

[Book Thesis: The Power of God Spreads the Gospel]

A Berean Love of Scripture

You ever wonder what makes people do what they do? Why would people behead a man they don't know? Hours after Paul Johnson's death this past week, Newt Gingrich—former speaker of the House of Representatives—denounced these people as barbarians, as enemies of civilization who deserve only death.

I don't agree fully that these are simply barbarians. Everybody does what they do for a reason. The issue is not just motivation, it's authority. What's theirs? What makes them do what they do?

So why do so many men choose just one woman and remain loyal to her alone, for life when some biologists are claiming that humans are like other animals, and that the male is inclined to breed *many* females?

When we travel down a road with a posted speed limit of 35, why do some of us go 35, and others 55? Especially when we know it's breaking the law and it might cost us a hefty fine. What is it that makes us do what we do?

Why do some students cheat in school. Based on national statistics, the majority do and that probably includes some of you. How come?

Today, there are men and women in uniform on the other side of the globe, earning meager salaries for what they do, yet hourly, risk their lives. And there are others—*also* dotted around the globe, who have left their homes and families, to live with people whose customs they don't like, to offer a message these strangers don't want to initially hear. Why?

Every deed, every thought, is birthed somewhere. We have reasons for what we think, or don't think; for what we do, or don't do. Except for psychopaths, or the mentally ill, we are not random beings who simply do what we do without some guiding light, without some compass, some north star, without some authority. We make deliberate choices to behave a certain way and not other ways. To entertain certain thoughts and dismiss others. Everyone has some authority that essentially runs the show of his/her life. What's yours?

Joel Belz of WORLD magazine notes, "...the problem isn't so much that we have the wrong views on homosexual marriage; the problem is that, as a society, we have the wrong views about where we get our views." Hmmm. READ Acts 17:10-15. PRAY.

Story

Like Philippi; things got hot in Thessalonica. With a local judge holding Jason's bail money, the Christians decided it would be best for the missionaries to be on their way. The new converts would just depend on God to nurture their baby church along. (Incidentally, it was often Paul's practice to plant a church and leave. It isn't a bad reminder that God is able to finish what He starts no matter how ideal or poor the circumstances are. God's Spirit is more competent to do ministry than any building, band, program or pastor.)

Paul, Silas, and Timothy (Luke probably stayed in Philippi) traveled 50 miles southwest to Berea, a sizeable town in a remote area of the Olympian Mt. Range. Paul immediately went to the local synagogue to preach, perhaps daily (v.11).

In Thessalonica, some listeners had turned *to* Christ, and some despised Him. In Berea, some also turned to Christ, but the hostility was missing. What intrigued Paul was how the Bereans assessed what he said. He said they were “*of more noble character than the Thessalonians.*” (11) While he was preaching, they were tearing apart the OT to see if what he said was true.

So when they surrendered to Christ, they didn’t do so just because the message was cutting edge, or because their sister-in-law converted, or because Paul was an impressive preacher. They did so because it checked out in the BOOK.

In perhaps a week or so, things got hot *here* too. Hearing that Paul and Silas were preaching in Berea, Thessalonian Jews took some vacation time to go and start a riot there. Hoping to throw off any pursuers, Christian friends took Paul east to the coast, then swerved south to the great philosophy center of Athens.

More noble character than the Thessalonians... Today there are many Bible studies, some small groups, some churches, and even a mission agency called “Bereans.” It has become synonymous with trusting, and searching, and living by, this book.

When I received my call to ministry I was a part of the particular Church. I knew that I could not remain to pastor in that denomination, because while some of my convictions were not in harmony with my church’s doctrine, my #1 concern was that the denomination seemed to be drifting from the Scriptures as its final authority.

When I came to Christ in 1975, it was through this book that God began to change me. A book compiled over 1500 years and written by about 40 authors. As far back as Moses’ day, God’s people believed that what was written here was, from God.

Watching the drift from Scripture in my denomination, I began to think more and more deeply about this book. I realized, that everyone has a book or a group of people, or a set of convictions that shapes their beliefs, their thinking, their speech, and their conduct. Everyone has a north star, a compass. Most of us utilize several, but we all have one that sits on top of the rest. The Muslims, have the Qu’ran and the Hindus, the Bhagavad Ghita. But there are also nonreligious authorities. For some people their compass is their...

- **Peers (not just teens):** people of influence: friend/friends, or perhaps someone strategically positioned such as a boss or manager; a spouse. It can be anyone you trust to do your thinking for you, to serve as your filter to what’s good and bad, what’s right or wrong, what’s useful and what’s not.
- **Popular culture**
 - **Entertainment world of movies, books, and celebrities**
 - **Information world of TV, newspapers, magazines, internet, etc.**
 - **Intellectual world: college professors, writers, thinkers and philosophers**
- **Parents or the Family (Mafia)**
- **Government?**
- **Ourselves: our desires, our feelings, our reactions.**

But we say, Christians, that the Bible is our authority. So, we are all Bereans, examining every argument, every advertisement, every fashion, every trend, every philosophy, every request, every political point, every personal desire, every persuasive conversation, by what the Bible says. Theoretically.

We use the Bible as our final screen for thought and conduct, because it's God's book. READ 2 Tim.3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21; Ps.12:6.

So, when someone says, "Let's go out and get hammered after work Friday night, we search the Scriptures and find in places like Prov.23:29b-33. (Quote). When someone tells us, "You know, Jesus Christ has already returned!" we check it out and see in Matt.24:23-24 that Jesus said, *At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive...*

If someone says, "To me, God is like this..." and proceeds to describe Him, I check the Scripture to see if it's *true*, or if my friend has fabricated a God in his own image.

At least, in *theory* that's how it works. But in some of our homes, the Bible's a coffee table or desk accessory, or a collection of homey sayings saved just for helping cheer people up who are down. You haven't read 10 chapters in the last 10 months. And while you claim to live by the Bible, what you really do is live by the code of your parents—or someone else you respect, because you couldn't *begin* to live by this book; you have no clue what's in it.

Find Mark 12:24. Trying to trap Jesus, some His opponents described a pathetic woman whose husbands kept dying on her: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and finally the seventh. By Jewish law, each brother after the first, was trying to give this woman children to rear in the name of the original brother. Yet she died childless. So, the Sadducees wondered whose wife she'd be at the resurrection? READ. You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. We'll take up the power of God another time.

The greatest threat to Christianity and the Bible today, is not an assault by liberals. The greatest threat is by Christians ignorant of their Bibles. According to George Barna's research, of people who claim to be born again, 50% do not believe Satan is a being, just a symbol of evil. 38% believe someone can be good enough to get into heaven. 31% believe that Jesus sinned while he was here on earth, and 26% of the people who claim to be born again don't think that it matters what faith you follow, because they all teach the same lessons.

Concl:

Is your authority the Bible or something else; someone else? If you don't know what this book says, you *will* need another source of authority: friends, some preacher you admire, the hottest selling author, or the culture itself will silently but forcefully, shape you into its mold. Why are liberal Christians rallying in support of the homosexual marriage and why were some on the front lines of the prochoice rally on the Capital mall in Washington April 25? Partly because their pastors have dismissed this book as authoritative, but mainly, because they themselves have failed to be Bereans. Are you of noble character? If not, why not?