

1 Thessalonians 5:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.

Analysis

Prove all things; hold fast that which is good—panta dokimazete, to kalon katechete (πάντα δοκιμάζετε, τὸ καλὸν κατέχετε). Dokimazō (δοκιμάζω, 'to test, examine, prove') means careful scrutiny, like testing metals for purity or coinage for genuineness. Panta (πάντα, 'all things') includes prophecies (v. 20) and all spiritual claims. Don't despise prophecy (v. 20) but don't accept uncritically—test everything. To kalon katechete (τὸ καλὸν κατέχετε, 'hold fast the good')—katechō (κατέχω) means 'to hold firmly, retain tenaciously.' After testing, cling to what proves genuine; reject what fails testing.

This command balances vv. 19-20 (openness to Spirit's work) with discernment. Testing criteria include:

1. conformity to Scripture (Acts 17:11; Isa 8:20)
2. exaltation of Christ (1 Cor 12:3)
3. edification of church (1 Cor 14:3-4)
4. character of prophet (Matt 7:15-20)
5. fulfillment of predictions (Deut 18:21-22).

Bereans modeled this: they 'received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so' (Acts 17:11). Openness plus discernment produces healthy church; openness without discernment produces chaos; discernment without openness quenches the Spirit.

Historical Context

The apostolic church faced both cessationists (despising prophecy) and fanatics (accepting all spiritual claims uncritically). Paul charts middle course: eagerly desire spiritual gifts (1 Cor 14:1), don't forbid speaking in tongues (1 Cor 14:39), but test everything (1 Thess 5:21), let all things be done decently and in order (1 Cor 14:40). This balance has challenged churches throughout history. Medieval Catholicism increasingly suppressed charismatic gifts through institutionalization; Radical Reformation sometimes abandoned discernment through naive acceptance. Reformed tradition emphasized testing but sometimes quenched the Spirit; Pentecostal tradition emphasized openness but sometimes lacked discernment.

Related Passages

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. What biblical criteria do you use to 'test all things' (especially prophetic utterances and spiritual claims)?
2. How do you balance eager openness to the Spirit's work with careful discernment to avoid both extremes?
3. What evidence demonstrates that you're 'holding fast' what proved good after testing rather than remaining perpetually skeptical?

Interlinear Text

πάντα	δοκιμάζετε	τὸ	καλὸν	κατέχετε
all things	Prove	that which	is good	hold fast
G3956	G1381	G3588	G2570	G2722

Additional Cross-References

1 John 4:1 (Parallel theme): Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

Romans 12:2 (Good): And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

Ephesians 5:10 (Parallel theme): Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord.

Luke 12:57 (Parallel theme): Yea, and why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?

Acts 17:11 (Parallel theme): These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

Romans 12:9 (Good): Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.

Revelation 3:3 (Parallel theme): Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.

Philippians 4:8 (Good): Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

1 Corinthians 15:58 (Parallel theme): Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.

Philippians 3:16 (Parallel theme): Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.