

The Great Stories of the Early Church
60-Paul and Silas 11
They Searched the Scriptures
Acts 17:1-12

- 1 Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews:
- 2 And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures,
- 3 Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.
- 4 And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.
- 5 But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people.
- 6 And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also;
- 7 Whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus.
- 8 And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things.
- 9 And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the other, they let them go.
- 10 And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews.
- 11 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.
- 12 Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few. KJV

Introduction:

We looked last week at the issue of God's commendation of these people through Luke's comment. Today we want to consider what it was they were actually doing and how important it is for us to follow their example.

First of all, we should remember that these people did not have Bibles in their homes. The scriptures were kept at the synagogue. But they were not kept in a book or even a set of books as we think about for no such things existed. They were kept in a large cabinet which covered one of the walls with cubbyholes large enough to hold the huge scrolls in which the scriptures were written. Searching the scriptures meant going to the synagogue and carefully pulling out scrolls, gently unrolling them and then searching for the piece of scripture one wanted. The books were not divided into chapters and verses like our bibles, so searching for something in Isaiah, Jeremiah, or Ezekiel was quite challenging.

This truly was an enormous task for which they were being commended.

But Paul had upset their world and rearranged many of their ideas concerning the Messiah and what His coming meant. They were obviously not of the same thought processes as Simeon and Anna who had met Mary, Joseph, and Jesus in the temple at His circumcision. More than likely they had the same expectations that many had in their day, The Messiah would come and revive the throne of David, drive the occupiers out of the land and establish the Golden Kingdom for which they all desperately longed.

Imagine this. You are lost in a jungle to which you have never been, but you have a map and you are using it to find your way out. Along the way you happen upon an experienced explorer to whom you explain your dilemma and show him your map. He takes the map and explains that you have been reading it wrong, that what you thought was north was really west and you are further from home than you were when you started.

Suddenly, the map becomes a new thing of interest to you. You begin to study it more intently and you see how wrong you have been. It is necessary for you to go back to the point where you started the journey and begin again, but this time, using the same document you make every decision differently. Soon you are back in familiar territory and soon you are home again.

It was much the same with these Jews at Berea. They were obviously people who wanted to know what the Lord had recorded in His Word and they were very interested in understanding as much as they could. But their map was wrong. The suppositions with which they came to the scriptures had them reading the words but with a skewed comprehension of what they meant.

The character traits that Luke associated with the description 'more noble' are fascinating.

They 'received' the Word

They possessed a 'readiness of mind'

and

The 'searched the scriptures....whether those things were so.

Bottom line is they were interested in what was true.

They did not presume that they had all information

or

That the conclusions they had already reached were the sum total of all things.

Like any true student of truth they were *ready* to change their minds but IF and ONLY IF evidence was presented which was worthy of their consideration and consistent with the Word of God.

But there is another element here, a *curiosity* which led them to consider new information, again, provided that information was worthy of their attention.

Honest seekers after truth are indeed a rare breed. They are far different from the foolishly 'open-minded' who are willing to hear and considered *anything* regardless of whether it has any valid worth or not.

Honest seekers love truth but also hold to the discipline that truth must be verified, must have an objective standard, and must be considered in light of truth already known. They are willing to be challenged but they will challenge right back. They will investigate trustworthy sources to see if the new information they are receiving can be proven beyond doubt. Then *and only then* will they bring a new idea into their mind as a truth to be embraced.

But this openness was refreshing to Luke and worthy of note. It was evidence that something had been going on at Berea long before Paul and his little company arrived. The Spirit of God, if you will, had already been at work preparing students to be challenged and granting them an openness to the gospel message that was coming.

When they heard Paul they realized that they needed to start all over, go back to the beginning and start afresh. Now, every decision was a different one and soon they began to feel comfortable with Paul's map and before long they were in communion with God, repenting of their sins, and believing on the Savior Who had died on the cross in Jerusalem and then rose again. In a sense everything was the same but in another sense everything was new.

So, why is searching the scriptures necessary and why is it such a big deal to God?

I. First of all, because there is a very real sense that it is all you have.

You are lost on a ball of rock that is hurtling toward eternity at breakneck speed. You yourself are racing toward death at a rate of 60 seconds per minute. There is one and only one way to find safety and that book is it. Get it wrong and the consequences are horrible beyond imagination. Jesus said as much to the Pharisees.

John 5:39-40

39 Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.

40 And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life. KJV

Many of them died in their sins because they read the scriptures wrong.

I have no doubt that these Jews at Berea saw that plainly and clearly which was the reason for their urgency in finding out if Paul was telling them the truth or not. Life was short in those days, many people died before they reached 40. One dared not put off important things, especially things which impacted his eternity. In fact, it was that way across much of history and is still that way in many places in the world.

God allows not do-overs, no mulligans, for those who fail to rightly understand critical truth. There is only one pass through this life and He has seen to it that the world is filled with scriptures. One can find a Bible for free almost anywhere and if he cannot find one he only need ask and someone will bring or send him one. It is one of the best financed operations in the world. He has promised to give wisdom to those who sincerely ask Him. His Own Holy Spirit will help the reader understand truths critical to his eternal survival.

II. We must search the scriptures diligently because some who purport to teach are ignorant despite good intentions.

Acts 18:24-19:5

- 24 And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus.
- 25 This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John.
- 26 And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.
- 27 And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace:
- 28 For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publickly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ.

Acts 19

- 1 And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples,
- 2 He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.
- 3 And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism.
- 4 Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.
- 5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. KJV

Without belaboring the point (we will get to this passage eventually), you should recognize that here was an earnest man who has some knowledge of scriptures but who was making disciples who were ill instructed because of his ignorance.

Please understand, the fact that your pastor was ignorant and taught you wrong will not be taken as a valid excuse on the Day of Judgment. Search the scriptures. Your eternity depends upon it.

