

61. The Importance of Searching the Word

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand why Paul and Silas were accused of turning the world upside down. We saw that this meant that they were accused of stirring up rebellion. As a result, Paul and Silas were forced to leave the city of Thessalonica. We also saw that God used that to cause the Christians in Thessalonica to send someone with their questions to Paul. Paul wrote the books of 1 and 2 Thessalonians to answer the questions of these new Christians. In this way, we see that God even used the plans of evil men to complete His plan to get these books written so that the questions of many new Christians have been answered through the years since that time.

In Acts 17:10-12, we read, “Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. 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. Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men.” The new Christians in Thessalonica waited until it was night and then sent Paul and Silas out of the city so that the mob in the city would not see them and kill them. Instead of sending them along the main road, they sent them to the city of Berea which was not on the main road. This was also an important city and there were enough Jews in this city that this city also had a synagogue.

As they did in each city, Paul and Silas first went to the synagogue to share the message of the death and resurrection of Christ with the Jews and devout Gentile proselytes that gathered in the synagogue. The Jews in Berea had a different attitude than the Jews in Thessalonica. The word translated “fair-minded” means *readiness of mind or eagerness*. The word is used twice in 2 Corinthians 8:11-12 where we read, “But now you also must complete the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to desire it, so there also may be a completion out of what you have. For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have.” In verse 11, the word is translated “readiness”; and in verse 12, “a willing mind”. This word shows that the Jews in Berea had an open mind and were ready to actually see what the Old Testament taught about Christ.

We read that the Jews in Berea searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. The word translated “searched” means *to examine, to investigate, to judge or to question*. Peter used this word when he spoke to the Sanhedrin in Acts 4:9-10 which says, “‘If we this day are judged for a good deed *done* to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole.’” In these verses, the word is translated “judged”. We see that the Jews in Berea carefully examined the Old Testament Scriptures to see if what Paul and Silas were saying was true.

This careful examination of the Old Testament Scriptures led many Jews in Berea along with many honorable women and men who were Greeks to believe. Here, we see a key lesson. Any time people will examine the Word of God with an open mind that really desires to understand what

God says, the Lord will work in their hearts and lives and many will believe. This is why evangelistic Bible studies with small groups who are searching to know the truth are so effective.

However, the day came when the Jews in Thessalonica heard that Paul was teaching the Word of God to the people in Berea. Acts 17:13-15 says, “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. Then immediately the brethren sent Paul away, to go to the sea; but both Silas and Timothy remained there. 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.” The Jews from Thessalonica did the same thing in Berea that they had done in Thessalonica. They stirred up the crowds. The new Christians immediately sent Paul away from their city and had some of the new Christians take him to Athens. However, Silas and Timothy were able to stay in Berea and keep teaching for a period of time. When Paul sent the men from Berea back to that city, he asked them to send Timothy and Silas as soon as possible.

Meanwhile, Paul was walking around the city of Athens while he waited for Silas and Timothy to rejoin him. Athens was the religious center for Greece and had idol worship of every kind. As Paul walked around the city, he saw that the city was given over to idols. This caused his spirit to be provoked within him. Acts 17:16-17 says, “Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols. Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the *Gentile* worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there.” The word translated “provoked” means *to make sharp or to arouse to anger*.

The only other place that this word is used in the New Testament is 1 Corinthians 13:4-5 where we read, “Love suffers long *and* is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil.” Here, we see that love is not provoked. This is important to help people understand. We are to hate sin, but love the sinner. Paul hated the sin of idolatry. However, he loved the people who were in bondage to Satan through those idols. As a result, even though Paul was waiting for Silas and Timothy, he could not keep silent, because he loved people and wanted to see them set free from the bondage of Satan.

To meet the people and have the opportunity to share the Gospel with them, Paul quickly found two places where he reasoned with the people. The word translated “reasoned” means *to discuss together or to compare different thoughts*. This word is used twice in Acts 19:8-9 where we read, “And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God. But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus.” In these verses, we see that when Paul first went to Corinth, he reasoned for three months in the synagogue. Then, he began reasoning daily in a school that was available during the hot hours of the day when people stopped their work for a few hours.

In Athens, Paul reasoned both in the synagogue and in the marketplace. The marketplace provided a place for daily contacts with the people of the city. In Acts 17:18-21, we see what happened in the marketplace. Those verses say, “Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. And some said, ‘What does this babbling want to say?’ Others said, ‘He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods,’ because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection. And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, ‘May we know what this new doctrine is of which you speak? For you are bringing some strange things to our ears. Therefore we want to know what these things mean.’ For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing.”

Religion and philosophy were closely related to each other in Athens. The Epicurean philosophers believed that there was a god but that he did not get involved with people. They felt people ceased to exist when they died so they lived for pleasure. The Stoic philosophers taught human self-sufficiency so they focused on self-discipline so they could reach a point where they experienced neither pleasure nor pain. The teachings of both groups had spread throughout much of the Roman Empire. The men of both philosophies called Paul a babbling, because he preached Jesus and the resurrection. They said that Paul seemed to be talking about strange gods. The word translated “babbling” meant *a seed picker* and was used by the Greeks to describe a person who had no philosophies of his own, but took ideas from other religions.

The people in Athens liked to spend all of their time talking about new philosophies and ideas. As a result, they took Paul to the Areopagus. The Areopagus was a court on Mars’ Hill where people would defend their philosophies and teachings. There they asked Paul to explain his new teaching. They said that they wanted to hear about this new teaching. Paul was not teaching about living for pleasure. Paul was not teaching about self-sufficiency or self-discipline. The philosophers said that Paul was saying things that sounded strange to their ears. The Epicureans were especially confused when Paul talked about the resurrection since they believed that people ceased to exist when they died. Many people today are like the Greek philosophers. They want to hear many different teachings so that they have much knowledge. However, such people often do not want to believe any of the teachings that they hear.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children realize that they may meet people in their lives who are very similar to the Greek philosophers. We are going to see in the next topic that Paul had to begin with the Creator to help these philosophers with no Biblical background. However, we will see that he ended with the resurrection of Christ. We will also need to show our children how to begin with the Creator when they are talking with people who have no background of the Bible. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to understand the backgrounds of various people.