



NEW LIFE

BIBLE-PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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“For the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev 1:9)

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LORD’S DAY 06 JANUARY 2008

WORK OUT YOUR OWN SALVATION WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING

Dear Brethren & Friends,

This is the first Sunday of this year and I trust that each one of us has resolved to walk with our Lord Jesus Christ with renewed dedication and devotion in this New Year I have chosen our church theme for 2008 to be *“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling”* taken from Philippians 2:12..

This verse is certainly not teaching us that we can gain salvation through our work or any good works on our part. It is a commandment given to the believers that their faith in Christ may be attested by their attending to those things which are the true marks of salvation.

John Gill in his commentary on this text put it this way, he says, “The words may be rendered, “work about your salvation”; employ yourselves in things which accompany salvation, and to be performed by all those that expect it, though not to be expected for the performance of them; such as hearing of the word, submission to Gospel ordinances, and a discharge of every branch of moral, spiritual, and evangelical obedience for which the apostle before commends them, and now exhorts them to continue in; to go on in a course of cheerful obedience to the close of their days, believing in Christ, obeying his Gospel, attending constantly to his word and ordinances, and discharging every duty in faith and fear, until at last they should receive the end of their faith, the salvation of their souls.”

Furthermore our text comes with a qualification, “with fear and trembling”, which means we are to “work out our own salvation in “consistent with the highest acts of faith, trust, confidence, and joy, and is opposed to pride and vain glory; and intends modesty and humility, which is what the apostle is pressing for throughout the whole context; and he urges us to a cheerful and constant obedience to Christ, with all humility of soul, without dependence on it, or vain glorying in it, but ascribing it wholly to the grace of God.”

Dearly beloved, though this entire New Year is before us, yet let us never think that we have all time in the time in the world. We may or may not live to see the whole of this year which the Lord has grant to us. But we certainly do well to take the words of the apostle Paul seriously when he says, *“Awake thou that sleepest, and arise...”*

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from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.” (Ephesians 5:14-17).

May every member of New Life BP Church, London, strive to walk the straight and narrow way which leads to life everlasting and *“be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest”* (Joshua 1:7) throughout this year.

*Yours sincerely in Christ
Mok*

THE BIBLICAL BEREAN SPIRIT

“These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Acts 17:11).

Some years ago, I was one of the leaders in a particular Christian fellowship group. There were about thirty or forty young adults in the group. We met every weekend, and each time we would either have a Bible Study or a sermon by an invited speaker. Although most of the speakers came from the same church denomination, we had a variety of opinions being expressed each week. There were some who were inclined to Calvinism, some who were inclined to Arminianism, some who would vouch for Dispensationalism, and others whom we could only describe as confused or without any theological system. One preacher, for example, was asked to speak on the *ordo salutis* (order of salvation). Instead of presenting an order that can be found in practically any systematic theology, he invented one where he placed ‘faith’ right at the beginning, and ‘regeneration’ towards the end! Not only so, he also had terms in between that no systematic or biblical theologians would ever include in the *ordo salutis*. Another preacher spoke on sovereignty of God, in which he essentially taught that God cooperates with man; and not just that man is responsible!

In the face of such diversity and sometimes heretical teachings, what did the leaders of the group do? Well, there were times when we had corrective sessions in which we tried to justify the preachers: “Perhaps he did not mean what we perceived him to be saying...”; “Perhaps he was looking from the human perspective...”; etc. But beyond that, we also urged the members of the fellowship group to be “Berean Christians.”

What we meant by being a “Berean Christian” was that we were to hear all preaching with suspicion, and we were to compare what we hear with the Scripture to see if what was preached was in accordance with the Scripture, and then to apply into our lives only if we were convinced that what was preached was indeed in accordance to Scripture. To buttress this idea, we used 1 Thessalonians 5:21, “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.” This ‘Berean’ approach to sermon-

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hearing sounds right. In fact, some of us may even have this principle so ingrained that we would normally attend any sermon with such a spirit. But is this the biblical spirit?