III. Some who teach the scriptures are liars and evil men.

It is a sad thing for me to tell you that there are many well-spoken and educated men who have been accepted into the ministry who are agents of Satan, wicked blasphemers, who will lead you down a path of destruction if it will enrich them in some way. They are smooth talkers but without a conscience.

2 Cor 11:12-15

- 12 But what I do, that I will do, that I may cut off occasion from them which desire

- occasion; that wherein they glory, they may be found even as we.
- 13 For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ.
- 14 And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.
- 15 Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works. KJV

Jude 3-4

- 3 Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.
- 4 For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ. KJV

I wish it were not true. It is an unhappy reality of life that there are people out there deliberately planting traps in your way, digging pits into which you might fall, planting lies to seduce you into believing error, not caring about the destruction they are causing. They will certainly have their place in Hell but they will carry you with them if they can.

Search the scriptures. Be diligent about it.

IV. If you love God, stand in Awe of what He has done and want to know more about it, you will search the scriptures.

It is a sad thing to acknowledge that many do not search the scriptures because they are simply not interested enough to do so.

How is that possible? How is it that a person who thinks that God loved him from all eternity past, ordained that His Son would bear that person's sins in His Own Body, sent the Holy Spirit to track him down, convict him and grant him new life, how could that person be so disinterested in the Great Work of God that he would not have enough curiosity to search God's Word to understand all that he might about his own salvation?

It is sad that so many simply have no internal motivation to study God's Word. Can such a person be converted? It is a mystery to understand how.

Our world is beset with intellectual laziness. Since the onset of visual entertainment the interest in reading and studying has been diminishing across the world. People rarely read books and almost no one reads the scriptures. Yet all of the really good information is tucked away between the pages of good books and especially the Bible.

All of us are riding a train to an eternal destination but, sadly, only a few have studied the map to see if it is really true that their story has a happy ending.

V. We must search the scriptures because it is not safe to be ignorant.

The formal churches tell their people not to worry, the church will do all of the work for them. They will sprinkle them with their 'holy water' tell them what information they need and make sure that the pathway to heaven is clear and clean for them to travel.

But the church has not control over anyone's spiritual condition. That rests today as it did in the days of Adam and Even, solely upon the disposition of the sinner's heart. If he will repent of sin, believe on God, and show that belief by obedience he will be saved but no one and no organization gets to participate in that.

Those willing to sit lazily and ignorantly in church pews assuming that the preacher, or the priest, or the church has secured their salvation will awake too late to realized that none of the work any of them did made a difference with God. He demanded repentance and faith and where that is not present, He condemns with an eternal and everlasting condemnation.

You may not know it but laziness and ignorance of God's Word paint you as unconverted.

The price tag of ignorance is too high. Search the scriptures.

VI. We must search the scriptures because there are flaws of understanding spiritual truth that are eternally fatal.

There were people who came from the church at Jerusalem to the church at Antioch in Syria and then to the churches of Galatia who told people that yes, they must repent of their sins and believe on Jesus but they also must be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses to be saved. That single error in their theology changed the gospel message to the degree that one who believed it could not be saved by it.

Paul wrote to them that this errant brand of the gospel is without saving power.

Gal 5:4

4 Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace. KJV

He had opened his letter by warning them that they should have nothing to do with such people.

Gal 1:8-9

8 But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.

9 As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. KJV

Here we see that a 'ready mind' does not mean that we embrace every new idea that comes down the road.

Our world is filled with such erroneous so-called 'gospel' message which place undue

importance on baptism, the Lord's Supper, good works, spiritual gifts and a thousand other things.

The fact that there are flaws which are fatal should induce us, if nothing else does, to 'search the scriptures.'

It is simply too dangerous to live a life and not know at least the fundamentals of what God's Word has to say about the gospel. Search the scriptures.

VII. The Theme of God's Purpose runs through it from beginning to end.

Men debate endlessly concerning what God was thinking when He created this world, when He allowed Adam to sin, when He sent the Flood, when He called Israel out of Egypt and then sent them into captivity, when He sent His Son into the World to die on the Cross.

Yet, the scriptures contain full explanations of it all. The problem that men have is not that the information is not available, it is the they do not like what the scriptures have to say.

If you would understand God and His Purpose, search the scriptures.

VIII. We should search the scriptures because of the price that was paid over and over again through history to put a copy in your hands.

Pagans sought to extinguish Christianity by destroying their scriptures. Romanists sought to keep the scriptures out of the hands of the people by forbidding their translation.

But Anabaptists and Reformers alike defied the wickedness of men and secured translations into the languages of the people. Many of them died for it, including the great John Wicliffe who was murdered for merely making an English copy of the Bible and distributing it to the common folk of his day.

No other book has endured such oppression or seen so many heroes die to keep it alive. It is a treasure beyond description and there is no rational explanation for those who call themselves God's People to allow dust to collect on their scriptures or be ignorant of what they say.

If nothing else, the value of it, sealed in the blood of its' champions, should induce us to spend careful time with our Bible on a regular basis.

IX. Finally, it is the only Revelation of God that we have.

Suppose your father had died and left you only a single letter in which he elaborately described His affection for you and detailed all that he had done through your life to make sure that you were OK.

Would you treasure it? Would you take it out often and read it? Would you love it so that you would have portions of it memorized? Of course!

But God has done far more for us than our fathers and has left a far more detailed account of His affection and His actions to make us safe for eternity. It is only reasonable that we search the scriptures to see that evidence and secure it to our memories.

The work of God the Holy Spirit is to prepare a ‘ready mind’ within us to be interested in the scriptures. Our work is to search them to make sure that we are not holding on to false hopes and flawed theologies of salvation.

Search the scriptures.