

ASSOCIATED BIBLE STUDENTS

“WEEPING MAY ENDURE FOR A NIGHT, BUT JOY COMETH IN THE MORNING.” PSALMS 30:5

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SEVEN TESTS FOR TRUTH

“Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” — John 8:32

Have you ever asked the question, “Why are there so many different denominations with so many different doctrinal interpretations?” How do we sort through all of the various creeds to come to one harmonious understanding of God’s Word? The following seven tests are methods whereby we might determine if we are on the right path. Finding the truth will have a *sanctifying* effect which will bring peace. “...His truth shall be thy shield and buckler.” Psalm 91:4

Test Number One: Heart Conditioning

God said, “My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways.” (Proverbs 23:26) The first and most important test in understanding Bible truth is upon our own hearts. Throughout the Bible, the Lord has blessed those who are of a humble spirit, for He can only instruct those who are in a teachable frame of mind. King David humbly requested of the Lord, “Create in me a clean heart...” (Psalm 51:10) Yes, the first step in the quest for understanding is the prayer for creating a teachable spirit within us. “LORD, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart.” Psalm 15:1, 2

In addition to our own hearts, it is important to examine *the company we keep*. Are we in a spiritually healthy congregation which exhibits sincerity, humility and a teachable demeanor? God is calling out a people for *His* name—those who represent Him and His righteous standards. And this also applies to those who serve as teachers. Are they *servants*, or do they behave like they are *masters*? The Apostle Peter warned those who would be shepherds: “Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being examples to the flock.” 1 Peter 5:2, 3

Test Number Two: God’s Character

Every doctrine should reflect God’s character. The Bible states emphatically that *God is love*. (1 John 4:16) Jesus lived and spoke in perfect harmony with his Father’s character, and so must we, to the best of our ability. The Apostle Peter encouraged the church:



“Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord.” (2 Peter 1:2) Truly knowing God and His beloved Son are key to understanding whether a doctrine will develop in us *grace and peace*.

Take, for example, this unusual statement made by Jesus in Matthew 18:9: “If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire.” Would a God of love really expect someone to pluck out his eye? Of course not. Jesus was using *symbolic language* to illustrate his point. Certainly, to take his words literally would be a gruesome thought, but, to take them symbolically would

be an illustration of how important it is to destroy our evil thoughts, words and deeds.

To carry this example further, ask yourself this question: If Jesus’ statement is symbolic, then would it not stand to reason that *hell fire* is also symbolic? In fact, a God of love could never create such a place of torment—for He said to His prophet Jeremiah that *the thought of torture never even entered His mind!* (Jeremiah 7:31; 19:5) Consider 1 John 4:16-18: “*God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God... There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment.*” There is an abundance of evidence that God is not the God of torment, but of mercy, compassion, forgiveness and love. (Lamentations 3:22, 23) If a doctrine does not square with this foundational truth, then it is important to discover why, and bring our thoughts into harmony with God’s character.

When the true, loving character of God is understood, it will have a transforming influence upon our own character, and will be reflected in the deeds of our lives. This holds true, as well, with the attitudes and activities of those with whom we meet. If the proper understanding of God had been appreciated in the Dark Ages, there would never have been an Inquisition and the Crusades where hundreds of thousands of innocent people were killed in the name of God. And, even within recent history, confused doctrines have been at the root of many horrible deeds done in the name of God, such as Hitler’s Holocaust against the Jews, the Ku Klux Klan’s racial persecution, and most recently,

church protests outside of military funerals. “*They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.*” Titus 1:16

Test Number Three: God’s Nature

All doctrine should harmonize with the fact that God is an all powerful, just, wise and perfect immortal being: “*...His work is perfect: for all His ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He.*” (Deuteronomy 32:4) God cannot make a mistake, cannot lie, and a concept which suggests otherwise cannot be true.

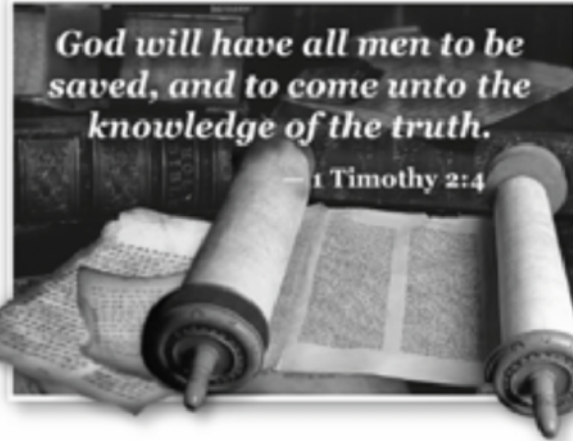
For example, the understanding that God’s Word is irrevocable helps the student of the Bible to properly apply prophecies concerning the Nation of Israel. God made an oath-bound covenant with Abraham that his *seed* would be instrumental in blessing all the families of the earth. God repeated His oath in the Old Testament through His many prophets, and again, in the New Testament through Jesus and the inspired Apostles. (Romans 11:15-29) But, some denominations teach that God has replaced the Jews and transferred all of their promises to the followers of Christ. This contradicts the irrevocable Word of God and implies that God either lied to the Jews or made a mistake in His plans concerning them.

