

The Bible is Final

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[0:00] Morning, Church. A little over 500 years ago, on the 31st of October, 1517, a 33-year-old Roman Catholic monk, Martin Luther, nailed his thesis to the door of the Wittenberg Church Castle.

Castle Church. Through close examination of the Scriptures, his thesis was a protest outlining 95 problems with the Roman Catholic Church.

Four years later, in 1521, at a council called the Diet of Worms, Diet means council and worms is a town, so they're not dieting on worms. But anyway, that's in Germany.

Luther was called to defend his objections with the church and papal authority, and in his own defence, this was his conclusion. Unless I'm convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures, or by clear reason, for I do not trust either in the Pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they often erred and contradicted themselves, I'm bound by the Scriptures I have quoted, and my conscience is captive to the Word of God.

I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. May God help me. In the centuries leading up to Luther's call to reform, Roman Catholicism, the church, had slid into error.

[1:26] Let's use my arm as the church. Church tradition, doctrine, and papal authority took precedence over God's Word, the Holy Scriptures. Luther was turning this upside down, placing the Scriptures in their right place.

The final authoritative Word of God was to be said above all things, and it's under God's Word that we're to submit and surrender. When asked to withdraw his views, he famously said this, I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe, knowing that one day I'm going to answer before God for what I've said and done.

Here I stand, I can do no other, so help me God. Amen. Well, our topic today, the Bible is final.

God's Word is authoritative. Our focus will be on the people from Berea, with a short contrast to the Thessalonians. The Apostle Paul was travelling from town to town and will look for every opportunity to preach the Gospel.

So we do begin in chapter 17, and he's in Thessalonica. So at verse 2. As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days, he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead.

[2:55] This Jesus I'm proclaiming to you is the Messiah. Some of the Jews were persuaded, and some Gentiles as well. Well, Luke, the writer of Acts, treats this day in Berea briefly.

While it could have been a short stay, we learn a great deal from the Bereans. The Bereans were serious students of Scripture and set a great example for us. The Bereans, which we're going to look at now, and I just encourage you to have your Bible open or your Bible app, and we've also got an app with the church.

You can follow along and take notes if that's your thing. They were serious students of Scripture, and they set a great example for us. Here in Acts 17, as we take a closer look at the Bereans, there are four things that I want us to take away from their example.

The Bereans give us a great model for Bible students. Before you say, hey, I'm not a Bible student, I'm not enrolled in Bible college, newsflash, if you're a follower of Jesus, you're a Bible student.

The word disciple, methetes, actually translates student, pupil, or learner. So if you're a follower of Jesus, you're a Bible student.

[4:18] Now, you might be a really good one, and you might be a poor one, but that's why we're here today, to grow in God's word. So what can we learn from the Bereans? The first thing we learn is that they're teachable.

We need to be teachable. Let's look at verse 11 closely, and the bulk of today's talk is actually coming from verse 11. Now, the Berean Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

The Greek word for noble could refer to a person's parentage, like noble birth, but here it's referring to being noble-minded. It's about their character. To be noble-minded means to be thoughtful.

The Bereans were open to receiving the preaching of Paul. In other words, they were teachable.

Being teachable, as we learn throughout the scripture, is actually the way of wisdom.

In Proverbs 9, verse 9, it says, instruct the wise, and they will be wiser still. Teach the righteous, and they will add to their learning. The secret source for being a disciple of Jesus Christ is teachability, and that requires a level of humility.

[5 : 36] Remember, the word disciple means student or learner. A people who are teachable, and this is what marks a teachable person. Someone who understands they will always have a lot to grow in.

They understand they are sinful. They understand they have an inclination towards sin. They recognize they need correction.

They recognize they will never graduate when it comes to the things of God. I don't care if you've been coming to church every single Sunday for your entire Christian life.

you will never graduate or arrive when it comes to the word of God. If you've been a Christian for some time, and you're in your retired twilight years, and think, Pastor John, I don't need to worry about this anymore.

