

# 1 Thessalonians 5:21 Commentary

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JESUS IS COMING AGAIN  
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Chart by Charles Swindoll

1 Thessalonians Overview				
1 Th 1:1-10	1 Th 2:1-20	1 Th 3:1-13	1 Th 4:1-18	1 Th 5:1-28
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Paul Commends Spiritual Growth	Paul Founds the Church	Strengthening of the Church	Directions for Spiritual Growth	Holy Living in Light of Day of the Lord
Exemplary Hope of Young Converts	Motivating Hope of Faithful Servants	Purifying Hope of Tried Believers	Comforting Hope of Bereaved Saints	Invigorating Hope of Diligent Christians
Written from Corinth Approximately 51AD				

1Thessalonians 5:21 But **examine everything** carefully; **hold fast** to that **which is good** (NASB: Lockman)

**Greek:** [panta de dokimazete, \(2PPAM\)](#) to [kalon katechete, \(2PPAM\)](#)

**Amplified:** But test and prove all things [until you can recognize] what is good; [to that] hold fast. [Amplified Bible - Lockman](#)

**Barclay:** Test everything, hold fast to the fine thing. [Westminster Press](#)

**NLT:** but test everything that is said. Hold on to what is good. [NLT - Tyndale House](#)

**Phillips:** By all means use your judgement, and hold on to whatever is really good [Phillips: Touchstone](#)

**Wuest:** but be putting all things to the test for the purpose of approving them, and finding that they meet the requirements, put your approval upon them. Be constantly holding fast that which is good. [Eerdmans Publishing](#) - used [by permission](#)

**Young's Literal:** all things prove; that which is good hold fast;

**BUT EXAMINE EVERYTHING:** [panta de dokimazete \(2PPAM\):](#)

- Isa 8:20; Mt 7:15-20; Mk 7:14-16; Lk 12:57; Acts 17:11; Ro 12:2; 1Co 2:11,14,15; 14:28; Eph 5:10; Php 1:10;; 1Jn 4:1; Re 2:2

## TEST EVERYTHING!

**Young's Literal** preserves the original Greek word order "all things prove; that which is good hold fast."

**John MacArthur** on **Paul's command for discernment** - It is significant that Paul sets discernment in a context of very basic commands (1Thes 5:16-20). It is as crucial to the effective Christian life as prayer and contentment. That may surprise some Christians who see discernment as uniquely a pastoral responsibility. It is certainly true that pastors and elders have an even greater duty to be discerning than the average layperson. Most of the calls to discernment in the New Testament are issued to church leaders (1Ti 4:6-7, 13, 16; Titus 1:9). Every elder is required to be skilled in teaching truth and able to refute unsound doctrine. As a pastor, I am constantly aware of this responsibility. Everything I read, for example, goes through a grid of discrimination in my mind. If you were to look through my library, you would instantly be able to identify which books I have read. The margins are marked. Sometimes you'll see approving remarks and heavy underlining. Other times you'll find question marks—or even red lines through the text. I constantly strive to separate truth from error. I read that way, I think that way, and of course I preach that way. My passion is to know the truth and proclaim it with authority. That should be the passion of every elder, because everything we teach affects the hearts and lives of those who hear us. It is an awesome responsibility. Any church leader who does not feel the burden of this duty ought to step down from leadership. But discernment is not only the duty of pastors and elders. The same careful discernment Paul demanded of pastors and elders is also the duty of every Christian. First Thessalonians 5:21 is written to the entire church. (Fool's Gold)

**But (de)** introduces a contrasting command which serves to counterbalance the preceding injunctions.

**Hiebert** - The missionaries are not advocating credulity toward all that claim to be a message from the Spirit. They need to realize that a false supernatural report may mimic the true. "The simple fact of a supernatural inspiration is not enough to establish the claims of a spirit to be heard. There are inspirations from below as well as from above." [\(Hiebert, D. Edmond: 1 & 2 Thessalonians: BMH Book, 1996\)](#)

**Milligan** comments that this "the whole clause stands in a certain limiting relation to the foregoing precepts: important as 'gifts' and 'prophesyings' are, they cannot be accepted unhesitatingly, but must be put to the test (cf. 1 Jo. 4:1). Nothing is said as to how this *diakrisis pneumatōn* (1 Cor. 12:10, 14:29) is to be effected, but it can only be by a 'spiritual' standard (cf. 1 Cor. 2:13) (St. Paul's Epistles to the Thessalonians. 1908. London: Macmillan and Co., limited)

**Everything (pas)** in context refers primarily to the **prophetic utterances** just mentioned. On the other hand, this command clearly has a general application, extending in principle to all things that impact our spiritual life (which in fact is *everything!*).

**Examine** (1381) (**dokimazo** from **dokimos** = tested, proved or approved, tried as metals by fire and thus purified from **dechomai** = to accept, receive) means to assay, to test, to prove, to put to the test, to make a trial of, to verify, to discern to approve. It means to test in order to verify the character of something. John uses the same verb to inform his readers that they should put the content of prophetic speech to the test (see **1 John 4** below).

Spiritual discernment is the ability to distinguish divine truth from error and half-truth, right from wrong or good from bad, an ability which is vital to assure a healthy Christian life. Test everything to see if it is the "real thing"... to see if it is authentic Christianity.

**Examine** is in the **present imperative** where the **present tense** denotes that the testing demanded is not an isolated action, but is rather to be the settled rule and continuing practice. Williams paraphrases it "but continue to approve all things until you can approve them." And remember that God's commandments always include His enablements, specifically the "Enabler!" What do I mean by using a term that society often uses in a negative sense? I am referring to the indwelling Spirit Who Alone can enable us to obey these commands. Yes, we still have to make a volitional choice to obey (examine everything), but we can only do so successively as we rely on His supernatural power, not our frail ("fallen") natural power. See "[Paradoxical Principle of 100% Dependent and 100% Responsible](#)" (100/100) ([See also the related discussion of God's commands and our need for the Spirit](#))

**Dokimazo** involves not only testing but determining the genuineness or value of an event or object. That which has been tested is demonstrated to be genuine and trustworthy. **Dokimazo** was used in classic Greek to describe the assaying of precious metals (especially gold or silver coins), usually by fire, to prove the whether they were authentic and whether they measured up to the stated worth. That which endures the test was called **dokimos** and that which fails is called **adokimos**.

**Dokimazo** - 22x in 20v - Luke 12:56; 14:19; Rom 1:28; 2:18; 12:2; 14:22; 1 Cor 3:13; 11:28; 16:3; 2 Cor 8:8, 22; 13:5; Gal 6:4; Eph 5:10; Phil 1:10; 1 Thess 2:4; 5:21; 1 Tim 3:10; 1 Pet 1:7; 1 John 4:1. **NAS** = analyze(2), approve(3), approved(1), approves(1), examine(4), examines(1), prove(1), proving(1), see fit(1), test(2), tested(3), try(1), trying to learn(1).

