



## **Gospel Impact – Part 2**

### **When It Draws Us In**

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Well, in an arguably and ungrateful and entitled generation, I certainly am thankful to parents who teach their children to say please and thank you. That's a good thing. And I hope as Christian parents, you know, there's a biblical obligation for that sort of response when people are doing things that are of service or good or gifts. Right? It says in Romans Chapter 13 verse 7 that we were to give, its passage about taxes and revenue, but it gets into saying, "Give honor to whom honor is due, give revenue to whom revenue's due, give respect to whom respect is due, and then the summation of it all, give credit to whom credit is due." You should do that. That's an appropriate thing.

None of the first 30 seconds of this sermon has been offensive to you or in any way controversial, right? Has it? I'm just, I mean, that's a pretty simple thing to say your kids should say please and thank you. I'm not as hopeful for the rest of the sermon, (audience laughing) but I was hoping so far that we're all on the same page. Give credit to whom credit is due. You're for that, right? Yeah. All right. Yeah. The problem is that we often don't give credit to whom credit is due as grown-ups because we struggle to do that. We struggle to even see where the credit should lie. And sadly, it's passages like the one that we're studying today that become a reason that some people tend to not give credit where credit is due.

Now, the heart of it, if you've got your worksheet, you can see right there in verse 11, it's a familiar passage to a lot of people and might have even been something you've connected to church names as a Berean Church or, you know, a Christian bookstore, a Berean Christian bookstore or, you know, even denominations, and they name them after the Bereans. Now, the Bereans, the reason that such a popular name to slap on your organization or to kind of imagine that maybe you're a Berean is because it compares the Bereans when Paul comes to that synagogue to the Thessalonians where he was in our study last week.

And it says that the Bereans "were more noble than those at Thessalonica," because they received the word, the same word by the way, if you were with us last time in First Thessalonians Chapter 2 verse 13, the Greek word "Dechomai," the same word is used here, dechomai. They embrace the word. They welcome the word. So they had an enthusiastic welcome for the word, and they "examine the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so." So they had the same kind of response but there was an added thing that they searched the Scriptures to see if what Paul was preaching was true or not. But they get that label there, "noble," right? Some translations translate it "noble-minded," which I don't think we should use that translation here. I mean, I like the English Standard Version that just says "noble."

There are a few things I think that we miss in just reading that. We miss that, I would contend, there's some irony in this statement. Irony because when you contrast the Thessalonians to the Bereans, and I don't mean to make too much of this contrast, but I'll try to exaggerate the contrast for you just to know that the history of Thessalonica was a city, and this is what we don't bring into reading it. Like if I said to you, what's the difference between the Bereans and



the Thessalonians? You might say, well, you know, if I said, what about the city, Berea and Thessalonica, I don't know you would say well whatever the first 15 verses of Acts 17 say.

But if you were living in the first century you would say, okay, one has a very storied past. Thessalonians, actually the city was founded by a family member of Alexander the Great. It was very important, as I talked a little bit about last week, that Thessalonica was a city that had become the seat of the Roman government in northern Macedonia, which is in northern Greece today. And it was very important. Matter of fact, it was, you'll see the artifacts from Thessalonica of, you know, images and plaques and commemorating its past. If you were there in the day when it was thriving in the first century, you would see grand civic buildings, you know, statues. It would be an important place that you would say, wow, that's an important city. Talk about nobility, that was a noble city.

Berea, not to make, you know, not to throw them under the bus. I hope to meet some Bereans one day in the kingdom, but it's not quite the city that Thessalonica was. It was 50 miles away, but it wasn't 50 miles on the interstate, on the Roman road. It was actually 20 miles down that important Roman road and it was 30 miles off the path. So this particular town we know a whole lot less about. Go look up, you know, in the encyclopedias or the dictionary, bible dictionaries about Thessalonica and then look up Berea. It's just a whole different kind of place. It wasn't that there weren't a lot of people there. There were people there. And some people would ask why would Paul even go there. Probably because of his commitment to the gospel as it's laid out in Romans Chapter 1 verse 16, that he's "not ashamed of this gospel, it is the power of God unto salvation to all who believe, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."

And clearly there's a synagogue there and apparently a lot of displaced Jewish people who were there. And so in keeping with his commitment, even though he'd been run out of a lot of synagogues, he's going to go to the synagogue. And while this is off the main road, he's going to go there and he's going to preach Christ. And even in this passage as we'll see Luke doesn't even give us any explanation about what he's preaching. But it's a lot like in Thessalonica. We can assume the same thing, he's preaching that Jesus is the Christ and he's opening the Scriptures and he's preaching to them.

But what gets us is that these Bereans were said to be "more noble than those in Thessalonica." And we like that. Matter of fact, we like to think we're more noble than, you know, the people in some other place. But a few observations that'll help. One is the one I just made that I do think if you were to compare the two cities back in the day, you would say, well Thessalonica is the more noble city. So there's a little bit of an irony just in calling one noble. The other thing is just please remember that both of these descriptions are about their response to Paul's preaching BEFORE they become Christians. They search the Scriptures and because of that, it'll say in the next verse, in verse 12, it'll say they believed in Christ.

So this is the description of the things that were happening in their lives before they became Christians. So we're comparing like the non-Christian response to the gospel and some of who get saved in Thessalonica, and the non-Christian response to the gospel and some get



saved in Berea. So we've got two cities. One is more noble than the other, we might say, more important, more prominent, more storied in its past and its history and kind the gravitas of the city in general. Again, we got to remember, these are non-Christians responding to the gospel, but then they become Christians. So this is a description of their pre-Christian pathway.

