



Nobility

**“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**

True Nobility

Have you ever considered what true nobility is? To some, nobility is aristocracy. To them, to be noble would be to be born into a family of high class on the social scale. Others believe nobility is to be famous. Still others think of someone or something that is grand or impressive as being noble. As we think about nobility, probably many of us have conjured up the image in our mind’s eye of men and women decked out in beautiful formal dress at a social ball. And, no doubt, some of us think about nobility as possessing outstanding qualities. We think of a particular person or group of people who possesses the highest moral qualities and is of superior character. He, she, or they can be looked up to by all men. They are honorable and of such character that all men ought to follow their example.

This latter ideal is what this publication is about. We want you to be noble! Our desire is for you to possess the most outstanding characteristics found in man. Do you want to be noble in this sense? If so, consider the following:

On Paul’s second missionary journey, he took the gospel into Macedonia of Europe. His first major stop was Philippi and then Thessalonica. At that time, Thessalonica served as a capital of one of the four districts of Macedonia. Within this city, Paul found a Jewish synagogue and began teaching “that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, who I preach unto you, is Christ” (Acts 17:3). Within three weeks, the Lord’s church was planted in this city with Jews, God-fearing Greeks, and some leading women (Acts 17:4). However, because of some unbelieving Jews, Paul and his company were sent away.

They traveled fifty miles southwest and came to the city of Berea. There, as Paul’s usual practice was, they taught in the synagogue. Concerning the citizens of Berea, Luke recorded this marvelous commendation: “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). The title of this publication is based upon this verse. The Bereans were noble people because they possessed outstanding qualities, and we want you to be like the noble Bereans!

What made the Bereans noble? If we are going to possess the nobility of the Bereans, we must know and understand their noble traits, and we must follow their noble example. So, what made them noble? Let’s look at the text to find out.

First, they were noble because “they received the word...” To receive the word means to understand and obey it. The word is the gospel. Unlike some of the Jews of Thessalonica who rejected the gospel for their traditions, the Jews of Berea received the word. It is truly a noble trait to receive the gospel. The gravest mistake of mankind is to reject the gospel of Christ, and yet so many people are

doing this very thing. How sad it is for Christ to give Himself as a sacrifice for man’s sins, and then to be rejected by men. To me, it is absolutely mind boggling to think of people who reject the love of God through Christ Jesus. His love ought to cause us to desire to know His will and obey it. It ought to cause us to receive His word like the noble Bereans. Do you desire to be noble? True nobility is to receive the word of God.

Second, the Bereans were noble because “they received the word with readiness of mind.” The Bereans received the word, but they did more than just that. They received it with readiness of mind. In other words, their reception of the gospel was deliberate and with eagerness. They were anxious to learn the word of God. Interestingly in the original, there is a compound word literally meaning forward-mind. It carries the idea of stretching the mind forward. In contrast to the Thessalonians who received the word for only three weeks, the Bereans continued to listen to the preaching of the gospel of Christ. Their’s is an exceptional example of nobility and is worthy of imitation. All men ought to be like the noble Bereans. Do you desire nobility? True nobility is to receive the gospel with eagerness.

Finally, the Bereans were noble because they “searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.” In other words, they were people of the Book. They examined the Old Testament scriptures which clearly indicates they understood them to be the inspired word of God. Luke’s point is that they evaluated Paul’s preaching by the scriptures. The original indicates they thoroughly and continually analyzed Paul’s preaching. It was a daily concern. They did not just take Paul’s word for it but were discerning. Unlike the Bereans, too many today simply accept what they have been taught rather than examining the scriptures. What about us? Do we desire nobility? True nobility is to daily search the scriptures and test the words of men whether they are of God or not.

We want you to be noble! So please follow the noble example of the Bereans.

Chuck Northrop, Conway, AR

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WHY DID JESUS DIE?

The Bible several times records the fact that Jesus sent His apostles to preach the gospel to the whole world (Mark 16:15). One of the men whom Jesus chose for this work (Paul of Tarsus) wrote the gospel includes the facts that [1] Jesus died, [2] Jesus was buried and [3] Jesus rose from the dead (I Corinthians 15:1-4). Many thousands of people find hope in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, but why did He die in the first place?