**C H Spurgeon** adds a note of caution on the command to **examine everything carefully** - "Oh," says a man "but you must prove all things." Yes, so I will; but if one should set a joint of meat on his table, and it smell rather high, I would cut a slice, and if I put one bit of it in my mouth, and found it far gone, I should not feel it necessary to eat the whole round of beef to test its sweetness. Some people seem to think that they must read a bad book through; and they must go and hear a bad preacher often before they can be sure of his quality. Why, you can judge many teachings in five minutes. You say to yourself, "No, sir, no, no, no, this is good meat—for dogs. Let them have it, but it is not good meat for me, and I do not intend to poison myself with it." (Barbed Arrows from the Quiver of C. H. Spurgeon)

**Dokimazo** means to put to the test for the purpose of approving, and finding that the person tested meets the specifications prescribed, to put one's approval upon him. For example Paul writes that unregenerate mankind "did not **approve** (**dokimazo**) of having God in knowledge, God gave them up to a disapproved mind, to do the things not seemly." (Young's literal translation see Ro 1:28-note) In this incredible verse fallen men presumptuously put God to the test for the purpose of approving Him to see He if He would meet the specifications which they laid down for a God who would be to their liking! But sinful man did not stop there, for finding that He did not meet their specifications, they refused to **approve** (**dokimazo**) Him as the God to be worshipped or have Him in its knowledge! They tested the infinitely precious God as they would a mere coin, and chose to turn aside from Him!

**Dokimazo** means to make a critical examination of something to determine its genuineness. **Dokimazo** was used in a manuscript of 140AD which contains a plea for the exemption of physicians, and especially of those who have **passed the examination** (**dokimazo**). **Dokimazo** was thus used as a technical expression referring to the action of an examining board putting its approval upon those who had successfully passed the examinations for the degree of Doctor of Medicine. **Dokimazo** was also used to describe the passing of a candidate as fit for election to public office.

On the basis of the truth in **Romans 1-11**, in **Romans 12:2** Paul charges believers to "not be conformed (assuming an outward expression not reflective of Christ Who is really inside you) to this world (the beliefs, values, moral atmosphere, etc of this present evil age which is ruled by Satan), but be transformed (daily, continually be undergoing a metamorphosis or change in your outward appearance which manifests your new, inner redeemed nature) by the renewing (re-programming your mind, as the Spirit changes your thinking as you saturate your mind with Scripture allowing it to control and guide your steps) of your mind, that you **may prove**

(dokimazo) what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." (Ro 12:2-note)

In a similar exhortation to the **Ephesians** who were formerly in spiritual darkness but now were light in the Lord, because of who they were in Christ, they should walk as children of light continually "**trying to learn (dokimazo** - continually putting every thought, word and deed to the test in order to prove) what is pleasing to the Lord (The one point of all moral investigation is, does it please God?). (Eph 5:10-note)

Walking in the light, in the Spirit (Gal 5:16-note), according to the Word and the revealed will of God is a sure way to test and approve what pleases our Lord. To be sure Paul says that certain individuals in the body did have the special Spirit giftedness to allow them to discern the spirits (cf, 1Cor 12:10 "*the distinguishing of spirits*" - i.e., ability to distinguish between what came from the Holy Spirit, what was a satanic counterfeit, and/or what was simply of the flesh - not physical flesh but our sin nature). Nevertheless, it is clear that every saint has the responsibility and the ability (the indwelling Holy Spirit) to be discerning in all matters that affect their spiritual life.

**MacDonald** says that one way to **examine everything carefully** is to ask "What does the Lord think about this? How does it appear in His presence? Every area of life comes under the searchlight (what a picture of "dokimazo"!)—conversation, standard of living, clothes, books, business, pleasures, entertainments, furniture, friendships, vacations, cars, and sports. ([MacDonald, W & Farstad, A. Believer's Bible Commentary: Thomas Nelson](#))

**Paul** prays for the saints at **Philippi** (and a good model prayer for us today) "that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that **you may approve** (dokimazo) (continually like a "spiritual metallurgist" assaying the things in their lives that were of real value, as to discern that which was true and genuine) the things that are excellent (some things are good and others are better - the good is often the enemy of the best. Dokimazo speaks of investigating to determine which is the best), in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ." (see notes Philippians 1:9; 1:10)

Note that in context we are to sift and test **prophetic utterances**. **Dokimazo** conveys the idea of proving a thing whether it is worthy or not, whether genuine or not. In the present context all prophetic utterances need to be tested to avoid erroneous teaching or false doctrine from entering into the assembly.

In the church, one of the chief functions of the elders or overseers is to be continually "holding fast (present tense = continually holding himself face to face as it were with the trustworthy Word of God!) the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict." (Titus 1:9-note)

If you are an elder, you will be held accountable for whether or not you fulfilled this function and examined everything (every Sunday School teacher, every video series no matter whose ministry it is from, every seminar speaker, every Bible study, every song the worship leader holds forth as Scripturally sound and edifying, etc) carefully, for as Paul warned the Ephesian elders (truth practical to all elders) "savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. (Acts 20:29-30-note).

Holding fast the faithful word is vital if one is going to be equipped to test everything carefully!

**Isaiah** speaks to the importance of the plumbline of God's Word declaring "To the law and to the testimony! (that is, the written Word of God, the only absolute and trustworthy standard which provides all the counsel and guidance we need) If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn. (Isaiah 8:20)

**John MacArthur** writes that "It is failure in the area of **holding fast the faithful word** that is largely responsible for the superficial, self-elevating preaching and teaching in many evangelical churches...the weak, shallow, insipid sermonettes for Christianettes" Here is the real villain that has led so many to be converted to what they consider relevancy and therefore to preach a pampering psychology or become standup comics, storytellers, clever speechmakers or entertainers who turn churches into what John Piper in his most excellent book [The Supremacy of God in Preaching](#) has called "the slapstick of evangelical worship" (Baker, 1990, p 21). Preaching and teaching are the primary responsibilities of elders." ([MacArthur, Titus: Moody Press](#))

Paul's point in his injunction to the Thessalonian church (the command to examine is plural) is for all the saints to exercise discernment. So also in our day, when "new" teachings are being proposed (even if they are popular and widely accepted by other churches), believers must continually test them to determine whether or not they have their origin in God and have as their chief goal to edify the body, make disciples like Christ and glorify God their Father. There is a caution needed here for this command does not mean we are to invoke rationalism (or pragmatism - the philosophical system that assumes that every truth or idea has practical consequences and that these practical consequences are a critical test of its truthfulness) as the criterion by which we test spiritual realities. Such reasoning might go something like this - "*If it 'works', it must be of God so let's adopt it into our church's program*". In the arena of spiritual truth, mere intellectual acumen is simply not able to make this test. The corollary is that if we rely on our intellect to "discern" the spiritual efficacy or veracity of a new program or method (e.g., "*all the churches in California are doing it and*

*their memberships are growing*") we are entertaining a prescription which will quite likely lead to spiritual frustration and give no supernatural sense of God's "seal of approval".

**Howard Marshall** (in the New Century Commentary) writes that "It is spiritual discernment rather than intellectual sagacity that is required."

**Hiebert** adds that...

The Thessalonians are not told how this testing is to be effected, but dearly it must proceed upon a spiritual standard. The Bereans tested the apostolic teaching on the basis of its agreement with the Scriptures (Acts 17:11-note).

The Scriptures are our sole and sufficient criterion for the testing of all teachings that claim to have divine origin and authority. It is the function of the Holy Spirit to quicken the spiritual perception of the believer so that he is enabled to detect spiritual error in the light of the Word of God (see John 14:26; 16:13; 1Jn 2:20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27).