I am afraid it is not. In this short article, I would like to explain what is the true biblical Berean spirit. But first let us take a quick look at some of the problems that attend to the kind of 'Berean spirit' outlined above.

Problems of a False Berean Spirit

Firstly, such a spirit gives rise to a very critical attitude when hearing sermons. The hearing of sermons would often become an academic exercise rather than being a means of grace. Such an attitude can easily descend into spiritual pride manifested by a *I-know-better-than-the-preacher* mentality.

Secondly, we may receive all things with suspicion, with all intentions to check the biblical validity later. But experience shows us that more often than not, we do not have the time or energy to study whether what was preached was correct,—even if we had the inclination and ability to do so. Thus, we would likely land up not receiving anything preached except what are obvious re-statements of Scripture verses. The inevitable result would be that preaching would no longer serve as a means to transform our lives.

Thirdly, how many of us are actually equipped to assess any message to know what parts we were to check with Scriptures and what we need not. It is cruel for us to counsel young believers to exercise such a kind of 'Berean spirit.' It would breed not only confusion but a contempt for preaching.

Yes, we cannot deny that in some situations, a suspicious attitude towards preaching may be better than a gullible receive-all attitude. Such may be the case in the fellowship situation mentioned above. For, in order to give ourselves a foundation to judge the messages we hear, we began to read widely, especially Reformed and Puritan works as well as systematic theologies and exposition of the confessional standards of the church. This proved to be the most fruitful and rewarding exercise as many of us found that we could learn much more from the books. However, this only increase our suspicion when we hear sermons because we began to see that often our invited speakers had systems of theology that were quite different from the stated confession of the denomination.

But, that does not change the fact that the 'Berean spirit' which we had adopted was not biblical, and should not be the norm in our hearing of sermons. It might be the best alternative when confronted with having to listen to a great variety of theological persuasions, but it must not be the attitude to adopt when attending sermons which are in accordance to the agreed doctrinal statement of the church.

The True Berean Spirit

So what is the true Berean spirit? Why were the Bereans in Acts 17 regarded as being more noble than the Thessalonians? First, it must be noted that the Bereans were not said to be more noble primarily because they searched the Scriptures to see whether what was taught by Paul was true. They did do that, and it is right that

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we should attribute that noble act to their name. But that is not the point of comparison. The point of comparison is that the majority of the Thessalonians not only rejected Paul and Silas but essentially drove them out (Acts 17:5–10); whereas on the other hand, the Bereans “received the word with all readiness of mind.” In fact, reading Acts 17:11 in Greek would immediately show that the main verb in the verse is “received” (Greek: *dechomai*), whereas the verb rendered “searched” (Greek: *anakrinô*) is a participle.

In other words, the true biblical Berean is one who receives the word with all readiness of mind (or with eagerness). Matthew Henry describes the Bereans thus:

They were very willing to hear it, presently apprehended the meaning of it, and did not shut their eyes against the light. They attended to the things that were spoken by Paul, as Lydia did, and were very well pleased to hear them. They did not pick quarrels with the word, nor find fault, nor seek occasion against the preachers of it; but bade it welcome, and put a candid construction upon every thing that was said (Commentary *in loc.*).

It should be immediately obvious that receiving the word with suspicion is simply the opposite of the Berean spirit. The Bereans received the word with gladness and reverence, and a ready assent to what was taught. We may infer that their checking the Scripture (in this case the Old Testament) was not with a suspicious attitude or a preconception that it was probably wrong. Rather, it must be with a desire to see a confirmation in the Scriptures. This does not mean, of course, that the Bereans accepted all that Paul said by trust or implicit faith, and not by trial against the Scripture. They did prove all things (1 Thes 5:21). The difference is in their initial reception of the word and the attitude with which they examined the Scriptures. The false Berean receives the word as “False until proven True,” the true Berean under normal circumstances receives the word as “True unless proven False.” This difference would become obvious where it is not so straightforward to determine if what is said is true.

