

Opening Grace, Part 2

Act 17:10-15

¹⁰ The brothers[b] immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. ¹¹ Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. ¹² Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men. ¹³ But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul at Berea also, they came there too, agitating and stirring up the crowds. ¹⁴ Then the brothers immediately sent Paul off on his way to the sea, but Silas and Timothy remained there. ¹⁵ Those who conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens, and after receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they departed.

II. Open-Minded (10-15)

The example of the Bereans calls us to yield our minds to the Scriptures that they might be steadied in his promises for courageous Kingdom service. After the uprising in Thessalonica, Paul and his colleagues were escorted to Berea. Their pattern is now very predictable; they go to the synagogue and start preaching because the Gospel always goes first to the Jews, God's first people. And God repeats his pattern as well. He uses the preaching of the Word to bring people to himself and then proves the reality of their salvation through persecution and suffering.

A. Preaching

In this synagogue, Paul and Silas experienced something unique in their ministry, a group of people eager to study along with them. They were engaged learners, because apparently like Cornelius they had been prepared to receive Paul's message by their study of the Old Testament long before the missionaries arrived. They literally had their Old Testament manuscripts open every day checking to see if the Christ Paul was preaching really had fulfilled the prophecies relating to the Messiah.

Luke says that they were more "noble" than the Thessalonians. Literally, the word translated "noble" means "open-minded" [*eugenesteroi*]. We tend to associate open-mindedness with compromise or theological liberalism. And we are called "close-minded" by so-called "open-minded" people because we insist on living and thinking according to the teachings of Scripture. We are called close-minded because we believe that Jesus is the only way to reconciliation with God and eternal life. But here our text teaches us that true open-mindedness connects us to reality, enables us to live in real freedom, and enlarges our hearts to love every person. Close-mindedness comes as one suppresses the truth of God's Word and thus lives in an irrational and unreal state of being.

I remember a man who came to Christ early in my ministry who called me one day in fear that he was losing his mind. He said, "My thought patterns are changing so dramatically that I am afraid I am losing a grip on reality!" The Spirit was changing his mind, and while disturbing, it was liberating. He was freed from

the soul-shrinking consumption of looking for ways to cheat others in order to improve his own lot. He was freed from his bondage to hold grudges. He was freed from devising ways to conquer women. He was freed to compliment and encourage. He was freed from worry because his life was no longer completely in his hands. The Bible creates true open-mindedness to think God's thoughts after him, which is the way our brains were created to operate. If you want to be a truly liberated and accurate thinker, then come to Christ and submit your thoughts to his Word.

B. Persuasion

As a result of faithful preaching, many Jews and Gentiles came to faith. The Spirit had prepared these converts' hearts with the Scriptures long before the missionaries arrived, so when the story of God's Messiah was filled out for them it was but a half-step to become disciples of Jesus.

What is most interesting to me in this passage is the expression of Luke's regard for the dignity of women. He always refers to them with equal deference, but in this case, he actually mentions these prominent women before the men. Their prominence was either due to their holding public office or being married to officials. Regardless, it was unusual to mention women before men. In other places Luke names the women who are involved and their relationships. For instance, he refers to Timothy's mother, Eunice (16:1); to Lydia and her occupation (16:14,15); to Damaris of Athens (17:34); to Priscilla as a co-laborer with her husband (18:2,18,26); and to Philip's daughters who were prophetesses (21:9). As I mentioned in the last study, God's grace is magnificently demonstrated in his zeal to build his Church as a place where women are dignified. The Church is to be a picture of restored Eden. Therefore, in the Church, women are to be honored and blessed as Adam blessed Eve. Further, women are to be viewed as equally bearing the image of God as they were created to do with men. One manifestation of biblical open-mindedness in a Christian is that he or she views the opposite sex with respect. That means they respect each other's person and submit to each other's God-ordained roles.

So when God saves us he changes everything about us including the way we relate to one another.

C. Proof

Then as we have seen throughout our study thus far, persecution frequently follows conversion. There are three perspectives from which to view this persecution. First, from the perspective of the Jewish leadership they were opposing Paul's message of the resurrected Christ—even though they knew it was true—because it dismantled their religious empire. Paul ultimately gave his life to demonstrate that no one in the civilized world could disprove Christ's resurrection. Second, we may view it from the devil's perspective. He is just not happy when people come to the Lord. As in this case, whole towns can be disrupted by Gospel movements because the devil effectively had the city under his domination. Third, we may view it from God's perspective. At times he allows such persecution to occur rather than impede it so as to prove that his salvation

is real. In fact, it is so real that not even floggings, imprisonment, or martyrdom can cause a truly converted person to turn his back on his gracious Savior.

The bottom line is that the promises and instructions in God's Word form an unshakable foundation for the believer. When his mind is being renewed by the transformative power of God's Word, he is able as Paul says, to prove to himself and to the world that God's will is good, pleasing and perfect (Ro. 12:1,2). When you are being anchored in the Bible's teachings through your personal reading, Bible studies, and preaching then nothing can move you. Sin cannot ultimately entice you, life cannot overwhelm you, and suffering cannot undo you. As the Psalmist said, "If your word had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction."

We must have our minds opened by God's word, his love letter to us. Throughout it, he continually writes the story of his great love for us. Only this love will enable us to persevere despite persecution and hardship.