

17:10–15 *Paul and Silas in Berea*

YOUR PASTOR IS AN AMBASSADOR FROM THE KING OF HEAVEN.

JOHN DONNE: Prejudices and disaffections and undervaluations of the abilities of the preacher in the hearer disappoint the purpose of the Holy Spirit, frustrate the labors of the man and injure and defraud the rest of the congregation who would, and justly, like what is said, if they were not misled and shaken by those hearers. Thus they work such jealousies and suspicions that though his abilities are good, still his effect on his audience is not their edification but to work on them to other purposes.

Though we do not require an implicit faith in you, so that you believe because we say it, still we do require a holy nobleness in you, a religious good nature, a conscientious ingenuity, so that you remember from whom we come—the King of heaven—and in what office, as his ambassadors. Therefore, know that since we must return to the One who sent us, giving him a report of our business, we dare not transgress our commission. SERMON ON THE SUNDAY AFTER THE CONVERSION OF SAINT PAUL (1627).⁹

WHY DOES LUKE CALL THE BEREANS “MORE NOBLE”? JOHN CALVIN: There is a threefold reason why Luke mentions superiority of birth in their case. We know how reluctantly people come down from a high position, how rare it is for the great, who are prominent in the world, to lay aside their pride and submit to the ignominy of the cross and to glory in humiliation, as James enjoins.

Therefore, Luke commends the remarkable efficacy of the Spirit of God when he says that the dignity of the flesh was no obstacle to those noble men, but that having

⁹ Donne, *Works*, 1:325*.

embraced the gospel, they prepared themselves to bear the cross and preferred the reproach of Christ to the glory of the world. In the second place Luke wished to make it plain to us that the grace of Christ is open to people of all ranks. That is what Paul means when he says that God wishes all people to be saved, so that those who are poor and of lowly birth, even though Christ did think them deserving of the first place, may not close the door to the rich. Therefore we see that noblemen and common men are gathered together, that people distinguished by a position of honor and those who are despised are growing together into the one body of the church, so that all, without exception, may humble themselves and truly extol the grace of God. In the third place Luke seems to be pointing out the reason why so many were added and why the kingdom of Christ increased in such a short time at Thessalonica, that is, because it was no ordinary help that the leading men, and those distinguished by birth, showed the way to others, because the common people are usually influenced by authority. COMMENTARY ON [ACTS 17:11](#).¹⁰

EAT GOOD SPIRITUAL FOOD. STEPHEN DENISON: This should teach the church of God the wisdom that God's people are not bound to receive every doctrine that they hear, but they must be like good Bereans, searching the Scriptures daily whether these things are so. We ought to be as wary about what we receive into our ears as about what we receive into our mouths; and indeed it is the sin of many, that when they are careful and thoughtful concerning the diet of their bodies and will have a care to eat no food but that which is wholesome and good, in the meantime are careless of the diet of their souls, feeding grossly on the very carrion of

¹⁰ [CNTC 7:100*](#) ([CO 48:399–400](#)); alluding to [Jas 1:10](#); [1 Tim 2:4](#).

human inventions. THE DOCTRINE OF BOTH THE SACRAMENTS.¹¹

THE SWEET HONEY OF THE WORD OF GOD. JOHN DONNE: If a man taste a little of this honey at the end of his staff, as Jonathan did, even though he thinks his eyes enlightened, as Jonathan did, he may be in Jonathan's situation: "I tasted a little honey with the tip of my staff, and behold, I will die." If the man read the Scriptures a little, superficially, perfunctorily, his eyes seem to be enlightened immediately. He thinks that he sees everything that he had preconceived and fore-imagined in himself as clear as the sun in the Scriptures. He can find flesh in the sacrament without bread, because he finds "This is my body." ... So also he can find wormwood in this honey, because he finds in this Scripture "the reward for sin is death." ... For the Scriptures are made to agree with one another, but not to agree with your particular taste and humor.