The acuteness of the believer's spiritual perception is dependent upon the spirituality of his daily walk (2Pe 1:8, 9-note, 2Pe 1:10, 11-note). (Ibid)

**Ray Stedman** feels that in light of possible problems with prophetic utterances Paul adds another command to...

**test it.** It is easy to imitate this. Anyone can stand up and say in a deep tone of voice, "This is the word of the Lord." We must learn to test what is said from what has already been revealed. Paul commended the Bereans for this, saying they were more noble than those in Thessalonica because they

received the word with all readiness of heart and searched the Scriptures daily whether these things were so (Acts 17:11-note)

**Test** it, is what Paul is saying. F. F. Bruce says there was a saying attributed to Jesus that was often quoted by early Christian writers. It is not in the gospels, but it was a commonly attributed saying that urged, "become approved money-changers." The money-changers in the temple were occupied in changing various currencies and were constantly looking out for counterfeit coins. That is what Paul tells us to do about prophesying. People on every side are telling us what God wants us to do, but there is much that is counterfeit in that today. Become approved money-changers. Test what is said. ([Living Christianly](#)) (Bolding added)

**Barnes** writes that the idea of **examine everything** is to...

Subject everything submitted to you to be believed to the proper test. The word here used (*dokimazo*) is one that is properly applicable to metals, referring to the art of the assayer by which the true nature and value of the metal is tested. See [1Cor 3:13]. This trial was usually made by fire.

The meaning here is, that they were carefully to examine everything proposed for their belief. They were not to receive it on trust; to take it on assertion; to believe it because it was urged with vehemence, zeal, or plausibility. In the various opinions and doctrines which were submitted to them for adoption, they were to apply the appropriate tests from reason and the word of God; and what they found to be true they were to embrace; what was false they were to reject.

Christianity does not require men to disregard their reason, or to be credulous. It does not expect them to believe anything because others say it is so. It does not make it a duty to receive as undoubted truth all that synods and councils have decreed; or all that is advanced by the ministers of religion. It is, more than any other form of religion, the friend of free inquiry, and would lead men everywhere to understand the reason of the opinions which they entertain. Cp. Ac 17:11,12; 1Pe 3:15-note. (Albert Barnes. Barnes NT Commentary)

**Calvin** - As rash men and deceiving spirits frequently pass off their trifles under the name of prophecy, prophecy might by this means be rendered suspicious or even odious, just as many in the present day feel almost disgusted with the very name of preaching, as there are so many foolish and ignorant persons that from the pulpit blab out their worthless contrivances, while there are others, also, that are wicked and sacrilegious persons, who babble forth execrable blasphemies. ([1 Thessalonians 5](#))

**Vine** - While "discerning" or "proving" is itself a "spiritual gift," 1 Corinthians 12:10, all spiritual persons are responsible to form judgments on spiritual things, see note at v. 11, and for this provision is made in the "anointing from the Holy One" which is given to the children in the family of God, 1Jn 2:18, 20, 27, cp. 2Ti 2:7-note. Spiritual perception, however, like spiritual power, depends on the walk of the believer, the slothful and evildoers are blind, only the godly have discernment in the truth, Proverbs 28:5; Daniel 9:13; 2Pe 1:9-note. Moreover, the desire to be impressed, to have the feelings wrought upon, rather than to be instructed in the ways of

the Lord, is a common snare to the saints, (see 2Ti 3:6, 7-note, 2Ti 4:3, 4-note). The completed Scriptures, i.e., the Old Testament and New Testament, became later the sole and sufficient standard by which all teaching, oral or written, could be tested, but long before that time, believers and churches had multiplied widely. During the intervening period, in the case of revelations for the testing of which the Old Testament was not available, such as that referred to in Colossians 1:26 (note), e.g., believers were encouraged by the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit, Jn 16:13, to compare utterances claiming to be spiritual, 1Corinthians 2:13, and so to test the prophecy and the spirit that prompted it, 1Corinthians 14:29; 1John 4:6; Revelation 2:2 (note). In early days a saying "**be ye tried money changers**" (which means "*accustom yourselves to distinguish between the true and false*" cp. Php 1:10-note, was commonly connected with these words (cp. 1Kings 3:9; Jer 15:19; He 5:14-note). (**Ed Note:** The phrase "be ye tried money changers" depicts a moneychanger testing the genuineness of a coin - remembering that the verb *dokimazo* means to test something to determine its authenticity). By some ancient writers this saying ("**be ye tried money changers**") was credited to the apostle Paul, by others to the Lord Himself but it does not occur in the New Testament. ([Vine, W. Collected writings of W. E. Vine. Nashville: Thomas Nelson](#))

**James Denney** - When the Apostle Paul claimed respect for the Christian preacher, he did not claim infallibility. That is plain from what follows, for all the words are connected. **Despise not prophesyings**, but **put all things to the test**, that is, all the contents of the prophesying, all the utterances of the Christian man whose spiritual ardour has urged him to speak. We may remark in passing that this injunction prohibits all passive listening to the word. Many people prefer this. They come to church, not to be taught, not to exercise any faculty of discernment or testing at all, but to be impressed. They like to be played upon, and to have their feelings moved by a tender or vehement address; it is an easy way of coming into apparent contact with good. But the Apostle here counsels a different attitude. We are to put to the proof all that the preacher says...No man is perfect, not the most devout and enthusiastic of Christians. In his most spiritual utterances something of himself will very naturally mingle; there will be chaff among the wheat; wood, hay, and stubble in the material he brings to build up the Church, as well as gold, silver, and precious stones. That is not a reason for refusing to listen; it is a reason for listening earnestly, conscientiously, and with much forbearance. There is a responsibility laid upon each of us, a responsibility laid upon the Christian conscience of every congregation and of the Church at large, to put prophesyings to the proof. Words that are spiritually unsound, that are out of tune with the revelation of God in Christ Jesus, ought to be discovered when they are spoken in the Church. No man with any idea of modesty, to say nothing of humility, could wish it otherwise. And here, again, we have to regret the quenching of the Spirit. We have all heard the sermon criticized when the preacher could not get the benefit; but have we often heard it spiritually judged, so that he, as well as those who listened to him, is edified, comforted, and encouraged? The preacher has as much need of the word as his hearers; if there is a service which God enables him to do for them, in enlightening their minds or fortifying their wills, there is a corresponding service when they can do for him. An open meeting, a liberty of prophesying, a gathering in which any one could speak as the Spirit gave him utterance, is one of the crying needs of the modern Church. ([1 Thessalonians 5 Commentary](#))

**Two good tests** to enable the exercise of spiritual discernment are

(1). **Will it make you or others stumble?** (Mk 9:42, 43, 45, 47; Lk 17:2)

(2) **Will I be ashamed if Jesus should return?** (1Jn 2:28, 1Jn 3:2-note, 1Jn 3:3-note, 1Jn 3:21; 4:17)

**Clarke** offers this suggestion...

Whatever in these prophesyings has a tendency to increase your faith, love, holiness, and usefulness, that receive and hold fast. (Clarke's Commentary: First Thessalonians)

Another way, and ultimately the best way, to test **prophetic utterances** is by comparing the utterances with the standard of previously given divine revelation, in the first century church the most readily available revelation being the Old Testament Scriptures. For example, Moses called for a similar "testing" writing to Israel that...

If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, 2 and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them,' 3 you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the LORD your God is testing you to find out if you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. 4 "You shall follow the LORD your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him. 5 "But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has counseled rebellion against the LORD your God who brought you from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery, to seduce you from the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from among you. (Deut. 13:1, 2, 3, 4, 5)

Later **Moses** added that...

the prophet who shall speak a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak,



or which he shall speak in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die. (Deut 18:20)

**John** gave similar advice in the New Testament ...

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but **test** (same verb **dokimazo**, here in the aorist imperative = issued almost like a military command - do this now, don't delay, do it effectively) the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; 3 and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; and this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world. (1John 4:1, 2, 3).

In **John's** gospel **Jesus** gave an excellent principle which will increase one's ability to discern truth from error...

"If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from Myself. (**Comment:** A Spirit inspired willingness and enablement to carry out God's will is the first prerequisite to ascertaining God's leading in some matter or the truth about some doctrinal question).