For example, suppose the Apostle Paul had preached on Psalm 16:10–11 to affirm the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Acts 2:25–28, 13:35–37). If his listeners had a false Berean attitude of suspicion, how would they have reacted? They could simply brush it aside and say, “This is a psalm of David. David was hoping that God would not let his body rot in the grave. It says nothing about the Messiah” (remember that “Holy One” can also be translated “faithful one,” i.e., referring to David). The true Berean would recognise Paul as a minister of God and accept his exposition of the text. Of course, this does not mean that they would not go back to Paul to seek further clarifications if they find that he appeared to have quoted out of context or wrongly.

The word of God

In fact, to further confirm that this was their attitude, we note that Paul’s preaching was known as “the word.” Why is it so called? It is so called only as a short form of “the word of God” (see Acts 17:13). In other words, the preaching of Paul was regarded by the Bereans as the “word of God.” When Paul preached, he was received as the herald of Christ, and his sermon was received as the “word of God.”

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This is how the Scripture views preaching. The Apostles “spake the *word of God* with boldness” (Acts 4:31). It was not reason that they should leave “the *word of God* [i.e., ministry of preaching and teaching], and serve tables” (Acts 6:2). Sergius Paulus, and later the whole city of Antioch in Pisidia, desired to hear “the *word of God*” (Acts 13:7, 44). Note, moreover, that Acts 17:11 demonstrates how that “the word of God” does not refer to the Scriptures, but to preaching, since the Berean examined what was said with the Scripture. While the written Word is infallibly and inerrantly inspired, the same cannot be said of preaching. Yet, preaching must be attended to as if we are hearing the very word of God.

It is for this reason that when Reformed theologians say that the Word is a means of grace, they are particularly referring to the ministry of the Word of God through preaching. The preaching of the Word is indispensable to faith in Christ (see Rom 10:14–17). This, of course, does not mean that personal Bible studies by individuals are unwarranted or useless. No, we believe in the perspicuity of Holy Scripture, and that every believer has the unction of the Holy Spirit (1 Jn 2:27). Nevertheless, the work of Christ through the church as His body must not be diminished. It must be regarded as the main means of grace by which Christ reigns over His Church.

Calvin was one who so taught:

How is it that God promiseth that He will reign in the midst of His people? He doth not say, because He inspireth them, that they have leave to coin new articles of faith! No, no: but He saith He will put the words of our Lord Jesus Christ into the mouth of such as must preach His name [cf. Isa 51:16]. For the promise was not made for the time of the law only, but is proper for the church of Christ, and shall continue to the end of the world (*Sermon on 1 Timothy 3:14–15*).

Notice the same idea in Spurgeon’s thought:

... tonight Jesus speaks to us in the gospel. So far as his gospel shall be preached by us here, it shall not be the word of man, but the word of God; and although it comes to you through a feeble tongue, yet the truth itself is not feeble, nor is it any less divine than if Christ himself should speak it with his own lips. “See that ye refuse not him that speaketh” (*Sermon on Hebrews 12:25*, preached on Lord’s Day evening, November 27, 1870).

So, then, as Berean Christians, we must attend to preaching as the “word of God.” How could we attend to the “word of God” with a disposition of suspicion? Let us rather take heed of the advice of the *Westminster Larger Catechism*, Question 160,

Q: What is required of those that hear the Word preached?

A: It is required of those that hear the Word preached, that they attend upon it with diligence, *as the word of God*; meditate, and confer of it; hide it in their hearts, and bring forth the fruit of it in their lives.

Practical Issues

All these are good in theory. But in reality, there are a few problems.

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First of all, what if the preacher makes a clear-cut mistake? Well, naturally, we must reject that portion of the sermon and the applications that may attend to it. Nevertheless, we must refrain from the temptation to listen to the preacher with suspicion from then on.

