

4 ways to test for true doctrine *adapted from an article Written by Dennis Regling*

Where true doctrine is taught. You'll find it challenged. How do we discern which is correct?

These are tests we can apply to a learn whether doctrine taught is genuine or false.

The number one, test of origin.

Sound doctrine originates with God. False doctrine originates with some creation of God.

When Paul wrote to the church in Galatia, he said for, ***“I would have, you know, brothers that the gospel that was preached by me is not man’s gospel for, I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.”*** Galatians 1:11-12

“Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.” John 7:16

Both Paul and Jesus insisted that what they taught had its origin with God himself. False doctrine always originates outside of God.

When Paul wrote to the Colossian church, he told them that they needed to avoid doctrine that promotes legalism and is ***“—according to human precepts and teachings? These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh”*** . (Colossians 2:22-23)

When he wrote to Timothy, he warned Timothy some would depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons.

Sound doctrine comes from the mind of God. False doctrine comes from the mind of some being that was created by God.

So here’s your test: Does this doctrine originate with God or has this doctrine been fabricated by someone or something else? But how can we know the origin of a doctrine?

Test number two, the test of authority.

Sound doctrine grounds its authority within the Bible, false doctrine grounds its authority outside the Bible. We believe as Christians that the Bible is God’s inerrant, infallible, complete authoritative revelation of himself to humanity. The Bible has ultimate authority because of its ultimate origin. The church in Berea was commended because they received the word with eagerness, examining the scriptures daily to see if these things were so, so they tested truth claims with the word of God.

So here’s your test. Does this doctrine appeal to the Bible for its authority or does it appeal to other tradition, text or to another logical system or philosophy for its authority?

This a good test, but what if both teachers claim that their doctrine originates with God and they both claim that it holds the authority of the Bible but yet they teach very different things?

How can we know whose interpretation is the correct one?

Test number three, the test of consistency.

Sound doctrine is consistent with the whole of scripture. False doctrine is inconsistent with at least some parts of scripture. Look for a consistent author (the Holy Spirit) behind the teaching. There’s a familiarity to true doctrine and a strangeness or an unfamiliarity to false doctrine.

When he wrote the letter to the Hebrews the author warned them about *diverse and strange teachings*. Paul wrote to Timothy warning him about accepting any different doctrine. (Hebrews 13:9; 1 Timothy 1:3, 6:3-4)

Therefore a new doctrine must always be compared to the established and accepted canon and body of scriptural truth. Those who study the scriptures and exemplify the fruit in their lives are the ones who are

best able to identify what is true from what is false. So scripture interprets scripture, to guard against counterfeits know the Bible.

Scripture interprets scripture – How do we rightly divide the Word of God?

The Bible is the revelation of God's perfect mind. So the interpretation can't be inconsistent. If something contradicts the rest of the Bible, it's false.

If something complements the rest of the Bible, it's true. So test number three: *Is this doctrine consistent with the entirety of scripture?*

Test number four, the test of spiritual health and godly living.

Sound doctrine leads to spiritual health, false doctrine leads to spiritual weakness.

When Paul wrote to Timothy he said, ***“If you point these things out to the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, nourished by the words of the faith and the good teaching that you have followed.”*** 1 Timothy 4:6.

Paul was saying that the Bible had nourished Timothy. It had made him spiritually strong and had given him spiritual health. Does this doctrine lead to spiritually healthy, spiritually mature, spiritually knowledgeable Christians, or does it lead to spiritually unhealthy, immature, ignorant Christians who, who really might not be Christians at all.

Sound doctrine leads to godly living. False doctrine leads to ungodly living. Doctrine always has practical implications in our lives.

- Doctrine is always meant to lead to worship.
- Doctrine is always meant to lead us to live in ways that express love to God and that express love to our fellow man.

The Bible says, ***“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”*** 2 Timothy 3:16

God doesn't mean for us just to know the facts of the Bible though. That's very good. We're also to meditate on the Bible and to apply it to our lives.

The Bible is meant to go from our heads to our hearts and then to work itself out through our hands. We don't just know doctrine as Christians. We live out our doctrine.

Does this doctrine lead us to live in a way that pleases God or does it lead us to live in a way that dishonors God? ***“If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority.”*** John 7:17

The four tests:

- Sound doctrine originates with God
- Is recorded in the word of God
- Is consistent with the entire revelation of God
- Leads to both spiritual health and to godly living.

False doctrine is inconsistent with the entire revelation of God. And it leads to spiritual weakness and to ungodly living. For doctrine to be true. It must pass each of these four tests. If it fails, one of them, it fails it all. Your responsibility is to hold fast to what is true and to deny and reject what is false.

Scripture interprets scripture – rightly divide the Word of Truth!