**Matthew Henry** adds that...

Corrupt affections indulged in the heart, and evil practices allowed in the life, will greatly tend to promote fatal errors in the mind; whereas purity of heart, and integrity of life, will dispose men to receive the truth in the love of it.

In short, believers should retain everything that passes the test of Scripture. And what does not pass the test is to be rejected along with all other kinds of evil.

About fifty years after Paul's letter, in one of the writings of apostolic fathers the Didache (The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles) instructed the church to evaluate the character of those who put themselves forward as prophets within the church writing that...

not everyone who speaks in a spirit is a prophet, except he have the behavior of the Lord (Did. 11.8 and vv. 9–12).

In another place in Didache we read

My child, flee from evil of every kind, and from everything resembling it. (Didache 3.1)

The charge to **examine...carefully** both the character and content of prophetic utterances resonates in the stern warning by Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount...

**Beware** (**present imperative** = continually guard against) of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. 16 "You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles, are they? 17 "Even so, every good tree bears good fruit; but the bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 "A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. 19 "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 "So then, you will know them by their fruits. (See **notes** Matthew 7:15; 16; 17; 18; 19; 20)

**Ben Patterson** - The American Banking Association once sponsored a two-week training program to help tellers detect counterfeit bills. The program was unique--never during the two-week training did the tellers even look at a counterfeit bill, not did they listen to any lectures concerning the characteristics of counterfeit bills....All they did for two weeks was handle authentic currency, hour after hour and day after day, until they were so familiar with the true that they could not possibly be fooled by the false." (Ben Patterson, Waiting: InterVarsity Press, 1989)

**To avoid being pulled into error,  
keep a firm grip on the truth.**

**Application:** Today we have a veritable plethora of "Christianized" literature and music and Paul would echo Jesus' words that we be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves (Mt 10:16), that we be like Bereans (Acts 17:11-note) who daily went to the Scriptures to check out whether Paul was proclaiming Truth! Why is this so critical in these last days when even Christianity has for most part succumbed to the deceptive, numbing, dumbing down intoxications of this futile world system which is passing away? Because ONLY God's pure unadulterated Truth will achieve eternal results (cp Acts 17:12, Col 1:5-note, Col 1:6-note; 1Pe 1:23; 24-note Jn 17:17).

**John MacArthur** on **Discernment - All That Glitters...A Call for Biblical Discernment** - Eureka! It is a simple Greek word, only six letters long. But for a generation of treasure seekers in the late 1840s, it became a life slogan. Meaning "I have found it!" in

English, the term purportedly comes from Archimedes, the Greek mathematician who cried out “Eureka! Eureka!” when he determined how much gold was in King Hiero’s crown. Yet, for James Marshall (who discovered gold at Sutter’s Mill in 1848) and many of his contemporaries, the term took on new meaning. For them, “eureka” meant instant riches, early retirement, and a life of carefree ease. It’s no wonder California (the “Golden State”) includes this term on its official seal, along with the picture of a zealous gold miner. News of Marshall’s discovery spread quickly throughout the nation. By 1850 over 75,000 hopefuls had traveled to California by land, and another 40,000 by sea. Whether by wagon or by boat, the journey was an arduous one, as adventurers left friends and family behind in search of vast fortunes. Even when they finally arrived in San Francisco, the closest goldfields were still 150 miles away. Undaunted nonetheless, many of the forty-niners set up mining camps and started to dig. As they traveled out to their various destinations, prospectors quickly learned that not everything that looked like gold actually was. Riverbeds and rock quarries could be full of golden specks, and yet entirely worthless. This “fool’s gold” was iron pyrite, and miners had to be able to distinguish it from the real thing. Their very livelihood depended on it. Experienced miners could usually distinguish pyrite from gold simply by looking at it. But in some cases the distinction was not quite so clear. So they developed tests to discern what was genuine from what wasn’t. One test involved biting the rock in question. Real gold is softer than the human tooth, while fool’s gold is harder. A broken tooth meant that a prospector needed to keep digging. A second test involved scraping the rock on a piece of white stone, such as ceramic. True gold leaves a yellow streak, while the residue left by fool’s gold is greenish-black. In either case, a miner relied on tests to authenticate his finds—both his fortune and his future depended on the results. Doctrinally speaking, today’s church is in a similar position to the California gold rushers of 1850. Spiritual riches are promised at every turn. New programs, new philosophies, new parachurch ministries—each glitters a little bit more than the last, promising better results and bigger returns. But, as was true in the mid-1800s, just because it glitters doesn’t mean it’s good. Christians need to be equally wary of “fool’s gold.” We must not accept new trends (or old traditions) without first testing them to see if they meet with God’s approval. If they fail the test, we should discard them and warn others also. But if they pass the test, in keeping with the truth of God’s Word, we can embrace and endorse them wholeheartedly. California gold miners would only cry “Eureka!” when they found true gold. As Christians, we should be careful to do the same. (Fool’s Gold)

#### **HOLD FAST TO THAT WHICH IS GOOD: to kalon katechete (2PPAM):**

- Deuteronomy 11:6, 7, 8, 9; 32:46,47; Pr 3:1,21, 22, 23, 24; 4:13; 6:21, 22, 23; 23:23; Song 3:4; Jn 8:31; 15:4; Acts 11:23; 14:22; Ro 12:9; 1Co 15:58; Php 3:16; 4:8; 2Th 2:15; 2Ti 1:15; 3:6; 4:14; He 10:23; Re 2:25; 3:3,11)

**To avoid being pulled into error  
Keep a firm grip on the truth**

**Hold fast** (2722)(**katecho** from **katá** = intensifies or gives added force to the compound verb;**kata** also means "down" + **écho** = have, hold) means to hold firmly, to hold fast or to hold down (to suppress). **Katecho** means to hold so as to avoid relinquishing something.

**Hold fast** is in the **present imperative** where the **present tense** denotes that the holding fast Paul commands is not an isolated action, but is rather to be the believer's settled rule and continuing practice. Keep clinging to what is good! Embrace it wholeheartedly. Take possession of it! And keep doing this all your Christian life. While believers are 100% responsible to obey ("hold fast"), at the same time we are 100% dependent on the enabling power of the Holy Spirit - See "[Paradoxical Principle of 100% Dependent and 100% Responsible](#)" (100/100) ([See also the related discussion of God's commands and our need for the Spirit](#))

In some contexts **katecho** means to prevent the doing of something or cause to be ineffective. The idea can be to hold back, suppress or restrain as in (Ro 1:18-note) In 2Th 2:6, 7 the **Antichrist** is actively being prevented from exercising power and so he is restrained or checked.

**Katecho** can mean to keep in one's possession and so to possess (1Cor 7:30, 2Cor 6:10)**Katecho** was legal jargon for “taking possession of property”.

**Katecho** is used in nautical circles with the meaning of “holding one’s course toward” as in Acts 27:40 where the storm-tossed ship held its course toward shore.

**Katecho** mean to keep within limits in a confining manner (Genesis 39:20, Romans 7:6-note)

**Katecho** was a technical term used to emphasize the necessity of adhering or holding firmly to beliefs, convictions, tradition or sound doctrine (See these uses below - Luke 8.15 [seed = word], 1 Cor. 11.2, 1Cor 15.2 [the gospel]; Heb 3:6, 3:14; 10:23-see notes Heb 3:6, 3:14; 10:23).



**Katecho** is used 17 times in the NT...

**Luke 4:42** And when day came, He departed and went to a lonely place; and the multitudes were searching for Him, and came to Him, and tried to **keep** (to detain, to hold Him back, to retain) Him from going away from them.

