

Would the Apostle Paul consider you noble minded?

When Paul visited a synagogue in Thessalonica to “reason with them from the Scriptures”, he was not received well.

Now when they had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And according to Paul’s custom, he visited them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ.” And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a large number of the God-fearing Greeks and a significant number of the leading women. But the Jews, becoming jealous and taking along some wicked men from the marketplace, formed a mob and set the city in an uproar; and they attacked the house of Jason and were seeking to bring them out to the people. (Acts 17:1-5)

Fleeing Thessalonica, Paul and his friends traveled fifty miles away to the ancient city of Berea (now known as the Greek city of Veria).

The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. Now these people were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they **received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.** Therefore, many of them believed, along with a significant number of prominent Greek women and men. But when the Jews of Thessalonica found out that the word of God had been proclaimed by Paul in Berea also, they came there as well, agitating and stirring up the crowds. (Acts 17:10-13)

In contrast to the people in the synagogue of Thessalonica, Paul considered the Jews of Berea as more “noble minded:”

1. They “received the word with great eagerness.”

Formerly trained as a Pharisee, Paul was knowledgeable of the Old Testament and capable of speaking with authority. The Berean’s keen interest to hear Paul implies a desire to test and improve their understanding of theology; they did not limit knowledge to their personal convictions and certainty did not dismiss Paul’s teaching without objective cause.

2. They examined “the Scriptures **daily** to see whether these things were so.”

The Bereans were careful to test what Paul was saying against the standard of God’s word, which at that time was the Old Testament for the Jews, and studied daily.

Paul’s commendation of the Bereans cause us to reflect on whether he would consider us as “noble minded.”

How eager are we to receive the word when we go to church or listen to a teacher of God’s word?

Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test? But I expect that you will realize that we ourselves do not fail the test. Now we pray to God that you do nothing wrong; not so that we ourselves may appear approved, but that you may do what is right, though we may appear unapproved. (2 Cor 13:5-7)

Do we test your understanding of theology to correct and build our faith in God and learn His ways?

For no one can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or straw, each one’s work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each one’s work. (1 Cor 3:11-13)

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By what standard do we test teaching that is new to us – God’s word, or the interpretation of a trusted commentator, or tradition?

Now I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. For I have been informed concerning you, my brothers and sisters, by Chloe’s people, that there are quarrels among you. Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, “I am with Paul,” or “I am with Apollos,” or “I am with Cephas,” or “I am with Christ.” Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? (1 Cor 1:10-13)

And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many crowns; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself. He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and **His name is called The Word of God.** (Rev 19:11-13)

With different levels of knowledge and spiritual maturity among Christians, differences in theology will abound. How does a Believer discern a false teacher?

Jesus warns His disciples of impostors of Him and false teachers who point to mortal human impostors of Jesus Christ with a view towards the eschatological future.

For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will again. And if those days had not been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short. Then if anyone says to you, ‘Behold, here is the Christ,’ or ‘He is over here,’ do not believe him. For false christs and false prophets will arise and will provide great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. Behold, I have told you in advance. (Matt 24:21-25)

And Jesus began to say to them, “See to it that no one misleads you. Many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am He!’ and they will mislead many. When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; those things must take place; but that is not yet the end. (Mark 13:5-7)

Paul warns of false teachers who teach of a different savior and different gospel, and motivated by fame and acclaim.

But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his trickery, your minds will be led astray from sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, this you tolerate very well! For I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles. (2 Cor 11:3-5)... But what I am doing I will also continue to do, so that I may eliminate the opportunity from those who want an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the matter about which they are boasting. For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds. (2 Cor 11:12-15)

I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel, which is not just another account; but there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, even now I say again: if anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed! (Gal 1:6-9)

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Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming, and now it is already in the world. (1 John 4:1-3)

The apostle Peter makes a distinction between knowledge and genuine faith. A false teacher, who may know God's word, is one who denies the reality of God and is disobedient to His words; his behavior does not exemplify a life set apart and sanctified for God.

But false prophets also appeared among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. Many will follow their indecent behavior, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep. (2 Pet 2:1-3)

For, while speaking out arrogant words of no value they entice by fleshly desires, by indecent behavior, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error, promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what anyone is overcome, by this he is enslaved. For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them. (2 Pet 2:18-21)

Paul's words of encouragement to Timothy to persevere in his ministry could very well apply contemporaneously to today's decline in biblical literacy around the world. In so doing, Paul describes the characteristics of a less noble minded person, similar to the Jews of the various synagogues he visited, that applies to both non-Believer and Believer:

I solemnly exhort you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, and exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not tolerate sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance with their own desires, and they will turn their ears away from the truth and will turn aside to myths. But as for you, use self-restraint in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. (2 Tim 4:1-5)