And thirdly, the word itself "noble." If you were to and you can, because of, you know, technology that you can just click on a word if you have software in front of you and see that this Greek word is a Greek compound that is translated elsewhere, "noble birth." It's really just a compound of the prefix "Eu," which is "good" and we translate it eu like "Euangelion" is the good message or the good news. Or you go to a funeral and there's a eu-logy, "eu logos." A eulogy is a good word about the deceased. So eu is the part of the word that is "good." And then the second part, we get the word "genealogy" from it or "genesis" from it. It means "birth." So literally the most literal way you would say this is "good birth," which of course means you're a noble person. You of noble, you know, past, you have this heritage. You're in the high-ranking, sophisticated society.

If you just look at that word and you say, okay, they're more noble than they were in that city, that I think you would probably intuitively know that other cities are more noble than this city. Well, it's almost an ironic thing to say. Now, it's a commendable thing. They're searching the Scriptures and I'm all for it. But I just don't want us to attribute credit where credit is not ultimately due here, because once we do, then we start to, as so many people have, identified with the Bereans and said, "That's what I want." Matter of fact, most sermons you'll hear on this passage will be all about, "Are you the Berean?" You know, you need to be the Berean. Okay. Yes. I want you to be a Berean. I would like you to search the Scriptures daily.

But I don't want you, as some people do, whether it's the current relationship you have with the Scriptures or whether it's the relationship you had with the Scripture before you became a Christian and you say, "Well, I responded well to that. I was more noble in my pre-Christian life than my neighbor who's still in his pre-Christian life, and he's not responding well. He didn't search the Scriptures, he doesn't even care. And so I'm more noble than he is because look at my pre-Christian experience with the gospel or hearing the message of how to get saved or church or Bible. I was so much better in responding to this than them." Can you start to see the problem here? And that is that if you just read this passage without the rest of the New Testament in view, you start to think, well, they were just better people who got saved. You know, they were better than the other non-Christians up the road.

Now, better is a relative term, but we've got to be careful that we don't attribute to the Bereans something that should only be attributed to God, to put it really clearly. As a matter of fact, this word "good birth," right? Good birth, noble, is used three times in the New Testament. Once when Jesus tells a story in Luke and he talks about a noble man who goes to a distant country to receive a kingdom and he comes back. He's got all these servants and it's the typical story of Christ and stewardship. But he sets up the story by saying this man is a noble man, an important man, a higher upper echelon man, with a lot of money, a lot of servants, a lot of property. He's going to go get a kingdom and come back. Nobel.



The other use of it is very clearly just like that parable, kind of a literal description of a man being of noble birth. Right? Now, the other time it's used is in First Corinthians Chapter 1. Now this is a bit of a longer introduction, but I would like you to... It can't be longer than the last week, so if you were here, right? Please, God, don't let it be as long as last week. (audience laughing) We're going to get to Acts Chapter 17, even though I've quoted a few verses from it already. But first, let's go to First Corinthians Chapter 1. I want to show you the third usage of this word in the New Testament where it's very literal and in no way says what I think we assume in our passage that that's how it works. Noble people who are more noble minded than non-Christians, those are the people who get saved. There's a quality about them that allows them to respond rightly to the gospel. Even saying it that way upsets you. If you're a Sunday school grad, you think, "Well, okay. I don't think that's what the Bible teaches." That is not what the Bible teaches.

And in First Corinthians Chapter 1, where we see this word enlisted, drop down to verse 26, you'll see in this passage, this is clearly just stating it as the opposite. This is not how it works. First Corinthians 1:26, "For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards," which I think is basically where we go when you want to think about "they were more noble than those at Thessalonica." Right? We think, "Oh yeah, they responded. They just had quality people there." Well, that's not how it normally works in this passage. That's not how it is. "Not many were powerful." Right? Like you're important people in society. And here it is, "Not many were of noble birth." Again, that's the same word. And it's translated two words here, "noble birth," and over in our passage, which we're going to get to, Acts 17 verse 11, it's just describing them and it's translated "noble." They were more noble. So noble birth.

And again, what is this saying? Well, that's not normally how it works. Why? Because God, verse 27, "Chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise." Now, this is really hard if you're hearing this thinking, this is Paul, like you're the original audience and Paul is writing this to you and he's saying, "I just want to talk to you Christians. And you know what's interesting about all you Christians is not many of you are wise and not many of you are powerful and not many of you are noble." Right? Matter of fact, what God does is choose, you know, people like us, foolish, the foolish in the world, but it ends up shaming the wise because in the end, when the wise of the culture get cast into outer darkness and you get ushered into the kingdom, wow, it seems like you're the winners here. But, oh, in terms of who you were, you weren't wise, you weren't powerful, you weren't noble.

So God shows what is foolish in the world and that stung a little bit, but hopefully he won't elaborate on that. Oh, he does. "God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised." I get it, Paul. Right? It's like, stop, right? Okay. We don't have more followers on Instagram than those people. I get it. We're not the powerful, we're not the richest, we're not the smartest. We're not the higher upper echelon. I get it. But look, he piles these words on -- foolish, weak, right? You're low, despised. And then he, like, says it in such a powerful, all completely... "things that are not in order to bring to nothing the things that are." Like right now, there are people, all the universities, the Ivy Leagues are so



smart, all the popular people, all the rich people in society, they're probably not sitting with a Bible open in their laps in church today. That's just probably that's not how it works. Right?

