

Christian Retirement

Part 57

By [Thomas Reade](#)

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ON THE CHARACTER OF THE BEREANS

The character and conduct of the Berean Jews, as recorded in the 17th chapter of Acts, is very instructive. As pride and prejudice shut out the light of truth, so humility and openness prepare the way for its admission. These Bereans were more noble than those of Thessalonica. They were people of a more ingenuous spirit. They did not resort to the base refuge of ridicule and persecution. They possessed a more elevated mind. Knowing the importance of the apostles' doctrine if true, they judged it, not only expedient, but due to the greatness of their message, to receive the Word. They admitted them into their synagogue, and with all readiness of mind, with a cheerful disposition of heart, listened to their preaching.

Having thus permitted the light to shine upon them, they did not, like the Thessalonians, immediately expel it, by driving the holy messengers of mercy out of their city; but they proceeded to search the Scriptures. They brought the doctrine of the apostles to the test of God's holy word. This they did, not superficially, but carefully; "they searched the Scriptures." They dug deep into the sacred mine. This they did, not occasionally, but constantly; "They searched the Scriptures daily," with unwearied assiduity, like those who were in earnest to discover the pure gold of divine truth. This they did, not critically, but sincerely; not to cavil with the apostles' doctrine by finding out objections against it; but to see "whether those things were so;" whether they were so revealed in the Scriptures as the apostles declared them to be.

The effect of this ready reception of the word, of this daily searching of the Scriptures, was, that they believed. The Holy Spirit graciously guided their inquiring minds into all truth, so that they heartily embraced the word of salvation. "Anyone who wants to do the will of God will know whether my teaching is from God or is merely my own." John 7:17. This blessing was not confined to a few. It is said, "many of them believed;" also, "of honorable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few." What a bright example! and what an encouragement is here held out to us!

Many of the Jews of Thessalonica, no doubt, acted like these Bereans; for we read in the 4th verse, "a great multitude believed." And in that city, the apostles planted a church, which shone exceedingly bright in faith and love.

The carnal mind, in every place, is enmity against God. Even in Berea, the unbelieving Jews who came from Thessalonica, stirred up the people so that it was found needful to send Paul away. What a striking picture the word of God gives us of the human heart! We see man under all circumstances an enemy of God. Whether he live in ruder or more polished times, the heart, until renewed by grace, is the seat of sin. Whether he be enveloped in ignorance, or enlightened by science, he naturally hates the pure and holy light of evangelical truth. The sensual shuns its purifying tendency, the self-righteous its humbling, tendency. All, without exception, love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.

Yet, God has never left himself without witness. In every age he has had a seed to serve him, who are accounted to the Lord for a generation. Neither has he ever left his people without sufficient evidence, whereby to prove the truth of his own revealed will respecting them. Among the many facts which may be adduced to prove the divine inspiration of the Bible, the two following may perhaps deserve some notice.

First—as it respects the Old Testament. It is well known that the Jews were never either a philosophical, or a literary people. There are no works among their ancient uninspired authors which can lay any claim to genius. Yet the books of their prophets surpass all the celebrated writers of antiquity. What heathen poet, however laureled by admiring ages, can exceed the sublimity of their conceptions, the grandeur of their descriptions, and the exquisite taste and beauty of their imagery, when describing the glorious majesty and unsullied purity of the One, Only True God—the works of his hands—the ways of his providence—and the wonders of his love?

How skillfully do they dissect the human heart, and delineate to the very life the character of man in his lapsed and restored condition. How pure are the precepts, how precious the promises, how dreadful the threatenings, how solemn the warnings, with which their writings abound!

When contrasted with the fables of the heathen poets; with their deification of the worst passions of mankind; with the impure character which they give to their gods; though embellished by all the flowers of rhetoric, and sweetened by the enchanting flow of numbers; it must surely convince every unprejudiced mind, that such writings as the Jewish prophets have left for the benefit of mankind, cannot be the product of unassisted fallen reason, but the gracious revelation of the Divine Spirit, under whose influence these holy men both spoke and wrote.

Secondly—as it respects the New Testament. The writers of the New Testament, with the exception of Luke and Paul, were men of no education; and yet their writings are the only standard of truth, respecting the character and work of the Savior of the world. These unlettered men elevated the standard of morals to the highest pitch, and revealed those heavenly principles which alone are able to restore man to the lost image of his Maker. So did not the most renowned and wisest philosophers of antiquity. The authors who immediately followed the said writers, called the primitive fathers, fell into many fancies, and even errors, on certain points; as if it had been permitted, in order to draw the line of distinction between divine inspiration, and the ordinary illumination of the human mind, more clear and defined.

But the two great evidences for the truth of Christianity, are Miracles and Prophecy. At the time when the Lord Jesus declared himself to be the Messiah, and proclaimed the glad tidings of salvation to a lost world, miracles were needful, in order to prove the truth of his mission, to manifest the divine approbation to his doctrines, and to fulfill the prophetic character of the Messiah, as recorded in the 35th chapter of Isaiah.