The historical political facts are that Jesus was arrested because the leaders of the Jews were envious of Him, and He was sentenced to death by the Roman governor who was willing rather to please people than to do what he knew to be right (Mark 15:10-15). But if Jesus is the Son of God, did He not have power to prevent their killing Him? If He had such power, why did He not use it?

This was precisely the question of some people present during the crucifixion of Jesus. In Matthew 27:39-44, we read that they mocked him: "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross," and "If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him." So why didn't He? It's a good question, and there are good answers.

Jesus died to pay the price for my sins. In the eternal plan of God, man has always been required to sacrifice something to God because of sin. "Sin is the transgression of the law" (I John 3:4). When laws are violated, a penalty payment is due. When man first sinned, God provided a plan by which man could sacrifice an animal to atone for his sin (Genesis 4:1-7). When God separated the nation of Israel unto Himself and gave them His law (*see the book of Exodus*), He provided a detailed pattern of sacrifices of animals and crops (*see the book of Leviticus*). Whereas these were not, Jesus is the *perfect* sacrifice that does not need to be offered repeatedly. The price was paid once and for all when He died (Hebrews 10:1-14).

Jesus died to save me from punishment for sin. Just as the breaking of man's laws demands fines, retribution or incarceration,

so "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). For his sin against God, man deserves the punishment of death (Genesis 2:17). God is that holy (I Samuel 2:2), and sin is that bad compared with His holiness (Proverbs 29:27). Instead of *my* dying for my sins, *Jesus* died in my place. Jesus is the "propitiation" for our sins (I John 4:10).

Jesus died to fulfill the plan of God. When the apostle Peter first preached the gospel after the death of Jesus, he said the envious Jews had "by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God" crucified Jesus (Acts 2:23). His death wasn't in opposition to God's plan; it was at the very heart of that plan. From the time that sin first entered into the world (Genesis 3:15), and throughout all the history of His speaking through the prophets (*i.e.* Isaiah 53:4-9), God said the Messiah (anointed, chosen One) would die.

Jesus died for you, too. As the price paid for sin, and as the agent of salvation from punishment for sin, Jesus' death is the greatest expression of the love of God (John 3:16). That love is for every soul in the world. There is not one who cannot benefit from His sacrifice and be saved from punishment for sin. Even those who, "by lawless hands," crucified Him were shown God's plan of salvation. When they asked, "What shall we do?" (Acts 2:37), Peter did not tell them it was hopeless. He said, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ" (verse 38). He added, "The promise is to . . . all who are afar off" (verse 39). One who wanted to obey this asked, "What hinders me?" The man of God answered, "If you believe with all your heart, you may" (Acts 8:36-37).

As he faced His death, Jesus said, "I lay down my life . . . No one takes it from Me . . . I have power to take it again" (John 10:17-18). It wasn't a tragedy; it was good news for you. Believe in Jesus. Repent toward Jesus. Profess faith in Jesus. Be baptized into Jesus. That's why He died.

Al Parr, Jacksonville, TX

The Unshakable Kingdom

Regardless of what most teach in "Christendom," the New Testament teaches the Kingdom of God was established. Two passages in your Bible affirms that in the first century AD, following Christ's resurrection and ascension, some had received and been translated into His kingdom: **Hebrews 12:28** states, "*Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.*" **Colossians 1:13** states, "*Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.*"

The Old Testament foresaw this kingdom and promised its eventual establishment. The prophet Nathan told King David that of his offspring God would establish his throne forever (**2 Samuel 7:12-13**). Further, Daniel, the prophet of God during the Babylonian captivity approximately 500 years after Nathan's prophecy, spoke of this same kingdom, still *yet* to be established. Daniel's prophecy included the time element and historical setting in which the kingdom of God would be set up — the times of the Roman Empire (**Daniel 2:44; Luke 3:1ff.**). These prophets saw the coming kingdom would be established in the last days. According to the Hebrews writer, the last days were ushered in during the first century AD, and we are presently in them now (**Hebrews 1:1-3**). Therefore, both Nathan and Daniel's prophecies are not presumptuous but fulfilled according to **Deuteronomy 18:19-22** and **Luke 24:44**. Premillennialists deny their fulfillment and make these prophets presumptuous.

