

A Good Model for an Open Mind

Acts 17:10-15

Introducing God...Part 3

One of the most important attributes of God is his communicating nature – that He is a self-disclosing God.

That God has chosen not to remain silent – that He spoke to mankind . . . in volumes!

I read recently of a \$100 million dollar initiative that began just a few months ago – a Russian billionaire donated \$100 million dollars to use the best of technology, capable of listening to radio waves and searching for new planets and alien life.

To basically find out if there is indeed someone out there in the universe who is listening or watching.

I read some of the material of this initiative which is being chaired by Stephen Hawking – I even watched their short introductory video – which of course depicts a human race evolving without a Creator and the universe as infinite and nature as all powerful in creating life.

And their primary purpose, not surprisingly, in this new initiative is to find out if we are alone – where we came from and where we are going – the video announcer asked, “Are we alone?”

The truth is we are not alone. There is indeed Someone listening and watching . . . and involved . . . in fact, the stunning truth is, He *has* communicated with us about our origin and our future.

He told us about the origin of life in Genesis chapter 1 and about our eternal destinies in life in Revelation chapter 21’ and a lot more in between Genesis and Revelation indeed.

In his recent blog on the growing illiteracy of Americans relative to the Bible, Al Mohler quoted

George Gallup and Jim Castelli who concluded, “Americans revere the Bible – but, by and large, they don’t read it. And because they don’t read it, they have become biblically illiterate.” How bad is it?

Well, fewer than half of all adults can name the four gospels. Many Christians cannot identify the names of more than two or three of the twelve disciples. At least 12 percent of adults believe that Joan of Arc was Noah’s wife. (“Arc” was the clue there)

A considerable number of respondents to one poll indicated that the Sermon on the Mount was preached by Billy Graham.

Dr. Mohler than makes the application – How can a generation be biblically shaped in its understanding of human sexuality when 50% of them think Sodom and Gomorrah are a married couple? How can individuals who believe there’s a verse in the Bible that says, “God helps those who help themselves” be able to understand salvation by grace, through faith alone?¹

This is our world today.

It strikes me that the world today is open minded about just about anything outside of scripture.

- aliens who seeded our planet with life;
- the energy of the universe to determine your future;
- the alignment of the stars to determine your fate;
- the power of nature to create order and beauty from disorder – if that’s true, I wish nature would work some magic on my back

lawn – nothing beautiful is growing back there.

However, if you mention a God who communicates;

- a God who has disclosed who He is and who we are,
- and the values and virtues He demands,
- and a gospel of sin and a glorious salvation forever,
- suddenly, the open mindedness closes and the shutters on the ears are slammed shut and the windows of the soul are closed and locked.

Have you ever thought about the fact that open mindedness can be a good thing?

The Apostle Paul is about to encounter a group of Jewish and Gentile people who will become – to this very day, a wonderful model of having an open mind.

Of course the Spirit of God is at work in their hearts, and we don't want to forget His invisible handiwork – He's going to pry open the shutters and unlock the windows of their heart and soul.

Let me show you where it happened.

Let's go back to *Acts chapter 17* . . . and let me work through this paragraph with you by giving you 3 characteristics of what it means to model an open mind – the right way, by the way.

Here's the first characteristic of a good model of an open mind.

1. You receive the word eagerly

Notice verse 10. And the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea; and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. 11. Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness.

Let me briefly set the stage, since Luke reveals a contrast taking place here. If you were with us in our last study, Paul and Silas left Thessalonica after creating a riot. The city was in an uproar because of what the Paul preached regarding the deity and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Most of them wanted nothing to do with Christianity.

And now after traveling for a couple of days, Paul and Silas arrive in Berea where they find this remarkable difference.

These unbelieving Jews – and Gentile proselytes among them – respond with an incredible eagerness to the message.

The verb for eagerness carries the idea of someone rushing forward – they couldn't wait to hear it.ⁱⁱ

Get the picture in your mind of starving refugees rushing toward a truck as workers unload bags of rice – of thirsty children reaching out their cups for water.

I watched a homemade video clip recently of people in an underground church receiving free copies of the Bible – as a man opened a sack in front of them, it was amazing and at the same time convicting to see them reaching eagerly for their own copy as if they were starving for food and water.

An elderly, former pastor I know once preached in the Soviet Union after the collapse of Communism and the church building was packed with people either sitting in chairs or standing around the walls.