Now, there are a few, but not many. Usually it's just the normal people like us. So again, if you say, okay, it's just the normal people and even less than normal people who often are becoming Christians and you see this definitively stated and it's clearly stated and it's emphatically stated and it's literally stated, then I can't go to Acts 17 and go, "Oh yeah, yeah, see there, those Bereans were better. That's why they got saved here." No, no, no, no. That's not it at all. Because clearly God is choosing the opposite of that, as he often does, the weak, the despised, the low, the people who are not wise, the foolish. "So that," here's the whole purpose, "no human being might boast in the presence of God." See, and that's a biblical foundational doctrine. You cannot take credit when the credit is not due to you. Right? Credit has to be where credit is due.

And when it comes to salvation. Right? Here's a basic biblical doctrine, the credit is God's, it's not yours. And you can read Acts Chapter 17 and start looking at the comparison between the Thessalonians and the Bereans before they became Christians and think, well, the Bereans were more noble. And then look, they get saved. And I'm just saying, that's not what God says. God says, I want to make it clear in choosing mostly the weak and mostly the foolish and mostly the despised, so that everyone can understand that it is "because of," verse 30, "him," because of God, "that you are in Christ Jesus." Not because of you, not because you were more inquisitive, you were more sensitive, you were more interested in the gospel, you were more favorable to spiritual things. You were smarter in figuring it out. You ask the right questions.

That's not why you're a Christian. It says here it's because of God "who became to us," and we get it now, "wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written," now he's quoting Jeremiah 9, "let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." Do you want to give credit? Give credit where it belongs. The credit belongs to God. It doesn't belong to your nobility or your high-minded thinking or your wisdom or your intelligence or your insight, or you are good enough to ask the right questions or you figured this out and your non-Christian neighbor did not figure this out. That's what we're trying to guard against. And we have to enter into our study of this passage saying, okay, it starts there. We got to start there. Okay. Are you with me?

Now, let's go to Acts 17. Read our passage with all that in our minds, because we could see it in a lot of places, but we want to understand this text in light of that. And it's not that we're not going to go, "Hey, Berean, that's great," but we need to know where credit is due. I'm so glad you responded this way to the gospel. But it wasn't you.

All right, verse 10, Acts 17:10. "The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away." Away from where? Thessalonica. "By night to Berea." Why? Because there were riots and people were after them, and they wanted to kill them. "And when they arrived," in Berea, 50 miles away, "they went into the Jewish synagogue." Now, it doesn't tell us what he did there, but he didn't go to put his feet up or listen to a sermon from some rabbi. He went there to do what he



was doing at Thessalonica and in every other city he goes to, Philippi and all the rest. He's going to go and preach that Jesus is the Christ. He's going to open up the Scriptures, he's going to prove, as he explains and applies these principles of Scripture to everything that God has fulfilled in Christ. He's going to bring all that to bear.

"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." Wow! That's fantastic. "Many of them therefore believed." Even the word "therefore." Therefore what? Why? Well, because they were receiving the word. They were eager about the reception and they were examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. Okay, well, that's good. You guys are noble. And all those idiots who didn't respond to the gospel, they are just dumb, dumb, dumb, dumb. You guys are smart, smart, smart. Okay. Again, I can't read it that way because I know what the rest of the Bible has to say as we'll try to drive home in the rest of this sermon.

"Many of them therefore believe, with not a few of the of the Greek women of high standing." Right? So there was some nobility there. But that is not why they became a Christian. "As well as men." We're going to see that by the word he's going to use to describe everyone like we saw in verse 10. There's some symmetry between verses 10 and 14. He calls all the Christians. It's like there were some high-standing people in Thessalonica, but they're all brothers. We're all just siblings. We're all just recipients of God's grace in all of this. And he says, "But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God had been proclaimed by Paul at Berea also," they couldn't handle it.

We saw and we kind of analyze some of the reasons that the Jews might be mad at Paul for all this and all the envy and the rest. "They came there, too." That's 50 miles. That's like from our front door of our church to LAX. If I said, let's walk to LAX because there's someone there doing stuff we don't want them to do because I'm really tweaked about it. You're going to walk with me to LAX this afternoon? I don't want to do that. Right? I mean, even if you're riding a donkey, let's ride a donkey to LAX today. You want to do that? Sometimes on the I-405 freeway it feels like you're riding a donkey to LAX. But I don't want to do that. I don't want to drive there. I don't want to walk there. I'm going to have to be motivated. How motivated were they? Super motivated. They came all the way to Berea. And what were they doing? Bottom of verse 13, "Agitating and stirring up the crowds." This guy's got to stop preaching all this stuff.

"Then the brothers immediately sent Paul off on his way to the sea." It probably some of the same people, probably the same exact people, many of them who were the heads of the opposition in Thessalonica are now there in Berea and they're doing the same thing. And just like they sent Paul away in Thessalonica, they're going to send Paul away now from Berea and he's going to go off to the port, to the seaport and get on a boat. I got the map there on your worksheet, you can see, he's going to sail a lot further than 50 miles. And he's going to go "all the way down to Athens," as it says.



The difference is in this case, they leave Silas and Timothy behind. "But Silas and Timothy remain there" in Berea. "Those who conducted Paul," they escorted Paul, they were on the boat with Paul, "they brought him as far as Athens, and after receiving a command," because Paul said this, "for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, well then they departed." And so then Paul's going to have some time by himself without some of his missionary partners in Athens. And we're going to pick that up next time, Lord willing, in verse 16.

But here we have the preaching of the word, people responding to it who seem to be praised and then all this opposition. So let's look at these parts and let's start with the first one. We're going to have to fill in what we know Luke means, because we've seen it throughout the book of Acts. We've seen it as near as the beginning of this chapter. He's preaching the words, he's going to the Scriptures and we focused on that. We were talking in this series about the impact of God's word, the impact of the truth, the impact of God's good news. And Paul is bringing that again to a new group of people.

