



Articles and Sermons :: The Noble Berean by Robert Wurtz II

The Noble Berean by Robert Wurtz II - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2012/3/10 23:24

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. (Acts 17:11)

Despite the fact that Paul told us in 2 Timothy, All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work, (2 Timothy 3:16, 17) the book of Acts is all too often treated as a simple historical narrative and little more. I understand that that is a sweeping statement, but I have found it to be generally true. This is not only unfortunate, it is unbiblical. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, that is to say, 'every scripture'. (1.) This includes the book of Acts. We will not delve into the many splendorous arguments about the genre or sub-genres of the book of Acts as that is beyond the scope and purpose of this entry; but we must establish on the front end that the book finds its place as profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. Not only profitable, but essential.

Ranking Books of the Bible?

It will come as a surprise to some, but there are certain theological persuasions that see the need to rank the Gospels and Epistles as if some were more important than the others. In fact, Martin Luther questioned the canonicity of Hebrews, James, Jude and Revelation. (2.) He gives his ranking in his preface to the New Testament. (3.) This helps us define for some their definition of sola scriptura as, 'only those scriptures that support my presuppositions.' It is a radical thing to say, but there it is. This sordid approach to the scriptures has all but crippled many theologians and bible students. The epistles and their scriptures are not like a deck of cards to be ranked so as to trump one another or exclude one another; but are to be viewed as a 'fully interlocking' jigsaw puzzle of over 31,100 verses. Each verse is important, though we may not understand its significance at the moment. It is only when each scripture is in its rightful place and rightly related to the others can we truly see what the Germans called Heilsgeschichte or salvation history. I call it, "The Big Picture." Until the puzzle is put together in such a way so as to include all the pieces, none left over, no tabs forced in place, we will not have the complete picture. Until we get there we have to challenge non-essential assumptions and labor to show ourselves approved. What profit is it, for some that have completed their version of the puzzle and have half a box of puzzle pieces left? How can a person be dogmatic about their theology when they are holding a bag of parts with no clue as to where they go? Some are content with their progress and see no need to go any farther. Others have theological biases (and we all have them) that make it impossible to consider any other possibilities than the party line. This is not a noble Berean, this is a ignoble politician.

Dealing With Anomalies

In our attempt to understand the scriptures, there are validities and anomalies. A validity is when we prove something we believe to be right; that is, it is logically and factually sound. There is a cogency in the reasoning that not only agrees with the intellect, but with the conscience. Keep that clear. For example, in Matthew 27:5 we are told Judas went and hanged himself. In Luke 10:37b we have a command, "go and do thou likewise." Further in John 13:27 we have the command, "that thou doest do quickly." Now, this illustration is cliché, but it serves the point that though there is a seemingly logical progression to what is being said, it smites the conscience as utterly wrong. John Wesley once advocated that difficult subjects are sometimes best to be left as nonsensical, than to place a sense upon them that violates our understanding of who God is. (4) In other words, our doctrine needs to square with our good conscience.

Unsettling Conclusions

We have to be careful as to where our conclusions lead us. That is to say, when our conclusions don't fit the personality and character of God then we need to question them. To misrepresent God is to mark a person's soul in some way. We have to be sober and careful. For example, as a matter of explanation let me just say, I have read many writings over the last 20 years that deal with unconditional election to salvation and damnation (reprobation). Not one person I have ever read or discussed this subject with has said they are 'comfortable' with the implications of such a doctrine. There may be

One or more, I just have not found them yet. Yet, those that hold this view suggest it is the highest expression of *soli deo gloria* (the glory of God alone) that such a doctrine is true. It demonstrates God's sovereignty in His arbitrary decrees. Yet none I have known of can answer satisfactorily how a benevolent God could arbitrarily decree the fall and then arbitrarily damn sinners. Many will almost admit, that such a view smites the conscience of not only the lost, but of the regenerate. Some say the sensibilities of man are not to be trusted. If that is true God has failed in the regeneration of man to instill in him/her what love and grace really are. The standard answer is, Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? (Romans 9:20) What is the problem? One too many puzzle pieces being forced into place. What happens? God is made into Satan.