It was cold in the church building – there wasn't any heat. But they huddled there by the hundreds and listened to every word he preached. When he was finished, he sat down, but no one moved. The lay leader leaned over and whispered – We want more.

He got up and preached another message – and after nearly an hour sat down again . . . and again no one moved – the lay leader leaned over and once again said, "Please – we want more."

That's the idea here – these Berean citizens are spiritually thirsty and hungry and they are eagerly reaching for the bread and water of life.

Notice how Luke begins at the opening of *verse 11 – These were more noble minded than those in Thessalonica.*

That doesn't mean that they were just better people . . . they were just, you know, more spiritually in tune; no they were lost in their religious traditions – just as lost as the Thessalonians.

The idea of noble minded doesn't mean that they were more intelligent, or better educated, or more civilized or even related to noble blood by birth.

This expression of *noble minded* in the original language refers to the fact that they were more *open-minded* and receptive to the message Paul and Silas delivered.ⁱⁱⁱ

And that doesn't mean they were just more gullible, either – more likely to believe whatever new thing came along. Not at all.

In fact, let me give you the second characteristic in this good model of an open mind – here it is – you not only listen to the word eagerly, but;

2. You examine the scriptures carefully

Verse 11b. They received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily . . .

Did you notice that the text did *not* say, “And they examined the scriptures weekly . . . they examined the scriptures for one hour in church.”

No . . . daily!

Listen, they had jobs. They had cattle to herd and goats to milk and children to raise and jobs to do. They probably even had Rabbi dedicated to teaching them.

But all of a sudden, they found something that demanded their attention – because if it was true, it will direct the rest of their lives and then it will determine their eternal destination.

They examined the scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.

This verb for *examine* is so intense – in fact, one linguist described the action as making careful and exact research as in a legal process.^{iv}

In other words, “We can't miss one word . . . there are legal, binding issues between God and us, and according to this man Paul, God has spoken . . . pointing to this crucified Man as the prophesied Messiah.”

Really? Where do the scriptures talk about that?! We need to see it in the scriptures!

And keep in mind they had only the Old Testament scriptures. Now we know that the synagogue was the place where the scrolls were kept – either in Hebrew, or in Greek translation, or both – and members of the Jewish community along with the Jewish teachers had access to these scrolls.

Schnabel, p. 710

- Maybe Paul took them to **Psalm 22:1** which Jesus quoted in His dying agony, **“My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?”** What's David talking about – God never forsook him?!

- **A band of evildoers has encompassed me; they pierced my hands and my feet (Psalm 22:16)** – that didn't happen to David!
- **They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots (Psalm 22:18)** – that didn't happen to David!

I can hear Paul saying to them, as he recounted the eyewitness testimony of the crucifixion along with these Messianic texts, “David was not talking about Himself – He was prophesying of the Son of David – the Messiah.”

And I can hear these Bereans saying, “Paul . . . please . . . we want more.”

One final good characteristic of modeling an open mind:

- You not only receive the word eagerly
- You not only examine the scriptures carefully, thirdly;

3. You adapt to the truth personally

Notice **verse 12. Many of them therefore believed, along with a number of prominent Greek women and men.**

This period of studying the scriptures lasted for a couple of months – and then many believed the gospel. Listen, it's really easy for us to forget what this would bring to them.

In fact, we're given just a taste of the trouble that started – notice **verse 13. But when the Jews of Thessalonica found out that the word of God had been proclaimed by Paul in Berea also, they came there likewise, agitating and stirring up the crowds.**

And now the city is stirred up – literally, the crowds are *shaking with unrest*.

The scriptures will tear close friends apart; it will divide families; it will bring division in this synagogue and stir up controversy.

Which is why what mattered most to these Berean's wasn't whether or not Paul was likeable or interesting to listen to or pretty novel in his new teaching; what mattered was the answer to this question – Had God spoken? Was this the Word of God?

Because if God has spoken (!) you can't remain neutral; you have to submit, confess, convert, follow and obey.

If God has spoken, then to disobey the word was to disobey God; to ignore the word was to ignore God; to argue with the word was to argue with God.

Just don't overlook that for these who believed, it could mean isolation and ostracism and even persecution. But that didn't stop them . . . notice, *many believed* . . .

Can you imagine how important it would be – for them and for you and me – to be able to say, we are inviting trouble into our lives, but we are following the word of God.