I've got my theology sorted. You're wrong. In fact, there's a word for that. It's the opposite of teachable. It's stubbornness. It's being closed.

[6 : 38] It's being proud. It's not being open. Stubborn people think they have it all figured out. They think they know everything. And if you're stubborn, you're never going to grow as a disciple of Jesus.

If you're not teachable, if you're stubborn, actually no one wants to be around you because you know everything. No one can speak truth into your life.

So these Bereans, they're open-minded to Paul, and they're right here in the same section as the Thessalonians, and we're supposed to compare and contrast them. After fleeing Thessalonica, and people did come to faith there, by the way, but then Paul was urged to leave.

We'll get to that in a moment. But coming to Berea, Paul would have thought, as he preached, these Bereans are keen to open the Scriptures. They're teachable. No one was agitating at the time while stirring up the crowd in defiance of the Gospel or seeking to cancel him because they were teachable.

What a breath of fresh air for Paul. We need to be teachable. That's the first point. The second is this. We notice, they received the Word with great eagerness.

[7 : 52] They were hungry. They were thirsty. There was a yearning for the things of God. They were like what the writer of Psalm 42 writes. He says, as the deer pants by the streams of water, so my soul longs after you, my God.

I believe we've got a mixed crowd here at St. Paul's, but I believe most Christians here would want to be like this. I did a quick survey. I did a heads down, thumbs up. I'm not going to do it.

Many of you would honestly say, I want to be eager. I want to be hungry. But here's the problem. We can't be eager towards God if we're being eager for the world.

We can't run towards God with eagerness if we're running toward the world with eagerness. Two different directions.

Jesus spoke about this in the Sermon on the Mount. Remember when he was talking about the different gates and the different roads? Matthew 7, verses 13 to 14. Enter through the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it.

[9 : 02] But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life. Only a few find it. Two different roads. One road goes to God, the other goes to the world, and Jesus said that road leads to destruction.

Ever tried travelling in different directions at the same time? Maybe, I don't know, at the airport, you know, they've got those travelators, whatever they're called, and you actually start moving really quite quickly along them, but then you think, oh, actually, I've just dropped my bag or something.

I've got to go back for it. And you're going against it. Now, if that just went forever, you're going to get exhausted and it's going to just take you away. And the world's just wanting to sweep us away to destruction.

We have to pick which direction we're going. If you want to run to Jesus, you have to run to Jesus. But you can't say, oh, I want to run to Jesus, but I still like running over here.

You've got to pick which road you're going on. Is it going to be the road to destruction? Or is it going to be the road to life? I believe the Bereans were so eager because their eyes are fully focused on God.

[10:15] They were hungry for the word because all eyes were on the Lord. A person who's eager for God's word is one who has their eyes on Jesus. If you're on that road to destruction, there's one thing you can do today.

You can repent. Repent means to turn. Repentance. Repentance. It means to change your direction. It's not just turning, but it's turning from sin.

It's not any kind of turning. The only way to be on the road to life is to Jesus. It's to turn to Jesus and turn away from sin. You have to change your mind.

It's a transformation. Turn to the one who's going to forgive you for your sins. Turn to Jesus, the only one who's going to give you the fullness of life. Well, that's the second thing.

They're eager. The third thing we learn from the Bereans is when it comes to studying the word of God, it's to be careful. The Bereans were examining the scriptures.

[11:17] This means we're to be careful like they were in the study of God's word. The word for examine here is the same word as a judicial investigation. So it's a deep dive.

It means the Bereans weren't gullible. They're not just going to fall for anything. They intentionally searched the scriptures. They looked to the word itself. They did their homework. This is why we encourage you to have your Bibles open or to have your Bible app open and follow along when we give a sermon so you know the preacher isn't making it up.

It's coming from the word of God. Follow along so you don't just take my word for it or any other preacher. Check for yourself. God's word is the final authority.

The more we're in God's word, the more we can have discernment to know if what is being said is right or wrong. To be able to know that what being is preached is sound and healthy because God has the final word.