A Questionable View of Sovereignty

I recently read an article by John Piper in which he states concerning the recent tornadoes that killed 39 people here in the US,

We do not ascribe such independent power to Mother Nature or to the devil. God alone has the last say in where and how the wind blows. If a tornado twists at 175 miles an hour and stays on the ground like a massive lawnmower for 50 miles, God gave the command. (5)

If you will indulge me, I think this is a gross over-simplification. God is sovereign, yes. But this does not imply that the fall did not set into motion realities in which Satan and his demons were allowed in some sense to walk about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. Job had a 'hedge' protecting him. What from? If God decrees even the position of particles of dust in the air, why would there need to be a hedge? A hedge implies intruders and intrusions. So we know that Satan would have attacked Job, but God had him hedged in. It was when God lifted the hedge and set the rules of engagement that Job suffered. But here is the question, what about everyone else that does not have a hedge? what about them? By implication everyone that has no hedge is in some sense fair-game. God has ultimate control, but He has afforded Satan some possibilities, and even more so since the fall. Other examples we could give. So to attribute to God the events of last week is a mistaken notion in my view based on an erroneous view of sovereignty. Error begets more error.

The 'God is Love' Test

Is God the author of sin? Did God will for man to fall? Does God have a 'secret will' that is unknowable to man? It would seem to me that God has 'tolerated dissent' and that is something all together different. In KJV language, He 'suffered' (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34; Luke 23:46; John 19:30; Acts 7:55; Romans 8:32; 1 Peter 2:24; Hebrews 9:15; 1 John 4:10) as in Mark 10:4) the dissent of angels and man; no more and no less. Without the possibility of dissent there can be neither virtue nor vice. I think it goes without saying that God cannot be double minded, so it would seem God's revealed will is in complete harmony with any 'secretive' (unrevealed) will. He cannot deny Himself. I would affirm that if God is love (1 John 4:8, 16) in the written revelation, He is still love in His eternal habitation. In other words, whatever God says or does in private I am sure it would square with what He has done (revealed) in public. He moves in integrity. So for me I have to conclude that God's unrevealed workings are in complete harmony with His divine attributes.

Perfect in Love

Jesus said, be ye therefore perfect even as your Heavenly Father is perfect. (Matt. 5:44-48), In the context of this passage, what was our Lord saying? We are to love as God loves; perfectly'. He who makes His sun to rise on the evil and the good is impartial and universal in His benevolence. If God, our absolute standard, has a secretive will- disjointed from what is clearly revealed, we may infer it acceptable to love only those 'we' decide to, for reasons known only to ourselves. If that makes sense. I'm charged to imitate God in Matt. 5:44-48, and if God can arbitrarily love I am commanded to do the same. It is a strange thing. If this is true then I should naturally desire, as a born again child of God, to arbitrarily love as well. We long to be like Him, but why don't we find this to be a desired attitude among ourselves? Because it does not square with our conscience. Very simple. And if it does not square with our conscience we need to keep working on the

puzzle, less concerned about towing doctrinal lines, and more concerned with having a right picture devoid of anomalies

Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15 NKJV) (6)

If we think about building our understanding of God's word as we would build a building, how should we approach it? should we measure and mark our cuts? Should we behave like a perfectionist or should we haphazardly cut the planks and set them in place? What if we decide we don't need certain boards, so we just toss them on the wood pile? what if we put the 2X4s where the floor joists are supposed to go? You get the point. When it comes to God's word we need to 'cut straight'. We need to make sure what we are believing and teaching is rightly put together. Again, like the puzzle analogy we can be forcing passages and concepts together that do not go. We need to ask, what does this passage say (exegesis)? Once we know what it says we can move on to discover how it applies and how it fits. The noble Bereans had it right, they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. (Acts 17:11) They did not believe whatever came down the road. They tested everything in light of scripture; that is, the full counsel of God. Not isolated passages, but the full revelation of God. If we will do these things in the light of a good conscience, trusting our God given sensibilities, we will be least apt to put the wrong construction on Biblical words and doctrines.

1. Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable (θεοπνευστος και φηλιμος). There are two matters of doubt in this clause. One is the absence of the article η before γραφη, whether that makes it mean "every scripture" or "all scripture" as of necessity if present. Unfortunately, there are examples both ways with both ηs and γραφη. Twice we find γραφη in the singular without the article and yet definite (1 Peter 2:6; 2 Peter 1:20). We have ηs Israel (Rom. 11:26) for all Israel (Robertson, Grammar, p. 772). So far as the grammatical usage goes, one can render here either "all scripture" or "every scripture." There is no copula (estin) in the Greek and so one has to insert it either before the kai or after it. If before, as is more natural, then the meaning is: "All scripture (or every scripture) is inspired of God and profitable." In this form there is a definite assertion of inspiration. That can be true also of the second way, making "inspired of God" descriptive of "every scripture," and putting estin (is) after kai: "All scripture (or every scripture), inspired of God, is also profitable." Inspired of God (θεοπνευστος). "God-breathed."

2. The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance
By Bruce M. Metzger P. 241-243

3. "From all this you can now judge all the books and decide among them which are the best. John's Gospel and St. Paul's Epistles, especially that to the Romans, and St. Peter's first Epistle are the true kernel and marrow of all the books. They ought rightly be the first books and it would be advisable for every Christian to read them first and most. ...John's Gospel is the one, tender, true chief Gospel, far, far to be preferred to the other three and placed high above them. So, too, the Epistles of St. Paul and St. Peter far surpass the other three Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

In a word, St. John's Gospel and his first Epistle, St. Paul's Epistles—especially Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians—and St. Peter's first Epistle are the books that show you Christ and teach you all that it is necessary and good for you to know—even though you were never to see or hear any other book or doctrine. Therefore St. James' Epistle is really an epistle of straw, compared to them. For it has nothing of the nature of the Gospel about it." (Martin Luther)

4. The life of Wesley: and the rise and progress of Methodism, Volumes 1-2 P. 174

5. <http://www.desiringgod.org/blog/posts/fierce-tornadoes-and-the-fingers-of-god>

6. Rightly dividing (αὐτὴν ὡς ἐστιν). N.T.o. oCl ass. In LXX, Proverbs 3:6; 11:5; both times in the sense of directing the way. From ὁμολογηθῆναι; straight and ὁμολογηθῆναι; to cut. Hence, to cut straight, as paths; to hold a straight course; generally, to make straight; to handle rightly. Vulg. recte tractare. The thought is that the minister of the gospel is to present the truth rightly, not abridging it, not handling it as a charlatan (see on 2 Corinthians 2:17), not making it a matter of wordy strife verse 14), but treating it honestly and fully, in a straightforward manner. Various homiletic fancies have been founded on the word, as, to divide the word of truth, giving to each hearer what he needs: or, to separate it into its proper parts: or, to separate it from error: or, to cut straight through it, so that its inmost contents may be laid bare. Others, again, have found in it the figure of dividing the bread, which is the office of the household steward; or of dividing the sacrificial victims; or of cutting a straight furrow with the plough.

Re: The Noble Berean by Robert Wurtz II - posted by PQ (), on: 2012/3/11 6:58

Thank you for posting this Brother Greg.

I sometimes read threads posted by the Brethren on certain subjects and wonder why they ignored other Scriptures verses pertaining to the same subject, as if other verses are of less significance.

Matthew 22:29 Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God.

We are indeed to follow the example of the noble Bereans.

Thank you again for posting!