And I just want to remind you that if you want to credit something, ultimately what we credit is the power of those words. We credit the message itself, and that's all I'm trying to help us and prevent us from doing, and that is I don't want us to take credit when the credit is not due the receptor of the message, the credit is due to God and his message. And that's where we need to make sure our minds are just focused on, even though we might describe, hey that was better irony that they're more noble here in this place than they were in that big city. But here's the deal, right? It's all about the salvation of these people based on God's word, which is an active message. It's a message and it's used repeatedly, active. It is, to quote Hebrews Chapter 4 verse 12, "It is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword. It pierces down into our lives, like of dividing joints and of marrow. It gets through the thoughts and intentions of my heart," and it judges them. I'm convicted by it because it's a message that comes from God and it's powerful.

I'm not ashamed of the gospel. "It is the power of God unto salvation." Right? That's why Jesus kept illustrating the pitching of the gospel as a seed being thrown. Right? It's like the seed itself is the thing that germinates and creates this crop and bears fruit. The seed is the powerful thing. And it's not that the people who are receiving it are noble and therefore they get saved and bear fruit, it is that the message is effectual to do things in people's lives. And that's where credit needs to remain in our thinking. We've got to think that way. You need to see that regardless of whether you're smart or dumb, whether you're powerful or you're weak, whether you're a Ph.D. or a dropout from junior high. Right? The bottom line is what you need is the same thing everyone needs, and that is we need God's words because the words are inherently powerful.

Number one, "See Your Need for God's Words." That's why Paul's a preacher. That's why we have missionaries. That's why we write Christian books. That's why we write Christian tracts. That's why we preach Christian sermons. We want the message of God to go out so that people can have to interact with the words of God. And it should be received, as Paul said in First Thessalonians Chapter 2 verse 13, that the Thessalonians received it as the word of



God. And now we've got some people in Berea who are receiving it as the word of God, and they're even going home and studying the Scriptures themselves to see if these things are so. Now their response to this, all I want to say is we don't give them credit for becoming Christians because they were more noble than the other people who were non-Christians or anyone else that we compare them to. They're Christians because God has a powerful thing to say to them and it's not about the person receiving it.

And I know that's a hard doctrine and that's why I warned you, right? "The first 30 seconds were great in the sermon, but I'm not sure I agree with the rest of it." I get that. But let me have you contend with Christ and not with me. Go to John Chapter 6 with me, please. John Chapter 6. I preached on this not long ago about the Bread of Life, and we talked about, you know, who Christ is and how it works and all that. But look at how he responds to the people here who are coming to get the benefits of Christ, which in this case was "I want a free lunch." And he's saying, but you're rejecting the person and the real message that I'm delivering to you. You don't like my message. You just want the blessings. And he's saying, you've got a problem. And the problem is you, the problem is not the words. The words that I'm giving you are powerful.

I just want to make the super clear and get this in our thinking. John Chapter 6. Drop all the way down near the end of the chapter. Go to verse 63. Which, by the way, as you're scrolling down to that, remember that Jesus at the beginning of his ministry, the Sermon on Mount, he's talking in Matthew Chapter 5 about the power of the Old Testament, and he's basically reflecting this Isaiah 40. "We're all like flowers and grass. We fade away, but the word of God stands forever." He says, there's not one serif or yodh, there's not one jot or tittle or however you translate it in the English Standard Version. There's not a bump on a letter. Right? Like the difference between an Ariel font and a Times New Roman which doesn't mean anything for us, we still read the letters the same, but in Hebrew the difference between a resh and a dalet brings a little tiny bump, right? And we see this everywhere in the Hebrew language that those little bumps make a big difference in what letter we're referring to. And that's a serif or a yodh, which is the smallest Hebrew character, which is like an apostrophe on our page in English.

And so it's just none of it's going to pass away until all of it is fulfilled. In other words, this is going to surpass every generation. This is God's eternal word and it's powerful. And he's always putting it on the highest shelf saying, "Have you not read?" Here is the teaching of Christ on the Old Testament. Then in Matthew 24 after a whole ministry that's laid out in the book of Matthew, he says this: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away." So now he's putting his words, his message. He is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies and the New Testament message, he's saying, just like the Old Testament, it supersedes and it... It goes beyond, it transcends. That's the word I was looking for. It transcends everything in this life. It is powerful.

So Old Testament, powerful. God has spoken, New Testament, powerful, he's spoken to us in his Son. So here we have the words of God. He's giving them, and here's how he describes his word in this passage, verse 63 of John Chapter 6. "It is the Spirit who gives life." Now, if I





said, why did the non-Christians at Berea become Christians, those who did? Because they were noble. No, no, no, no, no. It's the Spirit who gives life. But what about their flesh? It kind of seems to be a commentary on them, really kind of wanting answers and looking through the Scriptures, "the flesh is of no help at all." I mean, how absolute is that statement, right? "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you," just to tell you the means by which this happens, "they are spirit and life," right? I have life-giving words. And these words that I'm telling you will change everything.

"There are some of you who don't believe. (For Jesus knew from the beginning those who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him)," verse 65. "And he said, 'This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father,'" granted him, given him by the Father. So I have powerful words. Your flesh is of no use at all. Matter of fact, here's how it's described in Ephesians Chapter 2. "Dead in your trespasses and sins." So what has to happen for these words to germinate and bear fruit? Well, get down to it in verse 5 of Ephesians Chapter 2, "God has to make you alive in Christ." He has to grant life.