We're different than the Bereans. They actually had to get scrolls and there was limited supply of them and roll them out. They still did it and they poured over them. But we've got the complete word of God.

[12:31] We have multiple copies readily available. We have more opportunity to examine the scriptures and see what God is saying than any era in history. We're to be careful when it comes to God's word.

We're to examine God's word. We're not to be gullible. This also doesn't mean we're supposed to come to church and be the sermon police, having a critical spirit, ready to pounce on every little thing.

And certainly, preachers need to be held accountable to God's word. But if the reason you come to church is to nitpick, then you haven't come to worship and glory God. C.S. Lewis spoke about this subject in his classic book, *The Screwtape Letters*.

This book is about a demon writing to a younger demon on how to take believers down. And basically, he knows God wants his disciples to be lifelong pupils.

But you can't be a learner if you're not in God's word. And you can't be a learner if you're a critic. I say this carefully. I haven't been here that long.

[13:42] I'm not targeting anyone. But if you come to church on Sunday and you're being a critic, not just with the preaching, but with the music or development plans or anything else that you point out at morning tea that we might have fumbled, you're not here to worship.

You're being a critic. Well, with that being said, I encourage you to look at the scriptures carefully like the brands. If something doesn't sound right, investigate it.

Do your homework. Ask questions. But at the same time, guard yourself from having a heart of criticism. We can't worship if we're constantly on the hunt for something that point out is wrong.

The fourth thing, be diligent. All this comes from verse 11. They were examining the scriptures every day to see if what Paul was teaching matches the scriptures.

The brands were not just examining the word for 30 minutes a week on a Sunday morning or a Thursday night or the odd occasion during the week, but they were going to the word daily. [14:50] They were in the word every day. Friends, as believers, we need the word of God every single day. Not just on Sunday morning, not just Thursday nights or in community groups.

We need to be in the word every day. Being in the word of God is not just for information. It's for communication. The word of God is the voice of God.

What's that, God? What are you saying? I'm just not hearing anything from God at the moment. Well, you're not listening if you're not in his word. If you want to hear from the Lord, open your Bible. That's how you hear from God. We need God's word for strength, for encouragement, for correction, for protection. We need God's word to fight against sin and temptation.

All three times Jesus was tempted, he refutes Satan with the scriptures, God's word. Paul later wrote to the Ephesians that the word of God is a huge part of the armour of God.

[15:56] God's word is the truth, the sword of the word. If we're not listening to God's word, we're more likely to trip up in life and listen to false messages and the wrong voices and get on that road that's moving pretty quickly to destruction.

So you may say you don't have time to read the Bible. What's your excuse? The question is more likely what are you doing with your time? What are you doing with your time?

If you want to be in the word daily, you have to make the time and have a plan. As we see from the example of the Bereans, they were teachable, they were eager, they were careful and they were diligent to study God's word.

They give us a wonderful example to follow. Remember, we don't just study God's word for information, we go to God's word for change. We go to the word to be made complete.

We go to the word for holiness. We go to the word because Jesus clarified disciples on the road to Emmaus that it's all about him. We study and learn from the word because we learn about Jesus, our saviour.

[17:11] We also study to point others to Jesus. If we're to give a defence, if we're going to be a witness, we need to know about God and he's given us his word so we can know.

It's a gift to study God's word and point others to Jesus. This was the result in Berea. Look at verse 12. Many of them therefore believed.

Here's a lesson. When we start taking God's word seriously, people get saved. When we start living by the book, life changes.

God works. There's another side of the coin though. When you start taking the word of God seriously, we're going to face opposition. Paul went to Berea and proclaimed the word of God, the gospel that Jesus is the Messiah and after close examination of the scriptures, the Bereans came to faith.

Meanwhile, 72 kilometres away and you would have seen a map at the start of this talk, 72 kilometres away in Thessalonica. But when the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God in Berea, some of them went there, they went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up.

[18:32] It's a three-day trek. Man, they must have been kicking the dust, stirring up trouble. That's intentional. We're going to face opposition.