As another example, consider the concept of a *deathbed confession*. How would this be out of harmony with the perfect, omniscient nature of God? The Bible teaches that the reward of immortality in heaven is only promised to those who have proven to be faithful. In 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 the Apostle Paul declares: “*Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize?*” This refutes the idea that one could live a reprehensible life, and then, at the point of death, profess the name of Jesus to receive a heavenly reward. If God accepted a deathbed confession, it would result in heaven being populated with immortal spirit beings that had not been proven to be faithful and loyal to God. The truth is that God will test our faith, and *if we prove faithful* under His training, He will then give us a *crown of life*. Revelation 2:10; Hebrews 3:14; 1 Peter 1:7

Yes, to grant someone immortality who has never exhibited growth in knowledge and grace would be unwise of God and would go against His nature. The Apostle Paul admonished all disciples of Christ to add to their faith virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and charity. He continues, “*...give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom...*” 2 Peter 1:5-11; see also Deuteronomy 13:3

So then, what would be the judgment of those whose faith has never been put to the test before they died? Do they lose salvation? We see our answer when we again look at the nature of God—“*a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He.*” Certainly, God’s justice will not permit for these to go to heaven, but neither is it *fair* to condemn fallen, deceived and uninformed

mankind to a place of eternal torment. God’s love has provided a plan whereby He might be *just and yet the justifier* of those who, *in due time*, will believe in His Son. (Romans 3:26) God “*...will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.*” (1 Timothy 2:4-6) This *ransom* dictates that all mankind must at some point in time receive a full opportunity to *learn righteousness* and thereby receive the reward of a perfect *human* life. (Isaiah 26:9; John 5:28, 29) God’s superior intellect and unalterable nature is a beautiful touchstone of truth from which all other doctrines can be measured.



Test Number Four: Mystery versus Harmony

A typical response to difficult Bible questions is: “*It is a mystery,*” or “*We may not understand, but must trust God, for His ways are higher than our ways.*” If the Bible is the truth, and if God wants the sincere Christian to really know Him, then we can trust that He will provide a

method of revealing the truth of His plans and purposes to all who seek it. “*It’s a mystery*” is not a satisfactory answer.

Over the centuries, *the faith once delivered to the saints*, has been corrupted by the *doctrines of men*, thereby creating needless mysteries. But, now, in this *time of the end*, God has provided many Bible study tools which help to unravel the errors of the Dark Ages. (Daniel 12:4) We do well to examine church creeds to determine for ourselves whether these harmonize with God’s truth. “*Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.*” Colossians 2:20-23; Jude 1:3; 1 Thessalonians 5:21

Many times seeming contradictions in the Scriptures are presented as a *mystery*. For example, will the earth be *destroyed with fire*, (2 Peter 3:10) or will *the earth abide forever?* (Ecclesiastes 1:4) This becomes a mystery if a strictly literal interpretation is applied, but a *symbolic* interpretation harmonizes completely with the *earth abiding forever*. Again, *fire* symbolically represents destruction of the political, religious, social and economic *elements* of the earth corrupted by Satan and fallen man. Thus, the literal planet earth will remain forever.

One question which seems to perplex many church teachers is “*Why does God permit suffering?*” We know that God is just and good, and hates evil of every kind. “*For Thou are not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with Thee.*” (Psalm 5:4) Why then has God allowed 6,000 years of evil to reign over His creation? A sound scriptural answer must be found, or our faith may falter. The answer must harmonize with a God that is loving and wise, and who is providing all things for man’s ultimate good.

To understand why God permits evil, we must first realize the difference between *permitting* and *causing*. God has *permitted* man to have a temporary experience with evil, so that all will come to know first-hand the consequence of disobedience and selfishness. “*...This sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith.*” (Ecclesiastes 1:13) By faith in His promises we trust that God will not permit this educational experience with evil to last forever.

“Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.” 2 Peter 3:13

God encourages His children: “Come, let us reason together...” (Isaiah 1:18) Those who sincerely seek Him in prayer and study can expect to find answers to the seeming mysteries of the Bible.