Now, many of his disciples couldn't handle that, verse 66, and "many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. So Jesus turns to the twelve and says, 'Do you want to go away as well?'" Verse 68. "Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go?'" Now, he's getting verse 63 in his verse 68 response. "You have the words of eternal life," right? My eternal destiny is going to be changed based on the reality of these words. These words are going to explode like bombs. Right? They're going to be in farmer terms, are going to be like a seed that is going to become a huge tree, it's going to bear all kinds of fruit. Those words are powerful.

And those words make the difference about your eternity, whether you're a Berean or a Thessalonian or no matter who you are, smart or dumb, you know, whether your background is some amazing heritage that you have, some background that you have, it doesn't matter. What matters is God choosing to grant life with the powerful words that God is giving us through the messengers who bring the message of Christ's words. Whether someone could be a conversation in a coffee shop, could be picking up a Bible and reading it. It could be a biblically-based sermon, could be a Christian book that someone explains and proves through the scriptural references what the truth of the gospel is.

Which in essence is simply this: that you are a sinner, you deserve to be excluded from God's presence, but God has provided a solution to that. That's the Christ, that's Jesus the Messiah, that God would have all the righteousness that you need provided in him and his life and all the punishment you deserve laid on his cross. And now he's calling you to respond to him by putting your trust in him being so aligned with him in this passage, it's like you eat him, it is like bread that you ingest and that you become a follower of Christ. Repentance and faith. Those are the two shorthand verbs that are part of this gospel message, right? And then you become a follower of Christ.

The good news of the gospel, right? That simple message is rebuffed by most people, but embraced by some. And it's embraced by some when this word takes root in people's lives,



not because they're noble, not because they're sensitive, not because they're smart, but because God grants that life. Which is precisely when it says, "That's why I told you," in verse 65, if you want to know where he told them that in this context, go scroll back up to verse 26. Jesus answered and said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me not because of the signs, but because you ate and you've got your fill of the loaves," right? That's what you were doing. It was all about that.

Now drop down to verse 44. You want me for my blessings and everyone wants that. A lot of people want that. Verse 44. "No one can come to me," not for my blessings, but for me, "unless the Father who sent me draws him." What's described in Thessalonica is the drawing of the Thessalonians to Christ. What's described in Berea is the drawing of those Bereans to Christ. Who's doing that? I'm just saying stop giving credit to the Thessalonians or the Bereans or comparing them and saying, "Well, I want to be more like those guys and those guys because that's how I want to be. I want to be good enough to rightly respond to God's truth." I'm just saying let's give credit where credit is due, and that's a hard thing for us to process.

And many people said, "No, I'm not going to." And Peter goes, "No, we're going to, of course, because we know you have the words of eternal life. Your words are powerful." One more passage on this. How about this one? First Peter Chapter 1. First Peter Chapter 1. How badly do you need the words of God? Well, it's the difference between heaven and hell. It's the difference between God's power at work in your life or no power at work in your life. First Peter Chapter 1, dropped down to verse 23. "Since you've been born again." Follow me now on this. First Peter Chapter 1 verse 23. "Since then you have been born again."

By the way, that phrase "born again." John Chapter 3. Nicodemus comes and Jesus says. "You'll never see the Kingdom of God," never enter the Kingdom of God, can't see the Kingdom of God, "unless you are born again." Born by what? "By water and the Spirit," which is a reference to Ezekiel, the idea of being cleansed of your sin and having the Spirit change the inside of your life. And he says, this is a mysterious thing. I mean, the Spirit comes into Berea, comes into Thessalonica, comes into Orange County, and it blows and you don't know where it's going to go, where it's going to explode, where it's going to bear fruit. But the power of the Spirit, like Jesus said, my words are Spirit and life, they come and it's the prerogative of the Spirit. God's got to grant it. The Spirit is dispatched to do this work in people's lives.

And it says here, "Since you've been born again, not of perishable seed." Right? That's the analogy. Something explosive, something catalytic, "but of imperishable, through the living and abiding," knowledge and nobility that you have because you're so smart to figure out the gospel and your neighbor just can't get it. No, no, no. By the "living and abiding word of God." And then he quotes Isaiah 40, all flesh like grass, all the glory of the flower like grass, "grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of the Lord remains forever." It's not a whole nother category all by itself. This word is the euangelion, the good news that was preached to you.

You didn't have to sit there and read it. A lot of people became Christians without even reading the Scripture. Somebody articulated the Scripture to you. They explained the



message of the gospel to you. That's the good news and it was powerful. It is living and abiding and its spirit and its life. Now that's just for salvation. Right? Now we can start patting ourselves on the back for our sanctification. No, even though we're involved in that, I get it. And the commandment in Peter Chapter 2 verse 1 is about you doing things. Look at it. "Put away all malice, all deceit, all hypocrisy, all envy, all slander." But that doesn't happen just by your will. Look at this. You need the power of, as it says, and I quote it one more time, First Thessalonians 2:13, "it is the word of God," you accept it, "which is at work in you who believe."

So it's a continual ingesting of God's word. And he says, "Like newborn babies," verse 2, "you have to long for the pure spiritual milk." And what is that? The reference is, the end of Chapter 1, this good news, this truth that is preached to you, the word of God, "that you may grow up into salvation," you may measure up, start looking more like Christ, "if indeed you've tasted that the Lord is good." I mean, you've had this experience of new birth by the power, the instrumental power of the word. That's why, and this has been a debate throughout Church history, whether it's Augustine and Pelagius or whether it's Martin Luther and Erasmus, it was Luther who like to say, "the power of the word is the means of grace." It's as though he talks about it like it's a pipe. It brings in God's Spirit, the power of those words.

That's why you can't be a mature Christian without the Bible, without the biblical truth invading your life and moving you on to grow up into your salvation. Or if you're a non-Christian, you can't get saved without the power of God's gospel being articulated to you to where you understand it. But that's a gift of God. That's the work of God.

