Lamb could have died to have saved them from the power of sin. You see it, and now the word is infinitely clearer because you have the New Testament, which on so many places and so fully declares that the day Jesus Christ died, you died. He not only died for you, but he died as you.

He not only died to save you from hell, but to save you from yourself. He not only died to save you from the penalty of what you had done, but from the power of sin in your heart and life. And it is the searching of the scriptures that brings you face to face with this.

And so it was that as Paul commended them to the word and the word to them, this they would have seen and this you will see. It is therefore not only to see in the word as we come to it and search it diligently, that he died to save us from the power of sin, but his purpose further was to make us by his cleansing,

redeeming grace, vehicles for his presence. It is the word of God that clearly teaches, that sets forth an unmistakable clarity, that the intent of God in grace was not just to take you where he is when you die, but to come where you are while you're alive.

And that the Lord Jesus Christ not only wanted you to live in the mansion he's preparing for you over there, but he wanted to live in the mansion that you have for him here. That mansion being your body, your personality. He wanted you to present to him the body that he had made with such care, that it might be to him the vehicle by which he could manifest himself again among men and live again his life out through you.

This you will see in a careful searching of the scripture, that the normal Christian life is not for you to pull by your bootstraps and say, now I'm going to try so hard to be the kind of a person Jesus wants me to be, but it is to recognize that the Lord Jesus knew you couldn't be the kind of a person that he wants you to be, and only he could, and he so wonderfully, graciously made it possible, by taking you with him where he went to the cross and the tomb, that he could come with you where you are to live in you his resurrection life. You see this in the searching of the scripture. The Bereans would have seen this.

They would have also have discovered that it was the intent of the head of the church that all of the victory of the prince of the church, the Lord Jesus Christ, be manifest through his members, and that he thus gave gifts unto men. These gifts were abilities compensating for the loss sustained by sin, and that the supernatural gifts of the spirit belong in the church, for without them the church is incapable of doing, laboring in anything more really, in a sense, than the energies they have possessed before. But that these gifts that he gave when he let captivity captive, were his means of compensating to his body, to the church, for the loss sustained by sin, and that every member of the body of Christ has a ministry, has a gift, has a place, and that it was his intention that evangelists and pastors and teachers be given by him to the church for the purpose of leading the members of the church into this relationship with him which is normal, that every Christian might be an effective witness for him.

This you'll see in searching the scripture. You will discover that this was his plan. You will discover this was his program.

This is the reason why I say, be a Berean. Do as did these whom went from the preaching of the word to search the scripture. Does it say that you are the sinner that we have reputed and reported you to be? Does it say that this is what man is, that what I am, what you are, dead in trespasses and sins? Look to the word and find out.

Search the scriptures as did these, whether these things were so. Does it say that the Lord Jesus died to save us from the penalty of sin, that it's not by works of righteousness which we have done? Search the scripture. Find whether these things be so.

Does it say that he died to save us from the power of sin? Search the scripture and discover that he said, knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Christ, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not be the slaves of sin. Does it say that we are to give to him these personalities, present your bodies a living sacrifice wholly acceptable under God, which is your reasonable service? Does it say that we are to be filled with his fullness, that we might be being filled with the Spirit, that Christ may take up his lasting dwelling place in your hearts through faith, that you being rooted and foundationed in love may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height, and to experience the love of Christ which passes intelligence that you might be filled unto all of the

fullness of God? Search the scriptures, whether these things be so. When you find that they're so, then you've discovered what you must do.

It's not only to find out that they're so, to sit back in contemplation and approbation and say, isn't that nice? Having first found that it is so, then one has to commit himself to the place where we wait before the Lord till any hindrances standing in the way are removed, and he can make so in us, but so in the Word. This then is the ultimate outworking of being a Berean. Not to become just an expert with a pencil and a paper and an outline and a notebook and be able to alliterate all the chapters.

I think of one dear person who came to me down in Augusta, Georgia, seated on the home, the front porch of friends. She looked into my face and said, you know, I have a great need, and began to describe it. And I said, you know, I really feel that this is something the Lord is using you to press you to himself.

Oh yeah, she said, yeah, I know what you're thinking of. You're thinking of Ephesians. The first chapter is this, and the second chapter is this.

No, you see, I know Ephesians. My heart just ached, for I couldn't say one word. She knew Ephesians.

Listen, I've been 25 years reading Ephesians more frequently and more fully and more devotedly than any other book, and I don't know it. It's a world. It's a world of revelation.

Though how easy it is for a little outlander and a clever acrostic to rob us of the word of God. Let's have the eyeglasses taken off and the blinds taken off and come with devotion to the portions we know best and say, oh God, I see nothing as I ought to see. I know nothing as I ought to know.

I would become a believer in the very areas of truth that I've so smugly said were mine. I now confess I know only I see as men as trees walking. I've only begun to see the very barest outline and so little of the details.

May God put into our hearts today, however long we've been in the way, however far we've come in the pilgrimage, such a spirit as is here commended, and might we become of the nobler sort who search the scriptures to see whether these things be solved. And we become men of the book and we live in the book. Women of the book.

Not trying to smugly get outlines that can reveal our memories and our erudition and our skill, but we become men who eat the living bread and drink at the fountain of living water and breathe the breath of heaven until that which is imprinted on the page becomes enlivened in us. This, I believe, is what characterizes the experience. And this is why Paul was so wise.

I consider him to be a cultist who says, listen to me, don't check it in the word. He only can take his place as a preacher of the word of God who says, I give you what best I know, but you take it to the word. And if the word doesn't agree with what I've said, oh, renounce me, but cling to the book.

Cling to the word. And this is what Paul did. No one is ever afraid of sending a person to the word of God if his only desire is that they be nourished in the word.

You don't need to go to outlines and books and acrostics if you have him to teach you the spirit of God and the word from which you're taught. Let's be Berean, shall we? Give ourselves to this and have it said of us that those, they were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all

readiness of mind and searched the scriptures daily. What are those things? I commend you to the book and the God of the book.

And let the book be not the end of your searching, but the means by which you come to know him, whom to know is life eternal. Shall we pray? How grateful we are to thee, our father, that there's not a person here that needs take the pastor home to understand the word, but the very one who inspired holy men of old to read it, to write it, is there to unfold it. To those who with devout and earnest and obedient hearts come and are willing to submit what they see to what the church has seen in the past.

Grant, our father, that this that is thou has commended as being more noble than others shall become true of us, and that it shall be said by those who know us best that in this place there's a people that search the scriptures. They're not just cultists that absect outlines and schemes, but there are men and women who live in the word and in whom the word is lived, both living and written. Oh, how we long that our Lord Jesus Christ should find in us minds that have been disciplined, hearts that have been yielded, bodies that have been presented, wills that are open, that we can be vessels and vehicles for the revelation of how glorious he is.

So to that end make us Bereans. Grant that it shall be a pledge that each of us make in our own hearts to thee, that in a new measure we'll give ourselves to the reading of the word and the attendance to reading and meditation in the word, searching the scriptures, studying the word, knowing that all scripture is given by inspiration of thee and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that we may be mature, truly furnished to every good work. Grant that this may characterize us as on the weekend we go to the retreat and then beginning the Lord's day in the meetings, we shall search the scriptures with open minds and hearts to let these speak to us.

For Jesus' sake. Amen. Let us stand for the benediction.

Now may the love of God the Father, the communion and fellowship of the Holy Spirit, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be and abide with us all. Amen.

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