

Principles for Bible Study – How to Identify Sound Doctrine

1. Let Scripture interpret Scripture

Psalm 119:160 *“The entirety of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever.”*

God’s Word does not contradict itself. Difficult or symbolic passages must be understood in light of clear ones. The Bible is its own best interpreter. When all the pieces are brought together, the truth becomes plain.

Isaiah 28:10 *“For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little.”*

Though spoken in a context of judgment, this principle reflects God’s method of teaching—layered, progressive, cumulative. Sound doctrine is built as one verse confirms another.

2. Do not form doctrine from a single passage

2 Corinthians 13:1 *“By the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established.”*

No teaching should rest on one verse alone. When God reveals truth, He confirms it in multiple places—across different authors, eras, and settings. Doctrine must be built on consistency, not isolation.

3. Read in full context

Nehemiah 8:8 *“They read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading.”*

Context includes the surrounding verses, the historical situation, the covenant relationship, and the purpose of the book. Out-of-context verses can be misused. In-context study preserves truth.

4. Use both Old and New Testaments

2 Timothy 3:16 *“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine...”*

Truth does not begin in the Gospels. It began in Genesis and continues to Revelation. The New Testament clarifies and fulfills, but does not erase the foundation laid in the Old. Doctrine must be drawn from the whole counsel of God.

5. Begin with what is clear

Deuteronomy 29:29 *“The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us...”*

Doctrine should never begin with mystery. Start with what God has plainly revealed. Use clear passages to understand harder ones—never the reverse.

6. Take the literal meaning first

Matthew 19:4 *“Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female’?”*

Unless the context requires symbolism, we take Scripture in its plain meaning. Jesus and the apostles treated the Scriptures as historically and literally true. That is our starting point.

7. Confirm doctrine with multiple witnesses

Deuteronomy 19:15 *“In the mouth of two or three witnesses every matter shall be established.”*

God does not ask us to believe on the strength of a single reference. When several scriptures teach the same truth independently, we can be confident in its authority.

8. Avoid eisegesis (reading into the text)

2 Peter 1:20 *“Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation...”*

We must not force Scripture to say what we want it to say. The meaning comes from the text—not from emotion, tradition, or imagination. Sound doctrine comes from reading out of the Word, not into it.

9. Use proper study tools

Ezra 7:10 *“For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.”*

Ezra’s preparation involved effort and accuracy. Today, we have access to Hebrew and Greek lexicons, concordances, and interlinear Bibles that clarify original meanings. These tools do not replace Scripture—they help us understand it rightly.

10. Be led by the Holy Spirit—but tested by the Word

John 16:13 *“When It, the Spirit of truth, has come, It will guide you into all truth...”*

The Holy Spirit works with the Word, never apart from it. Spiritual impressions or insights must always be tested by what God has already revealed in Scripture. The Spirit does not lead us away from the truth—He leads us deeper into it.

11. Check the fruit

Matthew 7:16, 18 *“You will know them by their fruits... A good tree cannot bear bad fruit.”*

Doctrine produces outcomes. Sound doctrine leads to humility, obedience, and spiritual health. False doctrine leads to pride, confusion, and sin. The long-term fruit of a teaching often reveals its source.

Final Thought

Each of these principles is a safeguard. Not one of them can be neglected without risk. Taken together, they form a defense against error and a path toward the clarity God desires for His people.