

# How to Test Doctrines

by R. Stanley

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*The sermon teaches the importance of testing doctrines to ensure they align with biblical truth and promote holiness and evangelism.*

**Scripture:** Genesis 3:5, Luke 6:43, John 17:20, Acts 2:42, 2 Corinthians 5:7, Galatians 4:9, Galatians 5:1, Ephesians 2:8, Ephesians 4:3, 1 Thessalonians 5:21, 1 Timothy 1:3, 1 Timothy 6:3, 2 Timothy 4:3

**Topics:** "Sound Doctrine", "False Teachings"

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## Description

Francis Schaeffer emphasizes the importance of standing for truth and against false doctrine to prevent a barrier between future generations and the gospel. Paul's warning to Timothy about false teachings and the rise of false doctrines in the last days is highlighted. The sermon stresses the significance of sound doctrine in the early Church's growth and the need to test teachings and teachers. Seven tests are provided to evaluate teachings, including salvation by grace, liberty versus bondage, promotion of holiness, emphasis on Scriptures over experiences, worship of God's greatness, motivation for evangelism, and fostering spiritual unity over sinful seclusion.

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## Transcript

Francis Schaeffer, that great Christian thinker, asserted, "If we do not make clear by word and practice our position for truth and against false doctrine, we are building a wall between the next generation and the gospel!"

The very first message of Paul to Timothy was, "Command... men not to teach FALSE DOCTRINES" (1 Tim 1:3). And his closing prediction in his second epistle: "The time will come when men will not put up with SOUND DOCTRINE. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths" (2 Tim 4:3,4). Has not this time already upon us?

There were four secrets for the bursting growth of the early Church. Of these the first one was its steadfast continuance in the apostles' "doctrine" (Acts 2:42). To say, "Never mind doctrine, let's get on with evangelism," is as ridiculous as a football team saying, "Never mind the ball, let's get on with the game!" I have quoted Peter Lewis.

The New Testament speaks of false prophets (Mt 24:24), false apostles (2 Cor 11:13), false brothers (Gal 2:4) and false teachers (2 Pet 2:1). We are called to test everything. "Test all things; hold fast what is

good. Abstain from every form of evil" (1 Thess 5:21,22). The acid test of any doctrine is its fruit, outcome or result. "For a good tree does not bear bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. For every tree is known by its fruit" (Lk 6:43,44). We are not only to test the teaching but also the teachers. "Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the Word of God to you; whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct" (Heb 13:7).

I have a checklist of seven tests which I apply on any teaching or ministry before I embrace it.

#### 1. Does it speak of salvation by grace or by works?

This is the most fundamental issue. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Eph 2:8,9). We are saved not "by" works but "for" works. Don't put the cart before the horse!

Let me give a few examples of the teaching which emphasizes "works" for salvation. I once met a young man with a senior Christian and asked the former whether he was saved. The latter answered for him, "He is on his way to the Cross!" I asked, "How long?" He said, "Three months." What he meant was, this young man had been going about reconciling with all whom he had wronged and restituting matters, and he had been confessing "all" his sins committed from childhood "one by one!" He had not been through yet! There would come a time when this senior brother would tell him, "Now that you have confessed all sins and made all necessary restitutions, you can start praying for salvation!" Beloved, restitution with men is definitely a Biblical doctrine but it is more an evidence than a condition for salvation. Anyone can be saved in an instant. The tax-collector entered the temple as a sinner and he exited as a saint-- "justified!"

Still there are others who quote Matthew 28:19 and say that only fullfledged "disciples" must be baptized. Their definition of a disciple is one who has fulfilled all the conditions of discipleship laid in the New Testament. But the basic meaning of the word "disciple" is a student, an adherent or a follower. That means he has joined Jesus to learn from Him and follow Him. Whether your are in the kindergarten or the postgraduate class, you are a student! So the three commandments in the Great Commission (Mt 28:19,20) are Enroll, Baptize and Educate!

Sometimes folks make baptism a condition for salvation. We are saved by faith, and faith alone, on the finished work of Christ. Baptism follows this as an outward expression of the inward experience.

Salvation on God's side is all of "grace" and on our side all of "faith." Beware of any addition or subtraction!

#### 2. Does it lead to liberty or bondage?

"Stand firm in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage" (Gal 5:1). Comparing with the heavy yoke of the law of Moses, Jesus assured, "My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Mt 11:28-30). There are usually three areas where legalistic preachers bring God's people into bondage.