Secondly, what if the preacher says something that we have never heard before, or requires of us a duty which we had never afore been made aware of; and we find his presentation or proof from Scripture not thoroughly convincing for some reasons? I would suggest that in such a situation, it would be wise to check who else in the history of the Church has taken the view. Ask the preacher to show you! If what is taught is an innovation never before viewed favourably in orthodox Christianity, then you have a good reason to reject it or to be suspicious about it even if you may not be able to prove the preacher's exegesis to be wrong. However, if it can be shown that what is taught was held also by a goodly company of Reformed theologians in the past, then I would urge that the doctrine and practice be received with readiness of mind and applied even if you are not yet thoroughly convinced. This, I believe would be a safer course of action than to ignore what was preached or to delay implementation. Of course, if you should eventually have the time to examine more thoroughly the doctrine, then I would encourage you to do so.

Thirdly, what if the preacher insists on a particular view of a certain passage, when it is known that there are differing views on the passage, and it is difficult to determine which view is correct? Well, then I would suggest that you use the Confession of the church as a guide. The Confession is the stated consensus of the church. We must not despise the Confession. We must rather seek to promote unity in the church by giving preference to the interpretation of the Confession. Now, of course, I am not saying that if you have studied a particular issue thoroughly and are convinced that the Confession is wrong, that you should still follow blindly. No, if you are convinced that the Confession is wrong, there are two recourses: (1) seek to have the church recognise the error; or (2) resign to join a church which holds to a Confession you are comfortable with. Whatever the case, let us strive against the individualistic and private spirit which despises the use of Confessional standards. This spirit is so prevalent in our day and is often disguised as the Berean spirit. Take heed to A.A. Hodge's warning:

If they refuse the assistance afforded by the statements of doctrine slowly elaborated and defined by the Church, they must make out their own creed by their own unaided wisdom. The real question is not, as often pretended, between the Word of God and the creed of man, but between the tried and proved faith of the collective body of God's people, and the private judgment and the unassisted wisdom of the repudiator of creeds (*Confession of Faith*, 2).

Fourthly, what if your preacher has much limitations and is unable to preach well at all? Well, listen to Salmon Treat in his preface to Solomon Stoddard's tract entitled *The Defects of Preachers Reproved*:

Have you plenty of good preaching? You are highly favoured of God, you have the means of making the best gains; bless God for it, and esteem your preacher highly

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in love for his works' sake. If you are under dull preaching, take heed of a froward mouth and wrangling carriage. Consider your preacher is such as God's providence hath carved to you; and remember that God is able to give to you help in that matter. Lament it before God, and pray night and day for your preacher, that the Lord will enlarge him with grace and ministerial gifts; and do what you can to advantage him in his great work.

Conclusion

Do you have a true biblical Berean spirit, dearly beloved? I believe that unless you begin to cultivate such a spirit, this church will not attain to its desired unity of faith. As the Session of this church seeks to minimise heterodoxy on our pulpits, may the Lord grant us that we would disabuse our minds of the false Berean spirit, and start to receive the word preached with all readiness of mind as true biblical Bereans. Amen.

Pastor JJ Lim

Pilgrim Covenant Church, Singapore

(Adapted from Pilgrim Covenant Church bulletin dated 20 August 2000)

Erratum / Addendum

In our last article [i.e., above] on the "Biblical Berean Spirit," we indicated that if you have studied a particular issue thoroughly, and are convinced that the Confession of the Church is wrong, that there are two recourses: Firstly, you may seek to have the church recognise the error. Naturally, this does not mean going around the members of the church to promote your view, but to bring it up to the session. Secondly, you may resign to join a church which holds to a Confession you are comfortable with. Naturally, this should only be the recourse when all else fails.