God has spoken.

Here's a good model for an open Mind . . . that kind of open mind that is a good kind of open mind; let me summarize it with two closing principles.

a. A good open mind is only good when you place the priority on the examination of scripture.

What does the Bible say – what does the Bible mean to the original audience to whom it was written – is the Bible commanding us to do the same today.

Listen, who decides what you believe?

- Your peers?
- Your family?
- Your church?
- Your friends?
- Your professors?
- Your student body?
- Your television?
- Your culture?
- Your feelings and emotions?
- Your Bible?

It's one thing to own a Bible, it's another thing to read the Bible and memorize the Bible and study the Bible. Are you anchored to the objective truth of God's word? Not the subjective world of feelings.

We're surrounded by a subjective world-view that has gone faster and farther than anyone could have imagined. Now, everything from your gender, your age, and even your race can be determined by how you feel.

One evangelical author commented recently in one of his books I read a few months ago, about a couple of bestsellers, written to support this world-view; he referred to one best seller by a noted psychiatrist and radio talk show host who wrote, "In feelings there is wisdom, for the simplest feelings speak the greatest truth. Become comfortable with your feelings, because your feelings are your life . . .

trust your feelings . . . they are the only true guidance you'll ever get."^v

He referred to another bestseller, written for women, which contains a chapter called, "Trust Your Feelings, Not your Reasoning". In that chapter, she tells her readers, "Don't trust your thinking. It could be warped. Pay attention to your emotions, feelings, and moods . . . emotions have their own logic. They are linked to an inner knowing that we can trust."

The evangelical author then applied it by writing, "Suppose you see someone on a window ledge forty stories above the street, preparing to jump. They are perhaps clinically depressed; the deadly emotions they feel at this moment could be due to some catastrophic life event, or guilt – or even an imbalance of chemicals in the brain. What would you tell that person? "Trust your feelings! Your emotions speak the greatest truth – jump!"

Would you send your teenager out on a date saying, "Have a great time – oh, and whatever you do, don't trust your thinking – it could be warped – trust your emotions instead!" Of course not.^{vi}

- What does God say about that catastrophic event?
- What does God say about the value of your life?
- What does God say about sexual purity?
- What does God say about how you're feeling?
- What does God say about the guilt you are carrying?
- What does God say about where we came from?
- What does God say about where we're going?

Here's the first principle: A good open mind is when you place *the* priority on your examination of scripture.

b. Secondly, a good open mind is when you commit your life to the application of scripture

In other words, you're committing to live and believe and act upon what God has said.

Not what others say – not what your emotions dictate – or your feelings – or your personal sense of what you think – but the wisdom of God that comes when you pray and read His word and meditate on

the truths of scripture and ask Him for wisdom each step of the way.

You are anchored to the objective truth of God's word. Not the subjective world of feelings.

Let me give you an interesting illustration of how the Bible changed the belief of an Amazonian native.

In a journal I get, it told of a native believer who was being disciplined by a missionary. In their culture, the rainbow is a symbol of impending death. When this tribe sees a rainbow in the sky, they believe it is a sign that someone will die in the near future. Another tribe a few valleys over, they believe the rainbow is the walking stick of an evil spirit. And in another tribe, they believe that the rainbow is a giant snake that has come to earth to kill and destroy.

This missionary writes, I had the privilege of translating the verses about the Flood of Noah and the promise of God that the rainbow would be His covenant sign from then on to remind them of His promise to never again destroy the world by a flood.

As I read to Maki, this native believer, from Genesis 9, with wide eyes he took it all in. As soon as I finished reading that text and explaining what it meant to him – over the valley near us a giant rainbow appeared in the late afternoon clouds. His eyes got even bigger – but now, no longer in fear, but in awe of the promise and the grace and glory of God.

This inspired Book introduces us ultimately to our God who is worth knowing . . . worth following . . . worth studying . . . and definitely worth introducing to our world.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 1/31/2016 by Stephen Davey
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i AlbertMohler.com, *The Scandal of Biblical Illiteracy: It's Our Problem*; January 20, 2016

ii R. Kent Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire* (Crossway, 1996), p. 226

iii Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Acts* (Zondervan, 2012), p. 710

iv Fritz Rienecker & Cleon Rogers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (Regency, 1976), p. 307

v Michael Youssef, *When the Crosses are Gone* (KOBRI, 2012)

vi Adapted from Youssef