##### a. Days

For Christians there is no law of observance of any day or days. When the Galatian believers were seduced to add the Old Testament laws of observance of days to their Christian faith, Paul rebuked them saying, "But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? You observe days and

months and seasons and years" (Gal 4:9,10). Some Christians think that in the OT the Sabbath was Saturday and now it is Sunday! No! There is no law for Christians to keep any day. We are free to observe or not to observe any day. If we observe specially a day, it is to the Lord; if we don't observe also, it is to the Lord! (Rom 14:5,6a). Shout Hallelujah for this glorious liberty! However, keeping one of the seven days of the week exclusively for the things of God to honour Him has a great sanctifying value.

#### b. Diet

The dietary regulations of the OT are not binding on us under the New Covenant. "He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks!" (Rom 14:6b). A woman preacher a few years ago came up with a "revelation" that those who desired to participate in the first resurrection should not eat meat or sweet or savouries! Beloved, "Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. For it is good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them" (Heb 13:9).

#### c. Dress

There is nothing wrong to dress fashionably if it is modest. A friend almost shouted at me in 1975 how as a preacher I could wear bell-bottom trousers! I said it was comfortable but he wouldn't accept. I saw him in bell-bottom after two years when narrow trousers became fashionable! In the eyes of some who use only face powder, a woman with lipstick looks an awful sinner! What they fail to understand is while face powder improves the look of the facial skin, the lipstick improves that of the lips. Dyeing the hair or wearing of jewels is considered sin in some Christian assemblies. Again for some people putting on actual flowers is sin whereas they find nothing wrong in wearing a flowered saree or dress! After all one is 3-dimensional and the other 2-dimensional! One is actual and the other artificial! Beware of building doctrines around issues which must be left to the discretion of individuals.

Watchman Nee said, "Legalism is bound to produce pride of heart." How true!

### 3. Does it promote holiness or lead to careless living?

"If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing... From such withdraw yourself" (1 Tim 6:3-5).

The great men of God of old were those who understood that true doctrine always led to holy living. "The purpose behind all doctrines is to secure moral action," taught A. W. Tozer. "Loose theology leads to loose morality," observed R. A. Torrey. "Doctrine is not an affair of the tongue but of the life," stressed John Calvin.

God's will for us is to grow in holiness. "He who is holy, let him be holy still" (Rev 22:11). An unholy Christian is a contradiction of everything the Bible teaches.

After hearing a preacher or reading a book, I check whether my hunger for holiness and thirst for truthfulness has increased. The Word of God is sharper than a two-edged sword to sever and remove filth from our soul. The Word of God warns us of and cleanses us from "errors... secret faults... presumptuous sins... great transgression" (Psa 19:13).

False teachers kill the fear of the Lord in people's hearts and lead them to sinful licence in the name of spiritual liberty. A Christian is not free to please himself but to please God! Some preachers emphasize on "what" rather than "how." For them the end justifies the means. All kinds of corruptive practices in Christian ministries result from such insincere teaching. Beloved, holiness is costly. And preachers of holiness are becoming rare because it is no more popular to preach sanctification and self-denial. Programmes aim at making people happy rather than holy. But "even in Sardis" there are "a few" who have not defiled their garments! (Rev 3:4). They are a significant minority! Join them!

4. Does it emphasize the Scriptures or just feelings and experiences?

Growth in Christian life means growing in faith. The Tabernacle presents a beautiful portrait. There was sunlight in the outer court, candle light in the inner court and no light in the innermost place or the Holy of Holies. One cannot walk by sight but only by faith in the All Holy Place (2 Cor 5:7).

Apostle Peter had the most exciting experience of being with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration and witnessing the descent of glory on Him and hearing the voice of the Father. But in order to prove Christ's Messiahship he places the "more sure" word of the prophetic Scriptures above all visions and voices (2 Pet 1:16-21). There are simply too many preachers today claiming "infallibility" of their visions and voices and so-called trips to heaven. They almost threaten people of divine judgment and displeasure if they don't believe them. On the other hand look at the humility of a man like Paul, with all his visions and revelations. See how many times he confesses, "I do not know, God knows; I do not know, God knows!" And his boasting was in his "infirmities, reproaches, needs, prosecutions, distresses and weaknesses!" (2 Cor 12:1-11). His conclusion was, "I-am-nothing!" I would rather follow such a man than the many arrogant boasters on modern pulpits.

Our God is a God of miracles and we do need and have signs and wonders today. But Martin Luther warned, "Any teaching which does not square with the Scriptures is to be rejected even if it showers miracles every day!" Prophecy is a gift of the Holy Spirit but no prophecy should be accepted before it is "judged" as to its agreement with the teaching of the Scriptures (1 Cor 14:29). I believe in visions and voices though I never had one or heard one, but I place them only next to the written Word of God (Jer 23:28,29).

5. Does it inspire worship of the greatness of God or amplify the importance of man?

The very first temptation to man was, "You will be like God" (Gen 3:5). Though Satan has changed his methods his primary temptation is still the same. Remember the underlying note of all the three recorded temptations of Jesus was just the same?

