

RECOGNIZING A TRUSTWORTHY SOURCE

God has given you all the tools you need to ascertain the trustworthiness of content you are exposed to today. Most of these tools need disciplined practice to use well; otherwise, you will be at the mercy of anyone who would lead you astray. The first tool is the inspired word of God as recorded in scripture. Start with the red letters and work outward from there. Understand the difference between the old covenant and the new one we live under. Whatever you wish to test must be consistent with *all* scripture. Remember that Satan misused scripture in an attempt to get Jesus to do the Devil's will. Jesus's defense was a complete knowledge of scripture. If the scripture you are reading confuses you, consider switching to a more literal translation, use a concordance, or ask someone who has studied the Bible more than you have. The second tool, available only to Christians, is the Holy Spirit dwelling in you. With prayer, living in a way that has not grieved the spirit, and practice in listening, you will be able to tell the difference between the promptings of the Spirit, your own head, and your own heart. The third set of tools are the nature of God and His Creation. Content that contradicts either is false. A fourth test is the fruit born by the content - note that this is not a standalone test like others mentioned before unless the direct power of God is in evidence. Of the supernatural related tests, there is also the spiritual gift of discernment. This is where living in gospel community is particularly important, as the spiritual gifts are not necessarily distributed to all believers in equal measure. We are all parts of the same body, but not the same part. We rely on one another for access to gifts like this (and the others - see section about spiritual gifts), if you are living in a healthy community you will know whom to ask for help with discernment if you do not have this gift yourself.

In addition to the tests listed above, a trained mind and a wise heart are useful and necessary in rating the reliability of something you may be presented with. Understand logic and be able to recognize logical fallacies (they often have fun names like straw men, all true scotsman, etc...). Content, which does not hold together on its own, is certainly not going to hold up to real world applications. Likewise, be aware when the source is attempting to weave a spell of emotion to carry you into some concept. Many of the things we trust are likely to elicit an emotional response, but the response on its own is not evidence of sound truth.

Finally, it is important to recognize the difference between things that are true and things that are good. They are not interdependent. The truth can be used maliciously to harm. Good things, like "good family values," can be a tool to draw people into a false doctrine that will lead them to hell. Content that is trustworthy is true and used in a good manner.

SCRIPTURE VERSES

1 John 4:1

Acts 17:11

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