**Luke 8:15** "And the seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and **hold** it **fast**, (present tense = continually) and bear fruit with perseverance.

**Luke 14:9** and he who invited you both shall come and say to you, 'Give place to this man,' and then in disgrace you proceed to **occupy** the last place. (**Comment:** Here **katecho** means to have a place as one's own, to take into one's possession, or to occupy.)

**Acts 27:40** And casting off the anchors, they left them in the sea while at the same time they were loosening the ropes of the rudders, and hoisting the foresail to the wind, they **were heading** for the beach. (**Comment:** Here **katecho** is used by Luke as a nautical technical term to hold one's course toward, to head for, or to steer for - "they began to hold the ship steadily for the beach"

**Romans 1:18** (note) For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men (unrighteous men restrain the spread of truth by their unrighteousness), who **suppress** (present tense = continually) the truth in unrighteousness

**Comment:** Unregenerate men, at enmity with God, always going astray from His will, **actively suppress** the fact that there is a supreme Being with divine attributes to Whom worship and obedience are due, truth which all men can discern by observing Creation, which demands a Creator to answer for its existence. They continually **hold** this truth **down** in the sense that they refuse to acknowledge its moral implications, and consequently continue on in their sin.

**Romans 7:6** (note) But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which **wewere bound**, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.

**1 Corinthians 7:30** and those who weep, as though they did not weep; and those who rejoice, as though they did not rejoice; and those who buy, as though they did not **possess**; (**Comment:** What the believer owns is a trust, not a property.)

**1 Corinthians 11:2** Now I praise you because you remember me in everything, and **hold firmly** to the traditions (paradosis = a giving over came to refer to the content of instruction which was handed down), just as I delivered them to you.

**1 Corinthians 15:2** (note) by which also you are saved, if you **hold fast** the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.

**2 Corinthians 6:10** as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet **possessing** all things. (Though materially Paul had nothing, in spiritual terms he was possessing everything - a good perspective for all of us alien believers and short timers to have!)

**1 Thessalonians 5:21** (note) But **examine** everything carefully; **hold fast** to that which is good;

**2 Thessalonians 2:6** And you know what **restrains** him now, so that in his time he may be revealed. **7** For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now **restrains** will do so until he is taken out of the way.

**Philemon 1:13** whom I wished to **keep** with me, that in your behalf he might minister to me in my imprisonment for the gospel;

**Hebrews 3:6** (note) but Christ was faithful as a Son over His house whose house we are, if we **hold fast** our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end.

**Hebrews 3:14** (note) For we have become partakers of Christ, if we **hold fast** the beginning of our assurance firm until the end

**Comment:** The nautical use of holding fast to one's course gives us a vivid picture of what the writer of Hebrews is saying in Heb 3:6 and this passage. The point is that If the Hebrews would hold their course "like a ship", steadfastly along the lines of their present profession, that would demonstrate that they were saved. If they veered away from that course, that would show that they never had been saved, but that their profession of Messiah had been, not one of the heart but of the head. Be careful! This does not in any way

say they merited or earned their salvation by their own efforts to hold fast. True believers hold fast only because of the One Who holds them on course! It is all of grace!

**Hebrews 10:23** (note) Let us **hold fast** the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful (**Comment: Katecho** speaks here of a firm hold which masters that which is held)

**Katecho** - 53x in the non-apocryphal Septuagint (LXX) - Ge 22:13; 24:56; 39:20; 42:19; Ex 32:13; Jos. 1:11; Jdg. 13:15f; 19:4; Ruth 1:13; 2 Sam. 1:9; 2:21; 4:10; 6:6; 1 Ki. 1:51; 2:28f; 2 Ki. 12:12; 1 Chr. 13:9; 2 Chr. 15:8; Neh. 3:4f; Job 15:24; 23:9; 27:17; 34:14; Ps. 69:36; 73:12; 119:53; 139:10; Prov. 18:22; 19:15; Song 3:8; Isa. 40:22; Jer. 6:24; 13:21; 30:6; 50:16; Ezek. 33:24; Dan. 7:18, 22

**Genesis 22:13** Then Abraham raised his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him a ram **caught** (Hebrew = 'achaz = take hold, caught; Lxx = katecho) in the thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the place of his son.

**Genesis 39:20** So Joseph's master took him and put him into the jail, the place where the king's prisoners were **confined** (Hebrew = asar = tie, bind, imprison; Lxx = katecho); and he was there in the jail.

**Joshua 1:11** "Pass through the midst of the camp and command the people, saying, 'Prepare provisions for yourselves, for within three days you are to cross this Jordan, to go in to **possess** (Hebrew = yarash; = to take possession of, inherit, dispossess; Lxx = katecho) the land which the LORD your God is giving you, to possess it.'"

**Judges 13:15** Then Manoah said to the **Angel of the LORD**, "Please let us **detain** (Hebrew = 'atsar; = to restrain, retain; Lxx = katecho) you so that we may prepare a kid for you."

**Psalms 119:53** Burning indignation has seized (Hebrew = achaz = take hold, grasp, taken possession; Lxx = katecho) me because of the wicked, Who forsake Thy law. ([Spurgeon's note](#))

In this passage Paul is saying

"keep on laying hold of, holding fast to, taking possession of the beautiful (noble, morally beautiful)."

**Barnes** comments hold fast to that...

Which is in accordance with reason and the word of God; which is adapted to promote the salvation of the soul and the welfare of society. This is just as much a duty as it is to "prove all things."

A man who has applied the proper tests, and has found out what is truth, is bound to embrace it and to hold it fast. He is not at liberty to throw it away, as if it were valueless; or to treat truth and falsehood alike. It is a duty which he owes to himself and to God, to adhere to it firmly, and to suffer the loss of all things rather than to abandon it.

There are few more important rules in the New Testament than the one in this passage. It shows what is the true nature of Christianity, and it is a rule whose practical value cannot but be felt constantly in our lives.

Other religions require their votaries to receive everything upon trust; Christianity asks us to examine everything. Error, superstition, bigotry, and fanaticism attempt to repress free discussion, by saying that there are certain things which are too sacred in their nature, or which have been too long held, or which are sanctioned by too many great and holy names, to permit their being subjected to the scrutiny of common eyes, or to be handled by common hands.

In opposition to all this, Christianity requires us to **examine everything**--no matter by whom held; by what councils ordained; by what venerableness of antiquity sustained; or by what sacredness it may be invested. We are to receive no opinion: until we are convinced that it is true; we are to be subjected to no pains or penalties for not believing what we do not perceive to be true; we are to be prohibited from examining no opinion which our fellow-men regard as true, and which they seek to make others believe. No popular current in favour of any doctrine; no influence which name and rank and learning can give it, is to commend it to us as certainly worthy of our belief. By whomsoever held, we are to examine it freely before we embrace it; but when we are convinced that it is true, it is to be held, no matter what current or popular opinion or prejudice may be against it; no matter what ridicule may be poured upon it; and no matter though the belief of it may require us to die a martyr's death. (Albert Barnes. Barnes NT Commentary)

**That which is good** - **Henry Morris** comments that...

The Christian's faith is not based on credulity, but on sound evidence (see note 1 Peter 3:15). This exhortation applies to both doctrine and practice, especially as taught and tested by Scripture.

**Good** (2570) (**kalos**) does not refer to that which is superficial or cosmetic but to what is genuinely and inherently good, righteous, noble, and excellent. **Kalos** then describes that which is inherently excellent or intrinsically good, providing some special or superior benefit. **Kalos** is good with emphasis on that which is beautiful, handsome, excellent, surpassing, precious, commendable, admirable.