Test Number Five: Salvation versus Sectarianism

God does not recognize sectarian denominations, but looks upon the heart of each individual Christian. The Apostle Paul warned against dividing the body of Christ—following after one man or another. This is not to say that we should not respect teachers who are seeking to follow Christ as they “rightly divide the word of truth.” But, if the impression is made that one will receive salvation only by belonging to a particular sect of Christianity, and that all others will be judged as unworthy of life—then it is time to apply this test.

God’s plan of salvation is more merciful than portrayed by most denominations. Some put false limits on God’s love, magnifying His vengeance against others, while selfishly hoarding salvation for themselves. Jesus said: “...God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.” (Luke 16:15) God told Samuel: “...Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.” (1 Samuel 16:7) God determines whose hearts are in the right condition, and no Christian or body of believers has that authority. Matthew 7:2 states: “For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.”

Test Number Six: Rules versus Principles

Are we taught that we must perform certain rituals or abide by a list of church rules in order to be a *good Christian*? Conformity to sectarian rules may bring a sense of unity, but it is at the expense of learning the application of Bible principles. Obedience to rules without being taught the principles behind the rules will curtail true learning and character development.

The Word of God provides an abundance of principles to live by. “All Scripture given by inspiration of God is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” (2 Timothy 3:16, 17) For example, some denominations have strict rules about not having Christmas trees, keeping certain ceremonies of the Law, not using electricity, etc. Others insist on rituals to cleanse their sins by *works* of repentance—going to confession, counting rosary beads, saying *novenas*, etc. Rules and rituals place a burden upon the Lord’s children which is not authorized in Scripture. “Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (touch not; taste not; handle not; which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men?” (Colossians 2:20-22) Certainly, to make progress in the *narrow way* as a Christian, it is important to *show our faith by our works*, however, no *act* will cleanse the disciple of Christ from sin—only

prayer and faith in the precious blood of Christ will provide a *holy and acceptable sacrifice*. (Romans 12:1, 2; see also Romans 7:6) Instead of rules and rituals, the application of the *principles* of God’s Word is the best guide for Christian behavior and life-decisions.

Test Number Seven: Relative versus Absolute

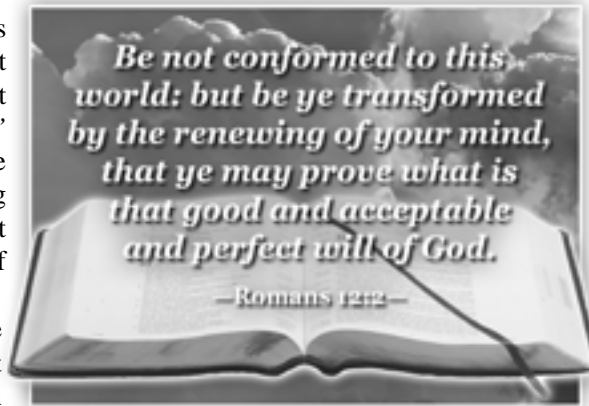
Truth does not constantly change, and is not *relative* to society’s standards, which radically change over time. For example, the social climate of our day is one which promotes *political correctness*. Some churches are now compromising clear Bible standards to make more comfortable those who are practicing *alternative lifestyles*. The Lord said of the teachers in Israel: “They shall teach my people the difference between the holy and profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean.” (Ezekiel 44:23) Making exceptions to Scriptural principles brings dishonor to God’s righteous Name. On the contrary, “...Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That

he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle... holy and without blemish.” (Ephesians 5:25-27) The Apostle Paul admonished those who should have known better: “For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.” (Hebrews 5:12) Note again, however, there is a difference between judging a *behavior* as wrong and judging an individual’s salvation. The one is proper for the sanctification of the body of Christ, and the other is the responsibility of the Lord. Roman 7:16, 17, 20

Morals are not relative to the society in which we live. God’s laws of conduct are absolute, and our conduct should reflect this. Having a proper understanding of truth will have a sanctifying effect upon our lives and will direct our path in accordance with God’s righteousness. “...Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the LORD.” (Isaiah 52:11) “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” Romans 12:2

Seek Truth as Silver

“If thou seekest her [truth] as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt Thou... find the knowledge of God.” (Proverbs 2:4, 5) The extent to which one understands the Scriptures will determine the *freedom* that comes from being in harmony with God. The Apostle Paul admonished the brethren to “Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” (2 Timothy 2:15) Those who seek to serve and honor God will make every effort to be sure that their doctrine is in harmony with Him, His plans and His character. Thereby, there will be no need to *be ashamed* before Him.



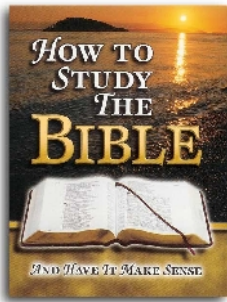


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