There are so many things to say there, but I have to press on. Let's go back to our passage, Acts 17. I hate when preachers say that, by the way. "Oh, there's so much I could say here." Well, then say it. "No, I don't have time." Well, you're wasting time by saying that. I don't like that. So if you didn't like that, I get it. I don't like it either at all. Acts 17 verse 11. "Now these Jews are more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, they were examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. Many of them therefore believed, not a few of the Greek women of high standing in Macedonian as well as men." So we have all stratas here, even including some nobility here, who are getting saved, they're responding to the gospel. Okay?

Again, I ask, how come? I've tried to set up this case. How come is because of the seeking and the eagerness, look at the words again, they were receiving, they were eager and they were examining. All of those things, I just want to tell you are not based and rooted or drawn or derived from their character. Right? This was a gift granted to them by God. And so what I want us... and let me just summarize that explanation of these conversions this way. Number two, you need to "Appreciate God's Work on Your Hearing." If I need God's words, what you need to appreciate as a Christian, if you're saved, you need to appreciate this: God just gave me ears to hear. He gave me eyes to see.

And you can't read the Bible without seeing this everywhere. We just read it in our Daily Bible Reading in Matthew where it says, "It has been granted to you to know the secrets of the



kingdom," he tells his disciples. "It's been given to you." I've given you eyes to see you. They have eyes, but they don't see. They have ears, but they don't perceive it, they don't get it. "But you have been granted to know these things." God gives us. God has to do things to give us eyes to see and ears to hear.

I think about that promise that is made in Acts 26 when Paul is concerned. But God says, you go. And Jesus says, "I'm going to deliver you from the people to whom I am sending you." You're going to "open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins in a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me." So it's like they're bound in this thing. Satan has got some kind of control over them. But you're going to bring a message and you're going to open their eyes. Now, again, do I give Paul credit for opening their eyes? The great ophthalmologists. No, no, no. It's the power of the message that you're bringing. I'm sending you to speak. Now, go speak. And that through the instrumentality of that message, I'm going to open up eyes.

And you need to recognize that God has to bring your ears to life. He has to give you the receptivity. This is how it works. Why? Because in and of yourself you don't have what it takes. This is going to be... this is hard. A lot of this has been hard after the first 30 seconds, a lot of it's been hard. Romans Chapter 3. If you know your Bible, what's going on in Romans 3? That's where Paul just rails on us all being sinners, right? It crescendos into "we all sin, all fall short of the glory of God." Okay, here's something it says at the beginning of this list. Let me read it for you. It starts quoting a bunch of Old Testament passages. This is in verses 10, 11 and 12. "As it is written: 'None is righteous, no, not one.'" Are you familiar with that verse? "No one understands," verse 11, "no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they've all become worthless; no one does good, not even one."

Now you've read that. Is there a place in your brain for that? "Well, except for me, I was pretty noble-minded. I responded to the gospel. I figured it out." No, no, no, wait. Here's what the Bible says. Your ears were as plugged as anybody's ears. Your eyes were as blind as anybody's eyes. You did not seek after God and immediately you're going go, "Well, wait a minute, but those people in Berea, they were. They were eager. They were welcoming the preaching, and they were even searching the Scriptures to see if what Paul was saying was true." They were. I just want to give credit where credit is due. Where's the credit due here? Because the Bible is saying that you as a lost person, you don't seek after God. You're like sheep who have just scattered. Do you know what you need? A shepherd to take hold of you and bring you somewhere. That's what we miss. We think somehow the shepherd is sitting on a hill and just saying, "Hey, guys!" And you're like, "Oh, there he is."

I mean, you'll even quote John 10, right? "My sheep hear my voice." But everything in that scenario, even though that's my experience, it's like I sensed the call of Christ. The Berens are saying, "I heard Paul preaching. I realized the truth of it. I search the Scriptures and I responded." And then you go, "Oh, I'm more noble minded than those who didn't." No, no, no. Even the act of drawing, that's the whole point of this message, the act of drawing all that was happening in you getting interested in Christianity and you being drawn to the truth of Scripture, you wanting to read the Bible, all of that, the Bible's very clear you didn't seek it.



You don't see God. No one understands. No one seeks after God. But you are. Well, how does that happen? Well, that must be granted to you. That must be external to you. That must be alien to you as a fallen person.

And this, by the way, is where Augustine and Pelgius were arguing. And it is where the Church and semi-Pelagianism was dealing with the problem. And it is what Luther and Erasmus were dealing with. And what is that? And that is how bad is the problem of sin? How infected with the problem of sin are we? Are we so infected that we can't seek after God? And the answer has historically and biblically been as long as we can humbly handle it, that all credit goes to God because we can't do this. Well, then, how is it happening?

Back to our passage. Acts Chapter 17. Paul is going to end up in Athens next. He's going to sit there with all the professors of the high intellectuals of Athens, and he's going to start preaching to them about people seeking God. But notice how it's described. Well, I thought people don't see God. Well, they do see God or none of us would be here. Of course we see God. Well, who gets the credit for that? That's what I'm trying to prove here. Acts Chapter 17. Drop down to this discussion in Athens in verse 26. When he's in the middle of this sermon, he says, "He," look at who the "he" is, verse 24, God, the Lord. "He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on the face of the earth, having determined," these are very strong words, he made, he determined, "the allotted periods of and the boundaries of their dwelling place." I'm going to tell them where they're going to live and when they're going to live. "That they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him." Okay.