Milligan writes that **kalos** is used of genuine as opposed to counterfeit coin "and is very appropriate here to denote the goodness which passes muster in view of the testing process just spoken of". The idea of good is that it denotes the intrinsic value of what has been tested and is to be accepted like a coin that is found to be genuine.

In **classical Greek kalos** was originally used to describe that which outwardly beautiful. Other secular uses of **kalos** referred to the usefulness of something such as a **fair** haven, a **fair** wind or that which was auspicious such as sacrifices. **Kalos** referred to that which was "morally beautiful" or noble and hence virtue was called "the good" (to kalon).

The New Testament uses of **kalos** are similar to the secular Greek -- outwardly fair, as the stones of the temple (Lk 21:5); well adapted to its purpose, as salt ("salt is **good**" Mk 9:50); competent for an office, as deacons ("**good** servant of Christ Jesus" 1Ti 4:6); a steward ("serving one another, as **good** stewards of the manifold grace of God", 1Peter 4:10-note); a **good** soldier (2Ti 2:3-note); expedient, wholesome ("it is **better** for you to enter life crippled" Mk 9:43, 45, 47); morally good, noble, as works ("Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your **good** works" Mt 5:16-note); conscience ("we are sure that we have a **good** conscience", He 13:18-note). The phrase *it is good*, i.e., a good or proper thing ("It is **good** not to eat meat or to drink wine", Ro 14:21-note). In the Septuagint (LXX) **kalos** is the most commonly used word for **good** as opposed to **evil** (e.g., see Ge 2:17; 24:50; Isa 5:20). **Kalos** describes good fruit (Mt 3:10), a good tree (Mt 12:33) and good ground (Mt 13:8).

This command to examine and hold fast to the good is in the context of not despising prophetic utterances. One is never to downgrade the proclamation of God's Word, but to examine the preached word carefully (cf. Acts 17:11-note). What is found to be "good" is to be wholeheartedly embraced. What is "evil" or unbiblical is to be shunned.

In **Romans 12** Paul charges believers to...

Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor (present tense - as your habitual practice) what is evil; cling (present tense - as your habitual practice) to what is **good**. (see **note** Romans 12:9)

In the context of Romans 12, the key to finding and following what is **good** is in not being...

**conformed** (present imperative) to this world, but [being] **transformed** (present imperative) by the renewing of [our] mind, that [we] may prove (**dokimazo**) what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect" (see note Romans 12:2).

As we separate ourselves from the things of the world and saturate ourselves with the Word of God, the things that are **good** will more and more replace the things that are **evil**. This is same principle the writer of Hebrews alluded to when he wrote that...

solid food (.the equivalent of Biblical "health" food which builds strong, healthy believers - Sermons are good, but they are not to be compared with personal Spirit illuminated Bible study as soul food. Songs and hymns are excellent, but let us not become "songbook Christians". Men wrote the songs but God wrote the Bible. A maturing Christian must be a Biblically saturated Christian.) is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. (see note Hebrews 5:14)

**Comment:** To avoid being pulled into error, keep a firm grip on the truth.

**G. K. Chesterton** wisely wrote...

Merely having an open mind is nothing. The object of opening the mind, as of opening the mouth, is to shut it again on something solid.

**Spurgeon** added that believers are to...

Beware! Error often rides to its deadly work on the back of truth!

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**Our Daily Bread** - Part of the training to be a US Secret Service agent includes learning to detect counterfeit money. Agents-in-training make a thorough study of the genuine bills--not the phonies--so that they can spot the fake currency immediately because of its contrast to the real thing. The child of God can learn a lesson from this. While it is helpful to study false religions and be fully aware of their dangerous dogmas, the best defense against such error is to be so familiar with God's Word that whenever we encounter error, we will spot it at once and won't fall for it. Today many are being led astray because they don't recognize how they are being deceived. For example, if a person isn't solidly grounded in the teaching of salvation by grace, he may swallow the line of

the legalists who inject human works into the matter of being saved. If he is not well instructed about the person of Christ, he might accept the error of those who deny the Savior's deity. A thorough knowledge of essential biblical doctrines is the only way to detect counterfeits. Let's be diligent in our study of the Word of God. Then, instead of falling into error, we will stand firmly on the truth. --R W De Haan

Lord, grant us wisdom to discern  
The truth You have made known,  
And may we not believe one word  
Beyond what You have shown. --DJD

## **PROVING AND HOLDING FAST**

### **Compiled by James Hastings**

Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.—1Th. 5:21.

1. THESE are very astonishing words to address to a community of new converts. We might have expected that the Apostle would be careful to give them precise and detailed instructions, plain and solemn warnings, encouraging assurances of Divine approval, but hardly that he should bid them take account of their own experiences, and train themselves in the difficult and risky art of self-direction. We might have expected that this earliest Epistle of St. Paul would point out clearly the manner in which controversies might be quickly and finally closed by reference to some authoritative tribunal; that it would have stated the constitution of the Christian Church in plain language, which should leave no loophole for schismatical casuistry; that it would set out in unambiguous language the powers of the Christian clergy, and the manner in which those powers were to be exercised. Of all this, however, we find nothing. The Epistle is addressed to the community or Church of the Thessalonians, and contains no clear reference at all to an official ministry; for the mention of some prominent members of the community, as supervising its business and "admonishing" it, hardly suggests an official ministry, but rather a volunteer executive sustained in office by the general confidence and goodwill. The Thessalonians are "to esteem them exceeding highly in love for their work's sake." The Apostle's appeal is directly to the whole body of members: "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."

2. The words of the text stand in close relation to the words which they immediately follow: "Quench not the Spirit; despise not prophesyings; prove all things; hold fast that which is good." It is manifest from the record of those Apostolic times that the operations of the Holy Spirit were of an exceptional and temporary character. This is specially apparent in those spiritual utterances, those mysterious "tongues," to which St. Paul refers in his First Epistle to the Corinthians. But, further, there appears to have been on the part of those early Christians a very natural desire to prophesy—to speak out, in the presence of others, their own impressions or experiences of the spiritual life. A new prospect, transcendent in its beauty and glory, had been opened up to them by the gospel of Jesus Christ. In the freshness of their new hopes and new joys, they were eager to make known to one another, with unregulated fervour even in their religious assemblies, their individual experience of the love of God in Christ Jesus their Lord. There would, however, be some among the Christian converts, some of the less enthusiastic and more sober-minded, who would both dislike and distrust such utterances. It is probably such critics as these that the Apostle has in his mind when he addresses to them the words of caution, "Quench not the Spirit; despise not prophesyings." He could see the possible danger of such utterances; but he recognized in them the workings of the Holy Ghost, and would have them not suppressed, but tested and controlled. There were in them, no doubt, elements of exaggeration, dangers of self-seeking and of unreality, of presumption and pride; and these were not of God, but of the evil one. Yet behind all these there was a spiritual reality, obscured but not obliterated, and therefore they were to prove all things and to hold fast the good.

¶ Many of the fathers of the Church connect these verses with what they consider a saying of Jesus, one of the few which are reasonably attested, though it has failed to find a place in the written gospels. The saying is, "Show yourselves approved money-changers." The fathers believed that the Apostle uses a metaphor from coinage. To prove is really to assay, to put to the test as a banker tests a piece of money; the word rendered "good" is often the equivalent of our "sterling"; "evil," of our base or forged; and the word which in our old Bibles is rendered "appearance"—"Abstain from all appearance of evil"—and in the Revised Version "form"—"Abstain from every form of evil"—has, at least in some connexions, the signification of mint or die. If we bring out this faded metaphor in its original freshness, it will run something like this: "Show yourselves skilful money-changers; do not accept in blind trust all the spiritual currency which you find in circulation; put it all to the test; rub it on the touchstone; keep hold of what is genuine and of sterling value, but every spurious coin decline."