The Old Testament pointed toward the coming of Christ, and pertaining to this, many things would have to be fulfilled that were revealed in the Old Testament. Consider the following prophecies which were fulfilled and confirmed by Christ in the New Testament: **1) the virgin birth and incarnation of Deity (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:21-23; Galatians 4:4); 2) the fulfillment of the seed line or genealogical promises given through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob/Israel, and then Judah, which involved such individuals as King David (Genesis 12:1-7; Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38); 3) Jesus would**

be the son of David, Prince of Peace, and King of kings and Lord of lords to sit upon His eternal throne (**2 Samuel 7:12-13; Isaiah 9:6; Luke 1:31-33; Acts 2:22-36; 3:20-26; Ephesians 2:14-15; 1 Timothy 1:17; 6:15** et al); and essential to the latter, **4) it is through His shed blood and sacrificial life that eternal life would be granted to those who contact His blood for the remission of sins (Isaiah 53; John 1:29; Matthew 26:28; Acts 2:38; Ephesians 5:1-2)**. Hence, Jesus is sitting on His throne right now in heaven (**Acts 2:29-36**).

Jesus came to fulfill all things written in the Old Testament pertaining to Himself (**Matthew 5:20; Luke 24:44; John 17:4**). He either fulfilled these things or He did not. In **Mark 1:13-14** Jesus said, "*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand.*" Later in this same account, He states that some would not taste of death before the Kingdom of God was established (**Mark 9:1**). During the life of Christ, He promised to build both His church and kingdom, which are also God's church and kingdom (**Matthew 16:18-19; I Corinthians 1:1; Romans 16:16**). And, when you read the book of Acts, the kingdom's message is preached in **Acts 2:1-47**, establishing the fact that both are synonymous ideas, and both have been established and not thwarted (cf. **Acts 1:1-8; 2:29-36, 41-47**). The eternal Kingdom of God is the same as the church of Christ, which Christ promised to establish. This is the same kingdom we are born into by water and the Spirit's message recorded in **Acts 2:41-47, John 3:3, 5, and 1 Peter 1:22-25; 3:21**. The Lord adds to His church/kingdom those that have an obedient faith (**Romans 6:17**). This is the kingdom that is unshakable and eternal, which the Lord promised to build in **Matthew 16:18-19**, and which the Hebrews writer said we have received (**Hebrews 12:28**). It is eternal because Christ eternally reigns in Heaven on the throne now and because its message is one of eternal hope of life after the grave. It is unshakable because the Devil has been forever defeated by Christ (**Genesis 3:15; Luke 24:5-6, 34**).

Bryan Braswell, Roanoke, TX

Dealing With Pain and Suffering

The Family As God Would Have It

Perhaps one of the most difficult things for people to deal with is the presence of pain and suffering in our world. This issue is one that has both destroyed and strengthened the faith of Christians around the world. We all know true stories of pain and suffering in our lives or in the lives of those close to us. Sometimes we can easily understand the purpose and meaning of these things and sometimes we cannot.

Pain has always been a part of the world. Adam and Eve surely felt pain when Cain killed Abel (Genesis 4:25). Job felt pain when all of his earthly possessions were taken away and his children were killed (Job 1:13-19). Paul would speak of the “thorn in the flesh” (2Corinthians 12:7). The book of Acts tells us how the apostles and some of the other first century Christians experienced pain and suffering.

Yet, all of this seems very inconsistent with the idea that God is an all-loving God. Why would a God of love allow such evil and suffering to abound in the world? Why would Paul say “... *we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose*” (Romans 8:28)? This passage and others can be troublesome for the people going through struggles and pain.

Pain and suffering can be attributed back to the beginning of time. This is something that began in the Garden of Eden when Eve and then Adam chose to sin (Genesis 3:14-19). In the previously cited passage, we have an explanation as to why pain exists. One reason it exists is due to the poor decisions that Adam and Eve made in the beginning of time. Those poor decisions had consequences, and those consequences carry into today. God gave them the ability to choose, and they simply made a bad decision. This is true on the opposite side of the spectrum as well. Just as the consequences of a bad decision are passed on from one generation to another, so are the blessings that come from good decisions.

Understand genuine biblical joy. When dealing with pain and suffering and all that the issue entails, it is only appropriate that we consider joy for a moment. To do this, we need to learn from the apostle Paul. He instructed us to “*Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!*” (Philippians 4:4). How could Paul, in all of the pain that he experienced make such a command. The answer is that rejoicing is a choice. Paul was able to say “*Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need*” (Philippians 4:11-12). He chose to be content and is able to tell us to be content or joyous because it is a choice. Joy is not determined by what happens to us but rather by what we choose. We must choose to learn from pain and choose to have joy in the midst of pain.

