

# EQUIPPING THE SAINTS

“...FOR THE EQUIPPING OF THE SAINTS FOR THE WORK OF SERVICE...” ~ EPHESIANS 4:12

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## EXAMINE EVERYTHING CAREFULLY

*By Andrew Dow*

Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians was likely written a very short time after his initial visit. Since Paul was so abruptly run out of Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-10), he wrote this letter to encourage and instruct the brand new Christians he was forced to leave behind. His last instruction to them is important for all Christians to follow: **“Examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil”** (1 Thess 5:21-22). Consider these instructions with me briefly.

### “Examine Everything Carefully”

While this instruction carries with it broad application, it is directed toward a specific issue. Immediately preceding this Paul wrote, **“Do not quench the Spirit; do not despise prophetic utterances”** (1 Thess 5:19-20). This was written in a time when God still revealed and confirmed His Word through miraculous intervention. Paul's direction for these young Christians is this: don't reject those who claim to speak for God, but don't accept them blindly either—examine everything carefully!

You see, God expects us to be inquisitive and discerning when it comes to spiritual things. Don't accept or reject something about God without thoroughly examining it to see if its true. What does it means to examine EVERYTHING carefully? It means not taking my words, or

or anyone's words as fact without checking them against God's Word! It means checking Paul's, Peter's and John's words to make sure they really are speaking for God. **"Examine everything."**

### **"Hold Fast to that which is good"**

After examining something carefully, if you find it to be good, hold it close and do not let it go. This should be obvious. When you find something that stands up to scrutiny and is true to God and His Word, make it apart of your life. A wise man once wrote, **"Buy truth, and do not sell it"** (Prov 23:23).

### **"Abstain from every form of evil"**

Finally, after examining something carefully, if you find it to be evil, keep yourself away from it. This too should be an obvious conclusion. I'm afraid, however, that this phrase has been misunderstood. Some have used this verse to say that we should avoid anything that *appears* to be evil (even if it is not evil). While there is wisdom in avoiding even things that appear to be evil, that's not what this verse is talking about. Paul is letting us know that we need to avoid evil in *whatever form it takes*. Did the preacher (or anyone else) say something that doesn't quite match up with Scripture? Avoid THAT form of evil!

### **Conclusion**

How can we know if something is good or evil? How can we know if we should hold it fast or abstain from it? We each must **"examine everything carefully"** (1 Thess 5:21), **"test the spirits"** (John 4:1), and **"weigh what is said"** (1 Cor 14:29). Don't blindly reject or accept anything you read or hear; measure everything by God and His standard!

## CONTEXT IS KEY

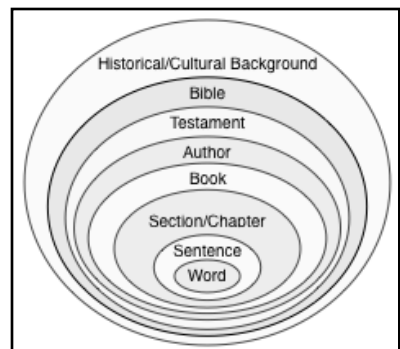
By Andrew Dow

“Words mean things.” I don’t know who first coined that phrase and I can’t remember who first shared it with me. However, it is true. If words don’t have meaning, then this article and all communication is an exercise in futility. However since you’re reading this (and I’m writing it) I can assume that we realize that words do mean things.

Let me take all of this a step further: “Words only mean things in the context in which their used.” Sure, we can define a word abstractly, but even dictionaries and spelling bee contestants understand the importance of putting a word in a sentence. The context in which a word is used shapes and narrows the meaning of the word.

For instance, if you read this sentence, “the boy caught the bat,” how would you determine the meaning of “bat”? You might pick up a dictionary and find that “bat” means “the wooden club used in certain games, as baseball and cricket, to strike the ball” (dictionary.com). This may be true, but what happens if we look at the context? What if I told you that the sentence just before the one you read says, “the winged creature was flying around the cave”? Does the context change the meaning of the word “bat” in the sentence above? Absolutely!

These things are true in every day communication and they are true in Bible study as well. Any given word must be understood in the sentence,



paragraph, and book in which it is found. Beyond that we must determine in what style a word was used: historical narrative, poetry, law, etc. We must seek to understand the historical and cultural contexts as well.

All of this is to say, unless we understand the context we will never fully understand Scripture. It is not enough to plug a dictionary definition into the text. We must work diligently to understand the context in which a word is used. May we all read and study the Scriptures daily in order understand it as it was intended to be understood.

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**AM LESSON:**  
I Pledge  
Allegiance To...

**PM LESSON:**  
Luke & Acts:  
Two of a Kind

**“GO THEREFORE AND MAKE DISCIPLES...”**  
**(MATTHEW 28:19-20)**