## **I PROVE**

1. Why must we prove? Because faculties have been given us for that very purpose. The possession of faculties for thinking and

reasoning tells us that we have the duty as well as the right of exerting them, just as truly as to have been born with eyes confers upon the individual the right to see. The eye has to be trained and so to become adjusted to objects about it. In many cases it is defective. We do not, therefore, bandage every man's eyes or put spectacles upon him, because these are required by certain persons. The maxim, *Usum non tollit abusus*, obtains here. Persons have grievously abused their right of private judgment; it does not follow that they should be deprived of it. It would be safer to infer that the faculty for forming such judgments imposes upon them the duty of using it.

¶ The question you put is by no means an easy one to answer: whether, namely, it be right and wise for you to read on both sides of the question—or rather, I should say, questions? for on this subject they are endless, and grow up like Hydra's heads. I could not reply, No: for that is the very advice given by the Romish Church, which we so much blame; and it is very inconsistent in us to condemn their prohibitions of heretical or Protestant books to the laity, if we, tractarian or evangelical clergy, forbid, as is constantly done, the perusal of books which we judge heretical. Now, first of all, the questions of religious truth are interminable, and a lifetime would scarcely suffice to pass even the outworks of them all. Next, very few minds are in possession of the means or of the severe mental training which qualifies a man to set out as an original discoverer of truth; so that if we cannot begin with a large number of truths, which must be considered as first principles and settled, life must be one perpetual state of Pyrrhonism and uncertainty. On the other hand, to refuse to examine when doubts arise is spiritual suicide; and I do not see how, on this principle, any progress in truth could ever have been made. Why should the Pharisees have been blamed for the views so long stereotyped or the Jews for remaining in Judaism?

2. This duty is not dropped when a man accepts the obedience of Christ. The Christian life is necessarily a struggle with intellectual as well as with moral difficulties, with ignorance as well as with sin. Let no one enter upon it with the thought that his days of perplexity are over, that henceforth he is to be within the calm shelter of the haven, where no breath of wind or stormy wave can reach him from the open sea. There may be those who are thus blessed, but most are called to the battle. But the battle is itself a blessing when it graces, strengthens, confirms. The great German thinker may have been guilty of an exaggeration, but it was the exaggeration of a truth, when he said, "Did the Almighty, holding in His right hand 'Truth,' and in His left 'Search after Truth,' deign to tender me the one I might prefer, in all humility, and without hesitation, I should request 'Search after Truth.' " There are, indeed, some who, wearied of searching after truth, have bowed their reason to some external authority, some infallible Church, admitting all its assertions as equally true; while others have found refuge in a universal scepticism denouncing all as equally false. The one goes against the precept, "Prove all things," the other against its natural and necessary counterpart, "Hold fast that which is good"; and both evade one of the most potent means of moral training for this ceaseless conflict, this patient endurance, this quiet hope, this earnest longing, this immovable confidence in what is right and good, when they do not use it as one of the ways in which God has chosen to educate us for Himself.

¶ Faith, whatever else it may be or imply, involves definite and strong conviction. Conviction requires evidence. Evidence is the objective truth which compels assent. Subjectively and spiritually, faith in a Fiji islander may be the same as it is in a cultivated and reflecting man, but intellectually it cannot be the same. Whatever the truth may be, or in whatever form it may meet the mind,—whether by an argument, or a person, or a dream, or a fantasy,—it must convince the intellect that something is true.

¶ In the Cathedral Church of Copenhagen, amid Thorwaldsen's famous group of the Twelve Apostles, stands the figure of a grave and meditative man, with earnestly questioning face, rule and measure in hand, as though prepared to bring all things under strict verification, whose name no one needs to ask, so plainly does the statue stand for the doubting Thomas. Thomas was, according to the traditions of the Early Church, a born sceptic, a constitutional questioner, whose faith followed his understanding, who could not rest on external authority, who brought even Christ's words to the bar of reason, and, failing to elicit an intelligible answer, withheld his assent—in short, a genuine Rationalist. Yet this Thomas was one of the twelve disciples, a full member of the Apostolic College.

## II PROVE ALL THINGS

1. "Prove all things" is a favourite text with Protestants, and especially with Protestants of an extreme type. It has been called "a piece of most rationalistic advice"; it has been said to imply that "every man has a verifying faculty, whereby to judge of facts and doctrines, and to decide between right and wrong, truth and falsehood." But this is a most unconsidered extension to give to the Apostle's words. He does not say a word about every man; he is speaking expressly to the Thessalonians, who were Christian men. He would not have admitted that any man who came from the street, and constituted himself a judge, was competent to pronounce upon the contents of the prophesyings, and to say which of the burning words were spiritually sound, and which were not. On the contrary, he tells us very plainly that some men have no capacity for this task—"The natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit"; and that even in the Christian Church, where all are to some extent spiritual, some have this faculty of discernment in a much higher degree than others.

¶ Again and again it comes home to me that true wisdom lies in the abiding recognition that spiritual things are spiritually discerned. If we labour for the meat which perisheth not, and if we witness to the Kingdom of God in word and deed, our labour and our witness

must be in the Spirit, i.e. by and to the Spirit.

¶ Johann was one day on his travels, and came to a wood. In an old tree he found a bird's nest with seven eggs, which resembled the eggs of the common swift. But the latter bird only lays three eggs, so the nest could not belong to it. Since Johann was a great connoisseur in eggs, he soon perceived that they were the eggs of the hoopoo. Accordingly, he said to himself, "There must be a hoopoo somewhere in the neighbourhood, although the natural history books assert that it does not appear here." After a time he heard quite distinctly the well-known cry of the hoopoo. Then he knew that the bird was there. He hid himself behind a rock, and he soon saw the speckled bird with its yellow comb. When Johann returned home after three days, he told his teacher that he had seen the hoopoo on the island. His teacher did not believe it, but demanded proof. "Proof!" said Johann. "Do you mean two witnesses?" "Yes!" "Good! I have twice two witnesses, and they all agree: my two ears heard it, and my two eyes saw it." "Maybe. But I have not seen it," answered the teacher. Johann was called a liar because he could not prove that he had seen the hoopoo in such and such a spot. However, it was a fact that the hoopoo appeared there, although it was an unusual occurrence in this neighbourhood.

2. The truth is, St. Paul is not concerned so much with the things which we are to prove as with the spirit in which the duty should be performed. What he would say to us is in substance this: "Whatever subjects may engage your attention, or require the formation of your opinion, let this be the course you pursue: be not prejudiced, be not hasty either in approving or in condemning; 'prove all things'; weigh them in the balance of a sober judgment, and deal with them by the use of that reasoning power with which God has endowed you. Estimate the value of every statement and every argument with what power and ability you may possess, deal with them in a philosophic rather than a polemic spirit. Pray that your intellectual gifts may be guided in their services by the Holy Spirit of Truth, and then, whatever truth, whatever good you may find, lay hold on that and hold it fast."

¶ A man has as much right to use his own understanding, in judging of truth, as he has a right to use his own eyes, to see his way: therefore it is no offence to another, that any man uses his own right. It is not to be expected that another man should think as I would, to please me, since I cannot think as I would to please myself; it is neither in his nor my power to think as we will, but as we see reason, and find cause. It is better for us that there should be difference of judgment, if we keep charity: but it is most unmanly to quarrel because we differ. Men's apprehensions are often nearer than their expressions; they may mean the same thing, when they seem not to say the same thing.

