

Test All Things

By Patrick Swayne

As we stated in last week's article, the Thessalonians faced a grave dilemma – an influx of false teachers and false doctrines. In light of this, a warning was given to them to “not despise prophecies.” It was essentially a warning encouraging them not to reject all teaching simply because false teaching existed (1 Thessalonians 5:20). However, that warning came with another command that was equally important. The Thessalonians were not told to listen to the prophesiers as sheep nor were they told to accept everything that the prophesiers said. Instead, they were told to “test all things” (1 Thessalonians 5:21). This command implies three things of which Christians must be mindful in order to keep it.

First, there is a standard by which to test all things. The standard by which the Thessalonians would test all things would be the writings and teachings of Paul and other inspired men. 1 Corinthians 4:6 records Paul's instructions to the Corinthians “not to think beyond what is written.” He stated this as a response to the Corinthian's tendency to exalt men above the messages that they preached. While they wanted to follow Paul, Cephas, or Apollos, Paul stated that they were but servants and stewards and that they too were bound by the message of Christ. Paul also told the Galatians, “But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:8). There is but one true gospel message, so when we encounter any spiritual teaching, the Bible is the standard by which it must be measured.

Second, it is possible to test all things. Even in Paul's day, before the advent of the printing press and even before the completion of the written New Testament, Christians were held accountable for what they believed and practiced. If they were held accountable for what they believed and practiced, then certainly Christians today will be held accountable. Far too many today are agnostics in the more literal sense of the word, saying that we cannot know anything. This line of thinking has crept into the religious world and without a doubt into Christianity. Religion for far too many Christians consists of whatever standard they *feel* is right. Paul didn't say to feel your way into all things, he said to test all things. It is possible for one to know whether or not a teaching is from God or from men. “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1).

Third, to test all things I must know some things. Knowledge is perhaps the greatest weapon we have against the snares of Satan. Christians must apply themselves to knowledge, “lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices” (2 Corinthians 2:11). The writer of Hebrews rebuked his audience, saying, “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food” (Hebrews 5:12). Christians today must not let themselves share in that rebuke, but instead should be diligent to show themselves approved before God as workers who know how to understand the word properly (2 Timothy 2:15). We may never know all there is to know about the Bible, but we must know the fundamentals of the faith in order to “test all things” and to be pleasing to God.

Paul did not want the Thessalonians to reject all teachings because of false teachers. Instead, he wanted them to use their knowledge to test all teachers and teachings by the standard of the gospel of God. As Thomas B. Warren, a gospel preacher, once said, “The

instruction to prove all things binds upon all men the obligation to have New Testament authority for all that they do in religion.”

All Christians must seek to walk as Paul instructed, “Let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind” (Philippians 3:16). The word “rule” here is the Greek word *kanon*, a word that referred to a reed that was used as a measuring stick. In essence, Paul was saying “let’s use the same ruler.” Anything beyond the ruler God has laid out in his Scriptures is too much; anything short of His ruler is too little.