Everything has purpose. Earlier, we looked at the verse in Romans 8:28, “*And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.*” From this verse, we learn that our pain and suffering in this life has purpose and meaning. This is perhaps a very difficult concept to understand. Based on things that have happened in our lives, this is something that we could question, at least in our own minds. There are some things in life and in religion that are very difficult to understand and analyze. Perhaps we are not to analyze in order to understand, but they are simple biblical principles that we are to believe through faith. Pain and suffering are very difficult to understand. Perhaps, this is an issue that must be accepted on faith in God and belief in His word.

Jeremy Northrop, Ashland, MS

“So, you are ready to be married and have a family. Are you ready for the fighting, suspicion, unhappiness, discouragement, sorrow, weariness with one another and the like that must come?”

Isn't it sad that some think that the above describes the family as it must inevitably be in today's society, a society filled with so many negative and frightening things. Obviously many do feel that way, and as a result, they become part of the statistics — the FBI states that the leading cause of injury to women age 14–44 years is domestic violence; in 2002 the Census Bureau projected that 50% of marriages being currently formed would end in divorce. Among the top reasons divorce lawyers give for the causes of divorce are change in priorities, lack of commitment to the marriage and infidelity — not a pretty picture of the family at all is it? Thankfully, there is a way which is better if we will but seek it — God's way. Far from the distressing outlook for marriage that many today have, God expects us to rejoice with the one we marry (Proverbs 5:18) and with our children (Proverbs 23:24-25). The family God desires for us, and which we can have, is to be a joy in the midst of a society filled with sorrow, a haven of rest to the weary, a place of safety in a world of fears, and a stepping stone which will help lead to success in all areas of our life. By now you may be asking, “How?! ... How can I have a family like that?” If that is your question, then you have taken the first step, that is, you desire to make your family as it ought to be and have not fallen prey to the attitude of “giving up and getting out.” Let's look at just two attitudes, which if we determine to put into our life, will make our family as God desires and we long for.

First, have a common love for the Lord. One of the hardest things to do is to keep harmony within a family that is divided in their love for God. But if we love God as we ought, then we will follow His commands (John 14:15). And if we follow His commands, our marriage *will* be fashioned after His desires. We must determine to do as the well known song proclaims — “all to Jesus I surrender.” The things which divide families in our society — the roles each member will fill (Ephesians 5:22-6:4), commitment to one another (Matthew 19:5-6), purity in the relationship (Colossians 3:5) — these and many more things will cease to be a problem, for they will be fashioned in God's will instead of man's lusts.

Second, have a common love for one another. Some may think it odd to even mention this, for surely those in a family love one another. But the love we speak of is far deeper than the “feelings” we have for one another. The supreme love the Bible speaks of is that we love one another as Jesus loved us (John 15:12), a sacrificial love that seeks the good of another. This love (from the Greek word AGAPE) is the love that seeks not its own (1 Corinthians 13:5). This love will bring into our lives and families the qualities of the golden rule: “whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them” (Matthew 7:12). Imagine the joy and benefits in a home absent of selfishness and self-serving attitudes! God's way removes them.

What kind of family do you desire? Do you want to become another statistic of unhappiness or divorce, or do you desire a family filled with goodness, joy and blessing. God desires that you have the latter. The choice is ours as to which we will have.

Jack Williams, Independence, MO

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LECTURESHIP

April 2-4, 2004

Does God Care About...

- Friday 7 P.M. “...Our Standard of Authority?”
- Friday 8 P.M. “...Which Church I Attend?”
- Saturday 10 A.M. “...My Pain and Suffering?”
- Saturday 11 A.M. “...How I Worship?”
- Saturday 1 P.M. “...My Spiritual Destiny?”
- Saturday 2 P.M. “...How I Live as a Christian?”
- Sunday 9:30 A.M. “...My Family and Friends?”
- Sunday 10:30 A.M. “...the Work of the Church?”
- Sunday 5 P.M. “...Morality and Ethics?”
- Sunday 6 P.M. “God Does Care, Do You?”