Miracles were also necessary after his ascension, to evidence the truth of those doctrines propagated everywhere by his apostles, which declared Jesus to be the Son of God, the true Messiah, the Savior of the world. When these doctrines were thus fully attested, by the power of God accompanying the preaching of the cross, miracles ceased in the church, as being no longer needed.

Yet a still more important evidence was reserved for future ages, no less declarative of the divine approbation to the Christian religion than miracles; and that evidence is prophecy. The gradual fulfillment of those prophecies which were foretold by Christ and his apostles, may be considered as a standing miracle; since it is utterly beyond the power of man to insure the accomplishment of any predicted event independently of the will and purpose of God. Any man may predict, but the accomplishment must prove the truth of the prediction.

Christ, as God in our nature, foretold what would come to pass through his own prescience. The prophets and apostles, as his servants, spoke under the immediate influence of his Spirit dwelling in them. (1 Peter i, 10, 11.) Thus the prophecies which have been fulfilled, and which are now fulfilling, and which still remain to be fulfilled to the end of time, form a chain of evidence to the divine origin of Christianity, which Satan and his emissaries can never destroy.

These two external evidences, of miracles and prophecy, taken together with the whole character of the blessed Jesus, answering in every minute particular to the ancient prophecies of the Old Testament; and also in connection with the internal evidence of the Gospel, arising from its agreement with the nature of God; and its adaptation to the needs of fallen man; ought, yes, and will, satisfy every honest inquirer after truth that Christianity is of God.

Such an one, through grace, will be led to acknowledge with heart-felt gratitude, like the Bereans of old, that Jesus Christ is God manifest in the flesh; the only Savior and hope of perishing sinners. The joyful exclamation of such an enlightened soul will be, "we have found him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write." And should any skeptic reply, "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?" The simple answer will be, "Come and see."

In every age, a generation of men has sprung up, the Serpent's brood, who have labored to bring the word of eternal truth into discredit by false statements and sophistries of every kind. "Your word is tried to the uttermost, therefore your servant loves it," was the language of David in his day.

It may appear strange, in this age of light and information, that the New Testament should be arraigned by modern infidels as the most immoral book that is extant. Surely this must be the dying gasp of infidelity; for what can be more feeble than such an attack? They may as well assert that the sun, when shining without a cloud in its meridian splendor, is the darkest part of the visible creation. The sun is indeed as darkness to those who are blind; and so are the things of God to those who are unenlightened by the spirit of truth.

How strange! A Roman emperor placed a statue of Jesus among his idol deities, on account of the excellence of his moral precepts; while modern infidels, reaping the benefits of his morality in the inestimable blessings of established governments, dare, in defiance of common sense, common honesty, and common experience, to denounce the holy Gospel of Jesus as the chief of immoralities!

It is truly awful to behold, how far men may travel in the road of sin and rebellion against the Almighty Governor of the universe! Is there in the whole world a morality so elevated, so pure, so influential, as the morality of the Gospel? We need only compare the lives of those who reject the Christian revelation, with the lives of those who truly believe it, and live under its purifying influence, in order to ascertain where true morality is to be found.

It lies in the pages of the Bible, and is exhibited in the spirit and conduct of its sincere believers. The history of the church in all ages attests this delightful truth, that, "the Gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believes." Men of the most savage natures have become mild; the most impure have become chaste; the most ungovernable have become obedient. In short, the whole moral change from darkness to light, from sin to holiness, from Satan unto God, has been effected solely by the Spirit of God, through the instrumentality of the Gospel of Christ.

Oh! blessed Suit of righteousness, you who are the light of the world, let your bright beams shine upon it, that the deep shades of error, superstition, and sin,

may flee before your powerful rays, until all the earth shall be filled with your glory.

Shine, blessed Jesus, upon your church. Let all your people become burning and shining lights in the world, shining by a reflection of your glory. Illuminate my dark mind. Take away the thick film from my mental vision. Remove the veil from my heart, and let me behold your glory with unveiled face. Yes, let me daily contemplate your glorious character, offices, and perfections, until I am changed into your holy image, and made fit for the enjoyment of your heavenly kingdom.

How rich, how varied are the themes,
The sacred page contains,
Like oceans deep, or lucid streams
That fertilize the plains.

Here, humble souls are sweetly taught
Salvation through his blood;
By whom alone mankind are brought
To happiness and God.

Here, lofty philosophic minds,
Deep versed in learned lore,
Are lost amid those vast designs
The cherubim adore.

The sacred mysteries of grace
Confound their reasoning pride;
They see no beauty in His face,
Who bowed his head and died.

But firm as on a solid rock,
The saint on Christ relies;
He smiles in death's dissolving shock,
And mounts into the skies!

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