Three-day journey, what a waste of time. But the devil is working overtime. He brought a group from the town to stir up the pot and that's the pattern we see in Paul's ministry.

If you stand on the word of God as the authoritative final word of God, if you take the word of God seriously, expect this to be the pattern in your life too. We're living in a culture today that mocks and ridicules the scriptures.

They're okay with the love bit but not okay with the judgment bit. They dismiss the word of God because of some bad press or they know a mean Christian or they aren't interested in what the Bible says if it means they have to change.

They find it offensive. Even Christian denominations struggle with God's word. Some to this day who continue to elevate church tradition and doctrines over the final authority of the scripture and there's others who believe that scriptures must align with reason and culture and personal experience which again takes precedence over God's word.

[19:57] That's the culture we're living in today. If we're going to stand on the word of God, if we're going to be a faithful disciple, which is student, 100% of God's word, we're going to face opposition.

100%. We are going to be out of step with culture. 100%. And we're going to feel some opposition. Like some Thessalonians, the world is not going to like it.

So brace yourselves. When you take God's word seriously, you're going to see people get saved, your life will change, you're going to see other people ticked off.

You might get cancelled. Someone might say, that offended me. Don't let that be a reason to compromise or go quiet. What happens when you face those times?

Run to God's word even more. For strength, for wisdom, for encouragement, for reminder that this is the truth.

[21:07] We've been challenged here today in the area of Bible study. We all need to be faithful students of God's word. The Westminster Confession of 1646, the word of God stands outside and over and above the church and all human opinion.

The Bible is God's word, its final authority. We have no authority on our own. God's word is definitive. The scriptures, the Old and New Testament, the word of God, can be misapplied or misunderstood.

But when interpreted correctly, paying attention to original context, considering the literary genre, thinking about the author's intent, the Bible is never wrong in what it affirms and must never be marginalised as anything less than the last word on everything it teaches.

It's okay to struggle and wrestle with God's word. There are biblical texts that are hard. Many thoughtful Christians have stumbled upon problems in the biblical text. At the beginning of his ministry, Billy Graham, he died a few years ago at 99, he was confident that the Bible was the true word of God.

But then he read some authors who didn't believe the Bible was the word of God, or some of it was and some wasn't, and then he had a really close friend who was an evangelical, Chuck Templeton, who was telling him that not everything in the Bible is true.

[22:37] After some time of reading and grappling, one evening he went to his room to study God's word alone, and he saw Jesus taught the Old Testament was completely true. In his head, he understood the Bible is the perfect true word of God.

He couldn't resolve the issue with his heart, it just wasn't settled. One time he went for a walk and he prayed, oh God, there are many things in this book I do not understand.

There are many problems with it for which I have no solution. even though he was praying sincerely, he could tell something was still unresolved, and then he said the Holy Spirit finally enabled him to pray.

And he prayed this, Father, I'm going to accept this is thy word by faith, and faith is confidence and trust.

I'm going to allow faith to go beyond my intellectual questions and doubts, and I will believe this to be your inspired word. And here's what happened next. When I got up from my knees that August night, my eyes stung from tears.

[23:53] I sensed the presence and power of God as I had not sensed it in months. Not all my questions were answered, but a major bridge had been crossed. In my heart and mind, I knew a spiritual battle in my soul had been fought and won.

We've been given a wonderful model to follow from the Bereans. Be teachable, be eager, be careful, be diligent. If you want to hear the voice of God, if you want to listen to God, you need to open up his word.

We're to be in God's final authority of word. That way we can live for God. We can be his disciples and be on guard. And a student of God's word, we keep talking about these practical steps you can take.

they'll help you to grow. Use a Bible reading plan like the Explore ones you can pick up at the bookstall out there. Meet with someone and go through John's Gospel word one to one.

Get a study Bible that has footnotes and some other bits of explanation underneath. Join a community group. Be eager, be teachable, be careful, be diligent.

[25:04] Amen. Amen.