3. This shows us the place and the duty of criticism in relation to the Bible. To criticize is, first, to distinguish—to distinguish in a complex reality what is primary, essential, eternal, from what is secondary, accidental, temporary. So we find out what is the essence of the thing itself, making it what it is, as distinct from accessories not necessarily peculiar to it, which have gathered round it, and which can be, and perhaps at times should be, stripped off. To criticize is, next, to test. When this first duty of distinction has been discharged, and the root of the matter made known to us, it has then to go on to the work described in the text—to test or prove it. It must try to discern, first, whether it is a reality—whether (that is) what it declares as truth is a real truth, accordant with the great laws of being; whether the power which it claims to wield is a real power, able to guide, to rule, and to exalt humanity. Historical science has studied and analysed the actual Christianity, the Church of Christ, in all ages. It has bidden us look through the visible developments of law, system, ritual, to the inner spiritual force, which gives them life; it has distinguished in it the obviously human element, with all the imperfection and evil clinging to it, which it shares with other great world-wide powers, from that element which is its peculiar characteristic, clearly unique and claiming to be miraculous and Divine. It makes us see plainly that this inner reality is, in spite of all imperfections, accretions, superstitions, the reproduction in the individual and the community of the life of Christ Himself. So, again, literary and critical science examines the Holy Scripture. It distinguishes in it also the human element of imperfection and progressiveness from that which claims to be Divine—the essential truth itself from the forms in which it has been conveyed. And the result is to make us see clearly that the one key to its right interpretation is the knowledge of the central manifestation of Christ Himself—His Life, His Word, His Person—that in relation to this all other parts stand simply as preparatory or explanatory, and only in that dependence can be rightly understood and reasonably revered.

¶ Professor Huxley once said that men of science no longer believed in justification by faith, but in "justification by verification." Now, St. Paul taught justification by faith, but he also, as we see, taught justification by verification. In his view, the one did not exclude the other. St. Paul calls, not for the surrender, but for the exercise, of the reason. We have his approval if we feel that, in religious as in other matters, we wish to have our intelligence satisfied, before we yield the submission of our hearts.

¶ In order to the discovery of that which is better of two things, it is necessary that both should be equally submitted to the attention, and therefore that we should have so much faith in authority as shall make us repeatedly observe and attend to that which is said to be right, even though at present we may not feel it so. And in the right mingling of this faith with the openness of heart which proves all things, lies the great difficulty of the cultivation of the taste, as far as the spirit of the scholar is concerned; though, even when he has this spirit, he may be long retarded by having evil examples submitted to him by ignorant masters. The temper, therefore, by which right taste is formed is characteristically patient. It dwells upon what is submitted to it. It does not trample upon it, lest it should be pearls, even though it looks like husks. It is a good ground, soft, penetrable, retentive; it does not send up thorns of unkind thoughts, to choke the weak seed; it is hungry and thirsty too, and drinks all the dew that falls on it. It is "an honest and good heart,"



that shows no too ready springing before the sun be up, but fails not afterwards; it is distrustful of itself, so as to be ready to believe and to try all things, and yet so trustful of itself, that it will neither quit what it has tried nor take anything without trying. And the pleasure which it has in things that it finds true and good is so great, that it cannot possibly be led aside by any tricks of fashion, or diseases of vanity: it cannot be cramped in its conclusions by partialities and hypocrisies; its visions and its delights are too penetrating, too living, for any whitewashed object or shallow fountain long to endure or supply. It clasps all that it loves so hard that it crushes it if it be hollow.

### III HOLD FAST THAT WHICH IS GOOD

1. The command addressed by St. Paul to the Thessalonians describes with incisive brevity the only kind of criticism that is right in principle and likely to be fruitful in results. It is the criticism, first, which claims, not to discover, but to “test” all things—taking the thing criticized as it actually presents itself, and not reconstructing it out of our own discovery or imagination. It is the criticism, next, which, until it is forced to an opposite conclusion, holds (with Richard Hooker) that whatever has spiritual life and power in it cannot be “wholly compacted of untruths,” but must have in it something “which is good,” and which it is therefore worth while “to hold fast.” It is, moreover and above all, the criticism which performs its two functions simultaneously, not waiting in suspense till the whole conceivable work of testing is over, before it proceeds to grasp anything firmly, but at every point laying strong and enthusiastic hold of whatever, so far, it has found by trial to be good, living in it by strong sympathy, and making this experience of its inner meaning a means of advancing towards larger knowledge.

¶ It is interesting to observe the various shades of meaning in which the Apostle uses the word δοκιμάζειν, which he here employs. There are passages, like the present, where the sense is general. But there are others where it clearly implies, not the exercise of the critical faculty, but the appreciative acceptance of what is manifestly good and true, as when he exhorts the Philippians to approve the things that are excellent, and the Romans to prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

2. So we are not only to prove all things; we are bidden to “hold fast that which is good”; to be faithful to whatever has proved itself to us as worthy of love and reverence. The value of every discovery or invention consists largely in its power to satisfy some human want. The great test is experience of its results. May we not apply the same test to religious truth? If we have felt a craving to be delivered from sin, and to be made partakers of light and holiness; to be drawn nearer to God and to be lifted above ourselves; to know something of human destiny, and to obtain more worthy views of the world, and a deeper insight into moral truth, then let us ask, Does Christianity meet any or all of these requirements? If, in our assurance that God is love, and that we, though weak and ignorant and sinful, are His children, we feel convinced that God has spoken to us, and that His Word is in His own Gospel; if we have believed in His promises, and tasted the blessings of forgiven sin, and the peace which the toil and the changes of the world cannot reach; if we have attained higher views of holiness and truth—are not these things good, and shall we not hold them fast? These are sufficient for our life; and as for others, we must maintain towards them an attitude, not indeed of indifference, but of bold and ceaseless endeavour, proving all things, and holding fast that which is good.

When the anchors faith has cast are dragging in the gale,  
I am quietly holding fast to the things that cannot fail.  
I know that right is right, that it is not good to lie;  
That love is better than spite, and a neighbour than a spy;  
In the darkest night of the year, when the stars have all gone out,  
That courage is better than fear, and faith is better than doubt;  
And fierce though the fiends may fight, and long though the angels hide,  
I know that truth and right have the universe on their side,  
And that somewhere beyond the stars is a love that is better than fate;  
When the night unlocks her doors I shall see Him, and I can wait.

3. Happily for us, the great truths which should guide our judgment are just those which cannot escape our observation. The distinction between good and evil is written upon our conscience in characters which nothing can altogether efface. The love of God beams in the sunshine, is poured forth in the refreshing shower, reveals itself in all the wondrous glory and beauty of the world. History reveals one human life in which Divinity shines out in all the radiance of perfect love, and purity, and Divine self-sacrifice. The condemnation of sin and the way of deliverance for the sinner were manifested in the death upon the cross. Thus, grasping with a perfect faith the great elements of good, we are able to look accurately at the difficulties which beset us, and prepare ourselves boldly for the journey or the fight.

¶ Christianity has abler advocates than its professed defenders, in those quiet and humble men and women who in the light of it and

the strength of it live holy, beautiful, and self-denying lives. The God that answers by fire is the God whom mankind will acknowledge; and so long as the fruits of the Spirit continue to be visible in charity, in self-sacrifice, in those graces which raise human creatures above themselves, thoughtful persons will remain convinced that with them in some form or other is the secret of truth.

## PROVING AND HOLDING FAST

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