Examples of this false teaching of man-centred religion are numerous. Questioning God is one example. Whatever may happen to us we cannot ask God, "Why?" God is not obliged to answer us. He will simply ask, "Why not?" Similarly we can never "command" God. The Bible nowhere teaches us that we can order Him. We can only pray and plead. Isaiah 45:11 is misinterpreted. The right translation is, "Do you give Me orders about the work of My hand?" (NIV). This agrees with the context of this passage. Read it carefully. As God's children we of course have the privilege to "claim" our rightful blessings, but that too because of the merits of Calvary. I have heard preachers tell people, "The miracle is in your mouth!" I don't believe this. The miracle is in God's hand. He may choose to do or not do it! He is Sovereign! Beware of such cut-to-size theology!

Any teaching that emphasizes the "blessing" rather than enthroning the "Blesser" is defective. Isaac was Abraham's laughter. The meaning of the name Isaac is laughter. Abraham and Sarah were rejoicing over the son of their old age. They were perhaps "preoccupied" with him. God demanded him to be offered on the altar. It was when Abraham stretched the lad on the altar he saw the Lamb yonder. Now it's no more the blessing, but the Blesser!

It was God who crowned the twenty four elders but they threw the crowns at His feet who alone was worthy. John the Baptist was a true prophet and his doctrine was, I-must-decrease-but-He-must-increase! Apostle Paul was a true teacher and his doctrine was, I-die-daily!

6. Does it motivate me for active evangelism or settle me in slothfulness?

The work of any minister, whether an apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor or teacher, is "to prepare God's people for ministry" (Eph 4:11,12). "Doctrine without duty is a tree without fruit; duty without doctrine is a tree without roots," observed Talbot Chambers.

Christ came into the world to save sinners. The Holy Spirit came to empower saints to witness to sinners. The most important item on God's agenda today is that the Gospel must be preached in all the nations so the end will come! The last call in the Bible is evangelistic: "Come, Drink!" (Rev 22:17).

Beware of preachers and teachers who directly or indirectly demotivate evangelism. There are two doctrines twisted to quench the fires of soulwinning. One is the doctrine of Predestination and the other the doctrine of Perfection. The former says that God knows who all would be saved and He would somehow save them and there's not much we could do about it. But Paul said, "God desires all men to be saved" and we are to supplicate, pray, intercede and give thanks for "all" men (1 Tim 2:1-4). We are to sow in the morning and not stop in the evening. We must share with seven and also eight. For we know not which will prosper! (Eccl 11:1-6).

The doctrine of Perfection tells folks, "Why go to preach to others when you haven't become perfect yet?" The fact is no one becomes perfect here on earth. Apostle James, that practical man, wrote, "We ALL stumble in MANY things!" (Js 3:2). All of the disciples who went all over the world were imperfect. None of the missionaries who came to India from the West was perfect. Praise God they refused to hear the Perfection teachers of their countries but came to India so my great grandfather could be converted from idols to serve the living God so I could have the privilege of being born in a Christian home!

The concern of Jesus was always the "other sheep" and the "other cities." Let's embrace this mind of Christ and eject any message that contradicts. Don't have the slightest interest in a theology which does not evangelize!

7. Does it strengthen spiritual unity or cause sinful seclusion?

The purpose of all ministries in the Church is to help saints "maintain" the unity of the Spirit until they "attain" the unity of the faith (Eph 4:3,13). Jesus prayed, "I do not pray for them alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one" (Jn 17:20,21).

Divisions are usually around personalities. "Of Paul... of Apollos... of Cephas!" Then there will be a fourth group-- "of Christ." Interdenominational?! God nominated the Church after Christ and man has denominated it! Denominationalism is sin. There are preachers who outrightly condemn denominationalism but ultimately condescend to form their own denomination with the dissidents and

defectors of other denominations! The process goes on and on!

Divisions are also caused by certain doctrinal emphases. Certain "portions" of the "whole" truth or counsel of God are emphasized at the cost of the other aspects of the truth. Extremism leads to eccentricity and that to sectarianism. The balance is lost. "Have you found honey? Eat only as much as you need, lest you be filled with it and vomit!" (Prov 25:16). A good advice, isn't it?

History is full of examples of extremism leading to denominationalism. All the time you talk about baptism and you end up with the "Baptist" denomination. You keep on talking against women speaking in the Church and you get the "Brethren" denomination. Always "Tongues, Tongues, Tongues," you become the "Pentecostal" denomination. Sabbath, Sabbath, Sabbath... Seventh Day Adventists! And so on!

Once upon a time five blind men touched an elephant and told what it was. One man said it was a rough wall. The other, it was a rope... I'm sorry, you know the story! Forget it not!

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