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According to the Bible, Is It Proper to Use Religious Titles Such as “Father,” “Reverend,” and “Pastor”?

Some things sound very pious, spiritual, and holy but are in fact hypocritical, boastful, and self-centered. Paul addressed such matters in Colossians. Chapter two, verse 18 says “Let no man rob you of your prize by a **voluntary humility** and worshipping of the angels, dwelling in the things which he hath seen, **vainly**

puffed up by his fleshly mind.” Note what Paul calls a “voluntary humility,” in other words, FALSE humility. Such is a part of what he calls in verse 22 as “the precepts and doctrines of men.” What do the doctrines of men and their false humility really amount to? Verse 23 is the answer: “Which things have indeed **a show** of wisdom in will-worship, and humility, and severity to the body; but are **not of any value** against the indulgence of the flesh.” Self imposed doctrines and so-called humility is just a show, a put-on religion.

Some of this self-appointed, false piety is addressed by Jesus in Matthew 23. Here, coupled with the hypocrisy of such things is the self-centered boastfulness of “titles” and the desire to be recognized by those whom these “titled” people believe are in a “lower station.” There are four descriptions found in verses 1-7 that amount to what Jesus says in verse 12 as merely exalting self. Such attitudes are contrary to plain Bible teaching on humility. First, note the hypocrisy of verse three: “All things therefore whatsoever they bid you, do and observe; but do not ye after their works; for **they say, and do not.**” So many “religious” people are saying one thing, yet portraying quite another. Jesus calls this hypocrisy seven times in this chapter. The word hypocrite means play-actor. What a shame and a sham that so many people are just play-actors when it comes to their religion.

Verse five shows these people to be boastful. Doing their “religious” acts merely to be seen by others. Then in verse six, we see them as rather self-centered: they want to be seen and set into the midst of whatever is going on. Finally, they want recognition (verse seven) and to be greeted.

Between these four descriptions (hypocrisy, boastful, self-centered, and desiring recognition) and the charge of exalting themselves in verse 12, there is instruction on how to avoid these four ungodly characteristics. This instruction, verses 8-10, decries how “titles” contribute to hypocrisy and exaltation. First Jesus says be not called Rabbi. The rabbi was a teacher, but not merely an instructor. Rabbis were the doctors of the law. Many of the scribes

and Pharisees were rabbis. Jesus said that the use of such a term (rabbi, or in our culture and vernacular, “Doctor”) merely to place oneself above another, or for special recognition, was boastful exaltation and to be avoided.

Second, verse nine says call no man “father” on earth. This is not referring to our dads but to a religious title. Only one deserves this spiritual title: God in Heaven. When men wear this title, they violate this passage and are placing themselves in God’s exalted position. This is why Jesus said such men would be humbled (verse 12).

Finally there is verse 10 wherein Jesus makes clear that He is the Master, and none other should call himself that. To do so is to exalt oneself above his or her rightful place and again be guilty of the prohibitions Jesus is pronouncing here.

Closely linked with these thoughts is the consideration one should make with reference to the “religious name” one wears personally. Do denominational names indicate anything? Certainly. Denominational names will strongly indicate what one believes or has been taught. If one refers to himself as a Baptist, Methodist, or Catholic, they are indicating an agreement with that particular denomination’s doctrines and practices. A Methodist would not call himself a Catholic, nor would a Baptist call himself a Lutheran. What does the Bible teach about such things? Paul shows this to be divisive when he told the Christians at Corinth “Now I beseech you, brethren, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you... now this I mean, that each one of you saith I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ” (1:10,12). He expressly states there ought not to be this type of division and distinction among God’s people. So, what does God want His people to be called? Luke tells us “the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch” (Acts 11.26). In fact, Peter tells us “if a man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God in this name” (1 Peter 4.16).

In conclusion, Jesus, Peter and Paul are all teaching us that religious titles are out of place either because they exalt one above his place, because they place one in the exalted role of deity, which no human can attain, or they promote division which God forbids. Men ought not to call themselves “reverend” or “rabbi” or “master” or “doctor” (in a religious sense) in order to call attention to themselves or their role or their education. Friends, let us just consider ourselves as the Lord has done: equal, one in Christ as Christians. Thanks for reading. May God bless you in your study of His word.

Robin W. Haley, Reynoldsburg, OH