Right there you going to go, "Well, that seems to contradict Romans Chapter 3." No, it doesn't. Not if you read the totality of the New Testament, clearly it says you will have the experience of seeking God. The question is, is it your nobility? Is it your inquisitive nature? Is it your sensitivity to spiritual things? What is it? No, you're dead in your transgressions and sins. God has to make you alive, God has to somehow, through the instrumentality of his powerful word, get the word in your life and open your eyes, which you would not do on your own and begin to seek him. And in this passage, I can say circumstantially he's arranging things so that you will seek him. He's even taken his written word that you need to hear and have ears to hear, he's even coded that on your conscience, it says in Romans Chapter 2, that the law of God is "written on your heart." Well, that's what I need. I need the word of God, the law of God, the rules of God at first just to know that I'm a sinner in need of salvation.

Well, the Bible says when I hear the message, it already comports with something that God has already done actively to make me, even ontologically as someone made in the image of God, reflecting his law. In other words, part of who you are just as a human being, Ecclesiastes 3 or as Jesus said about whose inscription is this on the coin, "Give to Caesar what's Caesar's, give to God what's God's." The point is the imprint of God, the image of God is imprinted on you as a human being. And that is the thing as it says in Ecclesiastes, "eternity has been placed in your heart." There's already something God is actively doing within who you are ontologically. And he's doing things like putting you in circumstances so that you will seek God. That's not inherent to you. You have the experience of seeking God. But what you



need to see is give credit to whom credit is due, and the credit is due to the one who's making all this happen.

And that is something that God is doing. "No one can come to me," Jesus said, John says, "unless the Father draws him." And the drawing, I just don't want you to say, "Well, yeah, I did that." You didn't do that, right? God was doing that. Did you have the experience? Of course you had the experience of God. But you wouldn't have done that were it not God producing this within you. And that's a hard, hard thing for us to do, particularly when we are all bent at wanting to pat ourselves on the back and get a trophy for the accomplishments of what we've done to become Christians. And all I'm telling you, that's not how it works.

Conscience, ontology, circumstances, the commands of God, all of these things that we see as good, of lifting Christ up, I'm going to draw all men to me, this concept of the drawing process of God is the active work of God. And that's all I'm trying to say, that this is clearly the case. Why? Because we are dead in our transgressions and sins. I mean, you talk about people having an ear. You know, you look for someone on a worship band or someone to work the soundboard, you say, I hope they have an ear, they got to have an ear. Some people can hear but do not have an ear for music, you understand that? That maybe you, "I'm tone deaf. I can't carry a tune in a bag. I just can't do it."

If you want to find a good soundboard guy, don't go and talk to the mannequins at May Company or whatever it's called now, Macy's. May Company, look how old I am. At Fedco, you know. I've been around. I don't shop much, obviously. I don't want mannequins to apply for the job because they know they don't have an ear, they don't have an ear at all for this. And all I'm saying is they hear without perceiving. And the idea is that we have such a problem because of sin. It is so thorough in affecting all of who we are that God has to actively work to make this happen. And in the process there's opposition all along the way, which is certainly personified in our passage, if you go back to it in verse 13 by those Jews who do not want the people in Berea to hear what Paul is saying.

Think about that. Let's go to LAX. Let's walk to LAX to try and tell those people not to be saying things in the terminal. You better be dead set against that to work that hard. Well, they are working that hard and they're not working that hard on their own the Bible would say. We're not wrestling against flesh and blood or the dudes from Thessalonica. Right? Even as Paul writes back to the Thessalonians, the Christians, he says, "We tried to come to you again and again, but Satan hindered us." Paul sees the spiritual battle. He wants to bring more of the word to them and here is Satan opposing as Satan always opposes the words of God. And that's the picture that we have in these people personified coming to Berea to say, "Stop it." Agitating and stirring up the crowds. There's always going to be a rebuffing of the word that will be fueled by Satan saying, "I don't want those people to hear that."

Number three, you need to "Respect the Powers Opposing It All." I want to hear the word of God. That's the powerful thing. It's "living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword." It prepares me to stand before the God with whom I have to give an account. I know I need the word. Satan's going to fight me getting the word. It's as simple as you, as a non-Christian,



knowing that you're in a battle to even understand the gospel. Or as a Christian just getting up in the morning and picking up your Bible and studying it. There's always going to be a battle for this. Always! And Satan is against you getting into the word. Fellowship, fine. Hanging out, fine. Right? Going on trips, fine. But the Bible, that's what Satan is dead set against you not reading, not having, not understanding.

Go to John 8 real quick. This is a great example of this. Jesus couldn't have said it more clearly. John Chapter 8. There were some in Berea who didn't get it, but some that did. Why would some people get it and some not get it? It's the same reason they got it and didn't get it in John 8. John 8:43. Let's start there. He says, "Why do you not understand what I say?" Well, wait a minute. Your words are spirit and life. Jesus, you said in John 6 your words are like explosive. They're like hand grenades. Why didn't some people, you know, get hit with the shrapnel? Why do you not understand what I'm saying? Right? He answers the question. "It is because you cannot bear to hear my word." You think, "Well that's how people are. That's what you just said, Pastor Mike. They're dead." That's right. Why? Because let's, how dramatic is this? Verse 44. "You are of your father," the Diablos, "the devil," the opponent, "and your will," what you want, "is to do your father's desires."

Which, by the way, I know the reason you're going to throw a flag on the play on this whole sermon because you're going to go, "Well, what about the next step? And the next step is if you're saying God is the one who draws people and God is one who grants life and God is the one who gets people to understand this, then why didn't he, why didn't he do that for my aunt or my friend or my cousin or my neighbor or my husband?" I don't know how close to home. You're going to start to struggle with that. And when you start understanding God's sovereign work in salvation, I understand you're going to start saying, "well, what about, what about, what about."