An astute brother pointed out that there should be a third recourse, namely, that if the issue is a relatively minor one, and you have brought up to the session, and the session cannot agree with your conclusions, that you should just overlook the difference and focus on your agreement with the Confession on major issues. I cannot agree more with this suggestion, and should not have neglected to mention it. It is, admittedly, difficult for many of us to discern what is major and what is minor; and oftentimes, what may in fact be relatively minor can become a major issue for us because we read much about it, and thought much about it. I would like therefore to put it in another way, namely: "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men" (Rom 12:18). In other words, you may want to register your difference (with the session) for conscience sake, and let the session advise you on what recourse you should take. But on your part, if you can overlook the difference, then overlook it for the sake of peace in the church, and seek not to promote your viewpoint in the church where your viewpoint is substantially different from the confessional standard of the church. The Confession, remember, needs not be subscribed to fully by every member of the church, but it is a tool to promote the unity of the church.

(Erratum / Addendum inserted, 27 August, 2000)

WELCOME TO NEW LIFE B-P CHURCH LONDON
CHURCH THEME: WORK OUT YOUR OWN SALVATION WITH FEAR
AND TREMBLING. (Philippians 2:12)

Our worship services begin promptly at **11.00 am and 4.00 pm.**

Please stay back for Bible Study and fellowship lunch after the morning worship and for tea after the evening service. Do invite your friends to come to Church.

Worship Services			WELCOME
Morning	Today: 06/01/2008	Next Week: 13/01/2008	We extend a warm welcome to all worshippers this Lord's Day. We especially like to welcome Andrew Chew & family, Mr & Mrs Mark Loh, Teo Jia Hui and Tan En Zi to the morning worship service last Lord's Day.
<i>Chairman:</i>	John Poh	Pr Mok Chee Cheong	
<i>Preacher:</i>	Pr Mok Chee Cheong	Rev Maurice Roberts	
<i>Message:</i>	Behold, I Make All Things New	Christ Is All	
<i>Text:</i>	Revelations 21:1-5	1 Corinthians 1:30-31	
<i>Organist:</i>	Grace	Yanning	
Evening			
<i>Chairman:</i>	Jonathan Kim	Pr Mark Chen	
<i>Preacher:</i>	Pr Mok Chee Cheong	Rev Maurice Roberts	
<i>Message:</i>	Redeeming The Time For The Days Are Evil	The Prodigal Son	
<i>Text:</i>	Ephesians 5:15-17	Luke 15:11-32	<p>• Lord's Supper: Next week, we will be observing the Lord's Supper. Please come with your hearts prepared.</p> <p>• Memory Verse Exercise: Please note that the memory verse final review exercise for the entire year of 2007 is due on end January 2008.</p> <p>• Family Worship: For those who would like to open up their homes for family worship, please contact Pr Mok.</p> <p>• No Prayer Meeting & Bible Study – 12 Jan 08: Please note that no prayer meeting and bible study will be held on that day.</p> <p>• Sabbath School: This will be held after the morning worship. Children are encouraged to sit with their parents during the main service.</p> <p>• Those serving on the Lord's Day for both morning and evening worship services: Please gather behind the pulpit area at 10.30am for prayer.</p> <p>• DHW Bible Study: Please take note that the DHW bible study will reconvene on 20 Jan 08.</p>
<i>Pianist:</i>	Joy	Hubert	
Other Duties			
	Today: 06/01/2008	Next Week: 13/01/2008	
<i>Ushers</i>	Chin Kiong/Esmeralda	Daniel/Yetta	
<i>Sunday Sch:</i>	Joyce	Hui Min	
<i>Lunch:</i>	Constance	Maureen	
<i>Washing-up:</i>	Volunteers	Volunteers	
<i>Bible Study:</i>	No DHW Class	No DHW Class	
Appointments of the Week			
Fri 11 Jan	7:30 pm	Young Adults Fellowship: YAF Meeting	
Sat 12 Jan		Prayer Meeting & Bible Study: No Prayer Meeting & Bible Study	
Last Week's Worship Service Collections			
Offering: £459.32 Lunch: £50.60			
Memory Verse			
<p><i>Last Week (Dec 07 Wk 5): Hebrews 12:1-2</i></p> <p>Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.</p> <p><i>This Week (Jan 08 Wk 1): Philippians 2:12-13</i></p> <p>Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.</p>			