But still the counsel is good on the other hand that "If you have found honey, eat only enough for you, lest you have your fill of it and vomit it." Content yourself with reading those parts of Scriptures which are clear and edify. Do not perplex yourself with prophecies not yet fulfilled. And content yourself with hearing those sermons which rectify you in all those things which you ought to believe and to practice. Do not follow those men who pretend to know those things which God has not revealed to his church. Too little or too much of this honey, of this reading and hearing may be unhealthy. God has chosen ways of moderation. He does not redeem us by God alone nor by man alone, but by him who was both. He instructs us not by the Holy Ghost alone without the ministry of man, nor by the minister

¹¹ Denison, *Doctrine of Both the Sacraments*, 62*.

alone without the assistance of the Holy Ghost. SERMON 31, PREACHED ON PENTECOST.¹²

A CHRISTIAN IS BIRTHED THROUGH THE PAGES OF THE SACRED WORD. BALTHASAR HUBMAIER: Search the Scriptures. They themselves will give the right witness about Christ and the Christian life. Do as the Thessalonians¹³ and you will not go astray or be deceived. And even if your pastors and preachers would offer to give their very souls for you, even that would not be enough. You must believe the Word of God and not them. God alone is truthful, but all human beings are deceitful. For Christ says, When a blind person leads a blind person, both fall into the ditch. It would be a little thing if the shepherd alone fell, but by the authority of the Word of Christ the little sheep would fall also. ON THE CHRISTIAN BAPTISM OF BELIEVERS.¹⁴

NO REST FOR THE DEVIL. JOHANN SPANGENBERG: How restless the devil is! He is absolutely unable to suffer the preaching of God's Word! So, he must quickly stir up in other lands and cities people who will persecute the gospel. BRIEF EXEGESIS OF [ACTS 17:13](#).¹⁵

WHAT DOES THIS STORY TEACH US? JOHANN SPANGENBERG: Two things. [First], nothing other than that a Christian's life is a constant soldier's struggle here on earth, a daily fighting and brawling, so that it would not be surprising if a

¹² Donne, *Works*, 2:23–24; alluding to [1 Sam 14:27](#); [Heb 4:4–6](#); quoting [1 Sam 14:43](#); [Mt 26:26](#); [Rom 6:23](#); [Ezek 18:31](#); [Prov 25:16](#).

¹³ The [QGT](#) editors note that “Hubmaier unquestionably meant the Bereans.”

¹⁴ [CRR 5:143](#)* ([QGT 9:158](#)); alluding to [Mt 15:14](#). Hubmaier uses this same argument in the introduction to his *Summa of the Entire Christian Life*, [CRR 5:83–84](#) ([QGT 9:110](#)).

¹⁵ Spangenberg, *Der Apostel Geschichte*, 151r.

Christian became sluggish and lethargic. If Paul had been a worldly person, without grace and the Holy Spirit, he likely would have said, “The devil take this gospel stuff! For me it is nothing but pure cross, tribulation and persecution!” But he does not do that. He knows very well that a Christian must bear the cross. So, he presses on and lets nothing trouble him.

[Second], following the example of those in [Berea], we should gladly read Scripture. For Scripture is the only rule and foundation of our faith. If a carpenter or mason is to build something ably, then he must have a plumbline. If a goldsmith is to test gold, then he must have a touchstone. So then, if we Christians are to judge what is God’s Word or human teaching, then we too must have a touchstone, and this is holy Scripture. From Scripture we must learn about Christ. Whoever teaches something other than what Scripture states about him errs and is mistaken. All human teaching should be tested with Scripture to determine if it is to be tolerated or discarded. Nothing should be allowed in a Christian congregation other than what has a sure basis in Scripture. For Scripture is nothing other than the pure sanctified Word of God delivered through the prophetic Spirit into the world, as Saint Peter says. Thus, Christ so often directs us to Scripture; he also exhorts us to search the Scripture. In Scripture he speaks with us in a living voice and comforts us in every concern and there promises us eternal life. BRIEF EXEGESIS OF ACTS 17:10–15.¹⁶

¹⁶ Spangenberg, *Der Apostel Geschichte*, 151r–152v*; alluding to 2 Pet 1:21.