But if you think that somehow invalidates human responsibility or culpability, or blame for wrong decisions, here's a good passage to remind you. "You cannot bear my word, you're of your father the devil." There's certainly some external opposition to this, but it is "your will to do your father's desires." That is what you want. Romans Chapter 1 says he just keeps seeing people running headlong into sin and he keeps turning them over to that because this is what you want. This is what you want. You don't want the truth. "You are of your father the devil. Your will is to do your father's desires. He is a murderer." This is not for good for you from the beginning. And he "does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies," and he loves the lie because he hates the truth, "he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

But because I tell you the truth, you do not believe me." My words are spirit and life, right? And the problem is, there's a spiritual opponent and you are in his grips. "Well, that's just the really bad people that Jesus was talking to here." You might want to jot down First John Chapter 5 verse 19, to at least remind you that this is systemic with everyone who's not a Christian. We are of God, "We know that we are from God, but the whole world," it says, verse 19, "lies in the power of the evil one." Or you can write down Ephesians Chapter 2 verses 2 and 3, and everyone, when they're not Christians, walk according to the pattern of



this whole world system that Satan is involved and working in. Satan is actively involved. "The spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience." So the power of the enemy in the world is a big deal. And it's always opposing you receiving, understanding and responding to the truth.

One last passage in Second Corinthians Chapter 4. Turn there with me, please. It kind of ties all of these elements together. I mean the most simple way to understand this as you're turning there is Jesus talking about the seed going out and then soon as it hits the ground, the crows come and eat it up and take it away. And Jesus explains this is Satan. He comes and he steals the word. He just wants to get it out of people's minds. He's actively opposing anything that would help you or get you to understand the truth.

Look at verse 1, Second Corinthians 4, "Therefore, having this ministry." What is the ministry that Paul has? Coming into places and giving the word of God. Which by the way, he can't even say because he always gives credit where credit is due. He always understands that credit is not his. He says, "by the mercy of God." How did you get to be such a varsity Christian? You're a missionary. How did you get? The mercy of God. He understands this. I don't get credit for this. I understand the fact that God is gracious to even allow me to be a Christian let alone proclaim the gospel.

"But we don't lose heart," even though you've heard a lot of things about how bad it's going for me sharing the gospel, people are opposing me. But we're not going to do anything to change the ministry here. We're going to keep going. "We've renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways." We're not going to pay people to become Christians. We're not going to appeal to their base nature. No, "we refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word." The number one, by the way, strategy of people trying to get heard. Right? Let's just play down the word. Let's change it a little bit. Let's edit it a little bit. We're not going to "tamper with the word of God, but by an open statement of the truth."

What does Satan think about that according to John 8? Hates it, he hates it. He's going to lie every time the statement of truth goes out. "We would commend ourselves," by stating the truth openly, "to everyone's conscience in the sight of God." We're just telling you what God said. "And even if our gospel is veiled," they can't see it, "it is veiled to those who are perishing." Why? Because they're still "under the power of the evil one," First John Chapter 5 verse 19. That's where they live.

And he goes on to say it, "In their case," 2 Corinthians Chapter 4 verse 4, "the god of this world." Who's the god of this world? In this passage, small "g," you understand who the god of the world is, right? The pit bull that's on a chain, but running rampant all over the junkyard of this earth. Right? That's the enemy. "The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing." Right? This is, like, obvious. You're a sinner, it should be obvious, right? There's a solution that should be obvious. You should repent and follow him. That should be obvious. But it's not obvious. They don't "see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God." He's the eternal payment for our sins. "For what we proclaim is not ourselves," clearly, not like we're the noble people. Join the noble crowd. No,





we proclaim Jesus the Messiah as the boss, Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants. We're here to do whatever we can for Jesus' sake. To get you to understand this.

"For God," I love this now, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness.'" If you got blind people they can't see. How is this going to work? Well, he's got to grant this. And so it says, "Let light shine out of darkness." So he is turning on the light in people's dead minds. How does he do that? Well, he's God, right? As Peter said when he's like I can't believe this rich, young Jewish ruler won't become a Christian and Jesus said, "With man, it's impossible." It can't happen. Right? "But with God, all things are possible." That's a statement about people getting saved and understanding the truth of the gospel. "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,'" in Genesis, "He has shown in our hearts to give," to grant it, "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

And what about you? Verse 7, "We have this treasure in jars of clay." Right? We know we're weak. "To show," not noble, "To show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us." And then he goes on to make this long list. Look at all these things in our lives, right? It's God. Who gets credit? God. Who did it? God. Why? Even fighting against the powers of Satan to shut this message down, constantly throwing lies of false religion, cult groups, world philosophies, all the professorial nonsense of our age. Right? But the gospel keeps exploding in the minds of people as light pops on. Bam, bam, bam, bam. And God chooses to do that by his grace, by his mercy.

Pray with me. God, please give us a more profound thanksgiving for what you've done in our salvation. Not just dying 2,000 years ago and then letting us see if we'll figure out how important that is. But your active work in drawing us to your Son. God, we're grateful for that and we want to be profoundly grateful that would never give us any room for boasting. Even that phrase. Everywhere you've given that phrase in the Bible to us that we should be without boasting. We're in Christ because of God and your grace. So we acknowledge that today, hopefully with a new clarity, we're sure that God has done it all. We're not going to be proud. We're not going to pat ourselves on the back. We're going to boast in you and your kindness and your mercy toward us. And we receive that by faith and we stand justified. We have the standing before you because of your finished work in sending your Son to die for us. So God, we're grateful for that. We celebrated it with great thanksgiving this morning. We humbly declare that you deserve the credit.

In Jesus name. Amen.